

# MILLENNIALS CIVIC HEALTH INDEX





## ABOUT THE PARTNERS

### NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

At the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), we believe everyone has the power to make a difference in how their community and country thrive.

We are a dynamic, non-partisan nonprofit working at the forefront of our nation's civic life. We continuously explore what shapes today's citizenry, define the evolving role of the individual in our democracy, and uncover ways to motivate greater participation. Through our events, research and reports, NCoC expands our nation's contemporary understanding of what it means to be a citizen. We seek new ideas and approaches for creating greater civic health and vitality throughout the United States.

### CIRCLE

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) conducts research on civic education in schools, colleges, and community settings and on young Americans' voting and political participation, service, activism, media use, and other forms of civic engagement.

Established in 2001 based on a recommendation of the National Commission on Civic Renewal, CIRCLE quickly earned its reputation for reliable, independent, timely research. CIRCLE's work is widely cited in scholarly publications and most national news media and has changed the public discourse on how citizens, particularly young people, engage in civic and political life, and the kinds of programs and activities in schools and colleges that foster student civic learning and engagement in democracy.

CIRCLE is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University. A national leader in civic education and research, Tisch College is setting a standard for higher education's role in civic engagement.

### MOBILIZE.ORG

Mobilize.org believes that in order to create long-term, sustainable and community based solutions to the challenges facing our generation, Millennials (young adults born between the years 1976 and 1996) must authentically engage their peers in identifying problems, proposing solutions, and most importantly, must work together to implement these solutions on their campuses and in their communities.

Our three-pronged program model; convene, invest and mobilize, has been developed over a decade, and with the input of tens of thousands of Millennials. Mobilize.org convenes Millennials to discuss the issues most important to them, provides an opportunity to work collaboratively to propose solutions to those issues and challenges, and then invests in groups of Millennials (both with our financial, and leadership resources) as they work to implement those solutions across the country.

Mobilize.org has convened 1,800 Millennials in person, and over 22,000 people online in 12 Summits, on issues including the lack of financial literacy for our generation, the barriers to community college completion and the challenges facing our returning Millennial veterans. Mobilize.org has invested over \$250,000 in 62 Millennial-led projects.

### HARVARD UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

Harvard University's Institute of Politics (IOP), located at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, was established in 1966 as a memorial to President Kennedy. The IOP's mission is to unite and engage students, particularly undergraduates, with academics, politicians, activists, and policymakers on a non-partisan basis to inspire them to consider careers in politics and public service. The Institute strives to promote greater understanding and cooperation between the academic world and the world of politics and public affairs.





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We would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals for their contributions to this report:

*Peter Levine, Director, CIRCLE*

*Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg,  
Lead Researcher, CIRCLE*

*Amber Goodwin, Director of Network  
Initiatives, Mobilize.org*

*Annie Lorenzana, Program and Com-  
munications Associate, Mobilize.org*

*Laura Simolaris, Director of National  
Youth Engagement, IOP*

*Matthew Warshauer, Harvard Public  
Opinion Project Student Chair, IOP*

*Kristi Tate, Director of Community  
Strategies, NCoC*



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# INTRODUCTION

## The glass is half full...

According to CIRCLE's estimate, 50% of young people (ages 18-29) voted in the 2012 election. Young voters turned out in large enough numbers to decide the election.<sup>1</sup> Not only do Millennials vote in large numbers, their volunteering and community service rates are much higher than those of their parents in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>2</sup> They also lead the country in the civic use of social media. According to a Pew Study on Social Media and Political Engagement, 44% of 18-29 year olds who use social networking sites use social media to "like" or promote political material, 42% to post thoughts on issues, and 36% to encourage others to act.<sup>3</sup>

## The glass is half empty...

Fifty percent of young people did not vote in 2012. Although the turnout rate was higher than it was in 1996 and 2000, it was right back to where it had been consistently from 1976-1992 (Fig. 1). Voting is very strongly correlated with socioeconomic status, and at no point since the 1970s have working-class young people voted in substantial numbers. Although volunteering has risen, and social media offer new opportunities for civic engagement, conventional group membership, attendance at meetings, working with neighbors, trusting other people, reading the news, union membership, and religious participation are all down for young people since the 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

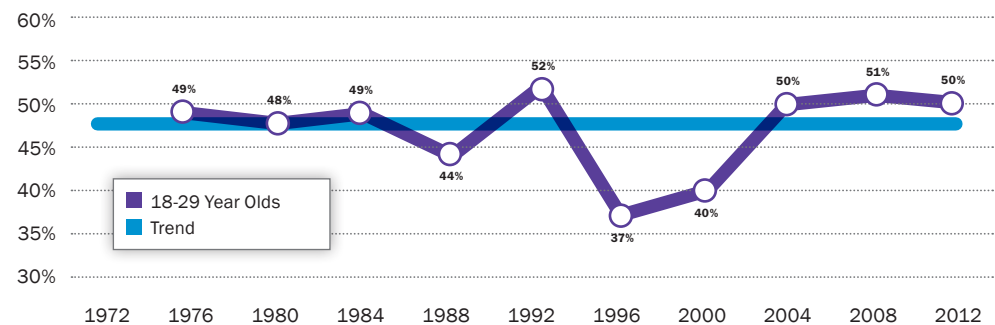
# 50%

of young people did not vote in the 2012 election.



Photo Credit: the co.space

**Fig. 1: Voter Turnout Among 18-29 Year-Olds, 1972-2012**



(CIRCLE estimates) with a trend line in blue. (1972 excluded because it was an outlier.)

Too often, negative stereotypes and miscategorizations of young Americans dominate the public dialogue. Labeling young people as lazy, entitled, or apathetic are all too familiar refrains in the public sphere. Immediately after the November election, a statewide official in Illinois said of Millennials, "They don't vote because very often they're lazy, and they're too busy playing with their little machines... They're just too in tune with texting and not in tune with what's going on around them."<sup>5</sup>

There is a common media narrative, as well, that depicts youth participation as unpredictable, at best, and flailing, at worst. Indeed, many would believe that youth turnout has fluctuated widely over the past decade -- reaching extraordinary and historic heights in 2008 and petering out in 2012. In reality, the numbers tell a different story. These misconceptions and generalizations are not only erroneous but can be damaging. When political parties, civic associations, news organizations, and other institutions assume that young adults do not engage, these institutions may avoid trying to recruit youth, which can lead to a cycle of disengagement.

It is equally important to avoid complacency. In some respects, young people today are more engaged than they were in the late 1990s, but many Millennials remain alienated and disempowered.<sup>6</sup> Even if recent increases in the volunteering and voting rates offer reasons for cautious optimism, there is no cause to celebrate when half of young Americans still do not vote in presidential elections—one of the lowest youth turnout rates in the world.

