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**For Immediate Release**  
**September 22, 2008**

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## **Civic Health of the Nation: Election Energizing & Engaging Americans, but Many are Frustrated**

### **Survey Shows Few Expect to Take Action on Key Campaign Issues After Election Strong Bipartisan Support for Laws & Policies to Spark Citizen Engagement**

**Washington DC** – Americans are heavily engaged in political activities this election season, but many are frustrated and do not anticipate taking action on issues raised during the campaign after the election according to a new report released today by the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC). However, there was overwhelming support for laws and policies that would support greater citizen engagement.

Designed and analyzed by Tufts University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the 2008 Civic Health Index is an annual comprehensive assessment of attitudes, behaviors, and actions of Americans on civic activities including politics, volunteering, community action, and others. The survey was conducted in July by Peter D. Hart Research Associates with national samples of 1,000 respondents by telephone and 1,000 surveyed online. The full report is available at [www.ncoc.net](http://www.ncoc.net).

“What’s apparent from our findings is that Americans are actively engaged in this presidential election and devoted to serving their communities,” said Peter Levine director of CIRCLE, which is part of Tufts’ Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service. “However, there is a lack of opportunities to develop their civic skills and contribute their talents to address our deepest public problems. Our nation needs to cultivate and capitalize on this desire through laws and policies and the commitment of our institutions and businesses to serving their communities.”

With voter turnout in the primaries at its highest since 1972, more Americans are participating in this election in ways that go beyond voting. More than half said they have tried to persuade someone to vote for or against a candidate, which is close to a historical high. The Internet has also expanded political involvement as 39 percent had watched an online video about a presidential candidate and 33 percent had watched a candidate’s speech online.

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However, more are “frustrated” (43 percent) than “excited” (19 percent) by the election. And despite Americans continuing to volunteer and stay involved in their communities after the election, not many expect to work on the issues debated in the campaign in their communities after the election. Less than 10 percent would contact a local official about an issue and just 14 percent would try to change local policies in their school, workplaces, and communities.

Despite the low expectations on election issues, there was strong and bipartisan support for changes in laws and policies that would support greater civic engagement between elections. Eighty-seven percent favored providing young people with the opportunity to earn tuition money by completing a year of national or community service and 73 percent believed service-learning should be required of all high school students. Eighty percent also showed overwhelming support holding a national deliberation on major policy issues and requiring Congress to hold hearings on the results.

Overall, African-Americans were the most engaged, especially in this election cycle, surpassing the rest of the population in voting, going to political meetings and rallies, and talking to other people about politics. This can be partly attributed to the first presidential nomination of an African-American by a major party, but previous research has found African Americans, especially youth, to be more civically engaged than their counterparts.

Millennials continue to demonstrate strong interest in civic participation and reverse declines among youths since the 1970’s, volunteering at high rates (17 percent) than their parents did at that age. However, more than half are “not very engaged”. Meanwhile baby boomers are reaching the period of life when civic engagement should be peaking. More than a third are deeply involved in several forms of civic work and only 34 percent are not engaged at all.

As previous research confirms, people with college experience, especially young people, were found to be more civically active than those who have not attended college and adults without high school diplomas lag even further behind. However younger people who never attended college are well represented and participate in online groups. Thus, the Internet, social networking sites, cell phones and other technologies may provide opportunities to engage them more, which may reduce the civic gap among younger generations.

***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 Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and several other foundations. The curriculum report, “Narrowing at the Base,” was funded by the Ford Foundation.*

***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.*