


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our analysis shows that young people should not be treated as a 

UNIFORM GROUP.

US CENSUS: CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY

Findings presented in this report are based on CIRCLE's analysis of the U.S. Census, Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Volunteering estimates are from the CPS September Volunteering Supplement (2002-2010) and voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement, (1972-2010). All other civic engagement indicators, such as access to information and connection to others, come from the 2008, 2009 and 2010 CPS Civic Engagement Supplements. We used the most recent data available. However, some indicators (news access and some political engagement indicators) were only available as pooled estimates from 2008-2009 data.

Youth civic engagement is critical to our democracy. Young people benefit personally by participating and communities need their voices and their energies to address problems. The future of our democracy depends on each new generation developing the skills, values and habits of participation.

In this report, CIRCLE provides an overview of young Americans' civic engagement: their service activities, membership in groups and associations, discussion of issues and political participation. Through its annual Current Population Survey (CPS), the US Census now provides data on these and other forms of civic engagement. Focusing on ages 18-29, we have analyzed this national survey data and examined the two most recent election years: 2008 and 2010.

Our analysis shows that young people should not be treated as a uniform group. Often called the "Millennial Generation," this cohort is extraordinarily heterogeneous. They are the most ethnically and racially diverse generation in American history. Some attend world-class universities while others attend high schools with dropout rates well above fifty percent. Thus it is no surprise that they differ greatly in their levels and types of civic engagement. Any generalizations about "youth voter turnout" or "young people's volunteering rates" conceal crucial differences within the cohort that anyone who hopes to engage young Americans should understand. Some young people will vote in 2012 and some will not. Instead of speculating about what the "youth vote" might be, we need to understand the differences among this diverse group so we can work to reduce the number of disengaged youth.



A majority of the Civically Alienated group held a high school diploma, only

**10 PERCENT
WERE
COLLEGE
GRADUATES,**

and a majority were people of color.

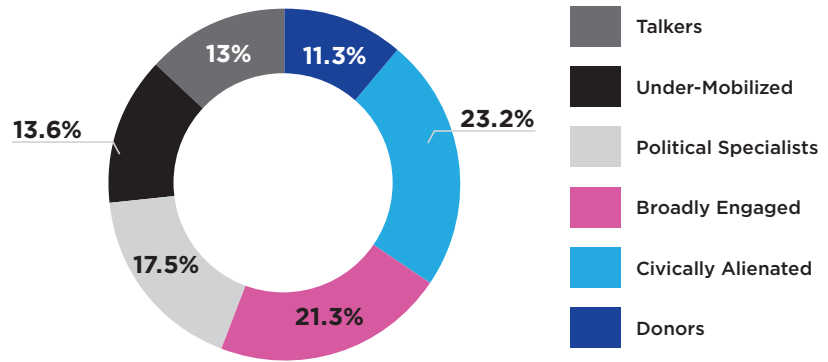
To explore these differences, CIRCLE conducted a cluster analysis of Census civic engagement data from 2008 and 2010. A statistical technique that divides a sample into distinct profiles, our cluster analysis identified groups of youth with different patterns and levels of civic engagement. Although some similar groups emerged in both 2008 and 2010, our findings from the two years differed in meaningful ways.

In 2008, the presidential election mobilized millions of young people to vote and got many talking about political and civic issues. Three of the six clusters that emerged in our analysis of that year's data reported voter turnout rates at or close to 100%. These clusters, Broadly Engaged (19%), Political Specialists (19%) and Only Voted (18%), differed mainly in whether and how they were engaged beyond voting. The rest of the youth population clustered into Civically Alienated (16%), Politically Marginalized (13%) and Engaged Non-Voters (14%). While largely comprised of non-voting youth, these three clusters also differed primarily by their engagement beyond voting. The 2008 clusters clearly reflect the excitement around the 2008 presidential race and overall high levels of civic - especially political - engagement among young Americans.

To illustrate how different these clusters were, consider the Broadly Engaged and Civically Alienated clusters. Almost everyone in the Broadly Engaged cluster voted and many also volunteered, worked with youth in their communities, attended public meetings or worked with neighbors to address community problems. Most had at least some college education and 70.6% were White. Meanwhile, the Civically Alienated group did not vote, volunteer, belong to any groups or otherwise participate in local civil society. A majority held a high school diploma or less, only ten percent were college graduates and a majority were people of color.

