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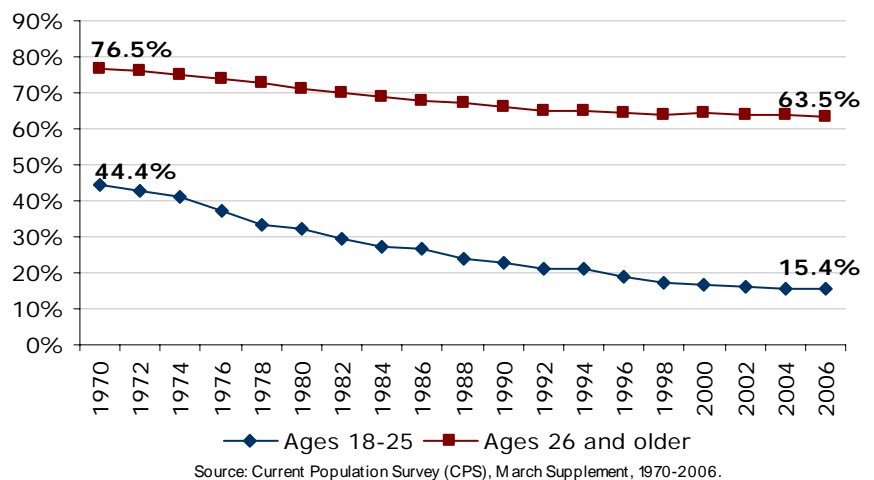
The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Marital Status and Civic Engagement Among 18 to 25 Year Olds

By Roberto D. Münster, Research Assistant<sup>1</sup>  
December 2007

Almost two thirds of Americans claim that the main reason to marry is to form “a lifetime union between two adults for their mutual happiness and fulfillment” .<sup>2</sup> However, marriage among young people ages 18 to 25 is less frequent than 35 years ago. In 2006, only 15.4 percent of 18-25 year old U.S. residents were married compared to 44.4 percent in 1970 (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> Part of the reason for this decline in the incidence of marriage is that young people today are waiting longer to get married. The median age for a person’s first marriage has increased from 20.8 to 25.5 for women and from 23.2 to 27.5 for men between 1970 and 2006.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, fewer young people are marrying today. An estimated 5 million were married in 2006 compared with 11 million in 1970.

≡ Figure 1: Marriage Rate by Age Group



One important finding in research on civic involvement has been the important link between marriage and civic engagement. For adults, those who are married are often more likely to vote or volunteer than those who are single.<sup>5</sup> Among young people, similar patterns are present, but important exceptions include volunteering, voting, and protesting.

In this fact sheet, I present evidence from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (2006 CPHS) on the correlation of a wide range of civic engagement activities and marital status of young people.<sup>6</sup> Young people are defined as those who are 18-25 year old and adults are those 26 and older.<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this fact sheet, I define two mutually exclusive groups by their marital status:

1. **Married:** these are individuals who reported that they were married as of spring 2006.
2. **Not married:** these are individuals in all other categories (living as married, widowed, divorced, separated, never been married, and those who said they "don't know" or refused to respond).

## The 19 Indicators of Civic Engagement

The 2006 CPHS measures 19 indicators of civic engagement (see table 1). These indicators are divided into three types of activities: civic, electoral and political voice. Appendix Table 1 shows involvement in each type of activity among young people by their marital status.

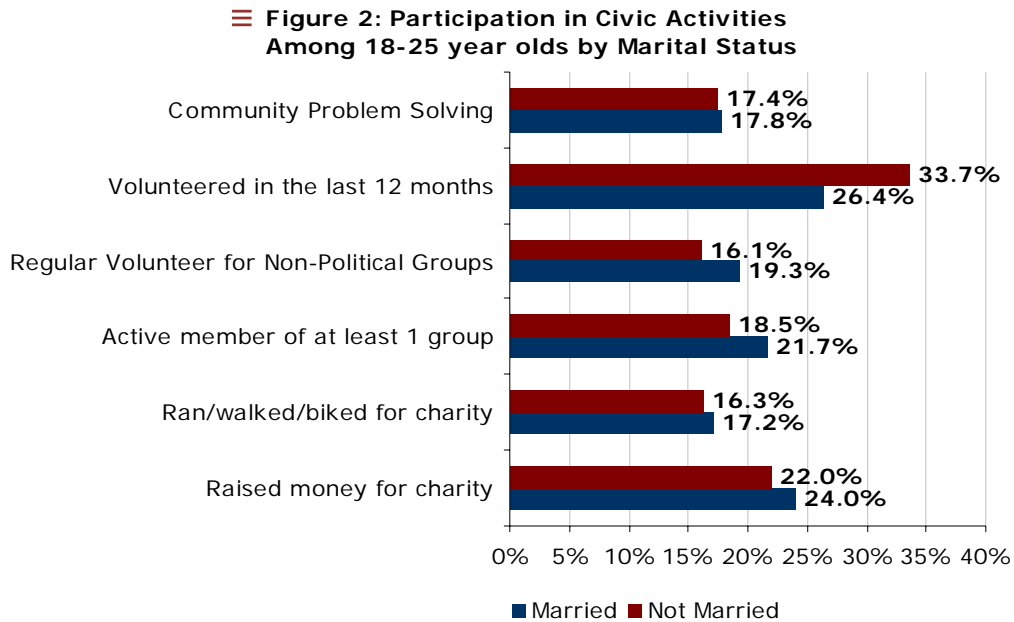
**Table 1 - The 19 Indicators of Civic Engagement**

<b>Civic Activities</b>	<b>Electoral Activities</b>	<b>Political Voice Activities</b>
Engaged in Community Problem Solving Activity	Regular Voter (ages 20 and older)	Contacted public officials
Regular Volunteer for a non-electoral organization	Tried to Persuade others in an election	Contacted the print media
Active member in a group or association	Displayed buttons, signs, stickers	Contacted the broadcast media
Participated in fund-raising run/walk/ride	Made Campaign contributions	Protested
Engaged in Other fund-raising for charity	Volunteered for a candidate or political organization	Signed E-mail petitions
		Signed paper petitions
		Engaged in Boycotting
		Engaged in Buycotting
		Canvassed

Source: *Civic and Political Health of the Nation Report* (CIRCLE), October 2006.

