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40% of 18-29 Year-Olds Have No College Experience: Campaigns Focusing Only on Campus Outreach Miss More Than 18 Million Eligible Voters

Largely alienated from politics, non-college youth lack positive role models and think institutions do not want their engagement – but they still want to contribute, especially on behalf of children

Medford/Somerville, Mass. – Today, the nation's preeminent youth research organization – [the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement \(CIRCLE\)](#), based at Tufts University – released its comprehensive study on non-college youth, entitled “That’s Not Democracy: How Out-of-School Youth Engage in Civic Life and What Stands in Their Way.” Recently, CIRCLE launched their [#YouthTruth](#) campaign to counter myths about young Americans, such as the widespread belief that youth are mostly college students and that their generation has uniform experiences and attitudes. The new study is available at www.civicyouth.org/?p=4240.

“This report underlines the diversity of the Millennial Generation,” said CIRCLE director Peter Levine, “and reminds us that working-class youth offer enormous potential but are widely overlooked – especially in an election year.”

Several significant and notable findings highlight the growing lack of entry points to social and political engagement/involvement for the 40% of 18-29 year olds who have no college experience – which translates to more than 18 million eligible voters.

Based on analysis of national survey data and interviews of 121 non-college youth in 20 focus groups – including Baltimore, Md.; Little Rock, Ar.; Richmond, Va.; and Lowell, Mass. – CIRCLE finds that:

- Unlike their predecessors a few decades ago, a majority of these “non-college youth” are basically disengaged from traditional civic life, with 37 percent completely disconnected, and only 13.5 percent engaged in forms of conventional civic leadership. Opportunities through unions, political parties and religious institutions have been waning, and non-college-bound teenagers are unlikely to receive effective civic education in schools.
- Nevertheless, many focus group participants said they served or helped other individuals in their own families and neighborhoods, though they did not think of these forms of helping behavior when asked about community-level change.
- Focus group participants were highly aware of social and political issues, concerned about them, and likely to discuss them critically in their own social networks, even if they did not see how they personally could address such issues.
- Campaign outreach solely focused on college campuses misses the energy and potential votes of non-student youth.

Non-college youth are most affected by local, state and national policy, but largely disenfranchised. The systemic challenges highlighted by this new research suggest that this group deserves the attention of 2012 campaigns and elected officials.

For more information or to schedule an interview with one of CIRCLE’s experts on young voters, contact Dan Fotou, 646.245.1706, Dan@LunaMediaGroup.com.

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CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous gift from the Pew Charitable Trusts and is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. CIRCLE's reputation for reliable, independent, timely research has been hailed by experts in the field of civic partnership, such as Harvard University professor Robert Putnam who said CIRCLE had brought "the best and most serious research to one place."

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/>) is a national leader whose model and research are setting the standard for higher education's role in civic engagement education. Serving every school of Tufts University, Tisch College creates an enduring culture that prepares students to be lifelong active citizens.

Tufts University (www.tufts.edu), located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the university's schools is widely encouraged.