In many cases, their decision not to vote is also a sign of broader alienation or distrust. In focus groups the Harvard Institute of Politics (IOP) conducted in Detroit 2012, it was not uncommon to hear young people make comments like this: “If I vote, I have to vote for the lesser of two evils. And it’s not really like either one of them’s going to make a change, in my opinion. One might make it a little bit worse than the other one will.” In fact, in an IOP survey conducted leading up to the election, 43% of likely non-voters between the ages of 18-29 agreed (either strongly or somewhat) that it did not matter who was elected because Washington was broken; 31% agreed that it did not matter who was elected because none of the candidates represented their views; and 25% agreed that it did not matter who was elected because the parties are more or less the same. Each of these statements reflects a troubling lack of trust in the political system.<sup>7</sup>

The path forward begins by avoiding easy generalizations about young people and instead examining the nuance in their backgrounds, experiences, and how they engage in their communities and democracy. By understanding these differences, we can find ways to engage everyone.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Millennial generation represents a critical civic asset for the nation, making up a significant portion of the population and representing a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

- *Forty-six million American citizens are in the 18-29 year-old age range. They make up 21.3% of the eligible voter population.*
- *Young people are more ethnically and racially diverse than the older population. Just 59.2% of 18-29 year olds identify as non-Hispanic white, whereas 19.9% are Hispanic, 13.5% are African-American, 5.1% are Asian, 0.7% are Native American, and 1.5% are multiracial/other.*
- *More than half (58.3%) of 18-29 year olds have gone to college, but 41.7% have never entered college.*
- *In the current challenging economic climate, 9.7% of Millennials are unemployed, and although 62.9% are currently working, 31.2% of the working Millennials work on a part-time basis.*

The ways in which Millennials engage in their communities are just as diverse; and forms of participation vary widely when looking at education, age, race and ethnicity, geography, and other measures. The findings of this report reinforce certain well-documented issues, such as the “civic gap” along lines of educational attainment. Regional differences in engagement are not particularly substantial. But overlooked differences emerge, such as the fact that people with low educational attainment are more likely to help their neighbors. A few key findings include:

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

- *Achieving more education strongly predicts the likelihood that a person becomes civically engaged. The civic gap between young people without high school diplomas and college graduates is quite large; and in some cases, a college graduate is four or five times as likely to engage in specific behaviors as someone without a high school diploma.*
- *One important exception to this rule, however, is in social cohesion. Young people without a college education are more likely to help their neighbors on a regular basis, even though they also show, on average, lower levels of trust in their neighbors.*

# 43%

of likely non-voters said it did not matter who was elected because Washington was broken.



## Age

- Civic engagement generally increases as young people become older. Service, civic leadership and voice, local voting, and discussion of political and social topics increase gradually as age increases. While this principle largely holds true across the Millennial generation, there are some important exceptions:
- Offline or face-to-face discussion of current events is more common among the older Millennials than the younger Millennials.
- 22-25 year olds, on average, have lower levels of social cohesion and volunteerism than their younger or older Millennial peers. The data are consistent with two hypotheses. Those four years of life may represent a unique development stage during which it is relatively difficult to be civically engaged, or the young people who are currently 22-25 years old may represent a cohort that is relatively disengaged because of their experiences so far, including the recent recession.



22-25 year olds, on average, have lower levels of social cohesion and volunteerism than their younger or older Millennial peers.

Photo Credit: Harvard IOP

## Marital Status

- A combination of marriage and having children predicts high social cohesion for Millennials. The two factors separately boost social cohesion by moderate amounts.
- For Millennials, being unmarried with children, however, may act as a significant barrier to civic leadership and voice, perhaps because the demands of single-parenthood interfere with being a leader.

## Geography

- Differences in geography do not predict civic engagement as strongly as education, ethnicity, or other demographic factors, but some significant differences related to geography do exist.

Millennials are a diverse generation, with a strong civic foundation but critical opportunities for growth. Understanding the distinct ways in which young people engage in their communities is the first step to informing strategies that are responsive to these differences.

## WHO ARE THE MILLENNIALS?

All generations are arbitrary constructs, and there is no single accepted definition of a “Millennial.” For the purposes of this report, we focus on Americans who were 18 to 29 years old in time for the 2012 election. Voting is by no means the only manifestation of civic engagement, but the attention given to under-30 voters in the last presidential election makes that group an important category for analysis.

Forty-six million American citizens are in the 18-29 age range. They make up 21.3% of the eligible voter population.

Young people are more ethnically and racially diverse than the older population. Just 59.2% of the 18-29 year olds identify as non-Hispanic white, whereas 19.9% are Hispanic, 13.5% are African-American, 5.1% are Asian, 0.7% are Native American, and 1.5% are multiracial/other. Compared with Americans 30 and older, the proportion of young adults who are non-Hispanic whites is about 10 percentage points lower, and the proportion who are Hispanics is about seven percentage points higher.



More than one quarter of the 18-29s (27.3%) can be considered to have immigrant backgrounds, meaning they or at least one of their parents was born outside of the United States. They are about as likely to be U.S. born with one or more foreign-born parents (14.0%) as foreign born themselves (13.2%).

More than half (58.3%) of the 18-29 year olds have gone to college, but 41.7% have never entered college. Of those who have not attended college, 13% have not finished high school, and 28.8% have obtained a high school diploma or equivalent but have not gone beyond that. For young adults, educational attainment is the best measure of socioeconomic status. Young people who attend college tend to come from middle-class or wealthy families and go on to obtain relatively high status and wealth.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, current income is a poor measure of socioeconomic status for young adults and is not used in our analysis.

Less than 20% of 18-24s are married today, down from almost half in 1960. Among 25-29s, more than 40% are married today, but that is also down sharply from the 80% who were married in 1960.<sup>9</sup> Despite the Afghan and Iraqi deployments, military experience is also rare. Just 1.6% of 18-29 year-olds are military veterans,<sup>10</sup> compared with 11.0% among those 30 and older.

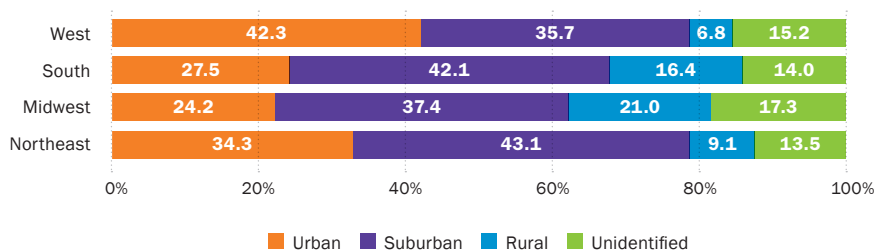
In the current challenging economic climate, 9.7% of Millennials are unemployed. Furthermore, although 62.9% are currently working, 31.2% of those Millennials work on a part-time basis. Over a quarter (27.4%) are currently out of the labor force, whether as full-time students or because of disability, incarceration, or full-time parenthood. Research also shows that unemployment among younger Americans (16 to 24 year olds) is twice as high as the national rate, and for Hispanic and African American youth, unemployment rates are even higher, up to nearly four times the national unemployment rate.<sup>11</sup>

The largest portion of youth live in the South: 36.5%, followed by 24.2% in the West, 21.5% in the Midwest and 17.7% in the Northeast. Almost 40% live in suburban communities, 31.6% in urban neighborhoods, and 13.8% live in rural areas (14.8% live in areas that aren't identifiable in those categories). Overall, this distribution is very similar to that of older people. But there are regional differences. Young people are highly concentrated in urban and suburban areas of the West and Northeast, while the Millennials in the South and Midwest are more evenly distributed between cities and rural areas (Fig. 2).

