

Gender and Civic Engagement: Secondary Analysis of Survey Data



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Increasing attention is being paid to understanding the political behavior of the newest age cohort to enter the electorate. Following on the heels of the “Slacker generation” (i.e., Generation X), this new generation, often labeled Generation DotNet, Generation Y, Millennials, or the “Echo Boomers,” is commonly understood to include young adults born after 1976. It appears that DotNets are behaving in ways that are both a departure from and continuation of the behavioral and attitudinal patterns of Xers. Along with Xers, they remain among the least engaged in the world of electoral politics. Yet, at the same time, their impressive amount of civic activism suggests they may see volunteering and other civic behaviors as an alternative to more system-directed activities that are designed to influence the formal political process.¹

Despite a flurry of research on this new cohort,² little, if any, attention has been paid to young women’s political distinctiveness – or lack thereof. Although it may seem reasonable to expect that egalitarian trends in the education and socialization of today’s youth should mitigate the importance of gender on citizen engagement, it is nonetheless a bit premature to assume the effects of sexism, stereotypes, and patriarchy have been vanquished. Politics is still largely the province of white men. Young women are likely to be internalizing this norm throughout the development of their political identities since research shows that political socialization in early adulthood has far-reaching consequences on attitudes and behavior later in life (Jennings and Niemi 1974; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Sigel and Hoskin 1981; Sigel and Reynolds 1979-80). Although patterns rooted in adolescence are not impervious to change in adulthood (Sigel 1989), knowing how a young woman is socialized can provide insight into her later attitudes and behavior. So, for example, if the political process appears to resonate less with young women than young men today, efforts can be made now to promote equality when behavior and attitudes are more malleable.

What follows is an overview of findings from

research that addresses whether, and to what extent, gender is salient in the development of norms of citizen behavior and key precursors to citizen engagement. A variety of data will be used to illuminate the complexity of gender’s relationship to citizen engagement among today’s youth. The bulk of the analysis, however, is drawn from the National Citizen Engagement Study (NCES).³

Across some key indicators, the story is about the same regardless of sex. Young women and men appear to be receiving the same cues about politics, elected officials, and the political process. They are also responding in much the same way – i.e., tuning out and doing little. However, young women are also demonstrating their distinctiveness in ways that are both hopeful and potentially worrisome. Thus, the picture to emerge is one that cannot be easily summarized by either sameness or difference.

GENDER, YOUTH, AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT: EXPECTATIONS

A variety of forces converge in a young person’s life that help to shape her early political identity. Among these is formal education. The benefits of formal education are amply documented in regard to the development of healthy norms of citizen engagement, such as voting and paying attention to what is going on in the world of government and politics (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960; Verba and Nie 1972, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). Whereas past generations of young women were disadvantaged by a gender gap in formal education, since either women were thought incapable of the rigors of higher thought or such an endeavor was deemed unnecessary for domestic caretaking, the same cannot be said today. Record levels of young women attend college and, among some demographics, their numbers exceed those of young male undergraduates (USA Today 2005). From 1970 to 2000 the number of women attending college rose by 136 percent, and women’s attendance in graduate school

increased by 168 percent. Today women make up approximately 56 percent of all undergraduates and they outnumber men by 1.7 million in colleges and universities (Poe 2004). Clearly the gender gap disadvantaging women in higher education is no more and, in fact, young men are now the group most likely to come up short in formal education. The egalitarian trend in formal education should translate into more political socialization for young women. As a result, it is possible that today's activism among youth is characterized by no less than parity across the sexes in expressions of citizenship.

However, at the same time it is important to consider the possibility - indeed probability - that education alone is not the panacea for disparities in engagement between the sexes. Theories abound as to why women in general are not drawn to politics as much as men are. These include the extent to which women are socialized to understand politics as a "man's game." Although the contemporary women's movement has helped achieve sizable gains in the number of women elected to public office and appointed to powerful positions in government (e.g., Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright, Janet Reno), it is still the norm for women to be underrepresented or absent when public policies are made. If the images that young women continue to see are of politically powerful men, politics and government will likely not resonate to the extent that they do with young men, regardless of education.

There are also arguments concerning female disinterest in "rules of the game" and notions of abstract justice, principles tied closely to the political process. Politics is about power, authority, and the allocation of scarce resources. It is often rife with conflict and there are often clearly understood "winners" and "losers." Dialogue and consensus are clearly not the norm when cable and TV news present information about the political process. The screaming matches of political commentary shows simply serve to reinforce the stereotype of politics being about dominance and control. Rather than plunging

into the "who gets what" world of politics, young women - we are told - are more likely to spend their time focusing on more immediate, personal, and consensual concerns. Regardless of whether politics is accurately reflected in cultural and media discourse, its representation may alienate young women.

