



ELECTION 2012: INFORMATION NEEDS OF YOUNG AMERICANS 18-29

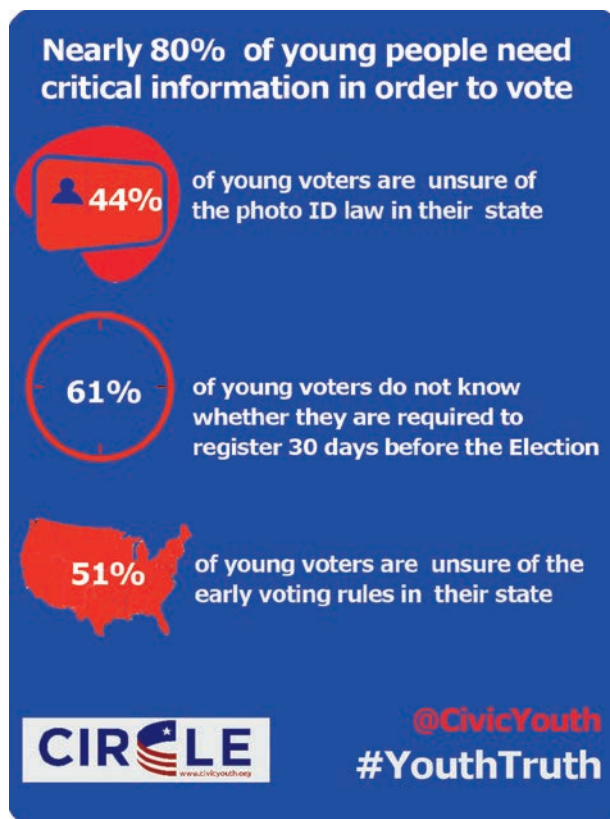
INSIGHTS FROM THE JULY 2012 CIRCLE/YOUTH ENGAGEMENT FUND POLL

A poll conducted by CIRCLE for the Youth Engagement Fund found high levels of uncertainty among young adults about key issues and the voting process itself. A nationally representative sample of 18-to-29 year olds answered a range of questions about the November 2012 federal election, key public issues, the presidential candidates, and their own motivations to vote. A little over one third (36.8%) of respondents were 18-to-21 years old and will have their first opportunity to vote this year in a federal election. A large number, 42.8%, have no college experience, a group highlighted in our new report “That’s NOT Democracy.”

even though health care costs were ranked as the third most important issue in the poll. Twenty-eight percent did not know what they thought would be a successful approach to improving the U.S. economy and creating jobs, even though jobs and the economy were ranked as the most important issue by 33% of respondents. Thirty-five percent did not know whether they opposed or supported the “Buffet Rule,” which would establish a minimum tax of 30% for people making \$1 million or more.

Respondents were less unsure about social policy. Only 22.9% didn’t know whether they supported or opposed the Arizona law that required police to verify the legal status of someone they had stopped or arrested. Slightly more, 25.7%, did not know whether they supported a pathway for children of illegal immigrants to gain legal-resident status by joining the military or attending college. Nineteen percent did not know whether they supported or opposed laws recognizing same-sex marriage.

The poll did not delve into the deeper reasons behind these “don’t know” responses, but it would seem that young people need better opportunities to learn about and discuss public policies.



YOUNG PEOPLE MISINFORMED ABOUT VOTING LAWS

Comparing what respondents thought were their state voting laws to the actual laws, we found that 68% of young people were either unable or unwilling to answer — or were incorrect about, — whether their state required a government-issued photo ID to vote. Eighty percent were unable to answer or were incorrect about their state’s early registration rules. Thirty-two percent of the non-registered young adults thought their state allowed them to register less than 30 days before the election, when it actually required them to do so at least 30 days prior. If they become interested in voting during the final phase of the 2012 campaign, it will be too late for them to register.

Anyone who works to get out the youth vote may have to raise awareness of the voting registration and poll-access rules in their areas.

MANY UNSURE OF KEY PUBLIC ISSUES

Although many respondents in the survey indicated strong views on current fiscal and social policy issues, a substantial portion of 18-to-29 year olds simply did not know where they stood on those issues. Forty-one percent did not know whether they supported or opposed the national health care reform law,

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CONNECTING WITH YOUNG VOTERS

It is often thought that social media, the Internet, and advertising campaigns are the best ways to reach young people. Although more than 90% of respondents had household access to the Internet, and two-thirds said they had smart phones, when asked about Facebook, only 21.6% said it might or would influence their voting, just slightly higher than the 20.4% who said celebrity endorsements might or would influence their votes.

Those looking to reach young voters would do well to work with the “microsystems” — friends, families, and organizational contacts—that are part of the lives of young people. In fact, 48.5% of respondents said they might or would be influenced to vote if their parents asked them to. Forty-five percent said they might or would be influenced to vote if their friends asked them “in person,” and 36.5% said they might or would be influenced to vote if an organization they belonged to asked them to vote. These personally meaningful connections are the strongest ways to reach young eligible voters.

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Respondents reported low levels of engagement with organized groups. More than three fifths (60.5%) indicated that

they did not belong to any group or organization. Of those who were involved with a group, the highest percentages (18.9%) said they belonged to a hobby group, sports team, or youth group. Fifteen percent said they belonged to a school club or association, and 11.4% said they belonged to a religious group.

GETTING YOUNG VOTERS INVOLVED IN CAMPAIGNS

For those running campaigns, it might be helpful to know that 32.7% of respondents said they might or would display a sticker on a car or a sign on their door or another location. Thirty-two percent indicated that they might or would spread a campaign message to friends and family. Downloading ringtones and donating small amounts of money via a cell phone were the least popular strategies, with only 12.4% and 14.1% of respondents indicating that they might or would engage in these activities.

Read more and get the basic findings here: <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=3951> ★