## Civic Indicators

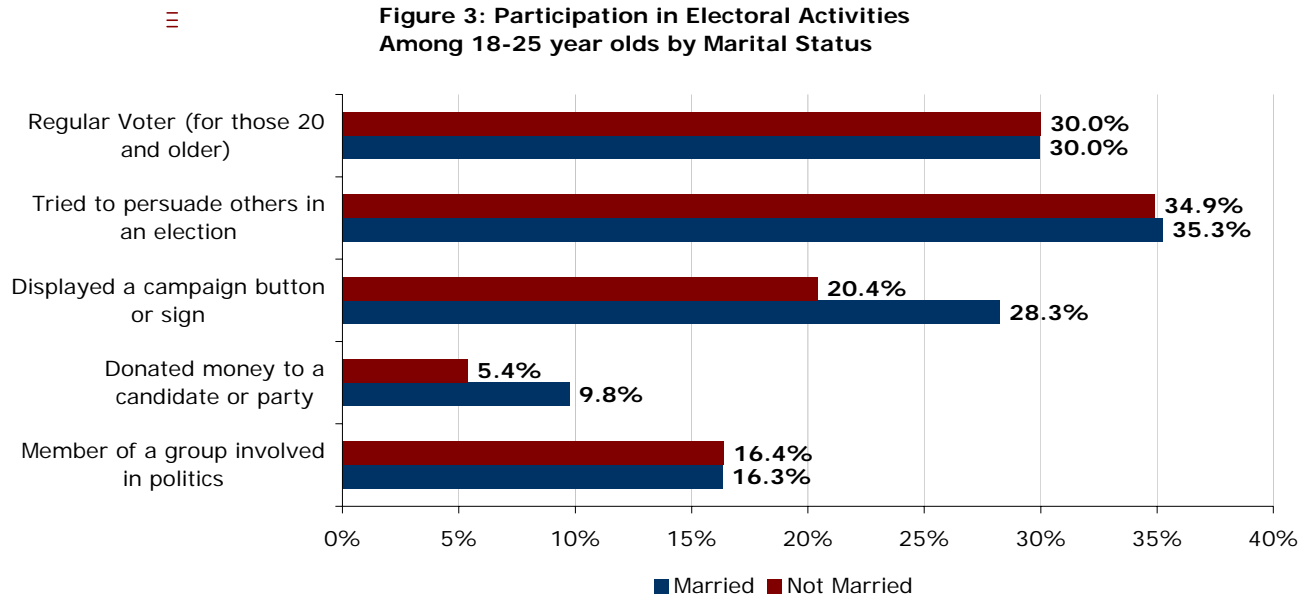
Young people who were married reported slightly higher levels of participation, of up to three percentage points, across five out of the six civic indicators as seen in Figure 2. Having volunteered in the last 12 months was the only category where married young people were less active than those who were not married, as 33.7 percent of single young people had volunteered compared to 26.4 percent of married young people. However, while single young people were more likely to report a volunteer experience in the 12 months prior to the 2006 survey, they were also *less likely* to report being a regular volunteer when compared to their young married counterparts.



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

## Electoral Indicators

The differences seen in civic indicators among married and not married young people were not as clear when comparing electoral indicators. Married young people had higher participation compared to single young people in donations to political candidates or parties (9.8 percent versus 5.4 percent), and displaying campaign buttons or signs (28.3 percent versus 20.4 percent). Figure 3 shows that in all other electoral participation categories there were statistically insignificant differences of less than one percentage point between married and not married young people.



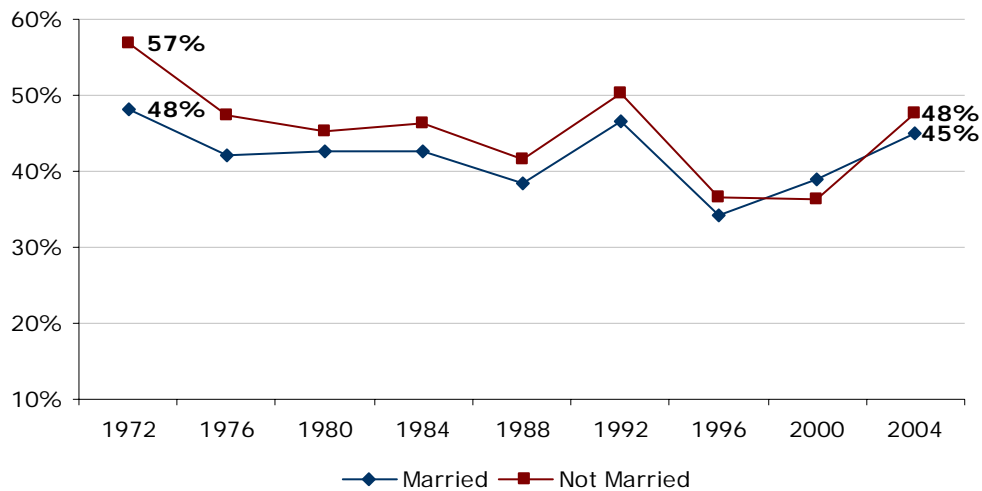
Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

## Voting

Figure 4 shows voting rates in Presidential elections among 18-25 year olds.<sup>8</sup> Married young people had lower voter turnout rates than single young people in all elections since 1972 (except in 2000).