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The picture shifted in 2010, the most recent year in which political participation was measured. Young Americans fell into different clusters, collectively reflecting a different climate for civic and political engagement than in 2008.

We identified a Broadly Engaged cluster (21%) and a Political Specialists cluster (18%) which showed similar patterns of civic engagement to the 2008 clusters with the same labels. While these two groups were about the same size as the equivalent clusters from 2008, the Civically Alienated cluster grew to over one-fifth (23%) of the youth population. Additionally, three new clusters emerged in 2010, Under-Mobilized (14%), Talkers (13%) and Donors (11%). These new groups indicate that a substantial proportion of young people were missing opportunities to engage civically. Under-Mobilized youth were registered to vote but did not cast a ballot, all members of the Talkers cluster reported discussing political issues frequently but did very little else, while Donors gave money to civic or political causes but were not engaged beyond that.

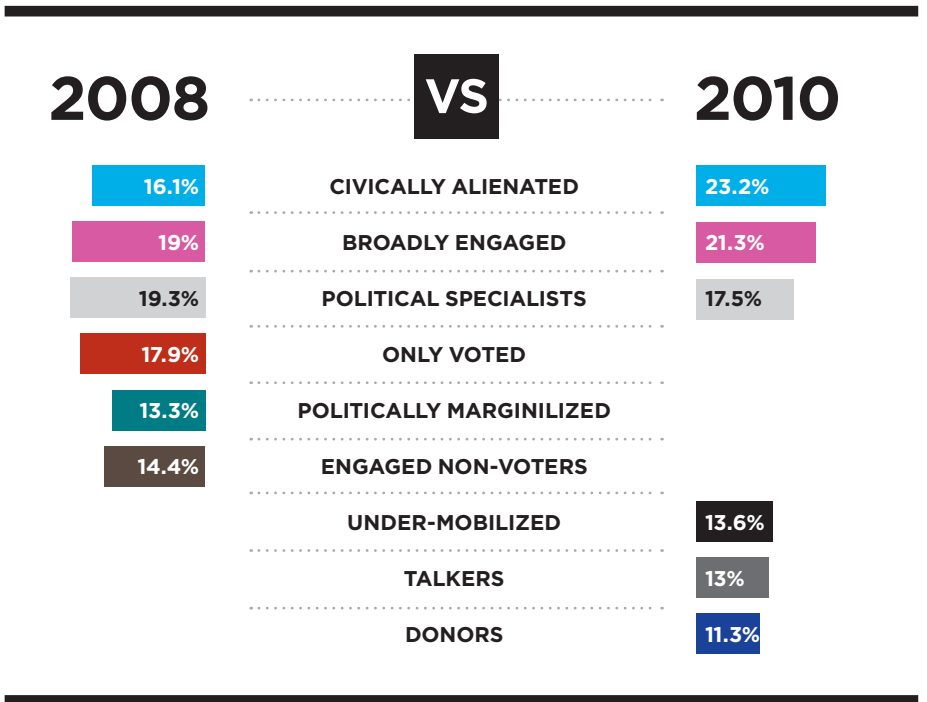
Although it is unlikely that 2012 will replicate either 2008 or 2010, our cluster analysis holds important lessons for the future:

- **Reflecting underlying inequalities in social circumstances and opportunity**, young people will probably divide into groups ranging from highly alienated to deeply engaged. Policymakers and others responsible for civic education in schools, communities and community service programs should focus on the severe gaps in civic participation.

ENGAGING MORE YOUNG AMERICANS IN CIVIC AND POLITICAL LIFE

requires an awareness of how the young adult population is segmented and the engagement of those subgroups.

