

CIRCLE DESIGNS AND ANALYZES 2008 CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

Designed and analyzed by CIRCLE, the 2008 Civic Health Index is an annual comprehensive assessment of attitudes, behaviors, and actions of Americans on civic activities including politics, volunteering, community action, and others. The survey provides a wealth of information about Americans' civic participation. Among other things, the survey found that citizens were heavily engaged in political activities during the 2008 campaign, but many did not anticipate taking future action on issues raised during the campaign.

AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE SURVEY FOUND THAT CITIZENS WERE HEAVILY ENGAGED IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES DURING THE 2008 CAMPAIGN, BUT MANY DID NOT ANTICIPATE TAKING FUTURE ACTION ON ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

"What's apparent from our findings is that Americans were actively engaged in this presidential election and devoted to serving their communities," said Peter Levine director of CIRCLE. "However, there is a lack of opportunities to develop their civic skills and contribute their talents to address our deepest public problems. Our nation needs to cultivate and capitalize on this desire through laws and policies and the commitment of our institutions and businesses to serving their communities."

The creation of America's Civic Health Index and report was a cooperative effort of the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC), CIRCLE, and the Harvard University's Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America. The survey was conducted in July 2008 by Peter D. Hart Research Associates with national samples of 1,000 respondents by telephone and 1,000 surveyed online. The full report is available at www.ncoc.net.

MOST PEOPLE DO NOT EXPECT TO STAY ENGAGED AFTER THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

This pre-election survey found that half of participants said they have tried to persuade someone to vote for or against a candidate, which is close to a historical high. The Internet has also expanded political involvement as 39 percent had

watched an online video about a presidential candidate and 33 percent had watched a candidate's speech online.

However, the survey showed that more were "frustrated" (43 percent) than "excited" (19 percent) by the election. Many did not expect to work on the issues debated in the campaign in their communities after the election. Less than 10 percent said they planned to contact a local official about an issue and just 14 percent planned to try to change local policies in their school, workplaces, and communities.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR POLICY TO INSTITUTIONALIZE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Despite the low expectations on election issues, there was strong and bipartisan support for changes in laws and policies that would support greater civic engagement between elections. Eighty-seven percent favored providing young people with the opportunity to earn tuition money by completing a year of national or community service and 73 percent believed service-learning should be required of all high school students. Eighty percent also overwhelmingly supported holding a national deliberation on major policy issues and requiring Congress to hold hearings on the results.

EIGHTY-SEVEN PERCENT FAVORED PROVIDING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO EARN TUITION MONEY BY COMPLETING A YEAR OF NATIONAL OR COMMUNITY SERVICE AND 73 PERCENT BELIEVED SERVICE-LEARNING SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.



AFRICAN-AMERICANS POLITICALLY ENERGIZED

Overall, African-Americans were the most engaged, especially in this election cycle, surpassing the rest of the population in voting, going to political meetings and rallies, and talking to other people about politics. This can be partly attributed to the first presidential nomination of an African-American by a major party, but previous research has found African Americans, especially youth, to be more civically engaged than their counterparts.

THE WORKING CLASS IS DISENGAGED, BUT TECHNOLOGY MAY HELP

As previous research confirms, people with college experience, especially young people, were found to be more civically active than those who have not attended college. Adults without high school diplomas lag even further behind. The following pie chart categorizes young people (age 30 and under) by types of engagement (See text box to the right for Civic Engagement Classifications). The charts show that young people with no college education are twice as likely to be uninvolved, and none of them are involved in several ways.

However younger people who never attended college are well represented and participate in online groups. Thus, the Internet, social networking sites, cell phones and other technologies may provide opportunities to engage them more, which may reduce the civic gap among younger generations.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CLASSIFICATIONS

Electoral specialists: Engaged in three or more electoral activities (registering, voting, volunteering for a candidate or campaign, attending political meetings and rallies, giving money to a candidate in person, giving money to a candidate online, and talking to someone about voting for a particular candidate).

Service specialists: Engaged in three or more service activities (volunteering, belonging to a group/organization, going to a club meeting, and working on a community project).

“Citizen-centered”: Both attended a public meeting where community issues were discussed and worked with people in the community to solve a problem.

“Involved in several ways”: Qualified for more than one of the above categories.

“Not very engaged”: Qualified for none of these categories.

Note that because some people are involved in several ways, the slices labeled “electoral specialists,” “service specialists,” and “citizen-centered” do not include everyone who qualified for those categories. Those who qualified for more than one are “involved in several ways.”

Figure 1: Young Adults with Some College Experience

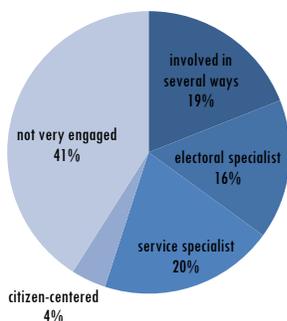


Figure 2: Young Adults with No College Experience

