



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

### Civic Engagement among Recent College Graduates<sup>1</sup>

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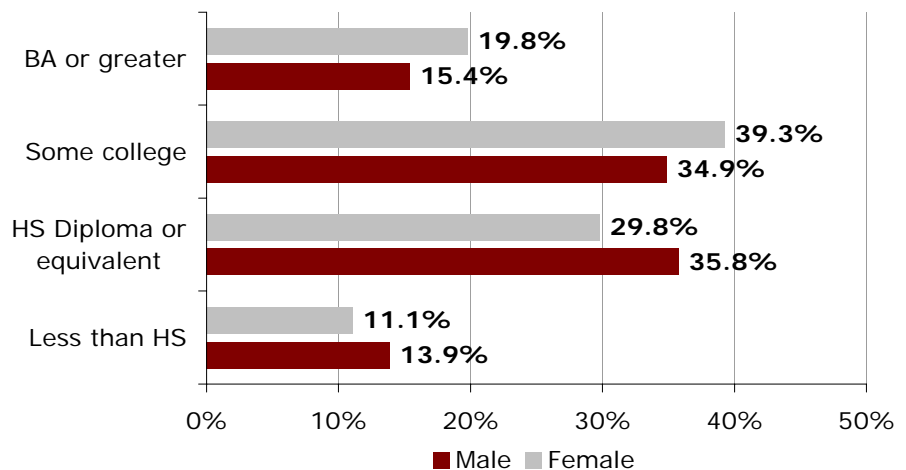
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The number of young people who hold a bachelor's degree has been rising over the last 20 years. Today, among 18 to 29 year olds, 19.8 percent of young women and 15.4 percent of young men hold a bachelor's degree or higher, with an additional 39.3 percent of young women, and 34.9 percent of young men with some college experience (including young people who were still working on their college degrees). See figure 1.

In a previous CIRCLE fact sheet we showed that young people who attend or have attended college are generally more civically engaged than those who do not. This finding was consistent with previous studies that have revealed correlations between years of education and political and civic participation.<sup>3</sup> In this fact sheet we limit our analysis to college graduates from the graduating class of 2000, highlighting relationships between core civic engagement measures, on the one hand, and graduates' race and

ethnicity, gender, type of college or university, SAT scores, and major field of study, on the other. We use data on college graduates from the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Longitudinal Survey<sup>4</sup> and data on youth and their educational attainment from the Current Population Survey September Supplements (1995 and 2005).<sup>5</sup> While, as expected, college graduates are very engaged, and are more engaged than most young people with no college experience, most of the differences we highlight here are modest in size. We find that:

**Figure 1: Educational Attainment Among 18 To 29 Year Old Citizens, By Gender (2005)**



Source: Authors' calculations of the Current Population Survey September Supplement (2005)

- African American and Native American and Native Alaskan college graduates are more highly engaged than Whites;
- that graduates of private universities are more engaged than those who graduate from public institutions;
- that Verbal SAT scores correlate with political participation;
- and that graduates with degrees in law, public administration, planning, or the humanities are more engaged than their peers in other fields.

This fact sheet concludes with some basic information about who is attending college.

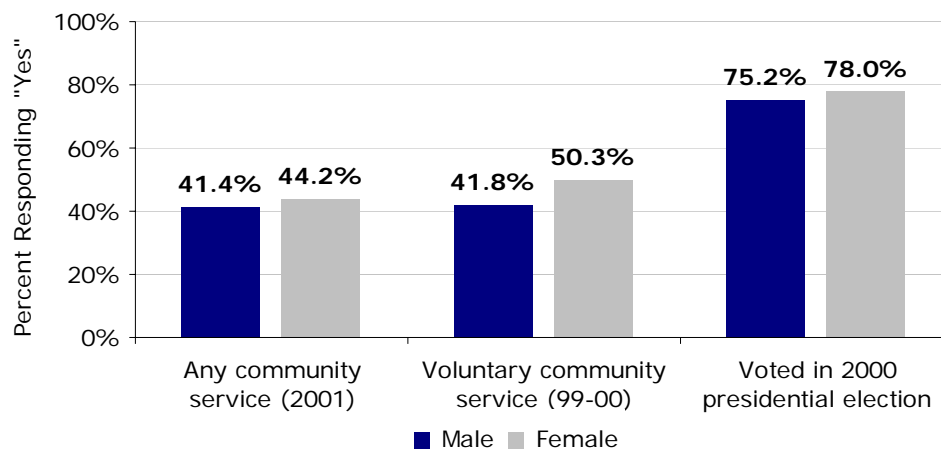
### Civic Engagement and College Experiences among Recent Graduates

The Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B 2000/2001) is a longitudinal survey limited to *graduates* of four-year college and university programs, a subset of all people who have attended college. Data from this survey collected in 2000/2001, and representative of the graduating class of 2000, reveal relationships between civic engagement and various specific experiences and attributes of college graduates. We focus on volunteering (a **civic participation** measure), voting (an **electoral participation** measure), and attending political meetings and writing opinion letters (measures of **political voice**). The following graphs highlight instances where participation rates differ significantly and/or where consistent trends emerge from the data. In other words, civic participation rates are not illustrated for those measures on which there is rough parity among all groups of college graduates. When reading these findings, it is important not to draw causal relationships from these data; the data only suggest correlations between certain characteristics of college graduates' experiences or identities and their civic participation rates.

#### *Differences by Gender*

Gender is often correlated with some forms of civic engagement; for example, analyses typically show that a higher percentage of women volunteer than men do, though men are more likely to engage in some electoral activities than women. For young people, while there are some distinctions between women and men, many differences are not exceptionally large.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of the B&B 2000/2001 survey generally supports this hypothesis. Out of the handful of core civic engagement indicators for which survey data are available, male and female college graduates demonstrate similar participation rates, but women show a higher rate of volunteering during their senior year of college and after they graduate. In addition, a higher percentage of female graduates voted in the 2000 presidential election than their male classmates did.<sup>7</sup> See Figure 2.

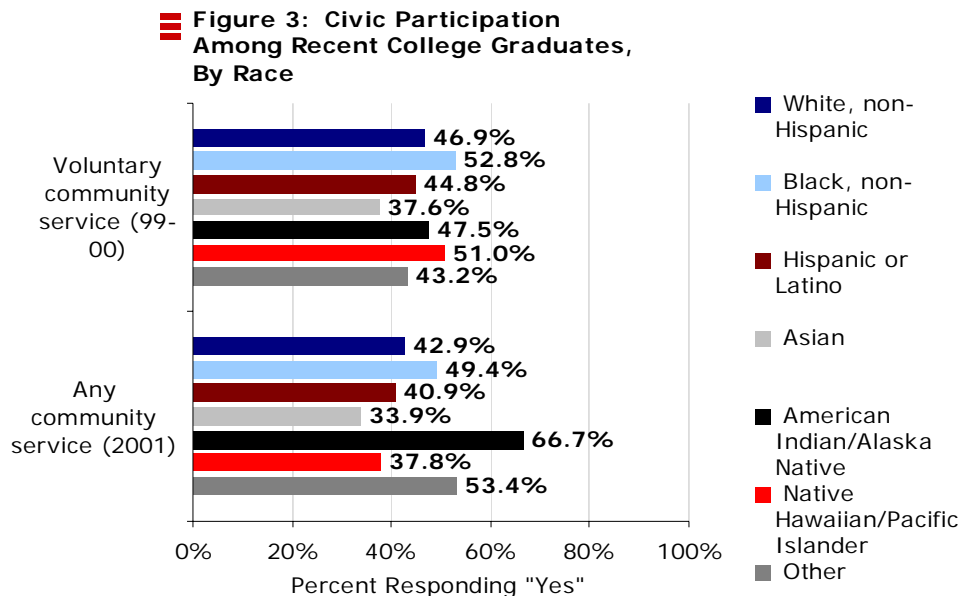
**Figure 2: Civic and Electoral Participation  
Among Recent College Graduates,  
By Gender**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

