

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Recommended Research Articles, Recent Research Abstracts, Literature Reviews, and Data Sets.

OLD-FASHIONED STRATEGIES PERSUADE LATINO YOUTH TO VOTE

Over the past twenty years, the Latino population has doubled and now constitutes the largest minority group in the United States. Moreover, this population is young, with a median age of 26, and represents a potential bloc of voters who could shape policy for many years to come. So far, unlike immigrant groups in the past, this rapidly expanding group has not realized its own voting power.¹ According to “CIRCLE Working Paper 10: Mobilizing the Latino Youth Vote” by Dr. Melissa Michelson of California State University, Fresno, one powerful way to address the problem of low Latino voter turnout is to “return to old-fashioned personal canvassing efforts.” In particular, the paper presents evidence that Latino youth (ages 18-25) are more likely to vote if asked to do so face-to-face.

FINDING WHAT WORKS: THE MESSAGE OR THE MESSENGER?

In the fall of 2002, Michelson conducted a randomized field experiment in Fresno, CA to increase voter turnout among young Latinos. The purpose of the experiment was to determine if the effectiveness of canvassing varies among registered voters of different races and ethnicities. Is canvassing equally effective in getting both registered Latinos and registered voters of other ethnic and racial backgrounds to cast a ballot? In addition, the experiment tried to determine if (1) the race/ethnicity of the canvasser and/or (2) the message delivered by the canvasser had any effect on the number of voters mobilized.

The experiment involved sending forty matched pairs of canvassers (either two Latinos or two non-Latinos) door-to-door during the final two weekends before the gubernatorial election to urge registered young people to vote. Each voter was randomly assigned to receive one of two messages. They were either given a message stressing civic duty or one that stressed community solidarity.

LATINO ACTIVISTS SUCCESSFULLY MOBILIZE LATINO VOTERS

Michelson found that going door-to-door and asking registered voters to vote on Election Day indeed led to increased turnout among young Latinos. In addition, the study revealed that Latinos

were more likely to vote if contacted by another Latino than if contacted by someone of another ethnicity.²

Latino canvassers were also more effective in getting potential voters, especially Latino voters, to open their door to listen to the canvassers’ message. This could be due to a number of reasons. Michelson states, “It is possible that Latino residents were more likely to open their door if approached by other Latinos or it could be that the Latino canvassers were more comfortable in these neighborhoods and thus had more effective strategies for making contact with potential voters.”

Finally, the study revealed that the content of the mobilization message appears to not have an effect on turnout. Those who received the civic duty message were no more or less likely to vote than those receiving the community solidarity message. Michelson’s findings indicate that the fundamental key to increasing Latino turnout lies in increasing the face-to-face contact with Latino voter activists. She concludes, “Turnout rates for young Latinos [are] likely to remain low unless dramatic changes are made to get-out-the-vote efforts. In order to increase Latino turnout, more Latinos need to have face-to-face contact with a voter mobilization activist. In order to have a real impact on the young Latino vote, these efforts must be made by Latino activists.”

A copy of the paper can be downloaded from CIRCLE’s Web site (www.civicyouth.org). 

SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIC ACTION

Written for educators and researchers alike, “CIRCLE Working Paper 06: The Role of Civic Skills in Fostering Civic Engagement” by Dr. Mary Kirlin takes a look at what we know and don’t know about the skills that are crucial for active participation in civic life. The paper gives a comprehensive snapshot of the broad and varied research findings on civic skills—skills that enable people to take effective civic action such as writing letters to a member of Congress or defending a position on a public issue. In addition, the paper includes a new typology of civic skills and provides direction for future research. A copy of the paper can be downloaded from CIRCLE’s Web site (www.civicyouth.org).

¹ The Latino population in the United States faces two barriers to voting that will likely be overcome in the future. First, a large portion of the population is below the legal voting age of 18. Second, many Latinos living in the United States are currently ineligible to vote because they have not yet become naturalized citizens. For more information see *CIRCLE Fact Sheet: Electoral Engagement Among Latino Youth*.

² The only canvassing efforts that had a statistically significant impact on voter turnout were the Latino-on-Latino personal contacts.