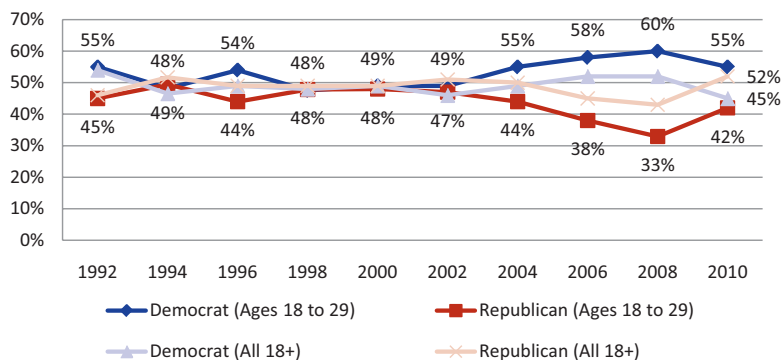


YOUNGER VOTERS WERE RACIALLY DIVERSE, VOTED DEMOCRATIC, AND APPROVED OF PRESIDENT OBAMA

Young voters in the 2010 midterm elections were racially and ethnically diverse, voted for Democrats, and approved of President Obama, according to new analysis of exit poll data released by CIRCLE and Generational Alliance (GA). (For more information about the GA please visit www.generationalliance.org.) The complete research findings, compiled from data of the National Exit Poll by Edison Research, can be found in a new CIRCLE fact sheet, "Young Voters in the 2010 Election," at www.civicyouth.org.

An estimated 22.8 percent of all eligible young people ages 18–29 voted in the 2010 midterms.¹ Younger voters chose Democratic House candidates over Republican House candidates by a margin of 55%–42%. By a 62%–38% margin, younger voters approved of Barack Obama's handling of his job as president. By a 53%–43% margin, they said that his policies will help the country in the long run. In contrast, a 55%–44% majority of all voters disapproved of the president and a 51%–43% majority of all voters said his policies will hurt the country.

Figure 1: House Vote Preference, 1992–2010



Source: 1992 - 2010 Edison Research National Election Poll

"Since 2004, young voters have been one of the strongest Democratic constituencies," said CIRCLE director Peter Levine. "Democrats need to engage them better than they did in 2010, and Republicans need to make inroads in a generation that continues to prefer Democrats."

Most (85%) of young adults who voted in 2010 had also voted in 2008. The 2010 young electorate was mostly a subset of the 2008 electorate.

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RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

10. Building the Youth Vote is About Building Infrastructure

CIRCLE is pleased to provide an enclosed copy of the Special Report "Civic Skills and Federal Policy." This report is the result of a meeting convened by CIRCLE of scholars, civic leaders, and federal officials. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a federal policy agenda for civic skills. The conference was co-sponsored by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and Strengthening our Nation's Democracy (SOND) and took place in Washington DC in April 2010.

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

Jonathan M. Tisch
College of Citizenship
and Public Service

JANUARY 2011

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, RESEARCH ARTICLES, RESEARCH ABSTRACTS, BIBLIOGRAPHIES, AND DATASETS.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COLLEGE EXPERIENCE MORE REPRESENTED AT THE POLLS

In U.S. elections, young adults who have never attended college (about half of the young population) are consistently much less likely to vote than their counterparts who have some college experience. In the 2010 midterms, it appears that the turnout rate of younger voters with college experience was at least twice as high.

ALL GROUPS OF YOUNGER VOTERS SAW THE ECONOMY AS THE TOP ISSUE FACING AMERICA.

All groups of younger voters saw the economy as the top issue facing America. But the young voters without college experience were substantially more likely to choose health care as the most important issue facing the country. Young voters without college experience believed that spending more to create jobs was an important priority, while they were more likely than their college counterparts to believe that Congress should let the Bush-era tax-cuts expire.

YOUNG VOTERS RACIALLY DIVERSE

In 2008, the strong turnout was driven by youth of color. Again in 2010, younger voters were more racially and ethnically diverse than the electorate as a whole. Among younger voters, 65% were white, 16% Black, 14% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 2% "all others" (this last category includes Native Americans and those who choose to classify themselves in any of the other categories). In contrast, among voters 30 and older, 80% were white, 10% Black, 7% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 2% "all other." Seven percent of younger voters said they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual, compared to 4% of all voters.

Younger Blacks represented 16% of all younger voters, slightly more than their proportion of the whole 18–29 population (14.4%). In 2008, they had represented 18% of younger voters and had the highest turnout rate of any racial/ethnic group of young Americans. This year, it appears that their turnout was about on par with, or slightly above younger voters as a whole.

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Continued from Page 2

Meanwhile, younger Hispanics represented 14% of younger voters, again close to the same as their proportion of the 18–29 population as a whole (14.2%). In past elections, the turnout of young Latinos had lagged behind other racial/ethnic groups, but the exit polls suggest that they may have narrowed or even erased the gap in 2010.

Youth of color and low-income youth are voting while dealing with institutional barriers such as disenfranchisement because of felony convictions. Other obstacles were evident at the polls, according to reports from members of the Generational Alliance this past November 3rd. According to Christina Hollenback, Director of the Generational Alliance, “In places like Florida, South Carolina and California around campuses with high numbers of Hispanic and African-American youth, young people were given misinformation in reference to their polling location and election day, had their legitimate forms of ID questioned and rejected, and were subjected to protests from people outside the polling locations trying to deter them from voting.”

