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DEEP DIVIDE IN PRIMARY YOUTH VOTE: 8 IN 10 YOUNG VOTERS WENT TO COLLEGE

New CIRCLE research shows that during the 2008 primaries and caucuses, young voters with college experience were much more likely to vote than their non-college counterparts. Although half of young Americans ages 18-29 have never enrolled in college, 79 percent of the young voters on Super Tuesday attended college, according to the new research. This gap was also evident in youth turnout rates: one in four eligible young voters with college experience voted on Super Tuesday, compared with one in 14 eligible young voters with no college experience.

"The overall rise in young Americans voting this primary season has been remarkable, but it's disproportionately well-educated young people," said CIRCLE Director Peter Levine. "Campaigns and interest groups mobilize youth on college campuses, but it's harder to reach non-college youth, whose membership in unions, religious congregations, and community groups has fallen since the 1970s. We need to find a way to counteract this inequality and motivate all young people to vote so that their priorities and perspectives get attention. Research shows that schools can boost young people's participation by providing civic education in the form of social studies classes, service opportunities, discussions of current events and other activities."

HIGHER INCOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS OFFER MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN ABOUT POLITICS AND CITIZENSHIP

Instead of making things more equal, though, school systems exacerbate this political inequality by providing more opportunities to learn about politics to higher income students, white students, and academically successful students, according to a new CIRCLE Working Paper (#59) by Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh of the *Civic Engagement Research Group* (CERG) at Mills College. Students in higher-income school districts are up to twice as likely as those from average-income districts to learn how laws are made and how Congress works, for example. They are more than one-and-a-half times as likely to report having political debates and panel discussions.

In addition, African American students are less likely than white students to have civic-focused government classes and current events discussions, and to participate in simulations of civic processes. Latino students reported fewer opportunities to volunteer, participate in simulations and have discussion in an open classroom climate.

"Schools should not offer opportunities to develop a civic and political voice on the basis of race or income or academic standing. Unfortunately, both our California and national data indicate that this is occurring," said Joseph Kahne, CERG's Director of Research and Dean of the School of Education at Mills College.

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The CERG study's more positive findings show that schools can make a difference. Young people who receive civic learning opportunities develop civic commitments including a commitment to vote, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. These opportunities include:

- discussing current events,
- studying issues about which students care,
- experiencing an open climate for classroom discussions of controversial topics,
- studying government, history and related social sciences,
- providing opportunities to interact with civic role models
- engaging in after-school activities,
- learning about community problems and ways to respond
- working on service learning projects, and
- engaging in simulations.

"Schools are exacerbating inequality in voting when they could be narrowing the gap. The good news is that because schools reach a broader cross-section of youth than colleges, if they provide quality civic learning opportunities to all students, they can promote more equal participation," said Kahne.

In response to this "Civic Opportunity Gap," the study's authors' recommend:

- Making desired civic learning opportunities part of the curriculum that all students receive rather than voluntary opportunities for the most interested or academically

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capable students.

- Providing professional development – especially for schools and teachers serving the groups of students that currently receive fewer opportunities.
- Assessing the degree to which all groups of students are receiving desired civic learning opportunities.

The CERG study draws on the IEA Civic Education Study, a nationally representative sample of ninth graders, and on a diverse set of more than 2,500 high school seniors in California. It was conducted in partnership with the Constitutional Rights

Foundation and the California Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools. [▶](#)

The Civic Engagement Research Group at Mills College conducts quantitative and qualitative research on youth civic engagement and the impact of civic learning opportunities on young people's civic capacities and commitments. Through its research the group works to frame priorities and develop evidence supporting best civic education practices. www.civicsurvey.org

CIRCLE FACT SHEETS

CIRCLE has produced numerous Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:

≡ **Young Voters in the 2008 Primaries and Caucuses:**

An estimated 6.5 million young people under the age of 30 participated in the 2008 primaries and caucuses. This fact sheet provides estimates of the number of young people who participated in the 2008 primaries and caucuses, shows how the youth vote increased between the 2000 and 2008 primaries (in states where data was available), and provides information on which candidates young people supported in 2008. Data sources used for the fact sheet include exit/entrance polls from the National Election Pool (NEP), vote tallies as reported by the media, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS), March Demographic file.

≡ **Quick Facts about Young Voters in the 2008**

Primaries and Caucuses: A series of state-by-state fact sheets about young voters in the 2008 presidential primaries and caucus states. Includes demographic information about young voters and past voting rates. Data sources used for these fact sheets include the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS), March Demographic file and the U.S. Census CPS, November Supplement.

≡ **The Youth Vote in the 2008 Super Tuesday States:**

This fact sheet contains analysis of young voters in the Super Tuesday primaries and caucuses. It reveals a huge gap in turnout between youth who have college experience and those who have not attended college. It also portrays a diverse group of young voters, among whom whites are a minority. Data sources used for the fact sheet include exit/entrance polls from the National Election Pool (NEP), vote tallies as reported by the media, and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS), March Demographic file.