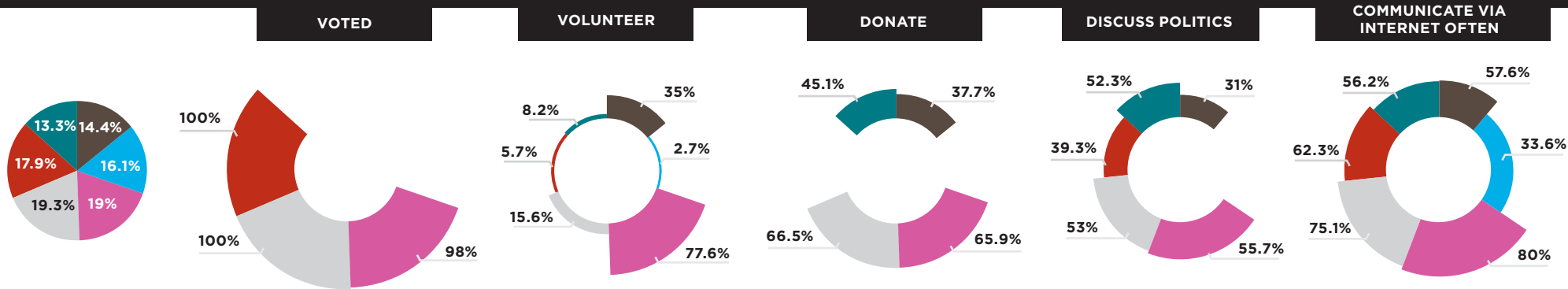
- **Engaging more young Americans** in civic and political life requires an awareness of how the young adult population is segmented and the engagement of those subgroups. For example, the Talkers cluster demonstrated interest in civic and political issues, but many did not vote 2010. Our own focus group research has found many disadvantaged young adults fit this profile. Other research suggests that some of these young people could be persuaded to vote if they were directly asked to participate or if voting seemed more accessible. Another important group consists of those who voted in 2008 but did virtually nothing else in the civic or political domain. Their interest in the 2008 election could be leveraged to get them involved in other ways.



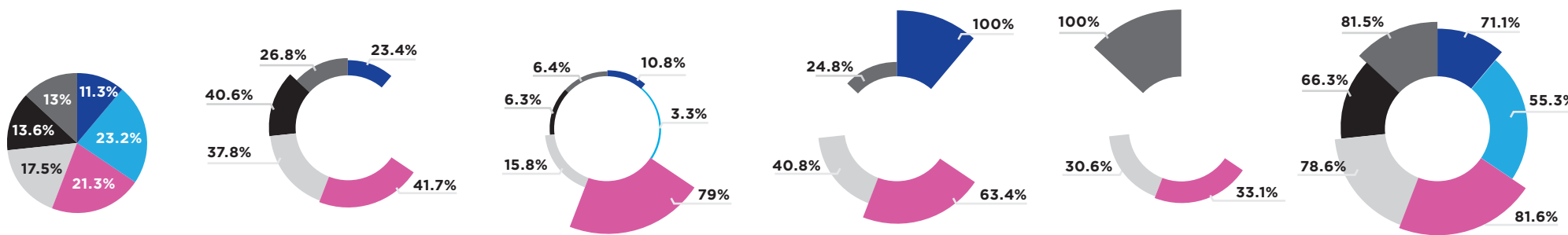
THE DIVERSITY OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Despite references to a single “youth vote,” CIRCLE’s analysis of American youth reveals diverse backgrounds and experiences, leading to a variety of forms and levels of political engagement. This infographic explores the results of a cluster analysis of American youth in 2008 and 2010. Graphs show each cluster’s level of engagement across five forms of participation.

2008 CLUSTERS



2010 CLUSTERS



2008 & 2010

2008 ONLY

2010 ONLY

POLITICAL SPECIALISTS
Moderately high levels of political participation and relatively low levels of service participation

BROADLY ENGAGED
Likely to engage in all types of civic behaviors

CIVICALLY ALIENATED
Almost completely disengaged from civic and political life

ONLY VOTED
Vote but are otherwise disengaged in civic activity

ENGAGED NON-VOTERS
Moderately engaged in community activities, but do not vote

POLITICALLY MARGINALIZED
Most are active in political discussions and groups, and may donate to causes, but none are registered to vote

UNDER MOBILIZED
Do not vote, are not registered to vote, and are not civically engaged

TALKERS
Stayed current with political discussions, may or may not vote, but otherwise disengaged

DONORS
Donated money or goods, but were largely otherwise disengaged