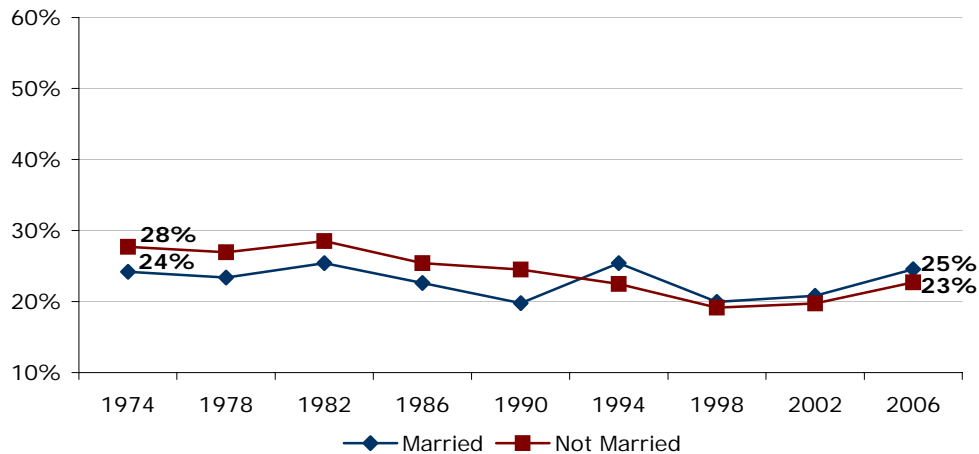
As seen in Figure 5, young people who were not married had higher voter turnout rates in Midterm elections from 1974 until 1990. However, in 1994 there was an increase of five percentage points in the voter turnout rate of married young people, who since then have had higher voting rates through 2006.

≡ **Figure 4: Voting in Presidential Elections Among 18-25 year old Citizens by Marital Status**



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Current Population Survey (CPS), November Supplement, 1972-2004.

≡ **Figure 5: Voting in Midterm Elections Among 18-25 year old Citizens by Marital Status**

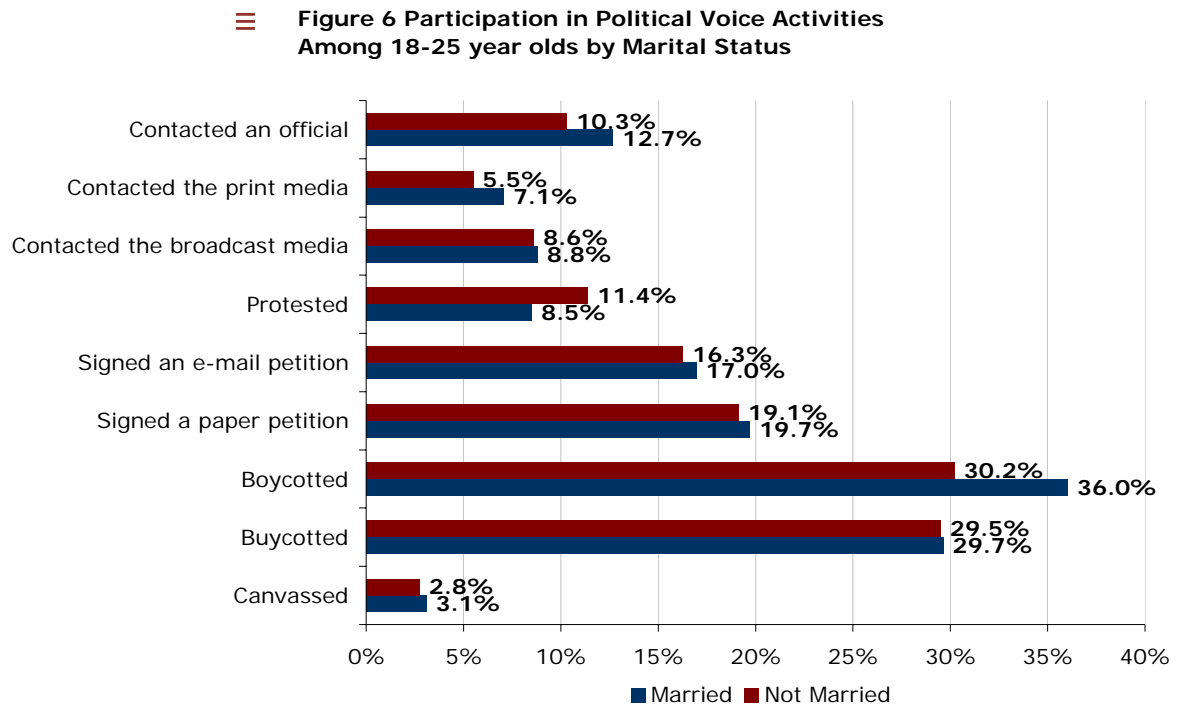


Source: Author's Tabulations from the Current Population Survey (CPS), November Supplement, 1974-2006.

## Political Voice Indicators

As seen in Figure 6, married young people were, overall, slightly more involved in political voice activities compared to youth that were not married. The largest difference was on boycotting, where married young people reported an almost six percentage point higher rate than those who were not married.

Figure 6 shows that protesting in the last 12 months was the only political voice activity in which young people that were not married reported higher participation than their married counterparts (11.4 percent versus 8.5 percent).



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

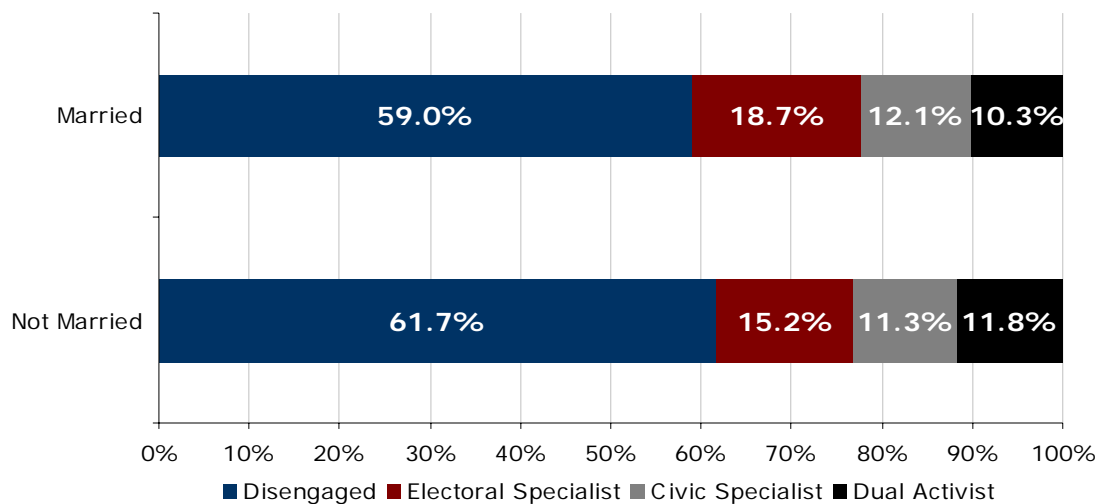
## Civic Typology

In the report, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation (2002)*, Scott Keeter and colleagues developed a civic activity typology.<sup>9</sup> This Civic Typology classifies people according to their levels of engagement into four mutually exclusive categories.