**9.7%**  
of Millennials are unemployed with 27.4% out of the workforce entirely.



**Fig. 2: Distribution of 18-29 Year-Olds by Region and Urbanicity**



The sum of percentages may not be exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

## HOW DO WE MEASURE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Citizens can engage in many ways to sustain and improve their communities and public institutions. In 2006, NCoC (the National Conference on Citizenship) began *America's Civic Health Index* by convening a working group of leading thinkers in the field to develop a set of indicators that capture the diverse ways in which individuals participate in their families, neighborhoods, communities, and democracy. In 2009, through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, NCoC was authorized to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the US Census Bureau. Annual data are now collected through the Census Current Population Supplement (CPS) which measures forms of civic engagement including volunteering, charitable giving, boycotting a product, discussing current issues online, seeing family and friends, and many more.

In this report, there are four composite measures which incorporate several specific indicators to summarize the level of engagement in major domains. These composites do not capture every aspect of civic engagement, but they are more statistically reliable than single indicators and they are able to convey information about groups more concisely. The four composites, each composed of between two and five specific indicators, are shown below:

### 1) SOCIAL COHESION

- a) The portion of neighbors whom one trusts
- b) Frequency of talking to neighbors
- c) Frequency of doing favors for or receiving from neighbors
- d) Frequency of seeing or hearing from family or friends

### 2) CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND VOICE

- a) Visiting a public official
- b) Membership in at least one type of group
- c) Taking a leadership role as officer or committee member
- d) Voting in local elections
- e) Boycotting products or "boycotting" (choosing to buy products for social or political reasons)

### 3) DISCUSSION AND EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

- a) Frequency of using the Internet to express political and community opinions
- b) Frequency of discussing politics with family and friends

### 4) ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

- a) Volunteering at all
- b) Volunteering at least 50 hours a year
- c) Working with neighbors to solve problems
- d) Attending community meetings
- e) Donating \$25 or more, or equivalent

These composite indicators were based on conceptual categories and refined based on their statistical properties. All individual scores were then standardized, so that a positive score indicates that an individual engages in a domain of civic engagement more than the mean. The units are in standard deviations: zero means exactly at the middle (i.e., the 50th percentile), and +1 means a person is at the 84th percentile.

The composite scores shown in graphs below are generally in the negative range for Millennials. That is because the composite standardized scores are based on all adults. Younger people are generally less engaged than older Americans. The value of these scores, however, is for comparing different groups of Millennials, or Millennials with older adults, so one should focus on differences. Whenever a single indicator seems more informative, findings and figures are included based on single indicators.



# 22.4%

of Millennials with college degrees say they always vote in local elections vs 5.6% of their peers without high school degrees.



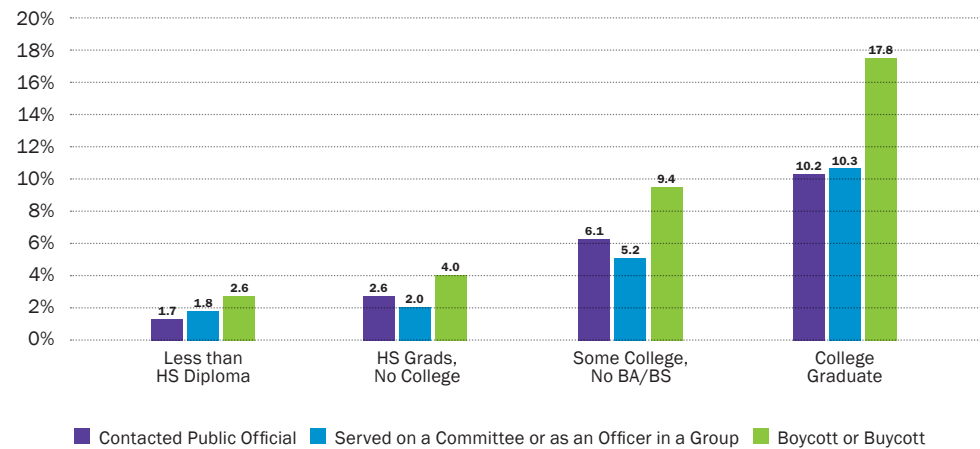
# WHO ENGAGES AND HOW?

## Educational Attainment

Achieving more education strongly predicts the likelihood that a person becomes civically engaged. This pattern is well known and, in fact, has been documented in “literally thousands” of scholarly studies going back to 1924.<sup>12</sup> In the CPS, the gap between young people without high school diplomas and college graduates is always quite large, and in some cases, a college graduate is four or five times as likely to engage in specific behaviors as someone without a high school diploma.

For instance, 22.4% of Millennials with college degrees say they always vote in local elections, versus 5.6% of their age peers without high school degrees. And 10.2% of college graduates have contacted a public official in the past 12 months, while only 1.7% of their peers without high school degrees have done so. Young people with college degrees are also much more likely to be involved in civic activities. Fig. 3 shows the differences for contacting officials, leading voluntary groups, and boycotting or “buycotting” (purchasing products for political or social reasons).

**Fig. 3: Non-Electoral Civic Activities by Educational Attainment, 18-29 Year-Olds**



# 10.2%

of Millennials with college degrees contacted a public official within the past 12 months vs. 1.7% of their peers without high school degrees.



These differences may indicate that education develops people’s civic skills and interests, but an alternative explanation is educational attainment defines social class, and civic engagement is a function of social advantage. Those two explanations are still debated in the scholarly literature.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the arrow between civic engagement and education might point in both directions, as some research demonstrates that increased civic engagement may lead to increased access to educational opportunities, better academic performance, and higher retention rates in higher education.<sup>14</sup>

One important exception to the general rule that education and civic engagement go hand-in-hand is social cohesion (i.e., socializing with, helping, and trusting friends and family members). Young people without a college education are more likely to help their neighbors on a regular basis, even though they also show, on average, lower levels of trust in their neighbors (see Figs. 4-6 on following page). This interesting and somewhat paradoxical pattern speaks volumes about the environment in which they live. In poor communities, the need to assist family and friends may be greater, but factors like poverty, segregation, and crime often lower trust. So it might follow that people help without being trusting.

Youth with less education are connected to smaller networks. In fact, only 7.4% of youth with less than a high school education say they can trust all of their neighbors, and 20.5% of them do not trust any of their neighbors. On the other hand, young people with a college education may help or talk with neighbors less frequently but generally trust at least some of their neighbors. Only 8.4% of youth with college degrees say they can trust no one in their neighborhoods.

Some of this might be connected to attachment to place. People without college educations may be more likely to stay in the communities where they grew up, meaning they may know their neighbors well. Pursuing a college education often means living away from home and taking jobs far away from the family of origin. In fact, according to CIRCLÉ's analysis of 2010 Current Population Survey, young people, on average, have spent shorter amounts of time in the community they live in compared to older people. Twenty-one percent of 18-29 year olds have lived in the same community for six months or less, and only 35.5% have lived in the same community for five years or longer. In contrast, just 6.4% of people 30 years or older have been in the same community for six months or less and 67.2% have spent more than five years in the same community. These factors may impact the degree to which people help neighbors on a regular basis.

