

CHECK OUT OUR NEW BLOG!

You ask, we answer! CIRCLE receives hundreds of requests for data analysis each year from practitioners, members of the press, policy makers, etc. These questions help us to focus our research on relevant topics and are also a source of our new blogging efforts. Each week, CIRCLE will post a blog entry to our website with data and analysis generated from a question posed to us from the field. Following are a few of our recent posts. Please visit www.civicyouth.org to view our latest posting. And, please help us spread the word. Posts can be shared via facebook and twitter!

HERE ARE TWO OF OUR RECENT BLOG POSTS...

"YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE OSAMA BIN LADEN NEWS," BY PETER LEVINE (CIRCLE DIRECTOR)

Yesterday, I was on KCBS radio news in San Francisco discussing why spontaneous public celebrations of the death of Osama bin Laden seem to draw mainly young adults. (A typical headline is this, from the New York Times: "9/11 Inspires Student Patriotism and Celebration.") Given the format of drive-time radio news, I just had time to say that today's 21-year-olds were at an especially impressionable age on 9/11/2001. They were first becoming aware of the big world of news and current events and did not yet have deeply held views. For them, the terror attacks would be especially influential, and Osama bin Laden would loom especially large.

I think that's true, but in a different setting, I would mention some nuances.

IN THIS CASE, WE DON'T KNOW WHETHER SPONTANEOUSLY SHOUTING "U-S-A!" WHEN OSAMA BIN LADEN WAS SHOT IS AN AGE EFFECT OR A COHORT EFFECT.

First, it's interesting that the celebrations were spontaneous and occurred in many different locations simultaneously. That suggests some breadth of interest and passion. Yet only a few thousand people participated, out of roughly 40 million young adults. I am not sure we should draw any generalizations at all.

Second, scholars like to try to distinguish between age effects and cohort effects. An age effect is the result of being at a certain point in one's life when something happens. For example, people who are eight years old at any given moment in history are less interested in sex than people who are 21 at the same moment. That says nothing about generational differences; it is a pure age effect. A cohort effect is the lasting consequence of going through an event when one was young. For example, people who experienced World War II have differed from other generations all their lives.

In this case, we don't know whether spontaneously shouting "U-S-A!" when Osama bin Laden was shot is an age effect or a cohort effect. It could be that people who are 21 (and especially if they are male) are always relatively likely to celebrate the violent death of a national enemy. Or it could be that people who were at an impressionable age when 9/11 occurred will always care more than others about the al-Qaeda story. There is not enough data to know which theory is right, if either one is. If I had to guess, I'd bet on an age effect.

There has also been a lot of discussion about a recent Red Cross poll that found: "Nearly 3/5 [of] youth (59%) – compared to 51% of adults – believe there are times when it is acceptable to torture the enemy." One of the leading explanations is a cohort effect: today's young people have (supposedly) been exposed to more favorable media depictions of torture than earlier generations were and are thus more likely to favor torture (now and in the future). Again, I'd bet on an age effect. I would guess that support for torture among today's young cohort will decline, simply as a result of their growing maturity.

Yahoo reported this week that two thirds of the people who searched the web with the phrase "who is osama bin laden?" were teenagers (ages 13-17). This fact has been interpreted to mean that "a goodly number of teenagers don't know who Osama bin Laden is." Kevin Drum, in particular, thinks that's an age effect: teenagers never know much about the news. I am not sure I agree: many kids who entered that search phrase may have been able to identify bin Laden but were looking for a biography or profile—a wise way to understand the news.

Finally, we don't know much about the motivations and ideologies of the people who spontaneously celebrated. Were they into

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CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

■ "CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY INFORMATION," BY ANDREW ATWAL, *YOUTH TODAY*, 6/10/2011

■ "NEW POLICY PAPER CALLS FOR INVESTMENTS IN A NEW CORPS OF YOUNG AMERICANS TO CREATE AND SHARE CIVIC INFORMATION," *YAHOO NEWS*, 6/10/2011