VOTERS OF ALL AGES AGREE: ECONOMY IS THE #1 ISSUE FACING THE COUNTRY

Young voters of all racial backgrounds felt that the economy was the most important issue facing the nation today. Despite their similar sense of the most important issue, younger white voters held views that were quite different from young voters as a whole. For example, 52% of young white voters said that the next Congress should focus on reducing the budget deficit, compared to 41% of the entire young voter population.

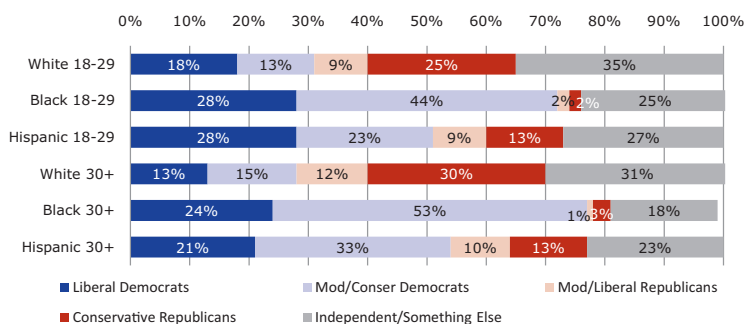
REPORTED PARTY SUPPORT AND IDEOLOGY VARY WIDELY AMONG VOTERS OF DIFFERENT RACES

Young voters in the 2010 election varied greatly in their party and ideological identification.

“WE ARE A FORCE THAT IS FIGHTING FOR CHANGE NOT JUST FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR OUR COMMUNITIES—BUT THIS FIGHT CANNOT CONTINUE TO HAPPEN ALONE,” SAID LEAGUE OF YOUNG VOTERS EDUCATION FUND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROB BIKO BAKER.

Among young Black and Hispanic voters, nearly three in ten self-identified as liberal Democrats, compared to 18% of their white counterparts. White youth, on the other hand, were most likely to self-identify as Independents/something else (35%) or as conservative Republicans (25%). White youth were more likely to support the Tea Party movement (34%) than Black and Hispanic youth (17% and 14%, respectively), although white youth were less supportive than their white adult counterparts (49% of whom supported the movement).

Figure 2: Ideology by Race/Ethnicity and Age



Source: 2010 Edison Research National Election Poll

“We are a force that is fighting for change not just for ourselves but for our communities-but this fight cannot continue to happen alone,” said League of Young Voters Education Fund Executive Director Rob Biko Baker. ★

ENDNOTES

1 CIRCLE computes youth turnout by multiplying the highest total vote tally reported by media outlets by youth share reported by the NEP National Exit Poll, and dividing the product by estimated 18-to-29 year old citizen count from March 2010, Current Population Survey. For more details on how CIRCLE estimates turnout, please refer to: <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP35CIRCLE.pdf>. National vote tallies were obtained from www.CNN.com and www.NYT.com on the morning of November 3, 2010 for first-day tally estimate (which produced an estimated youth turnout of 20.4%), and mid-day on November 4, 2010 (which produced an estimated youth turnout of 20.9%) for a second-day estimate. On November 15, 2010 Edison Research applied a final weight to the national exit poll data. This re-weighting increased the estimated share of young voters from 11% to 12%. Using this new share estimate combined with a second-day vote tally, CIRCLE now estimates youth turnout in 2010 was about 22.8%. In releasing our turnout estimates immediately after the election, we emphasized that youth turnout “was fairly typical for a midterm election”: well within the normal range. That clearly remains the case. A reweighting of the exit poll data more than one week after the election is unusual, and we are not able to assess independently which results are most accurate. A more precise estimate of 2010 youth turnout will be available once the Census releases its November Current Population Survey voting data in the spring. Meanwhile, the most reliable conclusion is that youth turnout (as estimated by the CIRCLE exit poll method) has stayed between 20 percent and 23 percent in all midterm elections since 1994. Any changes are within the margin of error.



CIRCLE'S WORK ON THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF NON-COLLEGE YOUTH: A SUMMARY

As previous research has found, about half of young (18-to 29-year-old) Americans have never attended college. They are less than half as likely to vote and to volunteer as their college educated peers. These youth have left academic settings and have few other opportunities to develop civic skills and participate in civic life. By default, society misses their potential contributions as citizens, and the youth lose opportunities to learn from civic experiences and networks.

Over the past few years, CIRCLE has worked to better understand this cohort, as well as gauge what steps are being taken to close the civic engagement gap. We hope that our research will provide the data needed to make institutional reforms that will better engage non-college youth in the civic and political arenas. The following gives a summary of this work and a brief overview of the findings. Our work is divided into four areas: analysis of national surveys, focus groups with non-college youth, partnerships with organizations working with non-college youth, and finally, an agenda-setting convening of organizations working with non-college youth.

CIRCLE'S QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

We have published a series of fact sheets and occasional papers on the civic engagement of non-college-attending youth, including "The 'Forgotten Half': Education Disparities in Youth Voter Turnout" (2010), "Civic Engagement of Non-College Attending Youth" (2009), and "Civic Engagement and the Changing Transition to Adulthood," by Constance Flanagan, Peter Levine, and Richard Settersten (2009). These studies have used data from the United States Census and other surveys to track differences in civic involvement by formal educational background.