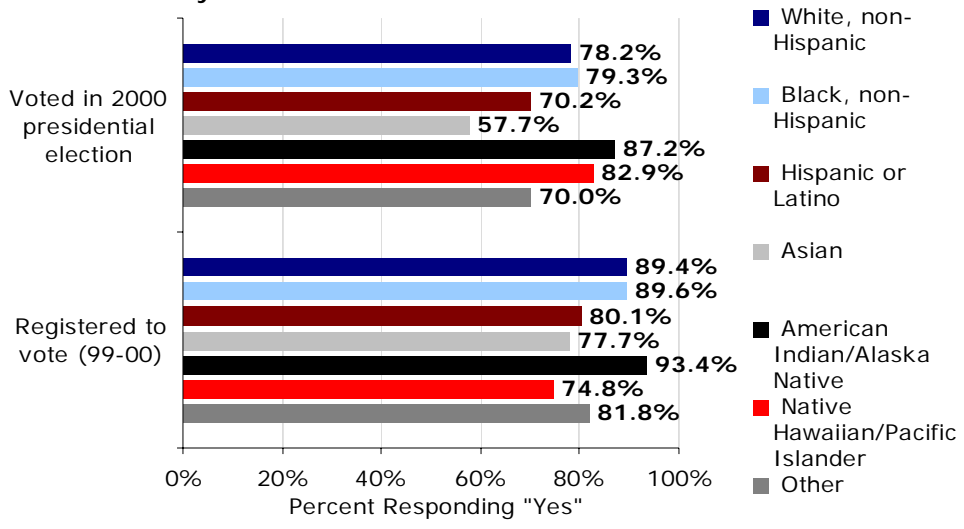
### Differences by Race/Ethnicity

Analysis from the B&B 2000/2001 survey shows differences in civic engagement according to graduates' race and ethnicity. For example, African American college graduates demonstrate a higher rate of volunteering than their White peers do, both before and after college. White and African American baccalaureates demonstrate higher civic engagement rates than their Latino or Asian peers across all six measures of civic involvement. American Indian and Alaska Native college graduates show the highest participation rates in nearly every civic engagement measure of the B&B 2000/2001 survey. Moreover, American Indian and Alaska Native students actually demonstrate increased civic participation (i.e., higher rates of volunteering) after they graduate, unlike the rest of their colleagues. However, these latter statistics reflect small sample sizes and the data should be interpreted with caution. See figures 3, 4, and 5.



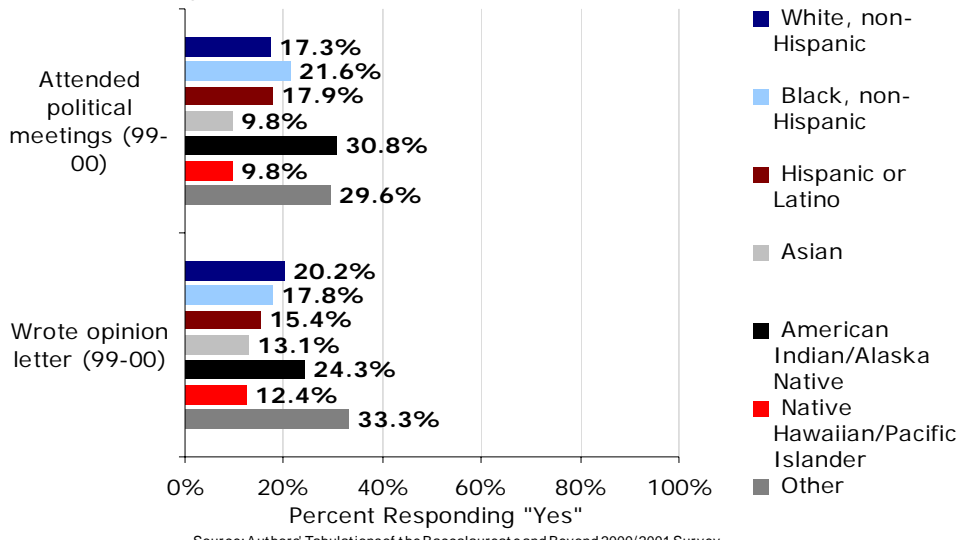
Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

**Figure 4: Electoral Participation  
Among Recent College Graduates,  
By Race**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