■ "HEY, FLORIDA REPUBLICANS...WHAT'S UP WITH THIS NEW CIVICS CURRICULUM??" BY LINEHOLDER, *REDSTATE*, 5/18/2011

■ "SOCIAL MEDIA: THE NEW FACE OF CHANGE," BY CAYTLIN HENTZE, *IOWA STATE DAILY*, 5/17/2011

■ "STUDENTS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!" BY LUIS RIVAS, *POLITICAL AFFAIRS (BLOG)*, 5/16/2011

■ "BRINGIN IT HOME: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT" *KVNF (WESTERN CO)*, 5/16/2011

■ "KEEP VOTE-BY-MAIL BALLOTS COMING," *CAMDEN COURIER POST*, 5/11/2011

■ "EFFORT SEEKS TO REVIVE CITIZENS' CIVIC INTEREST," BY JENNY MONTGOMERY, *INDIANA LAWYER*, 4/27/2011

■ "GREEN JOBS WILL TRUMP CLIMATE CHANGE FOR YOUNG VOTERS," BY OLGA BELOGOLOVA, *NATIONAL JOURNAL*, 4/19/2011

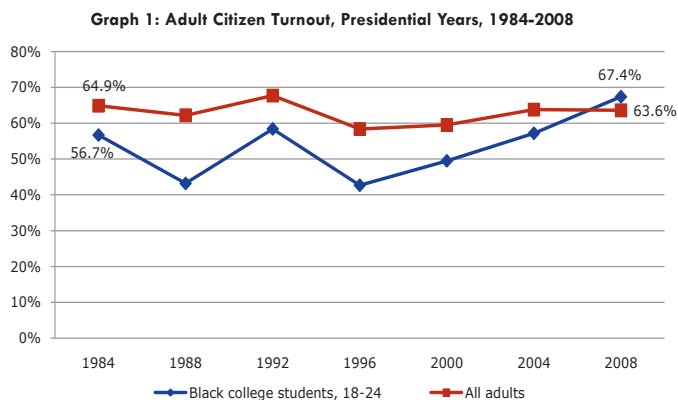
■ "OREGON LED NATION IN UNDER-30 VOTING IN 2010," BY JEFF MAPES, *THE OREGONIAN*, 4/16/2011

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the dramatic narrative of a bad guy being gunned down by Navy Seals? Were they moved by the attainment of justice? Was their motivation basically patriotic? Or did they seek the "camaraderie" of a shared, positive, public experience, as one of my CIRCLE colleagues suggests?

"AFRICAN-AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS IN 2008 AND 2010," BY ANDREW MAYERSOHN (CIRCLE INTERN)

If you asked casual observers of American politics who Barack Obama's most ardent supporters were in 2008, they would likely have identified two groups: African Americans and college students. So it's no surprise that African American college students turned out to vote in 2008 at their highest rate in decades:



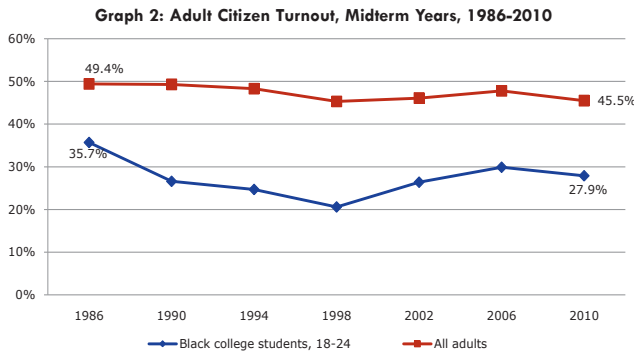
Source: Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplements 1984-2008

Turnout had been rising steadily for African American college students between 1996 and 2004, but that was due, in part, to a rise in turnout among all adults. In 2008, while turnout held steady nationwide, African American college students were ten percentage points more likely to vote than they had been in 2004. They were four points more likely to vote than the average citizen, and nine points more likely to vote than non-African American college students. Did they vote at the same impressive rates in 2010?

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Source: Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplements 1986-2010

In 2010, African American college students – like the rest of the population – voted a rate that was all but unchanged from the last two midterm elections in 2006 and 2002. One possible explanation is that African American college students are especially likely to live in uncompetitive states: 26.3% of all Americans lived in a state where a 2010 senate race was decided by ten points or fewer, against 20.5% of African American college students. Obama’s campaign (and those of his competitors) needed these

students to vote in the primaries in 2008; perhaps nobody asked for their vote in 2010. ★



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