

## CIRCLE AND THE COUNCIL FOR EXCELLENCE IN GOVERNMENT RELEASE NEW POLL ON YOUNG PEOPLE

**C**ampaigns hoping to use the Internet to reach new young voters need to be aware of both the pitfalls and benefits of using different online campaign techniques according to a new survey released by CIRCLE and the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government. The survey reveals that while the Internet does not currently pull many otherwise disengaged youth into politics, it does seem to hold some promise for mobilizing partisan, ideological, and engaged young people. The most effective online campaign techniques are online chat rooms, e-mails on issues, "blogs" geared to youth, and candidate events like those organized by Meetup.com. Conversely, young people react negatively to Internet banner ads, e-mails encouraging voter turnout, weekly e-mailed campaign updates, and especially text messages on handheld devices. The full survey results can be found on CIRCLE's Web site [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

The survey was sponsored by CIRCLE and the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government and conducted by Democratic pollsters Lake Snell Perry & Associates and Republican pollsters The Tarrance Group. In addition to

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*Politicians trying to reach young people need to be selective in the types of Internet communications they use. According to the survey, young people prefer Internet communications that they choose to receive, not unsolicited messages. They are more likely to pay attention to campaigns if they use the following techniques: online chat rooms, e-mails on issues, blogs on issues.*

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providing information on the effectiveness of online campaigning, the survey presents the latest polling data on Americans between the ages of 15 and 25, including the issues they care about, their levels of trust in others, volunteering rates, and their attitudes toward government.

### Online Campaigning: Choosing the Right Tool

Online campaign techniques are especially popular among young people who are liberal, college educated, and concerned about Iraq, as well as religious youth. "The good news for campaigns is that the Internet can be a very cost-effective way to reach young people, and it has the potential to be the primary tool for reaching engaged youth," said pollster Ed Goeas. "And campaigns can use the same tools and same issues to reach and target younger voters as they're using for older voters."

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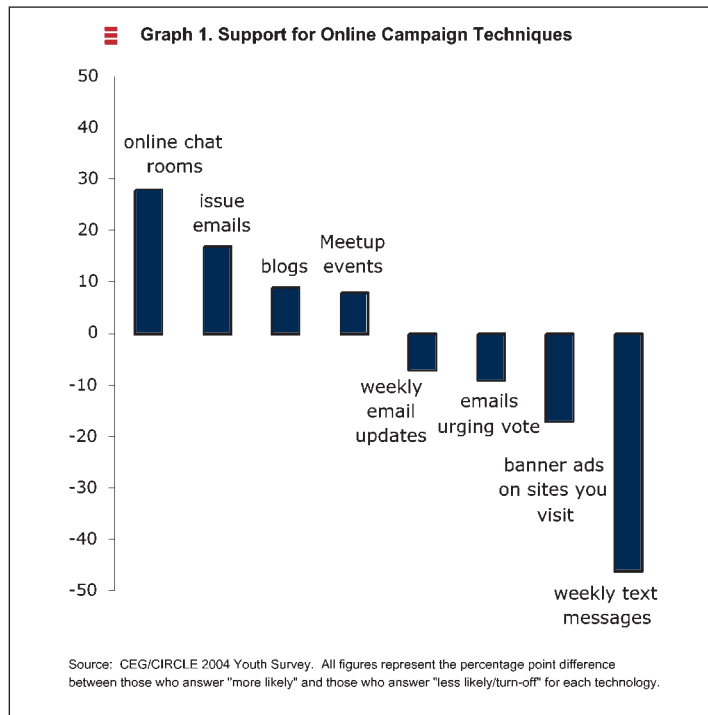


**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement

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In addition to stimulating interest in campaigns, these effective communication techniques are also trusted by young people. Overwhelmingly, young people think the information they receive through the Internet on politics and public affairs is as accurate (57 percent) or more accurate (13 percent) than the information they receive through more traditional communication techniques such as newspapers and TV reports. This is especially noteworthy since young people still rely on conventional means when deciding whom



to support in an election. The sources used most to decide for whom to vote are newspapers and magazines (42 percent), TV news programs (39 percent), friends and family members (38 percent), candidate debates (33 percent), and the Internet (26 percent).

"We know we need to do a better job of talking to young people if we're going to engage them in the political process," said pollster Celinda Lake. "This survey confirms that we have a long way to go for some, but it also tells candidates that there are good tools for reaching others and we should start using them. The Internet is one of those tools, but not a cure all."

**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 Affairs.

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## The Youth Stance: Issues and Partisan Identification

The survey also provides relevant information on the national issues young people are concerned about. Jobs and the war in Iraq weigh heavily on the minds of young people; with one fifth of young people reporting that jobs are their number one concern and one in seven youth rating the war in Iraq as a top issue priority. Among African-Americans and Hispanics, discrimination and prejudice also rank as important issues to them.

The issues young people are concerned about are also the same issues they consider when deciding how to vote or whom to support. The top five issues that guide their decisions are: the creation of good paying jobs, access to affordable college, the war in Iraq, access to affordable health care, and safety from terrorism. Other than the cost of college, these are the same concerns that older voters express.