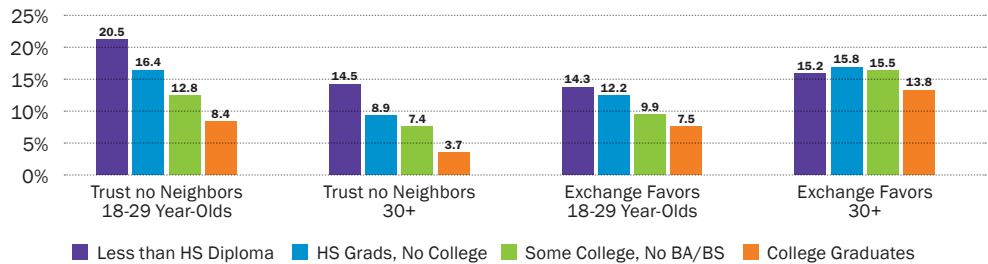


**20.5%**

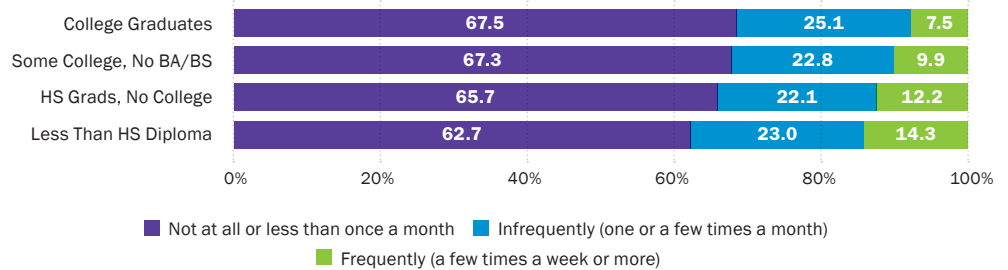
of 18-29 year olds without high school degrees trust none of their neighbors vs. 14.5% of those without high school degrees who are 30 and older.

Photo Credit: Mobilize.org

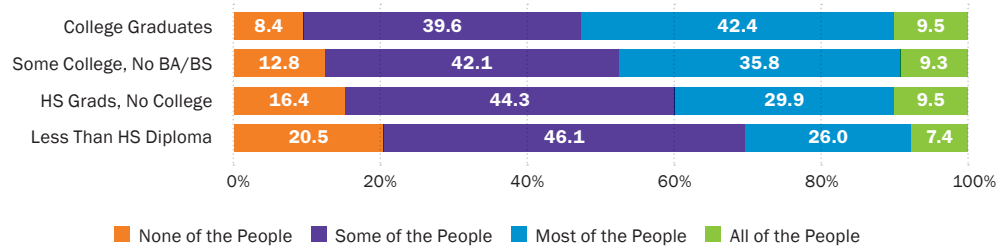
**Fig. 4: Trust in Neighbors, Exchange Favors with Neighbors by Educational Attainment**



**Fig. 5: Helping Neighbors by Educational Attainment, 18-29 Year-Olds**



**Fig. 6: Trust Neighbors by Educational Attainment, 18-29 Year-Olds**



The sum of percentages may not be exactly 100.0% due to rounding.



Photo Credit: Mobilize.org

These gaps along lines of educational access are reinforced by research conducted by Harvard University's Institute of Politics. IOP conducted a survey of young Americans regarding attitudes toward politics and public service in the spring of 2012. The survey of 18-29 year olds reflected a diverse range of educational backgrounds, based on current school enrollment.

When comparing responses among those currently enrolled in a four-year college or university, relative to the full group, similar gaps arise across indicators of participation. Eighty-three percent of four-year college students reported having been registered to vote in the 2008 presidential election versus only 66% of the group as a whole. Similarly, 78% of four-year college students did vote, relative to just 65% of the group as a whole. Similar gaps surfaced for other forms of community involvement, with 53% of four-year college students having volunteered, relative to 34% across the full group.<sup>15</sup>

Not only does educational access strongly predict engagement in most cases, but Millennials believe education is a critical issue to be addressed. On August 24-26, 2012, Mobilize.org convened more than 60 Millennial students, nonprofit professionals, and social entrepreneurs to discuss the challenges preventing the Millennial generation from realizing their civic and electoral potential for the 2012 election and beyond. Participants met with community leaders, elected officials, and social entrepreneurs to capitalize on the energy surrounding the election to create lasting change in their communities. Mobilize.org Summit findings indicate that one of the most pressing issues facing Millennials is education and they believe new education standards are needed to compete on a global level and to invigorate the economy.

This insight into the critical role that education plays in cultivating the skills and behaviors necessary for active engagement, as well as the understanding that Millennials believe education is a critical issue, can lead to strategies that yield multiple rewards. Through engagement programs focused on education, such as tutoring and mentoring or advocating for education reform, Millennials can work on a topic of importance while also helping to break the cycle of disengagement in the long term by improving educational opportunities for the next generation.

*“As a community college student, I know it’s crucial that we make education more accessible and that we empower students to take leadership roles and share their voice both inside and outside of the classroom.”*

—Jose Ibarra  
Mobilize.org Target 2020  
Florida Summit





Photo Credit: Mobilize.org

Mobilize.org has engaged Millennials on this issue by bringing together young leaders, activists, and community college students to discuss the challenges they face in completing their education. In collaboration with civic leaders, administration officials, and faculty, they worked to tackle these issues and develop stronger networks for student support. Participants overwhelmingly felt they had the power to change their communities but were not as confident their community colleges would help get them to make that change.

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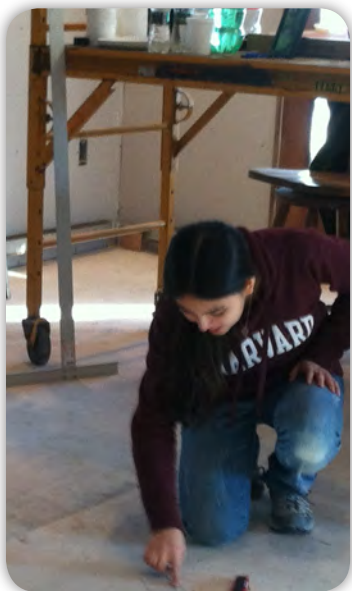
**Peer Pairing, Mobilize.org Target 2020 North Carolina Peer Pairing** is a student-led peer to peer support group for first year community college students. Student mentors are paired with new students to provide support, advice and encouragement; strategies for adapting to a new academic environment; coaching on effective study skills; inside track on college support services; tips related to college policies and an opportunity to foster positive friendships.

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## Age

Even when studying one specific generation, important distinctions emerge within the age group. Civic engagement generally increases as young people become older. Service, civic leadership and voice, local voting, and discussion of political and social topics increase gradually as age increases. While this principle largely holds true across the Millennial generation, there are some important exceptions:

- *Offline or face-to-face discussion of current events is more common among the older Millennials than the younger Millennials. However, there is no appreciable difference in the frequency of online discussion by age among Millennials.*
- *The 22-25 year olds, on average, have lower levels of social cohesion than their younger or older Millennial peers. For example, the 22-24 group shows a slightly lower level of trust in neighbors than other age groups.*
- *Similarly, volunteering rate is lower for the 22-25 year olds (18.2%) than the younger (22.0%) and the older group (21.7%).*



# 18.2%

of 22-25 year olds volunteer in their community compared with 22% of 18-21 year olds.