Thus, there are reasons to suspect that young women today are not embracing politics to the extent that young men are. Although disparities in education have certainly lessened, there remain structural and sociological impediments to getting young women interested in and engaged in the world of politics. What follows is a close look at how young women are doing on their way to becoming engaged and informed citizens, beginning with an overview of what young women are doing - and not doing - with regard to involvement in public life.

WHAT ARE YOUNG WOMEN DOING?

The NCES represents the best survey in recent years to examine rates and types of activism among both young women and men. It is rich with questions about a variety of ways people can influence politics and their communities. These range from activities designed to influence the formal political process, such as voting, to more private activities such as community problem-solving and using one's might as a consumer to reward or punish a company for its social or political values.

Scott Keeter and his colleagues - the authors of this survey - have divided their 19 core indicators of behavior into three distinct areas of engagement. Electoral engagement comprises actions people take to influence the formal political process, such as voting, donating money to a campaign or political party, volunteering for a candidate or political organization, displaying campaign buttons, signs, or stickers, and trying to persuade others politically during an election. Civic activism includes activities such as working informally with others to solve a community problem, volunteering for a non-political group, engaging actively as a member

of a group or organization, and charitable fundraising, whether through participation in a walk/run/bike event or another type of fundraising. Finally, there is what the survey authors classify as “political voice” activities – actions people take to express themselves outside the formal channels of political participation. These include contacting elected officials, consumer activism, protesting, contacting the print or broadcast media, canvassing, and signing petitions (both written and email).

ELECTORAL ENGAGEMENT

Regardless of sex, today’s youngest generation is only minimally engaged in activities that are designed to influence the formal political process. Regular voting in local and national elections, or what some might argue is the sole responsibility of citizenship, is reported by only about one in four women and men between the ages of 20 and 25. Among those who were too young to describe their past electoral participation (those between the ages of 15 and 19), their prospective participation looks a little better than what their older counterparts actually report. Thirty-eight percent of young women report intending always to vote in local and national elections when they are old enough, compared to 42 percent of young men.⁴

TABLE 1: ELECTORAL ENGAGEMENT

% of those 15-25 who report...	F	M
Persuading others politically	34	37
Always voting in local and national elections	23	26
Displaying a campaign button, sign, or sticker	23	19
Working for a party or candidate	4	2
Contributing money to a party or candidate	4	6

Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

Both sexes do slightly more when it comes to activities that are arguably easier than voting, such as trying to persuade others to vote for or against a candidate during an election (about a third for both women and men) and displaying a button,

sign, or sticker in support of a candidate (about one in five among each sex). Not surprisingly, a meager percentage of young women and men aged 15 to 25 report contributing money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates or volunteering for a party or candidate in the past 12 months.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

When the focus turns to the more private sphere of civic engagement, young women seem slightly more engaged in some activities than young men, and youth in general are considerably more active than in electoral politics. Today’s generation of young women is clearly engaged in helping to solve society’s problems through volunteering with a variety of organizations. Almost half of all young women between the ages of 15 and 25 (45%) report volunteering for at least one type of non-political group in the past 12 months. Of those young women who reported volunteering, almost half spent time with a religious group (49%), about one in five worked for an environmental organization (21%), 59 percent donated time to a civic or community group involved in health or social services, and three-quarters worked for organizations that improve the lives of youth and the quality of education (76%). Compared to the percentage of young men who said they volunteered for a non-political group in the last 12 months (36%), young women’s activism in this area looks healthy.⁵

TABLE 2: CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

% of those 15-25 who report...	F	M
Volunteering for a non-political group	45	36
Raising money for a charity	29	27
Working with others informally to solve a community problem	21	21
Active membership in a group or organization	20	24
Participating in a bike/run/walk-a-thon for charity	16	15

Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

As for the other civic behaviors, the differences among women and men are less compelling. About equal numbers of both sexes report participating in some act of charitable fundraising in the past 12 months (29% of young women; 27% of young men). And about one in seven young women and men say they have participated in a walk/bike/run-a-thon for charity in the past 12 months. Similar numbers of both sexes report doing one or the other - raising money or participating in an event - in the recent past. About 20 percent of both young women and men report that they have recently worked informally with others to solve a community problem. Similarly, about a fifth of both young women and men say they are actively involved in a group or organization.