We have also influenced national surveys by developing and pilot-testing questions about informal contributions. In some of our early focus groups, described below, young people who said they did not participate or give back to their communities also told stories about feeding and giving free housing to peers who were not family members. As a result of that testimony, questions about sheltering and feeding neighbors were included on the National Conference on Citizenship's 2009 *Civic Health Index* survey, which demonstrated that such contributions are

most common among low-income Americans and Americans with less formal education.

NON-COLLEGE YOUTH FOCUS GROUPS

In 2008, CIRCLE began talking directly with youth who were between the ages of 18 and 25 and not in college, as well as nonprofits who work with these youth. In total, we conducted 19 focus groups that included 147 participants in four cities: Baltimore, MD, Little Rock, AR, Lowell, MA, and Richmond, VA. In the coming months, we will be conducting formal analysis of the focus group transcripts and analyzing them in the light of a comprehensive literature review that is underway at CIRCLE. Below are preliminary observations from the groups.

Generally, respondents did not think that electoral politics makes serious change in their communities – especially, increasing jobs or reducing violence.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE INDICATED THAT THEY WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO GET INVOLVED IF THEY FELT THE POLITICAL SYSTEM WAS ACCESSIBLE (IF THEY KNEW HOW TO HELP) AND TRANSPARENT (IF THEY KNEW HOW DECISIONS WERE MADE AND HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO DECISION-MAKING).

The young people indicated that they would be more likely to get involved if they felt the political system was accessible (if they knew how to help), transparent (if they knew how decisions were made and how to contribute to decision-making), and if elected officials could be counted on to follow through on what they say. Shortly before the 2008 election, a Baltimore youth from our focus group said, "You have these politicians who sit up there who get flown around the country in private jets and probably waste more money in a day than we could make in a day. Just drive around saying hi to people, I mean, when they could be actually working on issues, just because they want to get their name out there. There's no connection at all...And then you know we are going to see in November the same thing happen all over again."

Continued on Page 5



The two most prominent issues that youth reported facing in these communities were the lack of jobs and hostile interactions with the police.

Not having a job seemed to influence the perception of participants' self-worth and significantly influenced how some viewed their potential contribution to their own community. But these young people report having a positive impact on other individuals, in ways that would be rare among college students, such as allowing family, friends or strangers to stay in their home. In addition, some respondents said that acting intentionally as role models was something they have done to help the community.

Research shows that young people are more likely to get involved if they are directly asked to participate. Many of the respondents, however, had never been asked to participate. This was the case for many of the youth in these cities and especially the case for the young men.

In reflecting on this, one participant stated, "It's so weird how, like, people look at Little Rock and they say 'why is Little Rock like this?', but yet all of us at this table, couldn't even like name an opportunity where we were asked to do something for the community."

The most common reasons young people gave for participating included: (1) they had a desire to help the community, and/or (2) they were asked by someone they trusted. Young people who were involved with community-based organizations and who trusted the staff at those organizations were also more likely to be and stay engaged.

CIRCLE WORKS WITH UNITED TEEN EQUALITY CENTER IN LOWELL, MA

An example of a community-based organization working primarily with non-college youth is the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC), located in downtown Lowell, MA.

THE CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF UTEC PLACES YOUTH AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING—YOUTH-LED POLICY MAKING, YOUTH-LED BUSINESS, AND YOUTH-LED EVENTS, ALL OF WHICH ARE SUPPORTED BY A STRONG AND SUPPORTIVE STAFF.

UTEC's mission and promise is to ignite and nurture the ambition of Lowell's most disengaged young people to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success. In 1999, UTEC was founded as the result of an organizing movement driven by young people to develop their own teen center in response to gang violence. Today, UTEC's nationally recognized model begins with intensive street outreach and gang peacemaking, reaching out to the most disconnected youth by meeting them "where they're at" and facilitating a peace process between rival gang leaders. Each young person in the target population (16-to 23-years-old, dropped out of school, homeless, and in a gang and/or criminally involved) receives at least three years of intensive case management. UTEC engages youth in *workforce development* programming that blends transitional employment with social enterprises in food services, multimedia, and maintenance/cleaning. UTEC provides *educational options* through GED preparation and an alternative diploma program. Values of social justice and *civic engagement* are embedded in all programming, with special emphasis in organizing and policymaking work both locally and statewide. Ultimately, UTEC's model can provide a pathway from the street to the state house for older youth most often overlooked and considered disengaged. The central philosophy of UTEC places youth at the center of youth-led policy making, youth-led business, and youth-led events, all of which are supported by a strong and supportive staff.

UTEC has been an important partner for CIRCLE and Tufts University. To give perspective to our previous qualitative research, CIRCLE has benefited from UTEC staff's input about how youth become engaged. Starting this fall, CIRCLE and UTEC will conduct a joint research project on how disconnected youth become engaged and remain engaged



NEW RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL DISCUSSION IN K–12 CIVIC EDUCATION

Research shows that systematically incorporating news media into school curricula improves standardized reading and math scores. A new CIRCLE Working Paper (#72) addresses whether these efforts to incorporate media into school curricula could also increase several elements of civic engagement, including students' media use, political knowledge or their sense of being able to understand and influence politics (internal political efficacy). In this working paper entitled "The Classroom-Kitchen Table Connection: The Effects of Political Discussion on Youth Knowledge and Efficacy," authors Dr. Tim Vercellotti and Dr. Elizabeth C. Matto find that reading news articles and discussing them, especially at home, has a beneficial effect on students' civic development.