- *Electoral Specialists* are those who have two or more electoral activities.
- *Civic Specialists* are those who reported having two or more civic activities.
- People who are both Electoral and Civic Specialists are classified as *Dual Activists*, and
- People who are neither type of specialist are considered *Disengaged*.

Figure 7 shows the Civic Typology of young people by marital status. Overall there were no significant differences in the civic typology for both groups.

Figure 7: Civic Typology Among 18-25 year olds by Marital Status



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

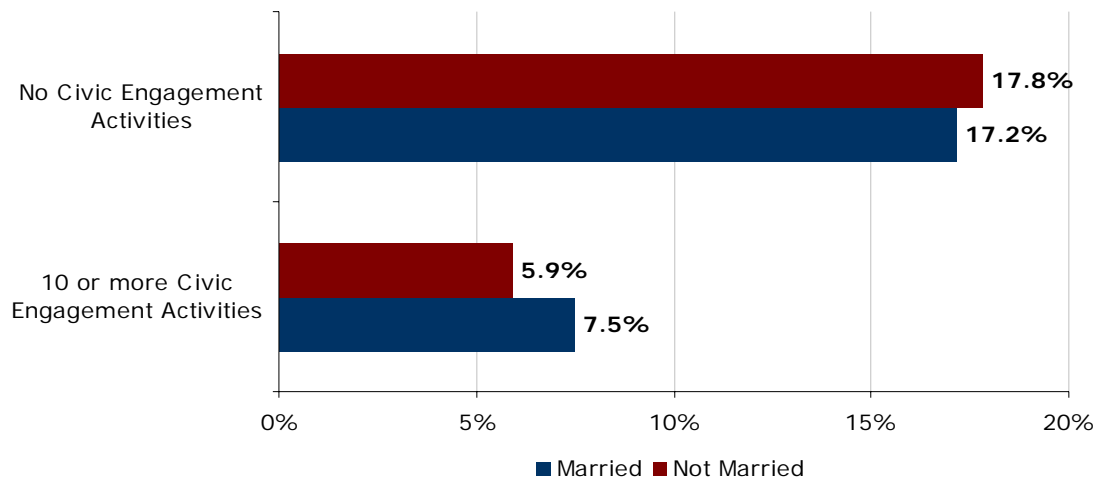


## Hyper-Engagement

The calculation of civic typology excludes political voice activities, for which a different measure can be used combining all three types of activities. Figure 8 shows the percentage of married and not married young people who did ten or more of the 19 civic engagement activities, and those who did no activities.

Married young people were more likely to have engaged in 10 or more civic activities (7.5 percent versus 5.9 percent), though there was little difference in the percent of both groups that were completely disengaged from civic activities.<sup>10</sup>

≡ **Figure 8: Hyper-Engagement and Hyper-Disengagement Among 18-25 year olds by Marital Status**

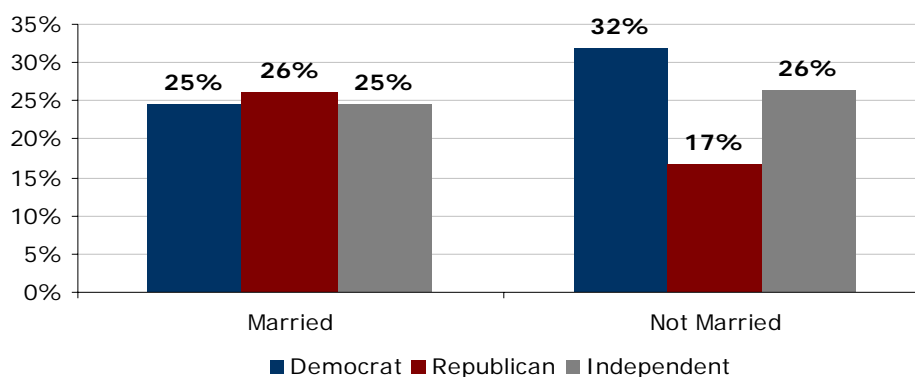


Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

## Political Affiliation and Ideology

When considering political affiliation and marital status among young people, the distribution of political party identification among married people was equally divided across Republicans, Democrats and Independents.<sup>11</sup> A difference existed among young not married people; 32 percent of young not married people identified as Democrat compared to 26 percent as Independents and 17 percent as Republicans. See Figure 9. Findings from the Pew Research Center indicate that “married people are more Republican than Democratic; those who are divorced, widowed, separated, or never married are more Democratic than Republican”.<sup>12</sup>

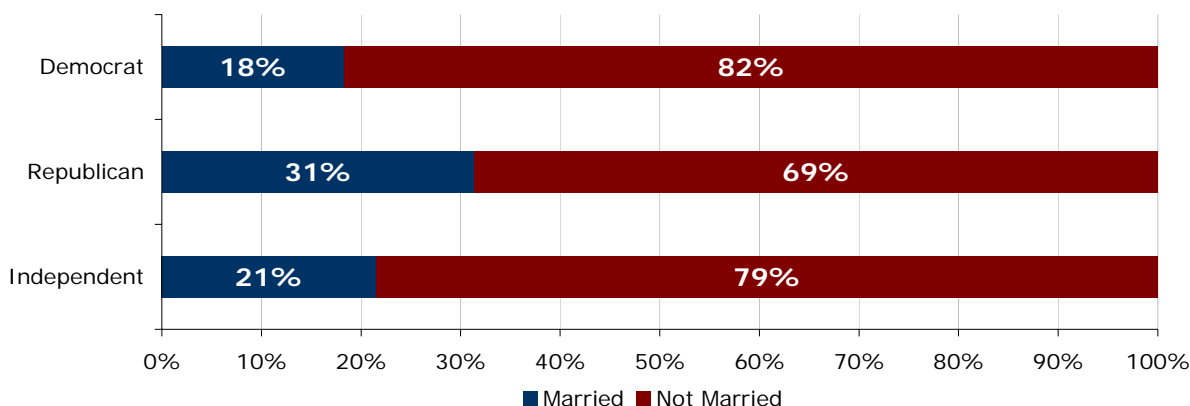
**Figure 9: Political Affiliation Among 18-25 year olds by Marital Status**