POLITICAL VOICE

The list of nine “political voice” activities ranges from consumer activism to contacting an elected official to signing email or written petitions. Virtually no differences separate young women from men in their rates of political voice activism. Among young women and men, the most common political voice activity is participation in consumer boycotts and buycotts. Similar numbers of young women and men say they chosen NOT to buy (i.e. boycotted) something in the past 12 months because of conditions under which the product is made or because they dislike the conduct of the company that produces it. The same is true for “buycotting,” consumer behavior designed to reward a company for its social or political values

TABLE 3: CONSUMER ACTIVISM

<i>% of those 15-25 who report...</i>	F	M
Participating in a consumer boycott	36	40
Participating in a consumer buycott	33	38
Participating in a consumer boycott and/or buycott	48	52

Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

through a purchase. Slightly more men (52%) than women (48%) report boycotting and/or buycotting something in the recent past, but the percentage difference is not big enough to warrant a credible

claim that consumer behavior is linked to gender among youth. While it is not clear what kind of products and services young women and men are choosing to reward and punish, they are clearly aware of their power as consumers and do take advantage of their perceived influence.

The next most frequent type of political voice activity in which young people, regardless of sex, report that they engage involves signing written and email petitions. A little more than one in ten young women and men say they signed an email petition in the past 12 months, and a fifth of both sexes report signing a written petition. The numbers of both young women and men drop considerably for engagement in the remaining types of political voice activities. Ten percent of both women and men say they contacted or visited a public official in the past 12 months to ask for assistance or to express their opinion. The same percentage of both contacted a newspaper or magazine to register their opinion on an issue. Smaller numbers – still similar across the sexes – reportedly called in to a radio or television talk show to express themselves, protested, or worked as canvassers in the past 12 months.

TABLE 4: POLITICAL VOICE

<i>% of those 15-25 who report..</i>	F	M
Signing a written petition	20	20
Signing an email petition	16	13
Contacting a public official	10	10
Contacting the print media	10	10
Contacting the broadcast media	8	7
Participating in a protest	7	7
Canvassing	2	2

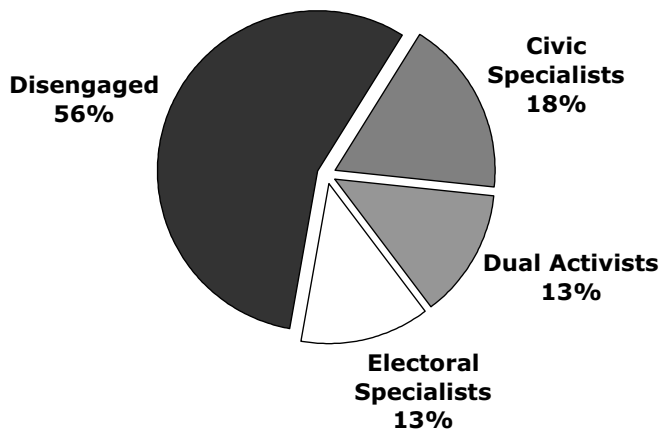
Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

CATEGORIZING YOUTH

Based on these finding, the story that emerges concerning the activism of today’s generation of young people does not appear to implicate the role of gender. There is no big “gender gap” in citizen

engagement among today’s youth. Across most of the options for participation in public life, the sexes are remarkably similar in both what they choose to do and what they tend to avoid (or at least have not yet considered doing). Although there are some interesting differences - such as rates of voluntarism - gender does not appear to be playing any significant role in shaping citizen engagement among youth.

FIGURE 1: ENGAGEMENT AMONG MEN 15-25 YEARS OLD



Source: National Civic Engagement Survey, 2002

A typology of engagement arrived at by Keeter and his colleagues helps to further demonstrate the similarities between young women and men. The typology divides people into four categories - those who engage in mostly civic or electoral behavior (civic or electoral specialists), those who do both (dual activists), and those who are largely disengaged. In order to be classified as a civic specialist, an individual had to engage in two or more civic activities but fewer than two electoral activities. Electoral specialists reported two or more electoral activities but fewer than two civic activities. Dual activists reported two or more civic AND electoral activities. And finally, the disengaged reported fewer than two civic AND electoral activities.

Using these criteria, the vast majority of today’s youth are not very engaged. Indeed, more than half of today’s youth - regardless of gender - fall among the disengaged. This means that many youth today demonstrate behavior that by most standards falls short of what it takes to be an

engaged citizen. Relatively few are specialists in either the civic or electoral worlds. And only about one in ten is among the most engaged, regardless of gender.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Education does little to change the story. The early evidence suggests that education is indeed an important part of getting young people engaged, both psychologically and in public activities. Across all of the core behaviors that make up citizen engagement, college attendance helps to boost the activism of young women and men. Moreover, educated young women and men demonstrate similar levels of involvement in public life.

