

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES MAY INCREASE LIKELIHOOD OF VOTING

A new CIRCLE Working Paper (#73) finds that extracurricular participation in general promotes voting, though some activities (notably, some sports) decrease it. Specific activities that encourage voting often have no political content, and their effects are not explained by the influence of voting rates of peers in these groups. One of the biggest and most robust effects is for the performing arts: participation in high school performing arts is related to a higher rate of voting in early adulthood.

Furthermore, some activities affect political ideology and party membership in adulthood. The overall pattern is that religious attendance and a few sports steer students to the conservative end of the political spectrum and into the Republican party, while academic clubs, drama clubs, and honor societies steer students towards the liberal end and/or into the Democratic party.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST AND MOST ROBUST EFFECTS IS FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS: PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS IS RELATED TO A HIGHER RATE OF VOTING IN EARLY ADULTHOOD.

The working paper, "CIRCLE Working Paper #73: Joining Young, Voting Young: The Effects of Youth Voluntary Associations on Early Adult Voting," was written by Reuben J. Thomas of The City College of New York and Daniel A. McFarland of Stanford University. The researchers used two nationally representative datasets to test the relationships between extracurriculars and youth voting: the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) (U.S. Department of Education 2004) and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) (Udry 2003).

PARTICIPATION TEACHES DEMOCRATIC SKILLS

The researchers suggest that certain extracurricular activities provide young people with the opportunity to learn important democratic skills. Performing arts clubs show the strongest relationships to early adult voting, while some sports are actu-

ally related to a lower likelihood of voting young. Moreover, those who do not participate in any extracurricular activities show lower voting rates than those who participate in at least one activity. The researchers hypothesize that the, "performing arts can be venues for civic learning, by teaching skills in public speaking, and engaging with dramatic material that often has strong civic and political themes. Even when there is no political content at all to the activity, students may still be learning political engagement by developing what Bandura (2001) calls 'collective efficacy,' the perception that the members can work together to affect their environment. Any activity that improves students' sense of being able to make a difference can increase their likelihood of voting, regardless of the overt mission of the activity."

Additionally, Thomas and McFarland suggest that one reason different types of extracurricular activities may have varying effects on voting patterns could be that different activities require different levels of commitment to credibly claim participation. They point out, "It may be common practice among students who show up to one language club or history club meeting to list it among their activities, particularly on college applications. But participation in a performing arts club implies participation in an actual performance, which typically requires many hours of rehearsal beforehand." Yet even when activities involve a strong commitment and teach collective efficacy, they might still discourage early voting among their participants if they instill cultural priorities that don't emphasize political participation. This may be why some sports show lower levels of youth voting.

EFFECTS ON POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Different extracurricular activities tend to move students toward different ends of the political spectrum. While no explanation was given for this finding, the researchers suggest that those working with young people need to be aware of this pattern.

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IN GENERAL, THEY FOUND THAT RELIGIOUS ATTENDANCE AND A FEW SPORTS ACTIVITIES PRODUCE STUDENTS WHO ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE CONSERVATIVE AND IDENTIFY WITH THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, WHILE ACADEMIC CLUBS, DRAMA CLUBS, AND HONOR SOCIETIES ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TOWARDS THE LIBERAL END AND/OR INTO THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY.

By providing different types of extracurricular activities, organizations help to build a strong base of future voters representing both sides of the political spectrum.

To download CIRCLE Working Paper #73, please visit http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP_73_Thomas_McFarland.pdf. ★

CIRCLE HOSTS A GATHERING FOR ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITH NON-COLLEGE-ATTENDING YOUTH

On June 14-16, CIRCLE met with 12 organizations that work directly with young adults (age 18-29) who have never attended college. All of these groups engage their participants in civic or political work. The meeting was intended to learn from each other's work, identify possible collaborations and inform current research.

CIRCLE has also been conducting qualitative and quantitative research about this demographic group.

CIRCLE is committed to conducting future research on non-college-attending youth and their political participation. If you have questions regarding CIRCLE's research on this topic, please contact Abby Kiesa, CIRCLE Youth Coordinator & Researcher, at Abby.Kiesa@Tufts.edu.