**Figure 5: Political Voice  
Among Recent College Graduates,  
By Race**

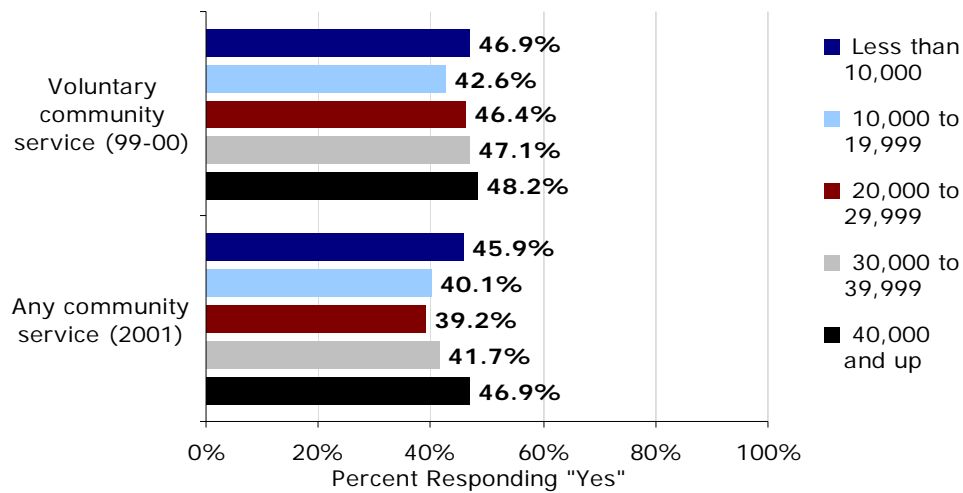


Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

### *Differences by Size of Post-Secondary Institution*

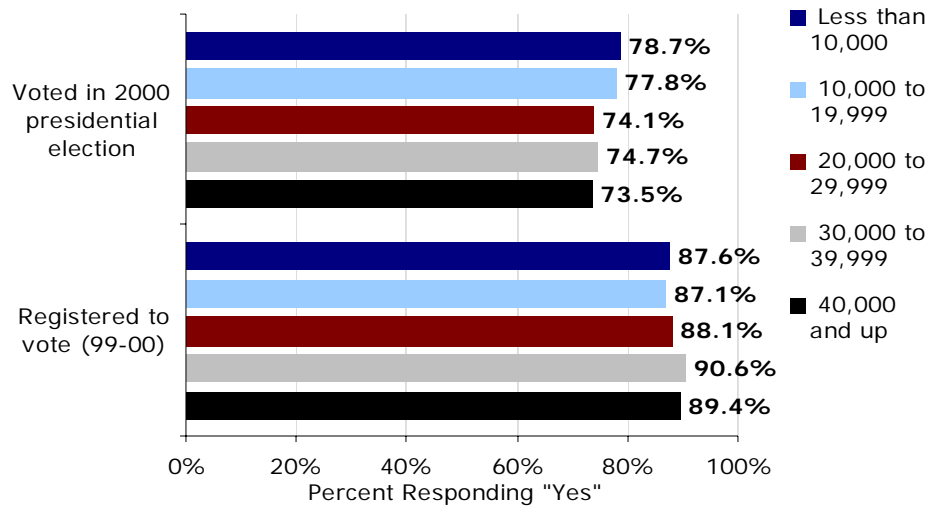
Civic engagement also differs among recent college graduates according to the size of the university they attended, but the relationships are complex. First, we have found that voter turnout rates decline slightly with the size of a graduate's institution. For example, in 2000, college graduates from the smallest institutions had a self-reported voter turnout rate of 78.7 percent, while those in the largest institutions had a voter turnout rate of 73.5 percent. However, while there is a difference in voter turnout rates, these differences are small; college graduates are voting at very high rates compared to all young people. Second, for several other measures (such as attending meetings), we see the highest participation rates among college graduates from the smallest institutions (those with fewer than 10,000 students) and in the largest ones (those with more than 30,000 students). See figures 6 to 8.