For example, education’s positive influence on electoral engagement can be seen for both sexes, but small gender differences still remain. Twenty-seven percent of young women with a history of college attendance report always voting in local and national elections, compared to just 18 percent of same aged women (i.e., 20-25) who never attended college. Among young men, the percent increases from 19 to 31 once college attendance is accounted for. Attempts to persuade others politically also seems to get a sizable boost through

TABLE 5: EDUCATION AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

% of those 18-25 who report...	College		Non-college	
	F	M	F	M
Persuading others politically	35	42	26	33
Always voting in local and national elections	27	31	18	19
Volunteering for a non-political group	42	33	29	19
Participating in a consumer boycott	45	52	31	33
Signing written petitions	30	32	15	14

Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

college attendance. About a quarter (26%) of young women with no formal education say they attempt political persuasion compared to over a third (35%) of college educated young women. Among young men the same nine percentage point difference distinguishes the non-college (33%) from college educated (42%).

Similar patterns are found when considering the role of education in promoting civic engagement. Forty-two percent of young women with a history of college attendance report volunteering for a non-political group in the recent past compared to only 29 percent of their peers who never attended college. And while the benefits of education among young men are apparent as well, it still looks as if gender is important for inspiring this kind of behavior since women volunteers outnumber their male peers regardless of education.

College attendance, not surprisingly, also encourages more frequent expressions of one's political voice. Reports of written petition signing double for both sexes once formal education is accounted for. And taking part in consumer boycotts increases too, although young women appear to fall slightly behind their male peers once they move into college. For other political voice activities, the pattern remains the same. Education gives a sizable boost to the activism of both men and women, but few gender differences are apparent regardless of college attendance.

In short, regardless of whether the focus is on the amount or content of citizen engagement among youth, the evidence points to the insignificant role gender seems to be playing. Depending on how one interprets the level of activism among today's youth, young women are either doing just as well or just as poorly as young men.⁶ But, at the same time, gender's importance cannot be so easily dismissed. There are meaningful and important differences across key behaviors that distinguish young women from men. In some cases, young women are doing more, but for other behaviors, young women are coming up alarmingly short.

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES: THE GOOD AND THE BAD

VOLUNTARISM

Looking at volunteer activities, an almost ten percentage point difference separates young women from men. Forty-five percent of young women, compared to 36 percent of young men, say they volunteered at least once in the past 12 months for a non-political group.

To some extent, the explanation is clear. The Council for Excellence in Government recently conducted a survey of youth which included a question about what kinds of things citizens should do to stay engaged in politics and their communities. Although both young men and women deem volunteering more important than political involvement, young women are more firmly committed to donating time to help others. Almost two-thirds (62%) of women believe volunteering is the most important thing for citizens to do, compared with slightly fewer young men (55%).

TABLE 6: BIVARIATE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN VOLUNTEERING FOR A NON-POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS AND...

	Women	Men
...Electoral engagement	.29	.19
...Civic engagement	.39	.40
...Political voice engagement	.24	.20

Source: *National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002*

Additionally, some evidence suggests that female volunteers are more engaged in activities that are expressly political. For both women and men, volunteering is significantly correlated with all types of engagement. But when it comes to the relationship between volunteering and electoral engagement, the coefficient is notably stronger among young women than it is among men.⁷ The data suggest that young female volunteers are more apt than male volunteers to be engaged in a variety of activities designed to influence the political process.

To some extent, it appears that volunteering among young women is more consequential for engagement – and in particular electoral engagement – than it is for young men. Could it be that young women who volunteer are more likely to see the connection between the problem their work addresses and the role that government should also be playing? If so, it would make sense to find a stronger connection between electoral engagement and volunteering among young women. In short, volunteering may be politicizing young women which, in turn, encourages them to get involved in influencing the political process.

Unfortunately, however, there do not appear to be any significant gender differences in the motivations young people give for volunteering. The NCES asked those who volunteered if they were doing so to address a social or political problem, to help other people, or for some other reason. As it turns out, the vast majority of young female and male volunteers said they were motivated by things other than helping to solve a social or political problem (91 and 88 percent, respectively). Thus, the data do not support claims about the greater tendency of young women to link their volunteer efforts with political problems.