When it comes to joining a political party, young people are evenly split in their identifications as Democrats (32 percent), Republicans (28 percent), and Independents (25 percent), and 15 percent did not know. It seems that the ten year stretch between ages 15

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and 25 is a prime time for the development of partisan identification. The survey shows that young people between the ages of 15 and 17 are the least partisan (26 percent Independent, 19 percent Republican, 16 percent Democrat). A sizeable portion (39 percent) of this age group has not yet decided with which party they identify. However, among the oldest age cohort surveyed—those between the ages of 23 and 25—partisanship is strongest with 39 percent Republican and 36 percent Democrat.

## Addressing Issues: Trust in Government and Volunteering

The survey reveals that young people have strong feelings on national issues. However, it seems that young people are doubtful about the government's ability to effectively address these issues. The survey documents a sharp drop in trust, as only 50 percent

said they trust the government to do what is right, a 12-point drop from two years earlier. Moreover, they are losing trust in people in general with only 35 percent reporting most people can be trusted, down from 41 percent in 2002.

"Although we saw a dramatic drop in trust levels over the last year, young people generally trust government more than older people do, while they trust other people less," said Peter Levine, CIRCLE's Deputy Director. "Far too many young people remain disengaged from the political process, even in a year that featured war and other issues of concern to them. The future of our democracy requires that we find creative ways to address this disaffection."

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## Youth Support Civil Unions, Marriage, and Protections for Gays and Lesbians

Young Americans show strong levels of support for tolerance and equality toward homosexuals, and majorities say gays and lesbians should be able to form legal civil unions and get legally married, according to a new survey released by CIRCLE and the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government. Additionally, young people overwhelmingly support equal protection when it comes to housing, employment, and hate crimes.

By six-to-one margins, American youth support gay rights and protections related to housing, employment, and hate crimes and those sentiments are held by all ideological, partisan, racial, geographic, and religious groups. One out of two respondents said they know someone who is gay; knowing a gay person has a significant impact on attitudes.

The percentage of young people who support and oppose rights for gays and lesbians are:

	Support	Oppose
• equal protection in housing	86%	10%
• equal protection in employment	85%	14%
• protection from hate crimes	85%	13%
• civil unions or legal partnerships	63%	30%
• ability to legally marry	56%	39%
• ability to adopt children	53%	39%

Full results are available on the CIRCLE Web site [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

15. **“Civic Intentions: A Study of Schools that Teach Democratic Values”**

Joel Westheimer, University of Ottawa

### Political Participation

16. **“First-time Voter Program: A Proposal to Increase Voter Turnout among 18 Year-Olds”**

Elizabeth Addonizio, David Ogle, and Beth Weinberger, Yale University

17. **“The Political Potential of Online Deliberative Dialogue”**

Constance Flanagan, Penn State University and James Knauer, Lock Haven University

18. **“The Impact of Trade Union Youth Programs on Young Workers’ Political Engagement and Participation”**

Nancy Brown Johnson and Paul Jarley, University of Kentucky

19. **“Immigrant Political Incorporation in the U.S.: Mobilizing Ethnic Group Consciousness”**

Jane Junn, Rutgers University

20. **“Generations, Agendas, and Participation”**

Merrill Shanks, Douglas Strand, Henry Brady, and Edward Carmines, University of California, Berkeley

21. **“New Jersey November 2003 Election Precinct Test”**

Ivan Frishberg, the State Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs)

22. **“The Political Socialization of Adolescents and the 2003 Baltimore Primary Election”**

Ed Horowitz, University of Oklahoma

23. **“Political Participation of Native Americans Ages 18-25 on South Dakota Reservations”**

Jill Ireland, University of South Dakota

24. **“The Role of Youth and Universities in Mobilizing Social Movements”**

James Riker, The Democracy Collaborative, University of Maryland

25. **“Throwing a Better Party: Mobilizing Institutions and the Youth Vote”**

Daniel Shea, Allegheny College

### Youth Civic Engagement

26. **“Survey of Civic Learning Opportunities for Out-Of-School Youth in the Adult Education and Literacy System”**

Melanie Daniels and Marilyn Gillespie, SRI International

27. **“Why We Are Engaged in Civic Society: In the Words of Immigrant Youth”**

Lene Jensen and James Youniss, Catholic University

28. **“Civil Engagement among Immigrant and Native Minority Youth”**

Alex Steppick and Carol Dutton Steppick, Florida International University

29. **“Powerful Spaces: Urban Youth, Community Organizations, and Democratic Action”**

Jennifer O’Donoghue, Stanford University, *Doctoral Candidate*. ★

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Young people report that they are willing to give of their time to work on national issues, if they are asked. Overall, 54 percent of young people say they would be very likely (15 percent) or somewhat likely (38 percent) to volunteer on an issue that is important to them. However, there is a decline in the number of

young people who report actually volunteering from two years ago. Just 26 percent have volunteered in the past year— and volunteering drops off quickly after high school. While 40 percent of 15 to 17 year olds have volunteered in the last year, only about half of those ages 18 to 25 did so. ★