**Figure 6: Civic Participation Among Recent College Graduates, By University Size**

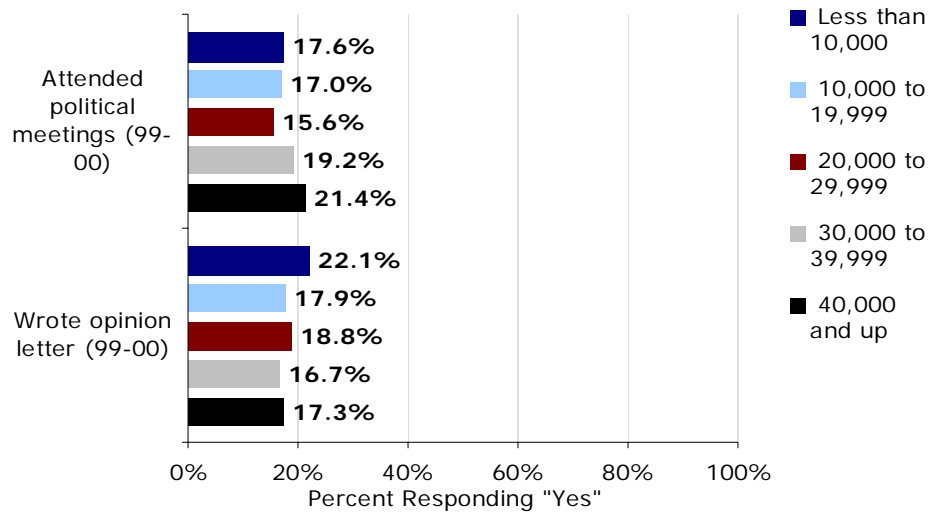


Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

**Figure 7: Electoral Participation Among Recent College Graduates, By University Size**

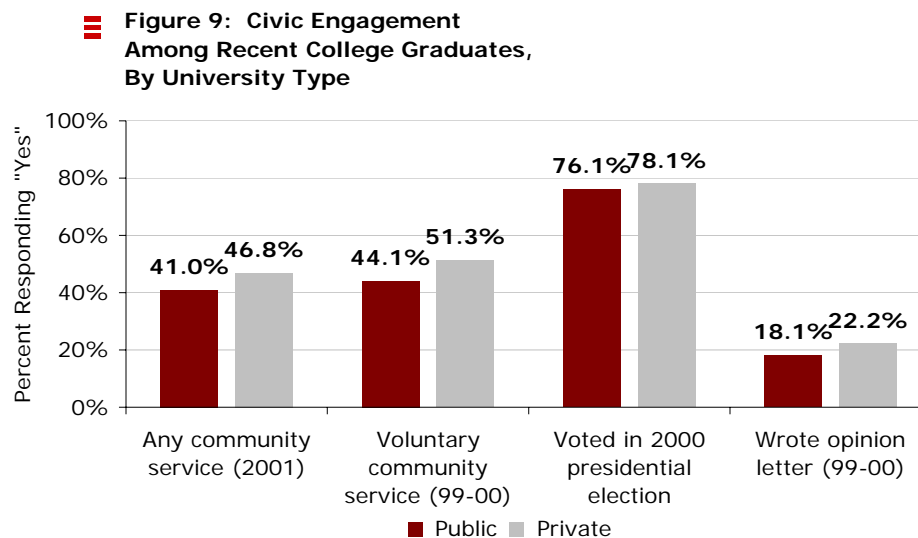


**Figure 8: Political Voice Among Recent College Graduates, By University Size**

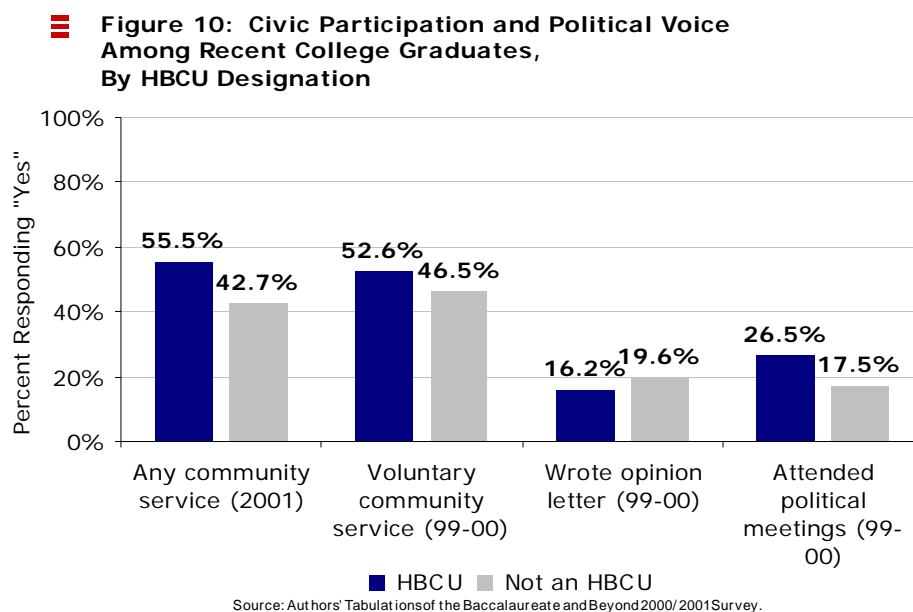


### Differences between Types of Institutions

Civic engagement rates—at least for volunteering, voting, and writing an opinion letter—differ among recent college graduates according to the type of college they attend. In the B&B 2000/2001 survey, students who graduated from a private university generally demonstrate higher civic engagement rates than their peers at public universities, though these differences are relatively small. See figure 9.