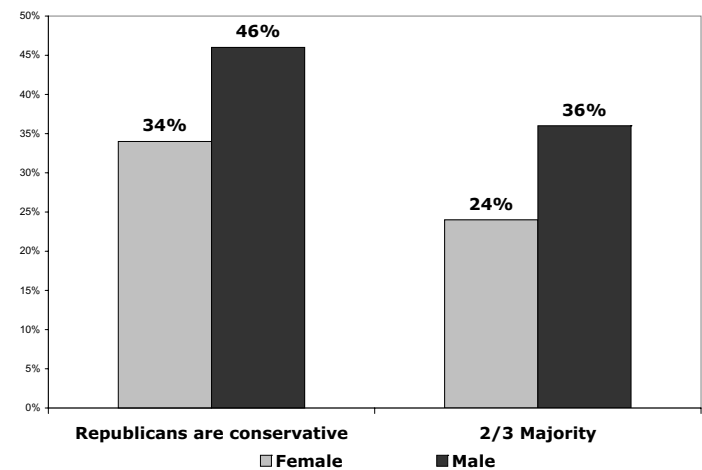
COGNITIVE ENGAGEMENT

Another area where gender differences are significant is political attentiveness. But in this case, unlike voluntarism, young women are coming up short in comparison to young men. The NCES found that a quarter of all 15-25 year-olds (25%) report regular attentiveness to politics and public affairs. However, a seven percentage point difference distinguishes young women from young men in this important precursor to engagement (21 versus 28 percent, respectively). Expanding the definition of attentiveness does little to change the story. Young women are consistently, and at times significantly, less tuned in than their male peers. For example, four in ten young men report regularly reading the newspaper, compared with a third of young women (34%). A similar percentage point difference separates the sexes when it comes to watching the nightly news on television on a regular basis (49% for men versus 42% for

women).⁸

Thus, across a variety of behaviors, both sexes display more inattentiveness than attentiveness. However, young women are the least engaged. Going a step further, it is no surprise that women outnumber men among those who are completely inattentive, at least as measured by a variety of relevant behaviors - following politics and government most of the time, engaging in frequent discussions about politics and public affairs with family and friends, and regularly reading the newspaper or watching the nightly news on television. More than a third of all women between the ages of 15 and 25 (35%) qualify as cognitively disengaged, compared with only a quarter of all young men (25%).⁹

FIGURE 2: POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE



Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

Given the gendered trend in inattentiveness, it is no surprise that young women also know less about politics, government, and the political process. Across a variety of surveys that include questions designed to gauge a respondent's political knowledge, young women consistently turn up among the least knowledgeable. For example, almost half of all young men (46%) know that Republicans are the more conservative party at the national level compared to barely a third of young women (34%). Similarly, 36 percent of young men know it takes a two-thirds majority in Congress to override a presidential veto compared to just 24 percent of young women. The trend continues even

across questions that are about politics closer to home. A recent survey by the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) found that significantly more young men can correctly name the governor's party affiliation in their own states than can young women (54 versus 43 percent). And an 11 percentage point difference separates the sexes in knowing which party has a majority in the lower house of the respondent's state legislature (28 versus 17 percent).¹⁰

ATTITUDES, BELIEFS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Are young women more apt to endorse active definitions of citizenship? How does gender relate to views of the political process and the workings of government? In short, do young women distinguish themselves in their psychological orientation to politics, or are we looking in vain for a gendered story in much the same way that sex appears to have little to do with engagement among youth? The answer, it seems, is largely an echo of what was found when the focus was on behavior.

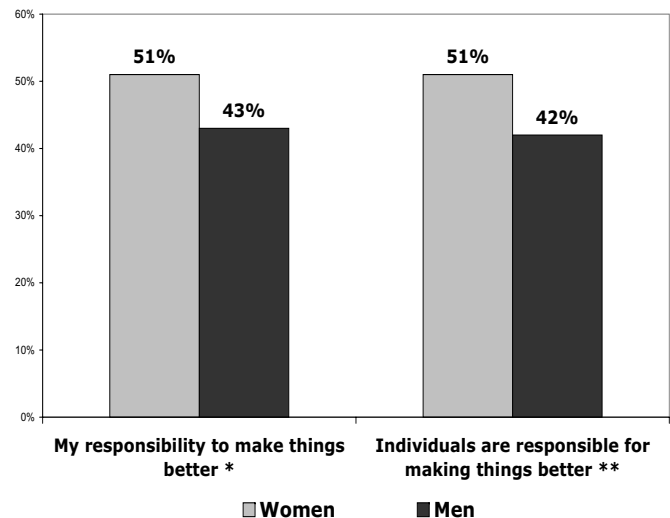
Cynicism toward government is the norm, and a great many of today's youth are distrustful of the power and influence of our institutions and leaders. The NCES found that about half of both young women and men believe that the political system works to give special favors to some at the expense of others (56 versus 52 percent, respectively) and that politics is a way for the powerful to keep power to themselves (48 versus 53 percent, respectively).

