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COLLEGE STUDENTS VOTE SMARTER THAN EXPECTED

Students from swing states maximized impact on 2008 election by voting back home

EVANSTON, Ill. --- College students make strategic choices about where to vote, most prefer absentee ballots, and they are especially likely to vote absentee if their homes are in swing states, according to a new Northwestern University study of student absentee voting in the 2008 presidential election.

The findings are published today (Oct. 1) by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University's Tisch College.

The study assessed the outcomes of an in-person voter registration drive held during the fall of 2008 on Northwestern's Evanston campus. Students were offered a choice of local college-state voting in Illinois or home-state voting by absentee ballot. (The drive was organized and staffed by Northwestern students.)

Two Northwestern students, Kim Castle and Janice Levy, conducted the study under the direction of Michael Peshkin, professor of mechanical engineering in the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science.

"2008 was the first presidential election for most college students," said Peshkin, who is a steering committee member of the University's Center for Civic Engagement. "That's often the moment when students emerge as political participants or political bystanders."

The researchers found that students from swing states preferred home-state voting by an 8-to-1 ratio. Even students from non-swing states preferred to vote back home, by a 2-to-1 ratio. Most students chose absentee voting even though absentee voting is more complicated than local voting.

The study disproved two common assumptions: that students are unreliable voters and that the extra steps required for absentee voting would further diminish the number of ballots students cast. The study found high turnout rates for both students who voted locally and those who voted by absentee ballot. Seventy-nine percent of students who registered locally voted, and 84 percent of students who got an absentee ballot voted.

"We were amazed how many students registered to vote when we asked them in person,"

said Castle, lead author of the study and an organizer of the voter drive last fall. “On-the-ground campaigns definitely still have their place.”

More than 1.7 million students attend out-of-state colleges. A 1972 Supreme Court decision, *Dunn v. Blumstein*, eliminated lengthy state residency requirements that prevented students from voting in their college state. Since then, students who are away at college are eligible to vote in either their home state or in their college state. The same applies to military personnel at out-of-state bases as well as “snowbirds” and others with more than one home.

The Northwestern study concluded that:

- Students can be diligent voters with high turnout, both by absentee ballot and in local voting;
- Students who can vote in their home state or their college state are strongly influenced in that choice by the closeness of the presidential election; and
- Even in the Internet era, in-person voter drives reach many students who would not otherwise vote.

The findings demonstrate that given the choice, students from swing states will maximize the impact of their votes by voting in their home states.

The study can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/castle2009>

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CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) conducts and promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. A part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, CIRCLE has received funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and several other foundations.

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, a national leader in civic engagement, prepares students from all fields of Tufts University to become engaged public citizens and community leaders.

Tufts University, 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.