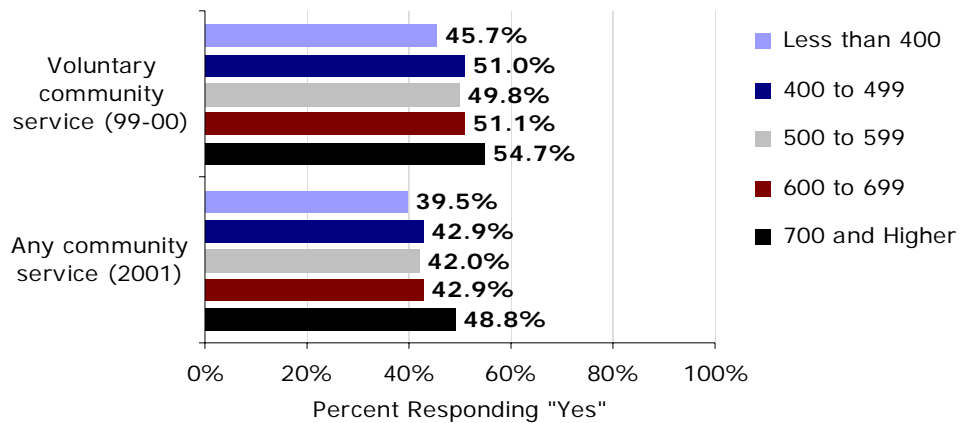
Whether a graduate's alma mater is a historically black college or university also relates to her civic engagement. Graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) show higher volunteering rates than their peers at non-HBCUs. Graduates of HBCUs also show higher rates of participation in political meetings than their peers at non-HBCUs, but they are not as likely to write opinion letters. See Figure 10.



### Performance on the SAT and Civic Engagement

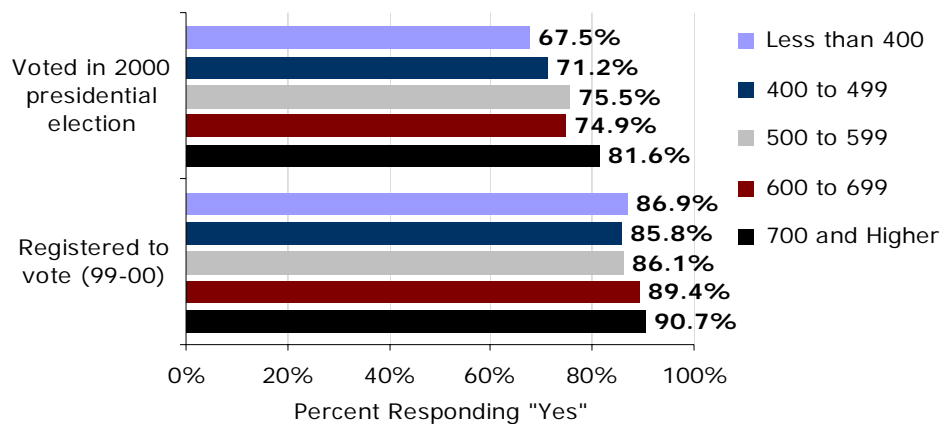
Civic engagement is generally positively correlated to graduates' SAT scores. An especially strong correlation is seen between Verbal SAT scores and political participation.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a graduate's Verbal SAT score is a stronger predictor of civic engagement than the Math SAT score. From the B&B 2000/2001 survey we find that the higher a graduate's Verbal SAT score, the more likely she is to volunteer, vote, write an opinion letter, and/or attend political meetings. The data also suggest that college graduates with very high SAT Verbal scores (700 and higher) are more likely to vote and write opinion letters than students who have very high SAT Math scores. Furthermore, in contrast to many of the differences highlighted above, differences between graduates who score high on either the SAT Verbal or Math and those who score low are among the largest we report. See figures 11, 12 and 13.

**Figure 11: Civic Participation Among Recent College Graduates, By SAT Verbal Score**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

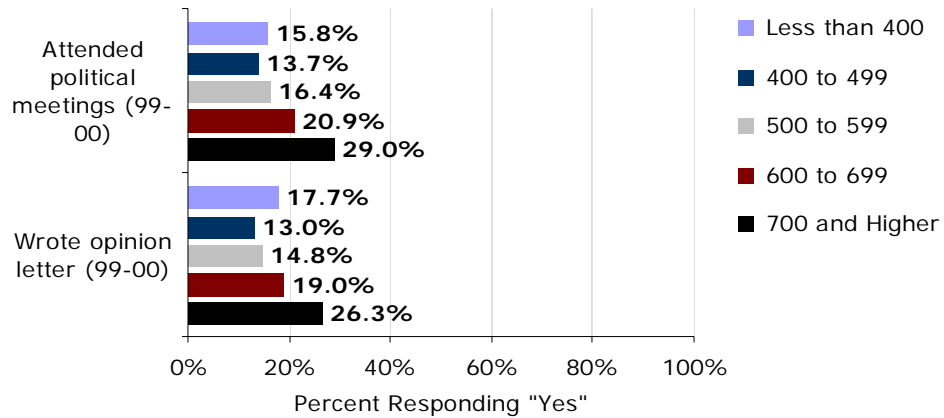
**Figure 12: Electoral Participation Among Recent College Graduates, By SAT Verbal Score**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.