Yet, at the same time, young people - regardless of gender - also demonstrate attitudes that suggest they are not entirely comfortable with writing government off. Slightly more young women than men believe that government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest (68 versus 61 percent, respectively). And similar numbers believe that government often does a better job than people give it credit for (68% women; 62 % men).

However, whereas gender does not seem to make a difference in what young people think about

the workings and responsibilities of government, there does appear to be a slight trend among young women to believe that more rather than less is required of good citizens. For example, significantly more young women believe that it is their responsibility, rather than their choice, to get involved to make things better for society. In fact, it is only among young women that a majority sees engagement as a responsibility of citizenship (51 versus 43 percent, respectively). When it comes to believing that individuals, as opposed to government and others, are responsible for making things better in society, young women have a slight edge over young men (51 versus 42 percent, respectively).¹¹

FIGURE 3: VIEWS OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY



* Source: National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002

** Source: National Council for State Legislatures Survey, 2004

REASONS FOR NOT VOTING

Why don't young people vote? Or, more specifically, why aren't more young women turning out to vote on election day? Are their reasons for remaining on the sidelines similar to those of young men? Or do young women have a difference of opinion with their male counterparts when it comes to their political abstinence? The data allows us to examine a few reasons often cited for non-voting among youth with a specific eye toward the role of gender.

First, mobilization has proven time and again to be instrumental in motivating voters. Simply put, those asked personally by someone to cast a vote on election day are more likely to do so than those left off the invitation list. Parties and candidates are prone to ignoring young voters and their interests. As a result, young people fail to turn out on par with older adults, in part because they are simply not asked to participate. Election year 2004 offered a hint of what can happen when young women do receive explicit invitations to get involved; while just over a third of young men aged 18-24 reportedly cast a vote in the presidential election (37%), close to a majority of young women turned out (46%).

Still, young people - regardless of gender - are less likely than older voters to have received a personal invitation to work for or contribute money to a candidate, political party, or any other organization that supports candidates in the recent past. Only about one in ten 15 to 25 year-olds report being invited compared with about a third of all those 26 and older (30%). Moreover, no gender differences materialize when considering the potential payoff that parties and candidates get by mobilizing youth. Among those 30 and younger, women are not significantly more likely to have followed through with making a campaign contribution if asked than are men.¹²

Another explanation for youth's inconsistent voting record concerns their dislike for politics and the political process. Having grown up in an age of media cynicism toward politics, young people may have decided that they would rather not involve themselves in such a distasteful process. Sentiments like these motivate young men to stay away from politics more than young women. The NCSL survey found that among eligible non-voters 18 and older, young women are more likely to give reasons for their non-voting that have nothing to do with their feelings toward politics. Rather, they give reasons that have to do with a lack of interest, feeling uninformed, and not having enough time or feeling inconvenienced. Young men, however, give slightly different reasons. Most notably, a top

explanation for young men was dislike for politics and government. Whereas 35 percent of young men who do not vote said they either dislike politics and government or they simply "don't do" politics, only 16 percent of young women said the same thing.

TABLE 7: TOP THREE REASONS FOR NON-VOTING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE 18 YEARS OF AGE AND OLDER

<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
...I'm not interested in politics	...I'm not interested in politics
...I'm not informed enough to make a decision	...I dislike politics and government/I don't do politics
...I don't have time/I'm often away/It's inconvenient	...It's hard to get reliable info about the candidates

Source: National Council for State Legislatures Survey

Taken as a whole, it is hard to argue for the importance of gender in keeping young women away from the polls. Although young female nonvoters are not as likely to be consciously rejecting politics, their lack of interest matches that of their male peers. Moreover, gender does not appear to be central in explaining which youth are invited to participate. While gender appears to be occasionally notable in a few behaviors and attitudes, there is not an abundance of evidence to suggest that today's generation of young women are very distinct from young men with regard to behaviors and beliefs consistent with active participation in public life.

DIFFERENT PATHWAYS?