THE STUDY DESIGN

The study took place in four suburban public high schools in central New Jersey with similar sizes and socioeconomic profiles. A total of 27 social studies classes with approximately 350 students participated. Over the period of about four months, students completed three separate surveys in the classroom which measured news consumption, political knowledge, and levels of internal political efficacy as well as a set of demographic questions. Students were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) a treatment group where students were assigned weekly articles from *Time* magazine and discussed them in class, (2) a different treatment group where students received the same treatment but in addition were required to discuss the articles at home with their parents, and (3) a control group that received no treatment.

The treatment lasted for two months and all participating students completed three surveys (pre, during, and six weeks after the treatment). Finally, the researchers conducted telephone surveys with parents of about one third of the students to measure the relationship between parent and student levels of media use, political knowledge and political efficacy. Multivariate analysis was conducted to control for the effects of students' gender, race, year in school, and whether the student was in an advanced placement or honors class.

A CURRICULUM INVOLVING NEWS MEDIA WORKS BEST WHEN IT'S NOT A "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" DESIGN

Overall, the researchers found that incorporating news media into the curriculum had positive benefits, but those benefits varied by type of student. According to the authors, "A theme that recurs in these findings is that, even with random assignment in an experiment, all students are not created equal, and therefore the benefits of the intervention varied along an important dimension." Among all study participants, those who were not in an AP or honors class were most likely to increase their level of information-seeking and political knowledge as a result of reading the articles and discussing them at home and in class than their more advanced counterparts. However, the students in the AP and honors classes were more likely to show increased internal political efficacy as a result of reading and talking about the material at home and in school.

OVERALL, THE RESEARCHERS FOUND THAT INCORPORATING NEWS MEDIA INTO CURRICULA HAD POSITIVE BENEFITS, BUT THOSE BENEFITS VARIED BY TYPE OF STUDENT.

The researchers caution that the findings may be impacted slightly by the location and timing of the experiment. The experiment took place in four high schools in the Northeast region of the country and therefore generalizing should be done with caution. They also note that the experiment took place during the 2008 primaries and therefore students may have been paying more attention to politics than during another time of the year. Bearing in mind these qualifications, the authors conclude that, "Assigning students to read and discuss articles about politics had a beneficial effect, especially when parents were involved. The more educators can do to build and maintain that connection between school and home, the greater the likelihood that educators and parents can work together to create a more knowledgeable and efficacious citizenry."

To download CIRCLE Working Paper #72, please visit http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/WP_72_Vercellotti_Matto.pdf. ★



CIVIC SKILLS AND FEDERAL POLICY

On April 29, 2010, scholars, civic leaders, and federal officials met in Washington to develop a federal policy agenda for civic skills. The conference was convened by CIRCLE at Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service. It was co-sponsored by the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and Strengthening Our Nation's Democracy (SOND). This report was written and endorsed by 33 participants (not including any of the federal officials who attended).

Participants shared these fundamental premises:

American citizens and communities can address our nation's fundamental problems. ...

But to do so **requires civic skills**, especially the ability to gather and interpret information, speak and listen, engage in dialogue about differences, resolve conflicts, reach agreements, collaborate with peers, understand formal government, and advocate for change. (Appendix 1 lists important skills in more detail.)

President Obama rightly noted on his first day in office that "Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge." ...

But **for government to benefit from citizens' knowledge, citizens must have skills** of expression, collaboration, and analysis.

Civic skills are gained from families, communities, private associations, local schools, and institutions of higher education. ...

But the **federal government has also played a constructive role** in developing skills since the time of the founders and should be a leader and role model again today.

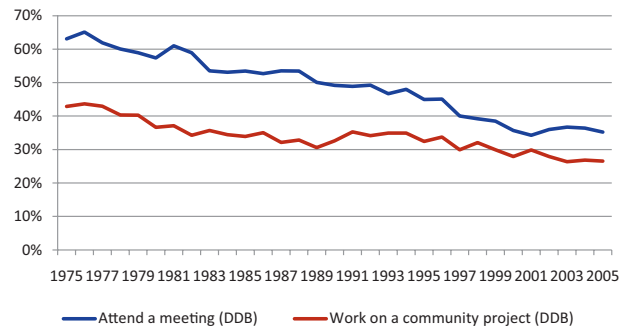
Knowledge and information are important, and so are acts such as voting and volunteering. ...

But **neither knowledge nor action** is satisfactory without civic skills.

Civic associations—among other institutions—have developed their members' skills throughout American history. ...

But these **associations are in deep decline** (notwithstanding some important new forms of online association), and therefore we cannot count on the public's civic skills to be adequate in the decades ahead.

This graph shows declines in two activities that build civic skills and reflect the use of civic skills: attending club meetings and participating in community projects.



Source: DDB Life Style Survey

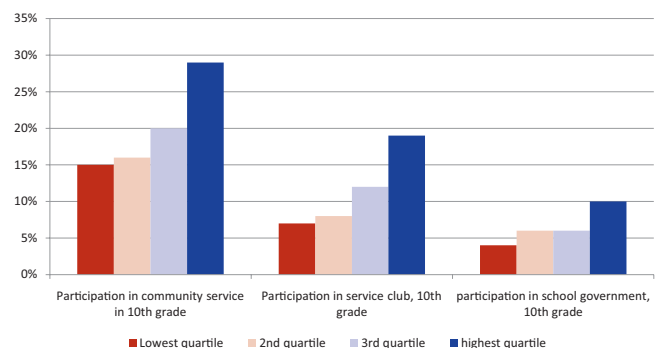
Policymakers and the public are rightly concerned with preparing young people for college and a competitive, global job market ...