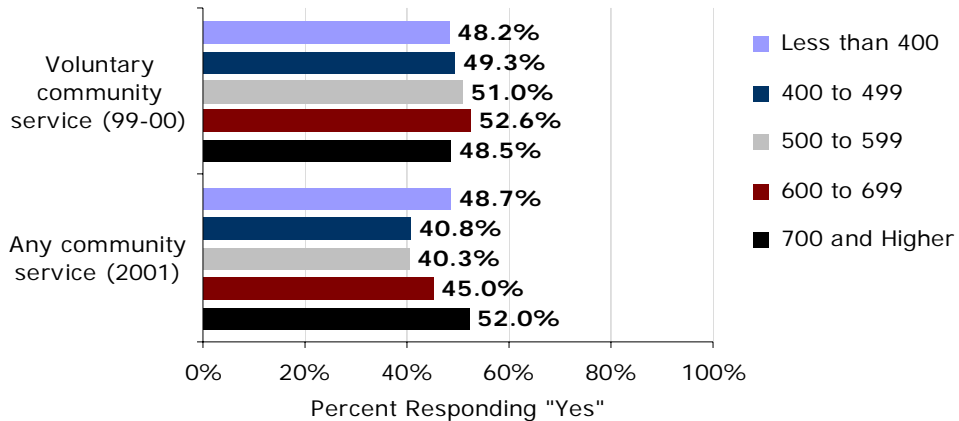
**Figure 13: Political Voice Among Recent College Graduates, By SAT Verbal Score**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

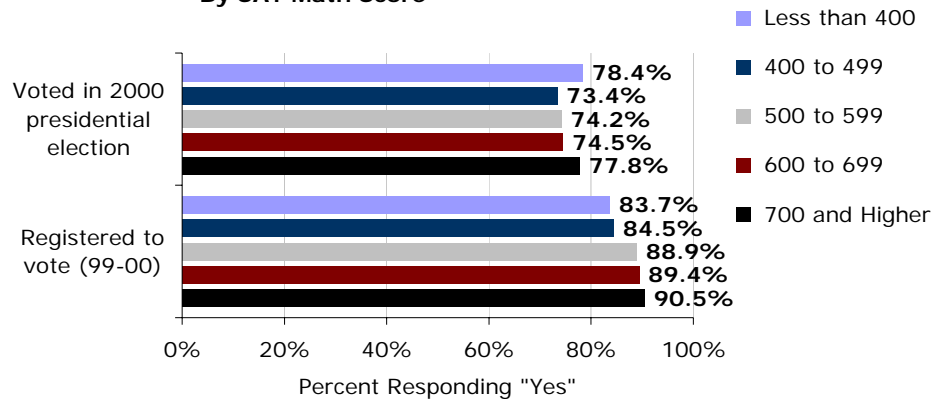
There is also a positive correlation between a graduate's SAT Math scores and her civic engagement. But the relationship is weaker than with Verbal SAT scores, though there is an important exception; students with Math scores below 400 show greater civic engagement than some of their peers with scores above 400, including those students with SAT Math scores over 700 (these are likely students who have relatively higher scores on their Verbal SAT). See figures 14, 15, and 16.

**Figure 14: Civic Participation Among Recent College Graduates, By SAT Math Score**



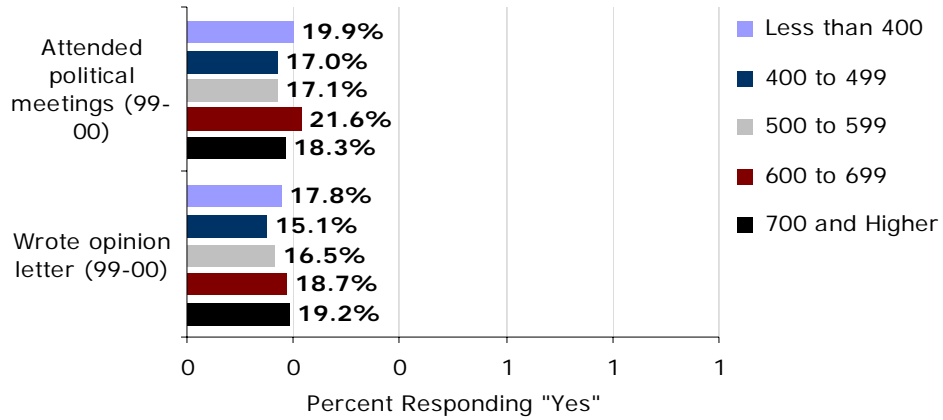
Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

**Figure 15: Electoral Participation Among Recent College Graduates, By SAT Math Score**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

**Figure 16: Political Voice Among Recent College Graduates, By SAT Math Score**



Source: Authors' Tabulations of the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey.