In addition to being rich with behavioral questions, the NCES includes questions that measure potentially important characteristics and precursors to engagement. These range from things having to do with religion, the extent of social networks, attitudes toward citizen responsibilities, and many other useful questions. Using a technique known as ordinary least squares regression to account for a variety of influences simultaneously, it's possible to see whether young women are motivated by the

TABLE 8: MOTIVATORS TO CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Women		Men	
Cognitive engagement	2.29*	Television avoidance	2.92*
Mobilization	1.64*	Cognitive engagement	2.34*
Age	1.55	Social network	1.78*
Television avoidance	1.51	Mobilization	1.60*
Mother's education	1.06*	Religious attendance	1.50*
Internet use	.92*	Age	1.25
Social network	.92	Individual efficacy	.96*
Parent/guardian volunteer	.90*	Internet use	.84*
Discuss politics while growing up	.86*	Political knowledge	.74
Citizen duty	.85*	Discuss politics while growing up	.68
Religious attendance	.79*	Strength of partisanship	.64
Individual efficacy	.78*	Citizen duty	.55
Political knowledge	.38	Mother's education	.53
Length of residence	.29	Generational identity	.42
Generational identity	.24	Parent/guardian volunteer	.33
White	.01	White	.25
Strength of partisanship	.00	Interpersonal trust	.09
Family income	-.04	Family income	.04
Role of government	-.14	Length of residence	-.19
View of politics	-.22	Role of government	-.34
Interpersonal trust	-.41	Education	-.39
Education	-1.33*	View of politics	-.45*
Adjusted R Square	.34	Adjusted R Square	.37

* Sig # .05

Note: OLS unstandardized coefficients; All variables are coded on a one-point range

Source: *National Citizen Engagement Survey, 2002*

same or different things than young men.

As the subsequent table demonstrates¹³, when it comes to understanding what motivates youth to become involved in public life young women are influenced to a greater degree by socializing experiences at home. Among all of the precursors that demonstrate a significant relationship to a summary index of participation (i.e., electoral, civic and political voice activities), the sexes differ in the importance derived from things such as maternal education, having family political

discussions, and growing up with a parent or guardian who volunteered. Young women get a boost from exposure to these kinds of experiences whereas young men appear to benefit from other experiences.

Other differences in precursors across the sexes include strong endorsement of civic norms, views of politics, television avoidance, and education. As was found earlier, young women are more likely to believe in the importance of individual efforts to improve society. These attitudinal differences

are apparent here as well, since young women are more motivated by civic norms than young men. However, when it comes to attitudes toward politics and the political system, young men who are critical are more apt to be engaged, whereas the same cannot be said for young women. What a young woman thinks about politics does not affect her activism in public life. Education, however, does. Unlike what was found previously when education seemed to promote electoral activism among young women in a simple bivariate relationship, controlling for the effects of other precursors in a model that accounts for citizen engagement writ large changes the story a bit. It appears that better educated young women participate slightly less than young women with fewer years of education behind them. Finally, fewer hours spent watching TV works to spur more involvement among young men, but television use is not a significant factor in young women's activism.

Attentiveness helps to spur participation for both sexes, which makes the previously discussed gender gap in this area of more concern. If young women continue to come up short on measures of cognitive engagement, fewer young women will benefit from this important precursor. Religious attendance, being asked to participate, believing in the usefulness of individual action for improving things in society, and Internet use are also factors that help to encourage more participation among both sexes.

In short, the most significant story to come from this analysis is the importance of early socializing experiences for young women. More family political discussions and parental modeling of good behavior appears to go a long way toward inspiring young women to be active and engaged citizens. While today's young men and women are motivated by many of the same precursors to engagement, it is equally important to recognize where young women differ and note the ways in which their activism can be encouraged. Young men can get a sizable boost simply by turning off the television. For young women, however, having good role models proves

key to encouraging more citizen engagement.

CONCLUSION

Taking a close look at gender and citizen engagement among youth has yielded insights both encouraging and discouraging for young women's involvement in public life. On the one hand, young women do not enter adulthood with tendencies that make them any less likely to be engaged citizens than young men. Sameness, rather than difference, is what distinguishes gender's importance for understanding young people's involvement in public life. On the other hand, young women are distinguishing themselves from young men on some key precursors to engagement, particularly attentiveness and knowledge. The fact that young women come up short in this area is not inconsistent with what has been found among older women (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). At least for now, society is poised to witness another generation of young women entering adulthood with norms of attentiveness that put them behind men. The trend can certainly be reversed, but it requires changes in the socialization of women that goes beyond the influence of formal education.

For its part, the Center for American Women and Politics is seeking to alter the equation with its NEW Leadership™ programs, which teach college and university students about women's political participation and encourage them to get involved. With more than a dozen NEW Leadership™ summer institutes already in place or in the planning stages at institutions around the country, CAWP aims to increase young women's attentiveness to politics and to show them how they can be more powerful forces for community change by linking their interest in volunteering to political action.