Photo credit: Harvard IOP

Multivariate analysis indicates that today's 22-25 year olds may represent either a unique development stage or a sub-generation that is relatively disengaged for a variety of potential reasons. For example, social cohesion is generally higher for people who have college experience than those without. But that pattern does not apply to the 22-25 year olds in the CPS sample. The 22-25 year olds with college experience are actually less trusting of others in the neighborhood, see family and friends less frequently, and work with and talk with neighbors less often than their non-college peers.

A cohort explanation presumes that people born around a certain time have an enduring character. A developmental explanation posits that people who are at a certain age when they are surveyed tend to answer in a particular way because of their stage in life. While concrete evidence is lacking to support either the cohort or developmental story, it is true that the 22-25 year olds in this study roughly coincide with the college-graduating classes of 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011, entering the workforce during the particularly bad economic years and with poor employment outlook. Although in 2011, 22-25 year olds with college experience are half as likely to be unemployed as the 22-25 year olds with no college experience, it is possible this middle cohort of Millennials are following a different development trajectory than the older cohort did.

On the other hand, it may be the 22-25 year olds simply show lower social cohesion because they are in the transient period of their lives. Many are still away at college (most graduate from college when older than 25), or in graduate school, while some may be just settling into a different stage of their lives, such as starting a new job, getting married, or starting a family.

Older Millennials show different demographic characteristics from younger Millennials. For example, the youngest Millennials are more likely to live in suburban areas than older groups, more likely to be native-born than older groups, far less likely to be married or have children but more likely to be unemployed than the older Millennial groups. Among the 18-21 year olds in the labor force, a very high proportion (20%) are unemployed, and of those who are employed, 59.9% are employed only part-time. Older Millennials, as we expected, are more likely to have gone to college than the youngest group: 47.6% of 18-21 year olds have gone to college, while 63.0% and 64.2% of the 22-25 year olds and 26-29 year olds, respectively, have gone to college.

While more evidence is needed to explore these differences between the younger and older Millennials, it can be said that the state of the economy is a pressing issue for the Millennial generation regardless. Mobilize.org Summit findings reported that the economy was the biggest issue that elected officials need to address. That finding is consistent with polling by Harvard's Institute of Politics, which found that the economy was the top issue for 61% of 18-29s, far above health-care, chosen by 10%. CIRCLE's polling during the 2012 elections season also found the economy to be the dominant issue.<sup>16</sup>

This challenge presents another critical opportunity to intervene, as research has shown that civic health and economic resilience are strongly interconnected.<sup>17</sup> Participation in civic life not only cultivates the skills and networks to help young people secure employment, but stronger civic health on a community level helps build the trust, access to information, reciprocity, and civic infrastructure that enables communities to weather a crisis. Strategies that engage Millennials in addressing economic issues, as with education, can yield multiple rewards by creating pathways for individual engagement while strengthening communities on the whole.

Strategies that engage Millennials in addressing economic issues, as with education, can yield multiple rewards by creating pathways for individual engagement while strengthening communities on the whole.



**The co.space, Mobilize.org Millennial Civic Engagement Summit** The co.space project is a program where university students and experienced change-makers live together for two years. The purpose of the project is to grow and nurture future world-changers. Through the program, students are given opportunities to apply sustainability innovation and social entrepreneurship to local community projects and global internships. The co.space project believes that more and more young people are passionate about becoming global change-makers but are unsure of where to start. The co.space is designed to create an environment where the barriers to taking those first steps are removed.

## Marriage and Having Children

Getting married and having children are major life changes. The general pattern is that being married and having children boosts civic engagement, whereas having children without being married does not. There are many possible explanations for why being married and having children might boost engagement, including access to a new infrastructure of engagement, whether that's through schools, sports and recreation, parent associations, and more. On the other hand, the demands of single parenthood might make engagement in some forms more difficult. It's important to look closely, however, at how these results vary depending on the form of engagement.

A statistical model was employed that estimates the effect of marriage, having children, or a combination of both, while accounting for age, educational attainment, and Hispanic origins, on the four civic engagement composites. Results for ages 18-29 and 30+ were also compared to see if there are differential effects for different ages.

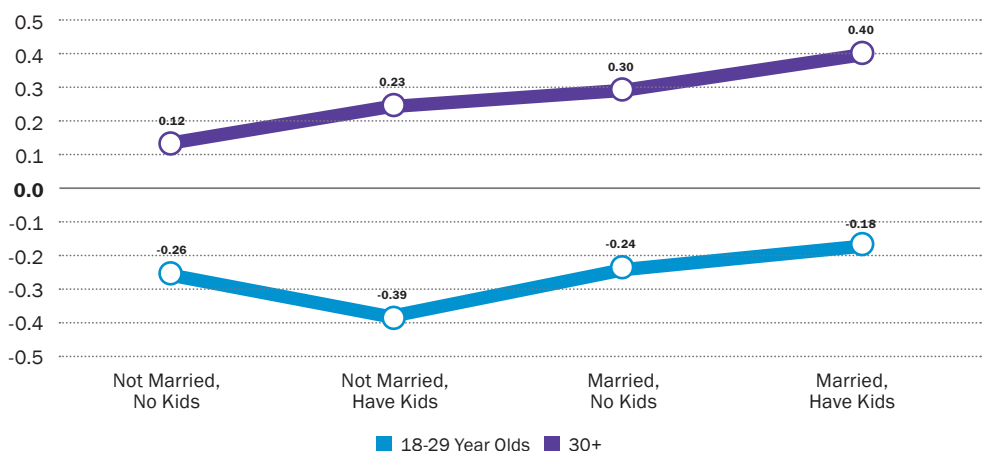
For Millennials, the likelihood of serving in the community primarily through service and working with neighbors increases when they are married. Having children does not have notable effects. On the other hand, for the 30+ age group, either marriage or having children in the home boost civic involvement. Married Millennials are just as likely to serve in the community as unmarried 30+ adults without children in the home.

A combination of marriage and children predicts high social cohesion for Millennials. The two factors separately boost social cohesion by moderate amounts. The same trends are seen in the 30+ group. Married Millennials with children report higher social cohesion than the 30+ unmarried adults without children.



Photo Credit: the co.space

**Fig. 7: Civic Leadership and Voice by Marital Status and Parenthood**





For Millennials, being unmarried with children may act as a significant barrier to civic leadership and voice, perhaps because the demands of single-parenthood interfere with being a leader. Being married is associated with higher levels of civic leadership and voice, and so is having no children. Being married with children boosts the level of participation by a moderate amount. (See Fig 7 on previous page.)

**Parents for College, Mobilize.org Target 2020 Florida** Parents for College works with students enrolled at Miami Dade College Hialeah Campus to attend class while leaving their kids in the daycare center. The program works to prevent parents from dropping out by assisting them with reliable childcare services and access to a support through a network of student parents.

Marriage and children have different effects on discussion of current events for Millennials and for older adults (see Fig. 8). Among Millennials, the group most likely to discuss current events is unmarried and without children, perhaps because they have the most time and opportunity. For the 30+ group, being married but without children in the home predicts the highest level of discussion. Looking at the results another way, having children in the home is a negative predictor for the 30+ group regardless of marital status, but for the Millennials, having a child is related to decreased discussion only if a parent is unmarried.