But **developing civic skills also helps students to succeed academically** and in the workplace because civic skills are life skills.

All Americans must step up and contribute to common problems. ...

But **civic skills are highly unequal**. Working class youth and immigrants are especially unlikely to receive such opportunities in their schools or their communities.

Civic Learning Opportunities are More Common for Wealthier Students



Source: The Education Longitudinal Study, 2002, 10th grade data



The original mission of public schools, early colleges, and subsequent public university systems in America was to prepare the next generation of effective and responsible citizens. ...

But today education at all levels is influenced by accountability measures, and **we lack standards and means of accountability that measure civic outcomes** with reliability and enhance civic learning.

Americans respond well to opportunities to contribute to their communities and learn skills. ...

But such **opportunities are scarce.**

Statistical evidence in support of these points is presented in the CIRCLE fact sheet, *Civic Skills and Federal Policy*, available at <http://www.civicyouth.org/federal-policy-and-civic-skills>.

Participants broadly defined the federal role in developing civic skills. Not only educational programs and programs aimed at youth are relevant. *All* federal agencies interact with citizens and community-based organizations and can support and enhance their skills. Federal civil servants also need skills to engage effectively with citizens and see themselves as role models. Learning civic skills is a lifelong process, constantly evolving as public problems, tools and technologies, and policies shift.

Those who endorse this report believe that the federal government must take the following steps to enhance the public's civic skills.

- 1) Across federal agencies, develop common principles, values, and language that help build the civic capacities of civil servants and that nurture authentic public engagement. This objective may require both an inter-agency working group on skills within the federal government and convening others outside the government to develop common principles and strategies. One important outcome would be more inspiring language for talking about "civic engagement."
- 2) Using similar principles, values, and language to those mentioned in #1, improve the training of future teachers and the professional development of current teachers. Base this effort on new research about what enhances teacher education.
- 3) Define the goals of K-12 and postsecondary education as preparation for further education, career, *and* citizenship and explore ways to make these three goals cohere, recognizing that most civic skills are also academic and job skills. Reframe civic skills so that they are also workforce skills. Make skill development a lifelong objective, not just a function of schools from kindergarten through 12th grade.
- 4) Redirect service-oriented programs and opportunities so that they become civic-skill-building and community-capacity-building programs. Go beyond the "service" language. At the same time, recognize that some service and service-learning programs already have strong records of developing civic skills.
- 5) Identify and invest in community-based organizations and community-university partnerships that target and legitimately reach young people who are not on a track to attend college and that build their civic skills (in addition to meeting other objectives). Invest in their efforts to develop civic skills.
- 6) Use social service agencies as opportunities to build portable civic skills among the "clients" of government. For example, social service agencies can be used as an entry point to civic education by providing voter registration assistance.

Many more ideas were proposed by particular working groups in the April 29th conference but did not receive as much support as those listed above. These ideas are listed in Appendix 2.

THIS REPORT WAS CO-WRITTEN AND ENDORSED BY THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS

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APPENDIX 1: CIVIC SKILLS

In surveys completed before the conference, participants identified the following as important civic skills.

Speaking and listening

Speaking and writing effectively on public issues; communication skills, persuasive argument, listening to others (especially those with whom you disagree); the ability to understand and be sensitive to different points of view and the reasons for them; the ability to discuss controversial issues in an informed way that doesn't lead to demonizing others or their opinions. In short, all the things that empower someone to use his or her voice effectively and with integrity in co-creating our common public world.

Collaborating, organizing fellow citizens

Convening and leading meetings, negotiating/compromising, problem-solving, decision-making, dialogue and deliberation, collaborative team work, goal-setting, consensus-building, public problem-solving through a variety of methods (advocacy, service, political engagement etc), working with others (especially those who are different).

Understanding formal politics

Basic knowledge of institutions and processes, understanding government, understanding political power. Power analysis—identifying various levers of power, how to access them, and which levers are appropriate to try to access and deploy given one's aims. Also, ability to participate in activities essential to the democratic process, including voting, petitioning for government to take action, and expressing opinions.

Advocacy

Exercising one's rights, community organizing, knowledge of the levels of government, knowledge of how to effectively engage policymakers and the system.

Information-gathering and processing

The ability to distill information and experience into an understanding of major common issues. Critical thinking (challenging ideas, questioning positions); the ability to discern fact from fiction, rumor from news, and demagoguery from honest debate; the ability to identify and define issues, gather the information needed to describe them (their scope, who is affected and how, etc.), analyze their root causes, develop

solutions that address those causes, and create a plan of action to accomplish those solutions. Identify multiple causes (individual, institutional, systemic; both proximal and distal) as a means both of understanding problems and devising solutions. A sense and knowledge of history, of salient issues in the present and of the complexity of the process of moving from the present to the desired future in public policy. Knowing how to interpret political communication such as cartoons or editorials.

Technology

Using technology to gather and share information and organize people to create change, savvy with the traditional media and new social media; the ability to judge online materials for accuracy.



APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL POLICY PROPOSALS

At the end of the conference, participants were asked to cast just two votes each for policy proposals that had been developed during the course of the day. The proposals that received the most votes are presented above, in the main text. The following proposals also emerged from working groups and received votes in the final plenary.

