



CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 13, 2004

Contacts: Michael Fleischer
202-667-0901

Election Day Calls Boost Youth Voter Turnout ***New Study Shows How to Target Mobilization Campaigns***

As election campaigns move into high gear and organize major mobilization efforts, a new study released today shows that personally contacting young people on Election Day can significantly increase youth voter turnout, but only if they've already expressed interest in voting. The study provides evidence that will be used this fall to make mobilization campaigns more cost effective.

Released today by the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) and the Center for Public Interest Research, the study is an evaluation of an extensive experiment conducted surrounding last fall's elections in New Jersey. It was designed to see what gains could be made when young voters contacted leading up to the election were urged to vote on Election Day.

The study tracked 2,817 registered 18-25 year old voters in 60 precincts randomly, who were contacted by phone or door-to-door in the days leading up to the election. The voters were randomly divided into two experimental groups; one group was recontacted on Election Day, and the other was not. The study found that turnout increased from 16.9 to 27.5 percent among those who had earlier said they intended to vote. An Election-Day call made no difference to those who had previously refused to say whether they planned to vote or weren't planning to vote.

"From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest the importance of establishing pre-election contact with young voters and of targeting Election Day reminders to those who are most receptive to this type of message," said Yale University Professor Donald P. Green, who analyzed the experiment.

State Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) volunteers and staff in New Jersey spearheaded the get-out-the-vote campaign during the state elections last fall. It was a pilot program for the New Voters Project, which is undertaking a major grassroots youth voter mobilization campaign this fall in six states.

"We were eager to see the results of Professor Green's evaluation of our efforts," said Ivan Frishberg, who directs the New Voters Project. "The effectiveness he attributed to Election-Day contacts confirms our experience that precinct-based mobilization involving peer-to-peer contacts are a highly effective way to increase voter turnout."

"In many of the neighborhoods in our target states that have the highest concentration of young people, we'll recruit hundreds of precinct captains to contact their neighbors, both through in-

person canvassing and over the phone,” said Frishberg. “On election day, the precinct captains will aim to contact all of their neighbors who indicated they planned to vote to remind them to get to the polls.”

“Large numbers of young people report that they intend to vote,” he said. “Combining our first wave of contacts with our ability to reach many young voters through their cell phones on Election Day, we believe that this model can have a significant impact on turning out new voters at the last minute.”

According to CIRCLE, the voter turnout rate among young Americans has dropped by a third since 1972 when 18-year-olds were first eligible to vote.

“This latest study is a good addition to the growing body of research we have on what actually works, and doesn’t work, in mobilizing voters,” said William A. Galston, CIRCLE’s Director. “This year, with young voters up for grabs and showing signs of interest, we have a particularly good opportunity to start reversing the trend of youth disengagement. The future of our democracy depends on how well we do.”

The New Voters Project is working in Colorado, Iowa, Oregon, Wisconsin, New Mexico, and Nevada. It is a joint project of the State PIRGs and the George Washington University’s Graduate School of Political Management, and it is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The New Jersey experiment and analysis was supported by CIRCLE. Professor Green has done extensive research on voter mobilization techniques and is the co-author of *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, which was published this year.

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