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

While examining political identification across married and not married young people is helpful, what are the characteristics of those who identify with specific political parties? As shown in Figure 10, marriage was more common among young Republicans and less common among young Democrats. Almost a third of young Republicans were married compared to only 18 percent of young Democrats.

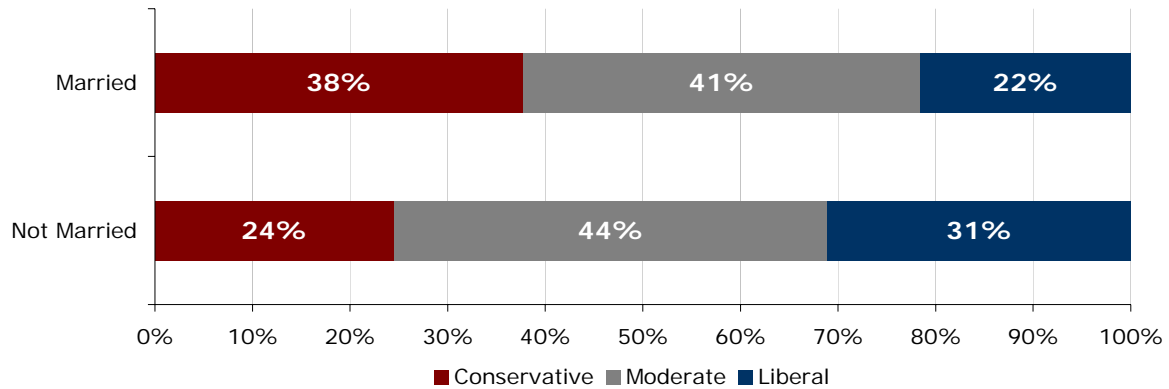
**Figure 10: Marital Status Among 18-25 year olds by Political Affiliation**



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

Across political ideology, young married people are more likely to identify as conservative than not married young people. Among married people, there was a 16 percentage point difference favoring identification with a conservative ideology over a liberal one. On the other hand, there was a seven percentage point difference favoring liberals over conservatives among not married people. See Figure 11.<sup>13</sup>

≡ **Figure 11: Political Ideology Among 18-25 year olds by Marital Status**

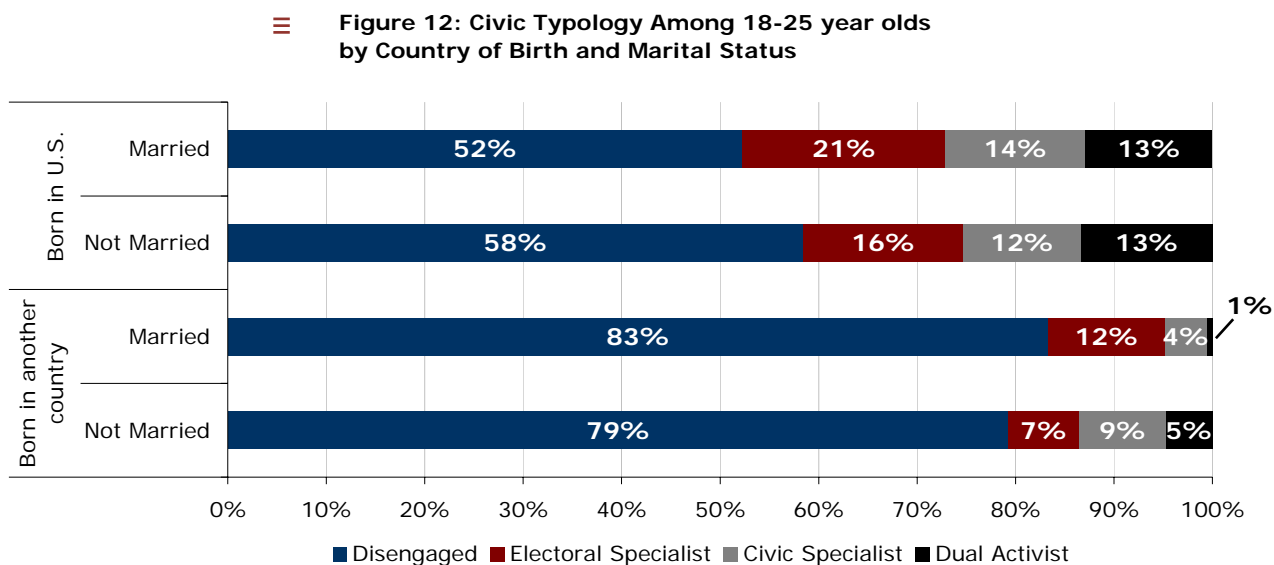


Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

## Country of Birth<sup>14</sup>

Figure 12 shows the Civic Typology of young people who are born in the U.S. and foreign countries by their marital status. Overall, foreign-born young people were more disengaged than U.S.-born young people (83 and 79 percent for married and not married versus 52 and 58 percent).

Among those born in the U.S., the ones who are married tend to be more engaged but the opposite is true with those who were born abroad. Regardless of country of birth, married young people were more likely to be electoral specialists than not married young people (21 percent versus 16 percent for U.S.-born and 12 percent versus 7 percent for foreign-born).



