

UNDERSTANDING THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF A DIVERSE GENERATION

“Youth Civic Engagement in the United States, 2008-2010: Understanding a Diverse Generation,” a recent study by CIRCLE Lead Researcher Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, and CIRCLE staff, shatters stereotypes and dispels conventional myths about the ways in which young people ages 18-29 are involved in the United States political system.

CIRCLE conducted a cluster analysis for this report—a statistical technique that divides a sample into distinct profiles. The cluster analysis identified groups of youth with different and distinct patterns and levels of civic engagement.

Using U.S. Census data on young voters from across the United States, the study compares youth engagement in the 2008 and 2010 election years. The findings show that regardless of the over-simplified portrayal of young Americans in the news media, their political engagement is diverse, and as such, young people should not be treated as a uniform group. For example, at least three quarters of youth were somehow engaged in their community or in politics in both 2008 and 2010. But they engaged in very different ways.

**AT LEAST THREE QUARTERS
OF YOUTH WERE SOMEHOW ENGAGED IN THEIR
COMMUNITY OR IN POLITICS IN BOTH 2008 AND 2010.**

THE BROADLY ENGAGED, TALKERS AND UNDER-MOBILIZED IN 2010

In 2010, the clusters were:

- The Broadly Engaged (21% of youth) fill many different leadership roles;
- The Political Specialists (18%) are focused on voting and other forms of political activism;
- The Donors (11%) give money but do little else;
- The Under-Mobilized (14%) were registered to vote in 2010 but did not actually vote or participate actively;
- The Talkers (13%) report discussing political issues and are avid communicators online, but do not take action otherwise; and
- The Civically Alienated (23%) hardly engage at all.

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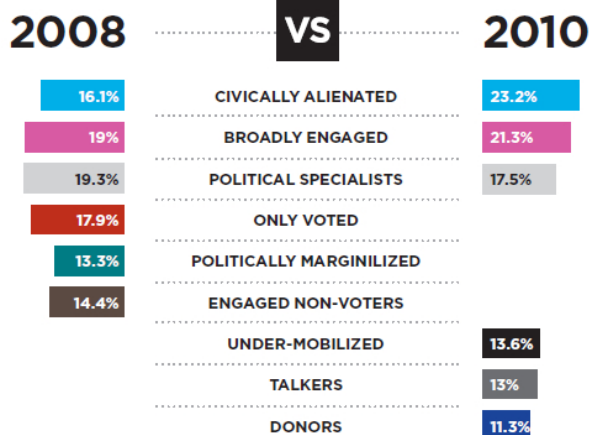
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THE RESEARCH ROUNDUP COLUMN HIGHLIGHTS RECENT RESEARCH FINDINGS COMMISSIONED OR GENERATED BY CIRCLE. ALSO INCLUDED IS AN UPDATE ON NEW CIRCLE PRODUCTS SUCH AS FACT SHEETS, RESEARCH ARTICLES, RESEARCH ABSTRACTS, BIBLIOGRAPHIES, AND DATASETS.

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The most notable difference between 2008 and 2010 is that the Only Voted cluster from 2008 disappeared in 2010. This is not entirely surprising because 2010 was a midterm election, which always draws far fewer youth (as well as older Americans) to the polls compared to a presidential election. Although the largest group in 2010 was the civically alienated group, there were a couple of bright spots. For one, a little more than a fifth of young people were broadly engaged—they engaged in their communities and took leadership roles. Furthermore, new clusters emerged in 2010, which were the Talkers, who reported discussing political issues, but were not necessarily mobilized in other ways.



POLITICAL ACTION

In 2008, the Presidential Election mobilized millions of young people to vote, and as a result, many young people voted, talked about politics and engaged in political issues. Three of the six clusters that emerged—Broadly Engaged (19%), Political Specialists (19%) and Only Voted (18%)—showed that a large percent of young people were in fact participating in the political process in some way. The largest difference between these three clusters was primarily whether or not they engaged beyond voting. In the case of the Broadly Engaged cluster, they also volunteered, worked with youth in communities, attended public meetings or worked with neighbors to address community problems.

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ENGAGEMENT RATES SHOW GAPS BY RACE & ETHNICITY AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Only a small minority of young people (16.1% in 2008; 23.2% in 2010) have been fundamentally disengaged based on the civic engagement indicators used in the study. Many have voted, donated money, engaged in discussions about politics or current issues, and more. On the other hand, the Civically Alienated cluster requires attention—as it is disproportionately made up of young people who had not completed high school or gone to college, who are low-income, and who may have not had the same opportunities for civic skill acquisition as their counterparts.

Those who were Broadly Engaged in 2010, for instance, were more likely to be White, college-educated, and high-income youth. 30% of this group had completed a four-year degree.

Similarly, in 2008, 35% had completed a four-year degree.

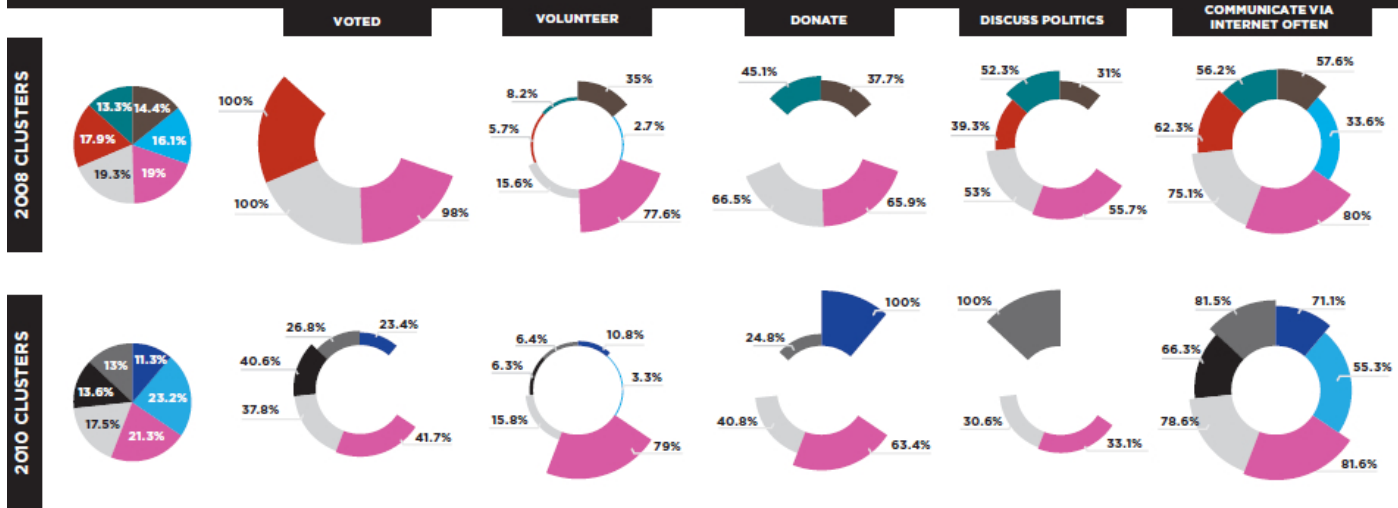
IMPLICATIONS FOR INVESTMENT IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The gap in participation implies that more should be done to invest in youth engagement. Policymakers and others who are responsible for civic education in schools, communities, and community service programs are just a few types of institutions which have the ability to engage youth in various ways.

The full report, findings and implications are available at: http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/CIRCLE_cluster_report2010.pdf. ★

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 & 2010

- 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

2008 ONLY

- 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

2010 ONLY

- 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