**Fig. 8: Discussion of Current Events by Marital Status and Parenthood**

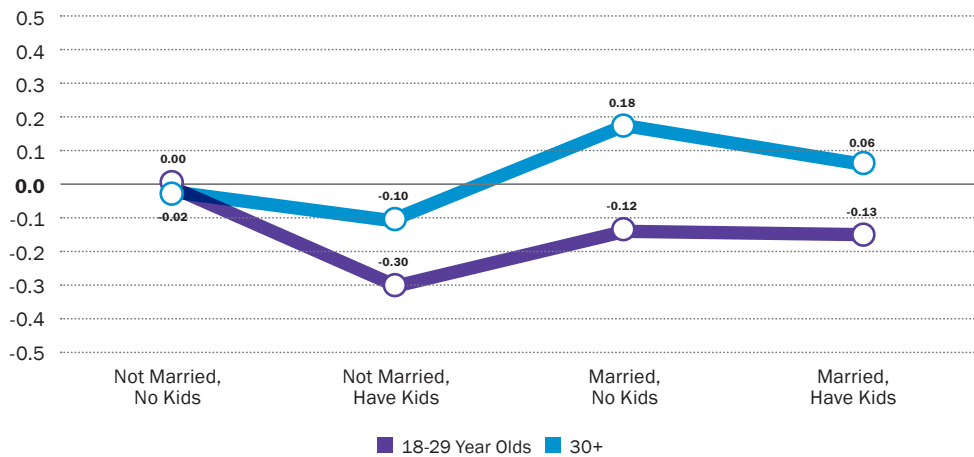


Photo Credit: Mobilize.org



Photo Credit: Mobilize.org



Photo Credit: Mobilize.org

**Making Democracy Count, Mobilize.org Target 2020 Florida** Making Democracy Count is a user-friendly web page that contains information for Miami Dade College Millennials on how to register to vote, access information on candidates, attend scheduled debates, as well as how to contact elected officials on a local, state and national level. The platform also offers interactive political trivia and social media integration designed for a Millennial audience.

# 15.1%

of Hispanic students dropped out of high school in 2010 compared with 8% of African Americans and 5.1% of Whites.

## Hispanic Background

Hispanic background appears strongly connected to lower rates of civic engagement in general. At the same time, it is often reported that Hispanic students are at the highest risk for not obtaining high school diplomas for a variety of reasons. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 2010 15.1% of Hispanic and 8.0% of African American students dropped out of high school, compared with 5.1% of Whites and 4.2% of Asians.<sup>18</sup> To tease out the effects of education versus ethnicity, a regression model was conducted to estimate the effect of Hispanic background accounting for education, marriage, gender, employment, and presence of children.

This model found that both Hispanic origin and educational attainment independently and significantly predict engagement, after accounting for other demographic factors. One exception was social cohesion, which was negatively related to Hispanic origin but unrelated to educational attainment.

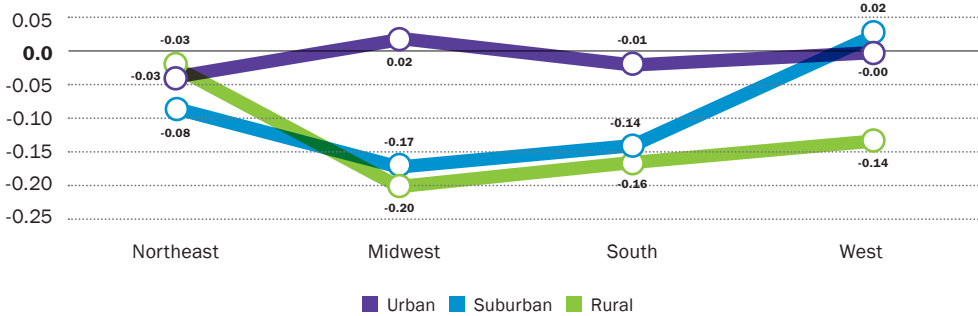
It is worth thinking about what factors relate to having a Hispanic background and which of those factors may lower civic engagement among Hispanic youth. Is civic engagement reduced, for example, by the experience of immigration and moving to a new context, by language barriers, by the citizenship status of the individual or his or her parents, by cultural norms in Hispanic communities, by a lack of opportunities for engagement that are consistent with the young person's culture or environment, or by ineffective recruitment and engagement by civic institutions? Further research is needed to elucidate this relationship.

## Region

Millennials can be viewed as living in four regions (the North, South, Midwest, and West) and in urban, suburban, or rural communities -- producing a total of 12 geographical categories. Living in these different places does not predict civic engagement as strongly as education, ethnicity, or other demographic factors do, but we find some significant differences related to geography. These differences may be useful for organizations and leaders seeking to engage Millennials in different parts of the country.

As an illustrative example, Fig. 9 shows that urban Millennials are generally more likely to discuss current events than rural or suburban young people. In fact, controlling for education, age, Hispanic background, marital status, presence of children, and female gender, urbanicity is a significant predictor of the frequency at which people discuss current events. But that difference is pronounced in the Midwest and South and absent in the West. Furthermore, there are very modest differences in the amount of discussion among urbanites across the country, but rural Northeasterners discuss current events much more than their rural counterparts in other regions.

**Fig. 9: Discussion of Current Events by Region and Urbanicity**



*“Urban areas like Detroit are filled with rising Millennial leaders and innovative thinkers. We are doing a disservice to our communities and our nation if we don’t better engage them in politics, civic dialogue and community challenges.”*

—Jay Rayford,  
Mobilize.org Millennial  
Civic Engagement Summit

Contrary to stereotypes about the sociable South, a Millennial’s region does not correlate with social cohesion once other factors are accounted for. However, rural residents are generally more likely to have high social cohesion than urban or suburban residents. This urban-suburban-rural trend is consistent across regions, but the difference between urban and rural areas is smallest in the Northeast.

Young people in the western and midwestern states are more likely to participate in civic leadership and voice activities than young people in the Northeast or South. Suburban youth are less likely to participate in these ways than urban or rural youth, when we control for other factors. Again, this national relationship conceals more complex regional patterns. Living in urban areas predicts higher levels of leadership and voice in the Midwest and South, while it predicts lower levels in the Northeast. Living in the suburbs appears to most negatively affect young people living in the southern and midwestern states, and suburban living does not seem to have the same deleterious effect in the Northeast and West.



After accounting for all other factors, young people in northeastern states are significantly less likely than their peers elsewhere to engage in service-related activities. Young people living in the western states are significantly more likely to engage in service than young people in the Northeast or South. At the same time, young people in urban areas are significantly less likely to engage in these activities than suburban or rural youth. Thus, as Fig. 10 shows, the urban Northeast is far behind the rural West in service. Note also that the South displays an unusual pattern in which rural youth are less likely to participate in service than urban and suburban youth.