To enhance civic learning in schools from kindergarten to 12th grade

- Increase funding for research on civic education
- Enhance school climates to nurture and encourage civic-skills training for all students.

To develop the civic skills of young adults not on track to college (approximately half of the young population):

- There should be a greater emphasis, overall, on recruiting non-college youth to civic engagement and civic learning.
- The federal government should use its power to convene across sectors.

To strengthen the role of higher education in developing civic skills

- Develop criteria for programs within higher education that include: student readiness and skill development, reciprocal community-university relationships and learning exchanges, cross-sector engagement, and community development and problem-solving. In each college or university, a community review board implements and assesses these criteria. Community colleges have especially important potential because of the students they reach and their relationship to their communities.
- Pass the DREAM Act (the The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act), which makes certain undocumented aliens eligible for federal financial aid.

To strengthen the role of federal agencies in civic-skill development

- Organize peer-to-peer learning opportunities for federal civil servants concerned with public engagement.

- Gather and apply advice about criteria for “authentic engagement” from civic engagement and citizen participation experts.
- When government regulations require public participation, include a range of allowable or recommended mechanisms such as planning, data gathering, and data use and interpretation.
- Encourage civic participation by allowing or encouraging flexible strategies that reward groups for improvements beyond required compliance.

CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

CIRCLE has produced numerous Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:

■ **VOTER REGISTRATION AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2008:** presents detailed information on registration rates among young people, broken down by racial and ethnic groups, differences in educational background, married and unmarried individuals, urbanicity, and state-by-state information.

■ **VOTER TURNOUT AMONG YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:** presents information on voter turnout for women and men with detailed information about racial and ethnic groups, differences in educational background and married and unmarried individuals.

■ **THE MINORITY YOUTH VOTE IN THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:** presents information on voter turnout for young people among different racial and ethnic groups. Fifty-eight percent of African-American youth voted in 2008—the highest turnout rate of any youth race/ethnic group since 1972. Although the 2006 midterm election did not follow the same trend as the 2008 Presidential election, data suggests that the minority youth vote can make a strong impact on the outcome of elections.



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2010 REPORTS PRESENT STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESS OF STATES' CIVIC HEALTH

In September 2010, the National Conference on Citizenship and the Corporation for National and Community Service produced the first *Civic Health Assessment*; this was the first federally funded research on civic engagement authorized under the landmark and bi-partisan Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act. Thirteen states and four cities signed on to complete individualized civic health reports in 2010.¹ CIRCLE contributed to the analysis of the state-specific data. Below is a summary of the completed reports, including Missouri, Arizona, North Carolina, Virginia, Ohio, California and the first city-level report of its kind, the *Greater Seattle Civic Health Index*.²

STATES SHOW EDUCATIONAL DIVIDE: CITIZENS WITH MORE EDUCATION TEND TO BE MORE CIVICALLY ENGAGED

This year, state-specific data allowed the state partners to break down participation levels among several different demographics, including age, gender, race, marital status, income level, urbanicity and more. There were similarities in each state, but there were also unique differences.

Mimicking national trends, several state indices found an education divide in engagement. Having education beyond high school has shown to be a key predictor of voter turnout and other indicators of citizen engagement. Slightly more than 80% of all Arizonans with a college degree voted in 2008, 32 percentage points higher than those with only a high school diploma. However, the *Missouri Civic Health Index* revealed a strong "blue-collar" base for civic engagement in Missouri compared to the nation as a whole. In Missouri, higher levels of education were associated with more participation, but people without college experience were participants and leaders at higher rates than residents of other states.

Virginians with no college experience turned out in much lower percentages in the 2008 Presidential Election compared to their counterparts with college experience (53.3% vs 80.5%, respectively). Moreover, Ohioans who attend college were more likely to volunteer, participate in groups, fix problems in the community and lead organizations, though Ohio ranks 44th in the nation in the number of people 25 and above with college degrees. This educational divide was particularly important in the California

report, as approximately 20% of Californians in 2008 did not graduate from high school. At the city-level, Seattle saw dramatic gaps in engagement between those with and those without college experience.

SOME STATES SHOW TRADITIONALLY DISENGAGED RESIDENTS CONNECTING IN OTHER WAYS

The 2009 *National Civic Health Index* found that in the midst of an economic crisis, Americans were engaging less in institutionalized forms of service, but they were still helping in other ways. State data in 2010 found this to be true in some of the states. North Carolinians without college experience, for instance, were less likely to be engaged in formal volunteering than their counterparts with college experience. However, they were more likely to have strong personal connections to family and friends and to help their neighbors than those who have some college education. North Carolina also found that rural residents had a higher level of "connectedness" than those living in metropolitan areas. Similarly, Missourians without high school diplomas did favors for their neighbors at a rate that was 10 percentage points higher than the rate for those with college degrees. Moreover, in the greater Seattle region, the only civic indicator that didn't directly rise with college experience was neighborliness.