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ENDNOTES

1) For a more thorough analysis of citizen engagement among all age groups, see Keeter, Zukin, Andolina and Jenkins (2002), located at www.civicyouth.org.

2) The Center for Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) represents the best source today for information on youth, citizenship, and politics. Its collection of reports and fact sheets is available online at www.civicyouth.org.

3) The NCES is a nationally representative telephone survey of respondents aged 15 and older (N=3246). The survey, conducted in the Spring of 2002 contains oversamples of the two youngest age cohorts, DotNets (aged 15 to 25) and Generation Xers (aged 26 to 37) (N = 1001 and 1000, respectively). The NCES measures a wide array of behaviors ranging from traditional acts of participation (i.e., voting) to new activities (i.e., consumer activism), as well as attitudes toward politics, government, the responsibilities of citizenship, and a variety of other relevant subjects.

4) However, while gender is seemingly unimportant in inspiring more regular voting, it appears that when it comes to turnout in specific presidential elections, young women are slightly more likely to report voting than young men. A recent report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement found that the downward trend in voting among youth is more pronounced among 18-24 year old men compared to women. For example, in 1996, 42 percent of young women reported voting compared to 37 percent of young men. While the percentage difference shrunk a bit in 2000, there still remained a statistically significant three percentage point disparity between 18-24 year old female and male voters (43 and 40 percent, respectively). Analyses of 2004 exit poll data suggest the disparity among young men and women widened in this past election. While barely a third of young men aged 18-24 reportedly cast a vote in the presidential election (37%), close to a majority of young women turned out for the historic election (46%).

5) Gender differences in voluntarism do not appear to be a new phenomenon. Every year UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) surveys college freshmen about a variety of topics related to their interests and activities including whether they performed volunteer work in the past year. Since 1984 - the first year students were queried about this activity - young men have lagged behind young women an average of four percentage points in their reported voluntarism (78 for female freshmen versus 74 percent for male freshmen). Thus, it looks as if today's generation of young adults are continuing the gendered trend of women volunteering more.

It is important to note that the gender gap in non-political volunteering all but disappears once regularity of volunteering is accounted for. That is, among young women who say they regularly volunteer for a non-political group, the percentage drops to 24. A similar percentage of young men (21%) tell interviewers that their volunteering happens on a regular basis also.

It is hard to tell why gender differences disappear once regularity is accounted for. It could be that young women are simply more engaged in sporadic instances of volunteering than are young men, but also consistently volunteer about on par with their male peers. Unfortunately, data are not available to examine the reasons behind these gender disparities in voluntarism.

6) Another way of assessing gender's importance for citizen engagement among youth is to consider a variety of relevant precursors - including gender - simultaneously in a model that helps to explain

participation. Four separate ordinary least square regression analyses were conducted, one for each type of citizen engagement and another that used a summary index of participation comprised of all of the 19 core indicators of behavior that were included on the National Citizen Engagement Survey. Each analysis demonstrated the insignificance of gender in helping to explain who participates and who does not.

7) Volunteering for a non-political organization has been removed from the combined index of citizen engagement and civic engagement.

8) Regularity of news consumption through reading a newspaper or watching the nightly news on TV is defined as using that source at least four days per week.

9) It is also important to note that the gender gap among youth in attentiveness does not appear to be a new phenomenon. While the question is not exactly akin to those that ask about behaviors, the Higher Education Research Institute's annual survey of college freshmen has consistently found young men to be more likely to believe that paying keeping up to date with political affairs is "very important." While the difference has waxed and waned over the years, female undergraduates generally express less interest in keeping up to date with political affairs.

10) Unfortunately the tendency of young women to be less attentive and informed about politics and government persists even during the college years. Young women - regardless of exposure to formal education - are significantly less likely than young men to say they follow politics and government regularly. About a ten percentage point difference separates the sexes among the college and non-college educated on a basic cognitive engagement question. Not surprisingly, political knowledge mirrors these findings as well. Young women, regardless of education, are less likely to answer correctly a variety of questions that assess political knowledge.

11) While the gender differences in this area are important to note, one should not overlook the rather bleak state of youth attitudes toward their understanding of citizen responsibilities. Indeed, the NCES found that clear majorities of both sexes believe that "simply being a good person is enough to make someone a good citizen" (59% women; 57% men) as opposed to "being a good citizen means having some special obligations" (38% women; 39% men).

12) Unfortunately data are not available that would allow us to tell if young women are more likely to work for party or candidate if asked.

13) Numbers marked with an asterisk indicate precursors that have a statistically significant influence on participation. The bigger the number, the greater the influence.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is now also funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

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