**Fig. 10: Service by Region and Urbanicity**

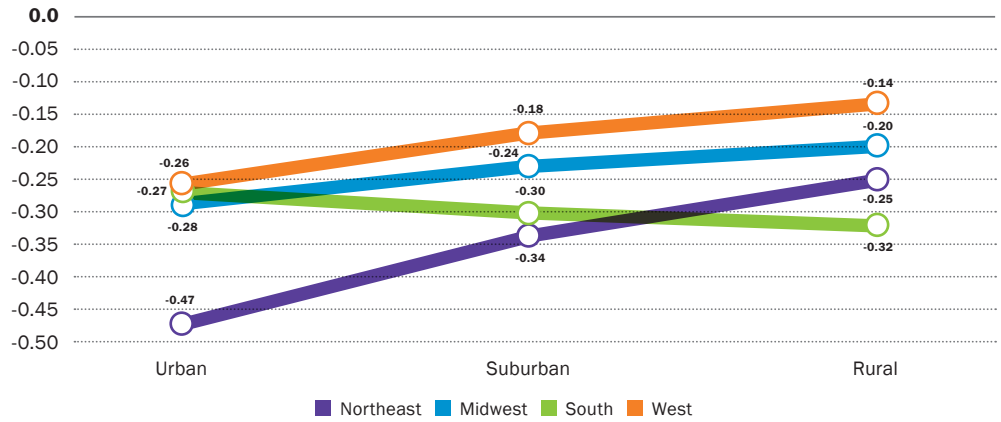


Photo Credit: Mobilize.org

**Charlotte Urban Farm Project, Mobilize.org Millennial Civic Engagement Summit**

Charlotte Urban Farm Project is an effort to create access to local food while meeting and engaging communities, individuals, and organizations where they are. The Project relies completely on recycled, borrowed as well as donated material and the farm sites act as a community space where citizens can initiate projects to meet their needs. Through the establishment of community-based CSA's, the Urban Farm Project lays the groundwork for a much needed Charlotte-area food co-op system that is working to address food deserts.



## CONCLUSION

Millennials are a diverse generation, with a strong civic foundation but critical opportunities for growth. Understanding the multifaceted ways in which young people engage in their communities is the first step to informing strategies that are responsive to these differences.

Numerous studies have shown the growing civic gap along lines of educational attainment and income, and these gaps are pronounced in the Millennial generation. Millennials report that education is a critical issue to competing in a global economy. The economic crisis in which many Millennials have come of age has, in particular, created new barriers and challenges to cultivating strong engagement. Furthermore, as research from all partners on this study has reinforced, the economy is the most pressing issue that Millennials feel needs to be addressed.

This challenge is even more critical to the civic health of the nation as research has shown that civic health and economic resilience are strongly interconnected.<sup>19</sup> Participation in civic life not only cultivates the skills and networks to help young people secure employment, but stronger civic health on a community level helps build the trust, access to information, reciprocity, and civic infrastructure that enables communities to weather a crisis. Creating pathways to engagement that speak to a diverse generation will prove critical to not only their individual trajectories but also the vitality of our communities in the years to come.

Initiatives like those described in this report engage and are responsive to youth voice and cultivate youth ownership over building the communities in which they want to work and live. They also provide a powerful reminder that, contrary to some public misconceptions, young people are engaged in their communities in important ways.

For some, youth turnout on November 6, 2012 came as a surprise. For others, it was simply an affirmation that Millennials are making their voices heard, and contributing their time and talents, on a daily basis in communities across the country. On Election Night, President Obama reminded the nation that, “The role of citizen in our democracy does not end with your vote. America’s never been about what can be done for us. It’s about what can be done by us together through the hard and frustrating but necessary work of self-government. That’s the principle we were founded on.” Millennials across the nation are heeding this and other calls to action, but more must be done to ensure all young people can realize their potential to do this work together.





## TECHNICAL NOTES:

Most of the findings presented above are based on analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data, conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). The data sources include CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2011, the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement (2010), and the CPS Civic Engagement Supplement. The Current Population Survey is a survey of approximately 50,000 households nationwide, used primarily to estimate monthly labor statistics. The CPS supplements are given in addition to the labor survey each month and cover a variety of topics including volunteering, civic and political engagement, and voting. The CPS supplements are the largest data source for volunteering, civic engagement and voting available in the U.S.

The composite scales for social cohesion, civic leadership and voice, discussion and expression of political and community issues, and engagement in the community were constructed using the items that were available in the CPS surveys, and validated by factor analysis. Each of the composite scales was found to have acceptable internal consistency, and to represent one construct. The analyses that included composite measures controlled for demographic factors such as gender, education and age using General Linear Modeling. For more details, please contact Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, the Lead Researcher of CIRCLE, at [kei.kawashima\\_ginsberg@tufts.edu](mailto:kei.kawashima_ginsberg@tufts.edu).

All of the analyses were conducted for young people aged 18 to 29 unless otherwise noted. Voting and registration statistics are based on eligible citizen population.

### *Items in the Composites:*

#### 1) SOCIAL COHESION

- a) The portion of neighbors whom one trusts
- b) Frequency of talking to neighbors
- c) Frequency of doing favors for or receiving from neighbors
- d) Frequency of seeing or hearing from family or friends

#### 2) CIVIC LEADERSHIP AND VOICE

- a) Ever visit a public official
- b) Membership in at least one type of group
- c) Taking a leadership role as officer or committee member
- d) Voting in local elections
- e) Boycotting products or “boycotting” (choosing to buy products for social or political reasons)

#### 3) DISCUSSION AND EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL AND COMMUNITY ISSUES

- a) Frequency of using the Internet to express political and community opinions
- b) Frequency of discussing politics with family and friends

#### 4) ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

- a) Volunteering at all
- b) Volunteering at least 50 hours a year
- c) Working with neighbors to solve problems
- d) Attending community meetings
- e) Donating \$25 or more or equivalent





## ENDNOTES

- 1 The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2012). *At Least 80 Electoral Votes Depended on Youth*. Available at: <http://www.civicyouth.org/at-least-80-electoral-votes-depended-on-youth/?%3E>
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- 3 Lee Rainie, Aaron Smith, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady, and Sidney Verba, "Social Media and Political Engagement," Pew Internet, October 19, 2012, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Political-engagement/Additional-Analysis/Social-Media-and-Political-Engagement.aspx>.
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- 5 Mark Brown, "Young Voters Hold a Lot of Sway," *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 13, 2012, <http://www.suntimes.com/>.
- 6 Surbhi Gotsay, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Abby Kiesa, and Peter Levine, *That's Not Democracy: How Out-of-School Youth Engage in Civic Life and What Stands in their Way* (Medford, MA: CIRCLE, 2012).
- 7 Findings are among the likely non-voters (39% of the sample) from the IOP Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes towards Politics and Public Service 22nd Edition: September 19 - October 3, 2012.
- 8 Martha J. Bailey and Susan M. Dynarski, "Inequality in Postsecondary Education," in Greg J. Duncan and Richard J. Murnane, eds., *Wither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances* (New York and Chicago: Russell Sage Foundation and Spencer Foundation, 2011), 117-31.
- 9 Frank F. Furstenberg Jr., "On a New Schedule: Transitions to Adulthood and Family Change," *The Future of Children*, 20(1) (Spring 2010): Fig. 3, 71.
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- 11 Rory O'Sullivan and Alistair Johnston, "No End in Sight? The Long-Term Youth Jobs Gap and What it Means for America." 2011, (accessed December 6, 2012) <http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/No-End-In-Sight-7.9.12.pdf>.
- 12 R. M. Sondheimer and D. P. Green, "Using Experiments to Estimate the Effects of Education on D. Voter Turnout," *American Journal of Political Science* 54(1) (2010): 174-189.
- 13 CIRCLE Staff with Haley Pero and Laura Nelson, "Voting Laws, Education, and Youth Civic Engagement: A Literature Review," CIRCLE Working Paper 75, November 2012, <http://www.civicyouth.org>.
- 14 Christine M. Cress, PhD, Cathy Burack, EdD, Dwight E. Giles, Jr., PhD, Julie Elkins, EdD, Margaret Carnes Stevens, EdD, "A Promising Connection: Increasing College Access and Success through Civic Engagement," *Campus Compact*, <http://www.compact.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/A-Promising-Connection-corrected.pdf>.
- 15 It is important to note that this survey captures only current school enrollment, which might group those who have previously completed higher education together with those who have not, as opposed to educational attainment which captures the highest level of education reached in CPS data. The data shed light on two distinct but important issues of how educational opportunity shapes engagement opportunities.
- 16 The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (2012). *Young Voter Poll 2012 Topline (non-college and college youth subsample)*. Available at [http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/YEF\\_CollegeExp\\_Frequencies\\_2012\\_07\\_30.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/YEF_CollegeExp_Frequencies_2012_07_30.pdf).
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# CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