### *Differences by Undergraduate Major*

Civic engagement among recent college graduates also varies according to undergraduate major. Of all major groups, students in math, engineering, and computer science show the lowest rates of volunteering and political participation. Conversely, graduates who majored in law, public administration, planning or the humanities demonstrate higher civic engagement rates than the rest of their peers. See Table 1.

**Table 1: Civic Engagement Among Recent College Graduates, By Undergraduate Major**

<i>Undergraduate Major</i>	Civic Participation		Electoral Participation		Political Voice	
	Performed community service (2001)	Voluntary community service (99-00)	Registered to vote (99-00)	Voted in 2000 presidential election	Wrote opinion letter (99-00)	Attended political meetings (99-00)
Business / Marketing / Communications	39.2%	41.9%	89.5%	76.4%	16.4%	14.6%
Natural and Physical Sciences	46.2%	52.6%	88.3%	73.9%	17.1%	16.3%
Math / Engineering / Computer Science	36.8%	34.6%	82.3%	70.0%	14.0%	9.7%
Law / Public Administration / City Planning	46.4%	57.9%	94.8%	77.7%	43.3%	32.6%
Architecture / Industrial & Fine Arts	34.4%	33.9%	82.5%	71.0%	15.3%	15.9%
Health Sciences	43.0%	52.6%	86.7%	76.7%	25.7%	13.7%
Education	45.5%	47.1%	88.3%	81.2%	16.0%	12.3%
Humanities	49.5%	53.8%	90.5%	79.9%	25.1%	26.1%
Other / Interdisciplinary	41.3%	49.4%	89.0%	79.3%	15.5%	15.5%
All College Graduates	43.0%	46.6%	88.2%	76.8%	19.6%	17.7%

Source: Authors' tabulations from the Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Survey. All results are for the graduating class of 2000.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We identify “college graduates” as people who have received a Bachelor’s degree from a four-year postsecondary institution.

<sup>2</sup> Research Director and Graduate Assistant respectively, Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, University of Maryland School of Public Policy. We thank Peter Levine, Karlo Marcelo and Abby Kiesa for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see the CIRCLE Working Paper 08 by Thomas Dee entitled “Are there Civic Returns to Education?” for recent research evidence that attempts to disentangle the selection effects of education on civic engagement. Also, see *Voice and Equality* by Sidney Verba, Kay Scholzman and Henry Brady.

<sup>4</sup> The Baccalaureate and Beyond 2000/2001 Longitudinal Survey (B&B) from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) is the main data source for all analyses of college graduates and their civic engagement. The B&B survey follows a sample of over 11,000 young people who graduated in 2000 from four year institutions.

<sup>5</sup> The Current Population Survey Supplements (1995 and 2005) were used for estimating educational attainment for all young people in the final section of this fact sheet.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the similarities in civic engagement between men and women see Krista Jenkin’s CIRCLE Working Paper Number 41 entitled “[Gender and Civic Engagement: Secondary Analysis of Survey Data.](#)” For an analysis of differences in voting behavior by gender, and evidence on the growing gap in voter turnout rates between young women and men, see the CIRCLE fact sheet by Mark Hugo Lopez, Emily Hoban Kirby and Jared Sagoff entitled “[Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men.](#)”

<sup>7</sup> This pattern was also evident in the 2004 presidential election. Using the 2004 Current Population Survey November Supplement (CPS), we find that nationally, young male college graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 voted at a rate of 64 percent while young female college graduates’ voter turnout rate was 70 percent. Note that these figures are lower than those reported from B&B since the CPS was conducted within a week of the national election, while the B&B 2000/2001 was conducted several months after the 2000 presidential election, suggesting that recall may be an issue. As a comparison, in 2000, the voter turnout rate for young male college graduates was 60 percent while for young female college graduates it was 62 percent.

<sup>8</sup> Examination of the 1993/1994/1997/2003 Baccalaureate and Beyond survey of the graduating class of 1993 suggests an even stronger relationship between SAT score and civic engagement. In that survey, the SAT Verbal score was monotonically and strongly correlated with all measures of civic engagement. These tabulations are available on request from the authors.