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The “Forgotten Half”¹: Education Disparities in Youth Voter Turnout

Netroots Panel to Discuss Strategies to Mobilize Non-College Voters
Saturday, July 24 at 4 pm PT, Rio Las Vegas, Miranda 1-2

Las Vegas – While young Americans with college experience continue to be more likely to vote than those who don’t attend college, there are effective strategies and initiatives to help bridge this gap, according to new research released by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Netroots Nation in Las Vegas this week.

Many more young Americans are going to college, but 22 million (nearly half) of 18 to 29 year olds are not enrolled in higher education programs. Since 2000 voter turnout among college-educated youth has increased by 12 percentage points and non-college youth turnout has increased by nine percentage points. In 2008 the turnout rate of college-educated 18 to 29 year-olds was 62 percent - 26 percentage points higher than the rate of non-college youth. Also, midterm turnout disparities are equally drastic: in 2006 there was a 17 percentage point gap between the two groups. The full report can be found at www.civicyouth.org

“It’s hard to reach non-college youth since their membership in unions, religious congregations and even community groups has fallen drastically since the 1970s” said CIRCLE researcher Surbhi Godsay, who will lead a Netroots Nation panel on this issue. “For far too long non-college young people have been ignored and forgotten. There are initiatives that may prove to be effective in increasing voter turnout among this cohort.”

Research shows there are strategies that may help to overcome these turnout disparities. In recent elections some states have implemented election reform laws, including Election Day registration, mail-in ballots, early voting, absentee voting laws and extended poll hours. In fact, in 2008 among 18- to 29-year-old citizens who are in the labor force, implementation of longer polling hours was associated with a seven percentage point

¹ This phrase was introduced by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship in the titles of *The Forgotten Half: Non-College Youth in America* and *The Forgotten Half: Pathway to Success for America's Youth and Young Families* (both 1988)

increase in the voting rate for full-time (35 or more hours per week) workers and a five percentage point increase for part-time workers.

Youth voter turnout disparities are even higher when broken down further into four more specific categories. In 2008, 72 percent of those with a Bachelor's degree or higher voted, which is 21 percentage points higher than the national average for young people. Fifty-seven percent of young people with some college experience voted. Among high school graduates, 39 percent went to the polls. Slightly more than a quarter of young people with less than a high school diploma voted in 2008.

The research also looked at the political party affiliation and ideology of young people in the 2008 election. Almost half of 18-to-29 year-old voters identified with the Democratic party, compared with a third in 2004. However, those with no college experience were slightly more likely (47 percent) to call themselves "Democrat" than their college-going counterparts (45 percent). Nearly four in ten self-identified as "politically moderate," roughly a third as "politically liberal," and a quarter as "politically conservative."

"With the critical midterm elections approaching, it's time to for both parties to develop more strategies to reach the many young people who don't attend college," said Godsay. "This 'Forgotten Half' could prove to be an important voting bloc to impact the balance of power in Washington."

***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 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.*