## State and Local Partnerships

NCoC began America's Civic Health Index in 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. In 2009, NCoC was incorporated into the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, and directed to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the U.S. Census Bureau.

NCoC now works with partners in over 30 communities nationwide to use civic data to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America and to drive sustainable civic strategies.

### STATES

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#### Alabama

University of Alabama  
David Mathews Center  
Auburn University

#### Arizona

Center for the Future of Arizona

#### California

California Forward  
Center for Civic Education  
Center for Individual and  
Institutional Renewal  
Davenport Institute

#### Connecticut

Everyday Democracy  
Secretary of the State of Connecticut

#### Florida

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship  
Bob Graham Center for Public Service  
Lou Frey Institute of Politics  
and Government  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

#### Georgia

Georgia Forward  
University of Georgia  
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

#### Illinois

Citizen Advocacy Center  
McCormick Foundation

#### Indiana

Center on Congress at Indiana University  
Hoosier State Press Association  
Foundation  
Indiana Bar Foundation  
Indiana Supreme Court  
Indiana University Northwest

#### Kentucky

Commonwealth of Kentucky,  
Secretary of State's Office  
Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility,  
Western Kentucky University  
Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education  
McConnell Center, University of Louisville

#### Maryland

Mannakee Circle Group  
Center for Civic Education  
Common Cause-Maryland  
Maryland Civic Literacy Commission

#### Massachusetts

Harvard Institute of Politics

#### Michigan

Michigan Nonprofit Association  
Michigan Campus Compact

#### Minnesota

Center for Democracy and Citizenship

#### Missouri

Missouri State University

#### New Hampshire

Carsey Institute

#### New York

Siena College Research Institute  
New York State Commission on  
National and Community Service

#### North Carolina

North Carolina Civic Education Consortium  
Center for Civic Education  
NC Center for Voter Education  
Democracy NC  
NC Campus Compact  
Western Carolina University Department  
of Public Policy

#### Ohio

Miami University Hamilton Center for  
Civic Engagement

#### Oklahoma

University of Central Oklahoma  
Oklahoma Campus Compact

#### Pennsylvania

Center for Democratic Deliberation  
National Constitution Center

#### Texas

University of Texas at San Antonio

#### Virginia

Center for the Constitution at James  
Madison's Montpelier  
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

### CITIES

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#### Chicago

McCormick Foundation

#### Miami

Florida Joint Center for Citizenship  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation  
Miami Foundation

#### Seattle

Seattle City Club  
Boeing Company  
Seattle Foundation

#### Twin Cities

Center for Democracy and Citizenship  
Citizens League  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

#### Millennials Civic Health Index

Mobilize.org  
Harvard Institute of Politics  
CIRCLE

**Justin Bibb**

Special Assistant for Education and Economic Development for the County Executive, Cuyahoga County, Ohio

**Harry Boyte**

Director, Center for Democracy and Citizenship

**John Bridgeland**

CEO, Civic Enterprises  
Chairman, Board of Advisors, National Conference on Citizenship  
Former Assistant to the President of the United States & Director, Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps

**Nelda Brown**

Executive Director, National Service-Learning Partnership at the Academy for Educational Development

**Kristen Cambell**

Chief Program Officer,  
National Conference on Citizenship

**Jeff Coates**

Strategic Initiatives Associate, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

**Doug Dobson**

Executive Director,  
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship

**David Eisner**

Former President and CEO,  
National Constitution Center

**Paula Ellis**

Vice President, Strategic Initiatives,  
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

**Maya Enista Smith**

Former CEO, Mobilize.org

**William Galston**

Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution  
Former Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy

**Stephen Goldsmith**

Former Deputy Mayor of New York City  
Daniel Paul Professor of Government,  
Kennedy School of Government at  
Harvard University  
Director, Innovations in American  
Government  
Former Mayor of Indianapolis

**Robert Grimm, Jr.**

Director of the Center for Philanthropy  
and Nonprofit Leadership,  
University of Maryland

**Lloyd Johnston**

Research Professor and Distinguished  
Research Scientist at the University of  
Michigan's Institute for Social Research  
Principal Investigator of the Monitoring  
the Future Study

**Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg**

Lead Researcher, Center for Informa-  
tion and Research on Civic Learning and  
Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M.  
Tisch College of Citizenship and Public  
Service at Tufts University

**Peter Levine**

Director, Center for Information and  
Research on Civic Learning and  
Engagement (CIRCLE) at the Jonathan M.  
Tisch College of Citizenship and Public  
Service at Tufts University

**Chaeyoon Lim**

Assistant Professor of Sociology,  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

**Mark Hugo Lopez**

Associate Director of the  
Pew Hispanic Center  
Research Professor, University of  
Maryland's School of Public Affairs

**Sean Parker**

Co-Founder and Chairman of Causes on  
Facebook/MySpace  
Founding President of Facebook

**Kenneth Prewitt**

Former Director of the United States  
Census Bureau  
Carnegie Professor of Public Affairs and  
the Vice-President for Global Centers at  
Columbia University

**Robert Putnam**

Peter and Isabel Malkin Professor of Public  
Policy, Kennedy School of Government at  
Harvard University  
Founder, Saguario Seminar  
Author of Bowling Alone: The Collapse and  
Revival of American Community

**Thomas Sander**

Executive Director, the Saguario Seminar,  
Harvard University

**David B. Smith**

Senior Advisor, National Conference on  
Citizenship  
Founder, Mobilize.org

**Heather Smith**

Executive Director, Rock the Vote

**Max Stier**

Executive Director,  
Partnership for Public Service

**Michael Stout**

Associate Professor of Sociology,  
Missouri State University

**Kristi Tate**

Director of Community Strategies,  
National Conference on Citizenship

**Michael Weiser**

Chairman,  
National Conference on Citizenship

**Jonathan Zaff**

Vice President for Research,  
America's Promise Alliance

**Iilir Zherka**

Executive Director, National Conference  
on Citizenship



**National Conference on Citizenship**  
*Chartered by Congress*