STATES DIFFER IN LEVELS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND NEWS CONSUMPTION

Voter turnout rates, one indicator of political engagement, varied greatly across the states studied. In North Carolina, voter turnout increased among citizens of all ages, races, and classes between 2004 and 2008. NC's voter turnout rate ranked 15th among all states studied. On the other hand, Arizona ranked 43rd for voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election (59.8%, a four percentage point decline in voter turnout from the 2004 election). Virginia ranked 9th in voter turnout among citizens age 18 and older. In Virginia, the 2008 voting rate for 18-to 29-year-olds was higher than the national average (58.7% for VA and 51.1% for US); however, young Virginians still lag behind their elders. Ohio ranked 25th in voter turnout among eighteen and older citizens in 2008. The Ohio report showed that voting was the most common form of political participation, though more than a quarter (29.5%) of Ohioans were active in 2008 by performing

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CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

A SAMPLE OF RECENT COVERAGE:

- **“BUILDING THE YOUTH VOTE IS ABOUT BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE,”** BY ABBY KIESA, *THE NATION*, 11/5/2010
- **“DID JOHN STEWART HURT THE DEMOCRATS IN ELECTION 2010?,”** BY GLORIA GOODALE, *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, 11/4/2010
- **“NEXT TIME, WOO YOUNG OBAMA SUPPORTERS,”** BY ERICA WILLIAMS, *CNN OPINION*, 11/4/2010
- **“ONE IN FIVE US UNDER-30’S VOTED IN MIDTERMS: STUDY,”** BY AFP WIRE, *YAHOO NEWS*, 11/3/2010
- **“VOTERS SAY THEY FEEL ABANDONED,”** BY DAMIEN CAVE, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, 10/31/2010
- **“TEA PARTY MOVEMENT ALIENATING YOUNG VOTERS,”** BY KEVIN BRENNAN AND JOSH LEDERMAN, *THE WASHINGTON POST*, 10/30/2010
- **“ARE YOUNG DISILLUSIONED?,”** BY KEVIN DRUM, *MOTHER JONES*, 10/25/2010
- **“ENTHUSIASM GAP AMONG YOUNG VOTERS,”** *CBS TV NEWS*, 10/16/2010
- **“THE KIDS AREN’T ALRIGHT,”** BY CARRIE DANN, *MSNBC FIRST READ*, 10/14/2010
- **“OBAMA TELLS STUDENTS THEIR FUTURE HINGES ON ELECTION,”** BY DAVID JACKSON, *USA TODAY*, 10/8/2010

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one or more non-electoral political acts such as participating in events for political parties, raising money and advocating for policy changes.

California ranked 33rd in voter turnout for the November 2008 election, with the rate of 63.4% for citizens age 18 and over. Though the ranking is low, California’s voting rate is about the same as the national average of 63.6%. While residents of the greater Seattle area were more likely to participate in non-electoral politics, such as contacting a public official or participate in a march, rally or protest, Seattle’s voting rate was slightly higher than the national average.

Research shows that those who read and discuss the news regularly are more likely to vote, volunteer and give money to charities. In Arizona, approximately 37% of respondents did not follow or discuss the news regularly. However, Arizona Millennials were more likely to discuss politics and current issues compared to their peers nationally. Additionally, the Missouri report found that there was a positive association between the frequency with which Missourians watch the news on television, read the newspaper in print or online and listen to the news on the radio, and their levels of social capital and voting. In North Carolina, those with some college education were more than twice as likely to access the news frequently and engage in political discussions with others as those with no college experience. ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, along with the metropolitan communities of Chicago, Miami, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Seattle.
- 2 A summary article of the remaining reports will be in the spring issue of the CIRCLE newsletter, v8.i2.

NEW ON CIVICYOUTH.ORG

Check out the interactive map on www.civicyouth.org, and click on a state to find state-by-state details on the youth vote in Midterm Elections, such as voter share, voter turnout and voter turnout among 18-to 29-year-olds by gender, race, and marital status.



FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE, A COLUMN DEDICATED TO RECOGNIZING SUCCESSFUL “BRIDGES” BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND PRACTITIONERS, REPORTS ON RESEARCH WITH PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

BUILDING THE YOUTH VOTE IS ABOUT BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

BY: ABBY KIESA, CIRCLE YOUTH COORDINATOR & RESEARCHER

The commentary on the youth voter turnout in 2010 is not particularly surprising. Even though initial youth turnout estimates of 22.8 percent¹ put this year on par with other recent midterms, there's still the usual back-and-forth between advocates and media about whether youth showed up to the polls.² We also see the usual pundits' criticisms and disappointment in young people, as though the turnout rate is just about individual decision-making.

In an attempt to contribute a different perspective to the conversation, let's step way back from today. Over the four decades since the voting age was lowered to 18, has anything been put into place to support ongoing youth voting? What processes and infrastructure exist to ensure youth voter turnout? Public, nonprofit, and private institutions that could help have varying commitments to sustained youth participation.

OVER THE FOUR DECADES SINCE THE VOTING AGE WAS LOWERED TO 18, HAS ANYTHING BEEN PUT INTO PLACE TO SUPPORT ONGOING YOUTH VOTING? WHAT PROCESSES AND INFRASTRUCTURE EXIST TO ENSURE YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT?

The first and most obvious place to begin looking for youth voter support is youth-focused organizations, especially those that focus on political engagement. These are the folks spending hours upon hours canvassing, taking care of voter registration cards, arranging get out the vote (GOTV) efforts, phonebanking, and much more.

Yet, more often than not, these organizations are scraping by, trying to piece together private funding each year to pay the organizers doing this work. In 2004, \$40 million was invested in youth voting by various philanthropic organizations, according to a 2006 article by Tobi Walker in the National Civic Review. This investment did turn out youth and led to important research about best practices.³ But the reality of nonprofit funding is that the interests and focus of

funders change, leaving youth organizations that work on voting in an uncertain place each election cycle.