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

As seen in the Appendix Table 2, involvement in civic activities was lower for married people who were born in foreign countries compared to both married people born in the U.S. and not married people born in foreign countries. Young married people born in foreign countries only score higher than any and all other categories in raising money for charity.

All young people who are born in other countries had lower participation in almost all electoral indicators regardless of marital status. Young foreign-born people who are not married have higher participation on voting<sup>15</sup> and membership in political groups than those who are married and foreign-born.

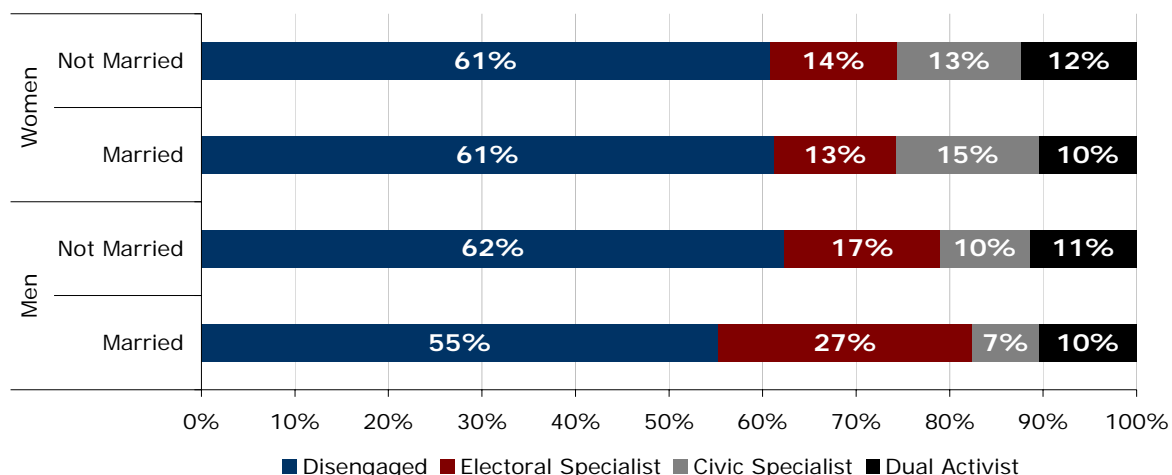
Participation in political voice activities shows that U.S.-born young people tend to be more involved and among foreign-born people, those who are not married are more involved. One exception is protesting in the last 12 months, in which young married and not married foreign-born individuals had over twice as high participation rates as their U.S.-born counterparts. There are also small differences when comparing those who contacted an official during the last 12 months. U.S.-born individuals were more active regardless of marital status, and married people were more active regardless of country of birth.

## Gender

Previous CIRCLE research suggests that young women ages 15 to 25 are more engaged in civic activities and young men are more engaged in electoral activities.<sup>16</sup> Figure 13 shows similar results for men and women ages 18 to 25. Overall, married young men are more engaged than not married young men and all young women. Young women who are not married are slightly more involved than those who are married.

Among young women there are no significant differences according to their marital status. Among young men, those who are married are more engaged in electoral activities (27 percent versus 17 percent) and less disengaged (55 percent versus 62 percent).

Figure 13: Civic Typology Among 18-25 year olds by Gender and Marital Status



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

Among those who are not married, there are no significant differences between young men and women. However, fewer married young men are disengaged than married young women. Married young men are more likely to be electoral specialists (27 percent versus 13 percent), but married young women are more likely to be civic specialists (15 percent versus 7 percent).

Appendix Table 3 shows all the civic engagement indicators among young people by their gender and marital status. Married young men are not only more engaged in electoral activities but also in political voice activities. Married young men are more involved than anyone else by at least five percentage points in the following categories: voting, trying to persuade others in elections, donating money to a political candidate or party and boycotting. Other than protesting and being members of groups involved in politics, married young men are more involved than any other group in all electoral and political voice activities. Among civic activities, married young men are not as involved as married young women. In fact, all women are more engaged than men regardless of marital status.

**Appendix Table 1: Marital Status and Civic Engagement by Age.**

	Age and Marital Status			
	18-25		26+	
	<i>Married</i>	<i>Not Married</i>	<i>Married</i>	<i>Not Married</i>
<b>Civic</b>				
Community Problem Solving	17.8%	17.4%	22.8%	14.6%
Volunteered in the last 12 months	26.4%	33.7%	38.6%	24.1%
Regular Volunteer for Non-Political Groups	19.3%	16.1%	28.0%	15.6%
Active member of at least 1 group	21.7%	18.5%	31.1%	16.2%
Ran/walked/biked for charity	17.2%	16.3%	18.0%	10.0%
Raised money for charity	24.0%	22.0%	35.2%	16.8%
<b>Electoral</b>				
Regular Volunteer for Political Candidates or Groups	2.2%	1.3%	3.4%	1.4%
Regular Voter (for those 20 and older)	30.0%	30.0%	60.1%	48.8%
Tried to persuade others in an election	35.2%	34.9%	43.1%	34.8%
Displayed a campaign button or sign	28.3%	20.4%	28.3%	26.9%
Donated money to a candidate or party	9.8%	5.4%	15.0%	11.0%
Member of a group involved in politics	16.3%	16.4%	29.9%	18.9%
<b>Political Voice</b>				
Contacted an official	12.7%	10.3%	24.0%	17.6%
Contacted the print media	7.1%	5.5%	11.4%	11.4%
Contacted the broadcast media	8.8%	8.6%	7.9%	8.8%
Protested	8.5%	11.4%	5.2%	5.3%
Signed an e-mail petition	17.0%	16.3%	21.7%	18.3%
Signed a paper petition	19.7%	19.1%	28.1%	23.0%
Boycotted	36.0%	30.2%	41.2%	31.6%
Buycotted	29.6%	29.5%	34.1%	31.7%
Canvassed	3.1%	2.8%	1.6%	2.1%

Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

**Appendix Table 2: Marital Status and Civic Engagement Among 18-25 year olds by Country of Birth.**

	Country of Birth and Marital Status			
	Born in U.S.		Born in another country	
	Married	Not Married	Married	Not Married
<b>Civic</b>				
Community Problem Solving	22.2%	18.5%	1.3%	13.2%
Volunteered in the last 12 months	30.7%	37.2%	8.0%	17.4%
Regular Volunteer for Non-Political Groups	23.5%	18.2%	3.6%	5.8%
Active member of at least 1 group	25.7%	20.5%	7.3%	8.2%
Ran/walked/biked for charity	19.6%	17.5%	8.8%	9.6%
Raised money for charity	23.3%	21.8%	27.6%	25.8%
<b>Electoral</b>				
Regular Volunteer for Political Candidates or Groups	2.9%	1.5%	0.0%	0.5%
Regular Voter (for those 20 and older)	35.6%	32.5%	9.6%	15.3%
Tried to persuade others in an election	37.8%	36.7%	23.6%	23.5%
Displayed a campaign button or sign	32.2%	21.8%	14.3%	13.1%
Donated money to a candidate or party	10.7%	5.8%	6.6%	4.7%
Member of a group involved in politics	19.9%	17.6%	3.2%	11.5%
<b>Political Voice</b>				
Contacted an official	13.4%	11.0%	10.5%	7.4%
Contacted the print media	7.9%	5.4%	4.1%	7.7%
Contacted the broadcast media	11.2%	9.3%	0.0%	6.6%
Protested	5.7%	10.4%	19.3%	21.1%
Signed an e-mail petition	20.3%	18.0%	5.0%	8.6%
Signed a paper petition	25.1%	20.7%	0.0%	14.5%
Boycotted	43.9%	33.4%	4.5%	16.3%
Buycotted	33.9%	31.8%	11.7%	20.3%
Canvassed	3.7%	2.6%	1.1%	4.6%

Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

**Appendix Table 3: Marital Status and Civic Engagement Among 18-25 year olds by Gender.**

	Gender and Marital Status			
	Men		Women	
	Married	Not Married	Married	Not Married
<b>Civic</b>				
Community Problem Solving	15.7%	18.0%	19.1%	16.8%
Volunteered in the last 12 months	24.8%	30.0%	27.5%	37.9%
Regular Volunteer for Non-Political Groups	15.0%	12.7%	22.1%	20.0%
Active member of at least 1 group	18.1%	16.9%	24.1%	20.3%
Ran/walked/biked for charity	16.9%	13.7%	17.4%	19.4%
Raised money for charity	22.2%	19.1%	25.2%	25.4%
<b>Electoral</b>				
Regular Volunteer for Political Candidates or Groups	4.0%	1.2%	1.1%	1.4%
Regular Voter (for those 20 and older)	38.8%	31.9%	24.1%	27.9%
Tried to persuade others in an election	41.7%	36.0%	31.0%	33.7%
Displayed a campaign button or sign	31.1%	20.2%	26.4%	20.7%
Donated money to a candidate or party	17.7%	6.3%	4.5%	4.4%
Member of a group involved in politics	14.3%	14.6%	17.7%	18.5%
<b>Political Voice</b>				
Contacted an official	13.8%	10.4%	11.9%	10.3%
Contacted the print media	7.3%	5.9%	6.9%	5.1%
Contacted the broadcast media	10.4%	9.1%	7.7%	8.1%
Protested	10.3%	9.9%	7.3%	13.0%
Signed an e-mail petition	19.5%	13.9%	15.3%	19.0%
Signed a paper petition	21.4%	18.0%	18.6%	20.5%
Boycotted	40.9%	28.9%	32.8%	31.7%
Buycotted	33.8%	28.1%	26.9%	31.1%
Canvassed	5.1%	2.9%	1.7%	2.6%

Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.



## Notes

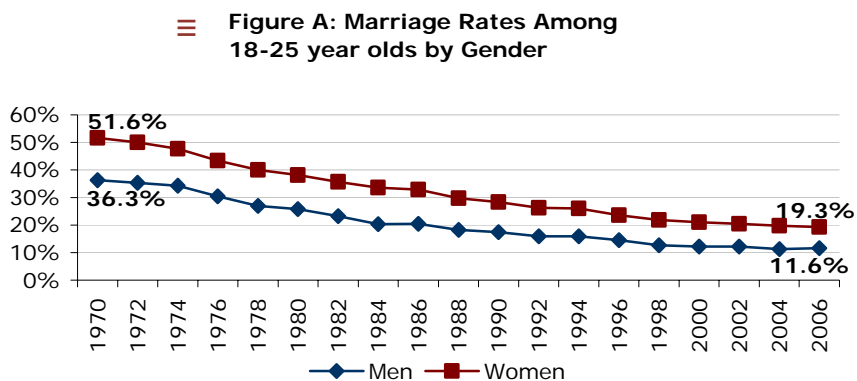
<sup>1</sup> I thank Karlo Barrios Marcelo and Mark Hugo Lopez for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Talyor, P., Funk, C. and Clark, A. *Generation Gap in Values, Behaviors: As Marriage and Parenthood Drift Apart, Public Is Concerned about Social Impact*. July 2007. Pew Research Center, p. 29. <http://pewresearch.org>

<sup>3</sup> Lopez, M. H. and Marcelo, K. *Youth Demographics*. November 2006. Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement. [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

<sup>4</sup> Estimated Median Age at First Marriage, by Sex: 1890 to the present, U.S. Census Bureau, available at: <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ms2.csv>

Figure A shows marriage rates for young men and women from 1970 until 2006. More women get married between the ages of 18-25 than young men, although both rates have decreased. The gap between marriage rates among young men and women in 2006 is about half the size it was in 1970.



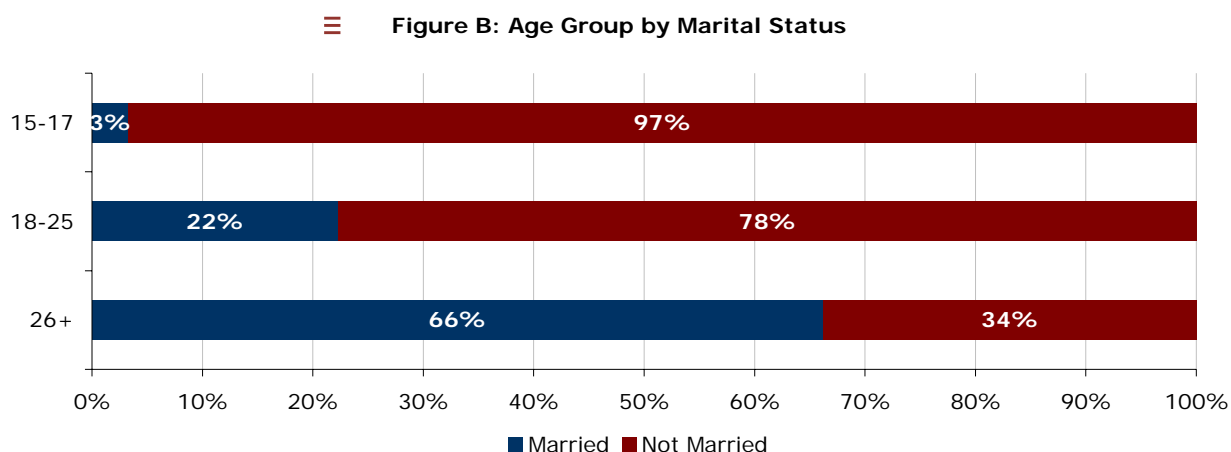
Source: Current Population Survey (CPS), March Supplement, 1970-

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady.

<sup>6</sup> The 2006 CPHS was conducted between April and June of 2006. It involved interviews of over 2,200 people distributed in the following age categories:

Age	Frequency
15-17	553
18-25	1121
26 and older	547

<sup>7</sup> According to the 2006 CPHS, as expected, adults have higher rates of marriage than young people. Figure B shows higher marriage rates among older people. All individuals wishing to marry in any state, without parental or judicial consent, are required to be at least 18. Therefore, we will not consider the 553 people between the ages of 15 and 17 who were interviewed in the 2006 CPHS.



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006.

The only exceptions are Nebraska and Mississippi, which require couples to be 19 and 21, respectively: Mississippi Code: § 93-1-5

(<http://michie.com/mississippi/lpext.dll?f=templates&fn=main-h.htm&cp>)

Nebraska Revised Statutes: Sections 42-105 and 43-2101

([http://uniweb.legislature.ne.gov/LegalDocs/view.php?page=index\\_statutes](http://uniweb.legislature.ne.gov/LegalDocs/view.php?page=index_statutes))

<sup>8</sup> Unlike other references to voting rates in this fact sheet, tabulations from the Current Population Survey include 18 and 19 year olds, and have a restriction on citizenship.

<sup>9</sup> Keeter, S., Zukin, C., Andolina, M., and Jenkins, K. (2002) *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. CIRACLE and The Pew Charitable Trusts. [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

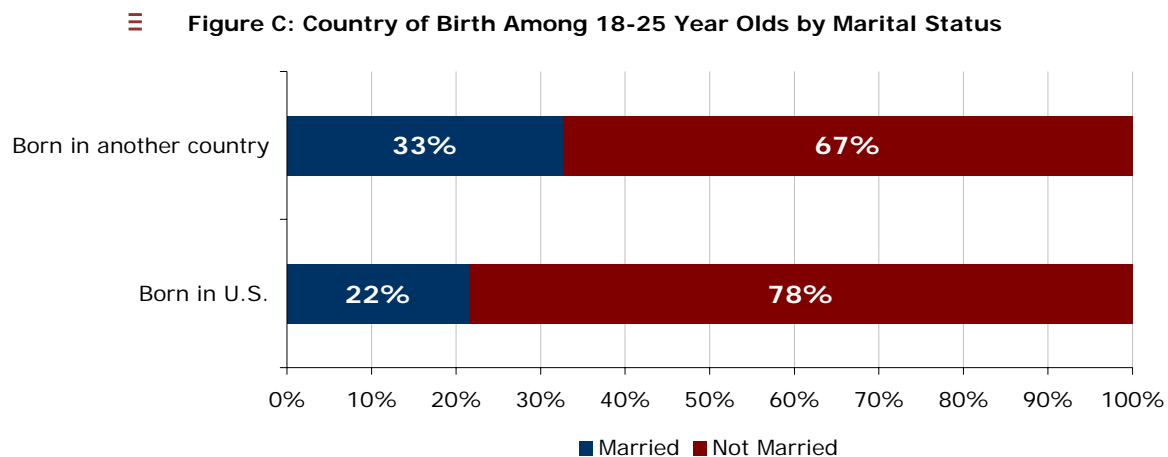
<sup>10</sup> In order to explore whether differences between married and unmarried young people is a result of marriage or other confounding factors, I estimated a multivariate model that with the total number of civic engagement activities as the dependent variable and controls for gender, country of birth, race/ethnicity, mother's education, economic class, home ownership, religious service attendance and internet use. Results from this analysis suggest that conditional on these factors, married young people participate in 0.36 more activities than those who are not married. The difference is not statistically significant, suggesting that other factors explain a large part of the observed differences between married and unmarried young people. Regression results are available upon request.

<sup>11</sup> The remaining 25% was divided among those who preferred something else, those who refused to respond and those who said they "don't know".

<sup>12</sup> *The 2004 Political Landscape: evenly divided and increasingly polarized*. November 2003. Pew Research Center, p. 16. <http://pewresearch.org>

<sup>13</sup> People who said they were conservative and very conservative were grouped in the "Conservative" category and those who said they were liberal and very liberal were grouped in the "Liberal" category.

<sup>14</sup> Figure C shows the distribution of marital status among young people according to their country of birth.



Source: Author's Tabulations from the Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) April to June 2006

<sup>15</sup> Data on citizenship and eligibility to vote are not provided in the 2006 CPHS, which may explain lower participation in voting rates among those who were not born in the U.S.

<sup>16</sup> Marcelo, K., Lopez, M. H. and Kirby, E. *Civic Engagement Among Young Men and Women*. March 2007. Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement. [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)