The second place to look is schools. While youth organizations have proven to be life-changing for some young people, public schools have the widest reach. And one of the reasons public schools were created was to promote civics. But the reality of civic education today is that it is not about encouraging people to vote. Opportunities young people have to learn about democracy, to learn basic information about how government works, vary considerably by school and are scarcest where they are needed most—in schools serving low-income kids. School systems are not operating in a way that will equitably build communities of voters and civic actors.⁴

The third place to look to supporting youth engagement is political parties. President Barack Obama's campaign increased hopes that political parties had learned an important lesson about building a youth constituency. In 2010, we saw record millions spent on midterm campaigns by parties and candidates hoping to affect voter sentiment and consequent turnout.⁵ Yet the funds are too often invested in ad buys rather than strategies that promote engagement. Research has shown that having interactive conversations through canvassing can lead to a seven to ten percentage point increase in youth voting.⁶ The personal, interactive strategies that have been proven successful with young voters require an intentional investment of time and money that the transactional campaign process has failed to provide.

The final institution that needs to be addressed on this subject is one the United States does not have, but could: A national “non-partisan public electoral authority.” One of the central researchers in this area is Henry Milner, a political scientist at the University of Montreal. (CIRCLE recently published his comparison of the political knowledge acquisition of young Americans and young Canadians.⁷) Milner points out that:



The many specific actions undertaken by non-partisan public electoral authorities in other countries to address declining youth participation, must, in the U.S., typically be left to voluntary associations. Even registering young people so that they are eligible to vote in federal elections depends on local initiatives.

The voluntary associations to which Milner refers have become increasingly numerous in the United States as community service initiatives and appropriations for the Corporation for National and Community Service increase.⁸

This is exciting for a lot of reasons, but creates two problems when related to voting. First, the field of youth engagement is often fragmented into more nuanced divisions—such as youth voting, volunteerism and community service, political advocacy, youth media, civic education, and others—that do not intersect as often as they could or should.

Second, the places where youth participation are seeing the most growth and support, such as service, often involve efforts that try to avoid a tinge of voting or politics, which is controversial in a system that often only funds nonpartisan efforts. Introducing ideas that are explicitly or implicitly connected to politics can be seen as dangerous in maintaining nonpartisan status and, thus, funding.

UNTIL AND UNLESS WE DECIDE THAT YOUTH VOTER PARTICIPATION IS SOMETHING WORTHY OF INVESTING TIME AND RESOURCES INTO, WE WILL CONTINUE TO PLACE UNREASONABLY HIGH EXPECTATIONS ON A HAPHAZARD INFRASTRUCTURE THAT IS NOT DESIGNED TO SUSTAIN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT.

These circumstances leave us riveted each election night to see if enough resources were invested in youth to build on previous years. The approaches to youth engagement that I have mentioned are not the only ones that might impact youth voting (the civic role of the media and many other factors also play a role). Regardless of approach, however, youth voting must have continuous commitment and intentionality in order to truly build ongoing increases in youth political participation.

Until and unless we decide that youth voter participation is something worthy of investing time and resources into, we will continue to place unreasonably high expectations on a haphazard infrastructure that is not designed to sustain youth engagement. ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 The original article on Campus Progress, found here: http://www.campusprogress.org/articles/building_the_youth_vote_is_about_building_infrastructure/, cited 20.9 percent as the original turnout rate. According to CIRCLE, reweightedExit Poll data suggest youth turnout may have reached 22.8%. <http://www.civicyouth.org/reweighted-exit-poll-data-suggest-youth-turnout-may-have-reached-22-8/>
- 2 <http://www.civicyouth.org/revise-circle-youth-turnout-estimate-20-9/>
- 3 <http://www.studentpirgs.org/new-voters-project/research/circle-and-yvs>
- 4 <http://www.civicyouth.org/circle-working-paper-59-democracy-for-some-the-civic-opportunity-gap-in-high-school/>
- 5 <http://www.opensecrets.org/overview/index.php>
- 6 http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/Young_Voters_Guide.pdf
- 7 <http://www.civicyouth.org/featured-circle-working-paper-60-the-informed-political-participation-of-young-canadians-and-americans/>
- 8 <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serveamerica/index.asp>



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from late adolescence to young adulthood. UTEC has a capacity to follow youth through transitional coaches up to two years after they complete a program at UTEC; thus CIRCLE has a unique and important opportunity to understand the role that a community-based organization can play in civic development of disconnected youth.

EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN ENGAGING NON COLLEGE YOUTH

An additional component of research about non-college youth focuses on what practitioners feel are the best and most effective strategies for engaging this group. To learn more about this, CIRCLE met with 11 organizations that work directly with this cohort, including: Hip Hop Caucus, Public Allies, The Corps Network, United Teen Equality Center, YouthBuild USA, Usher's New Look Foundation, America's Promise, League of Young Voters Education Fund, Gathering for Justice, and Generational Alliance. All of these groups engage their participants in civic

or political work. The meeting was intended to learn from each other's work, identify possible collaborations and inform current research. As part of the continued research, CIRCLE plans on continuing to work closely with these groups to write a collaborative statement about the state of civic opportunities and resources available, and to generally learn more about this population.

Practitioners cited several program components that successfully reach out to non-college youth. Crucial to an effective strategy were team-based learning leadership development, an emphasis on young people as change makers (while addressing the cultural issues associated with powerlessness), adult allies and role models, and in general, maximizing the young person's opportunities and networks. ★



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