



THE CIVIC AND POLITICAL HEALTH OF THE
NATION: A GENERATIONAL PORTRAIT

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September 19, 2002

CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research
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Executive Summary

This study describes the civic and political behavior of the American public, with a special focus on youth ages 15 to 25. Using an extensive national telephone survey of 3,246 respondents, we describe what citizens are doing, and how often they are doing it. We look at a panorama of 19 core activities — ranging from voting to volunteering to signing petitions — and at many other political attitudes and behaviors. The report describes these activities, who is doing them, and how they vary by age group.

What Are Americans Doing?

Younger cohorts trail their elders in attentiveness to public affairs and in electoral participation, but hold their own in community-related and volunteer activities and in activities that give voice to their concerns. In fact, younger citizens look very much like future contributors to the *civic* health of the nation, even though their lack of an *electoral* presence is troubling.

The report also provides an in-depth look at volunteering, which while common relative to many of the other behaviors considered, is largely episodic and nonpolitical. Young adults are emblematic of this—being the least regular and most non-political of all age cohorts.

Consumer activism—a largely unstudied phenomenon—is practiced by a surprising number of individuals. Over half report boycotting a company or product at some time in their lives; almost as many say they have bought something to reward a company for its practices.

The Civic – Political Divide

The survey reveals two distinct modes of engagement: the civic and political. While both are positive pathways leading to a robust citizen life, many choose to walk only one road, and there is clearly a wide generational schism in the choice Americans make.

Half of all Americans can be characterized as engaged. One-in-five (20%) specialize in the electoral realm (by voting, working for a candidate or party, for example); another 16 percent confine their efforts to the civic realm (working on problems in their community, raising money for charities or volunteering). Those who are active in *both* the civic and electoral arenas (16% overall) are quite different, and quite remarkable in their contribution to citizenship. These individuals who contribute personally to their communities and also effectively exercise their franchise as citizens are not especially different from the less active in terms of race, gender or political persuasion, but

they are unique in their means of political expression, speaking more loudly and through a broader variety of channels than other citizens.

While the country has succeeded in transmitting the value of civic engagement to successive generations, there is strong evidence that it has failed in keeping the chain of political engagement unbroken. Over half of those ages 15-to-25 are disengaged; 15 percent are involved in electoral politics only (compared to 20% overall); 17 percent limit their activities to the civic world. Just one-in-ten (11%) qualify as dual activists.

Pathways to Engagement: Institutions And Intermediaries Matter

Engaged citizens do not create themselves. We should no more expect spontaneous engagement than we do spontaneous combustion. The norms of the culture are against the former, just as the laws of physics are against the latter. However, our evidence suggests that much can be done to encourage and increase civic and political engagement. Young people need help to get involved. They respond to school-based initiatives, at least in the short run, as well as to other invitations to involvement. Open discussion in school and political talk at home also make a difference. Growing up with a volunteer in the home has a powerful impact on their level of participation in both civic and political affairs.

The Millennials Rising? Mixed Evidence

Generation DotNet — the youngest cohort — is not just a continuation of GenX. This younger group has a stronger sense of themselves as a generation and, while less trusting of their fellow humans, they are also more willing than older Americans to see government play a larger role in their lives and the life of the country. They are also significantly more accepting of homosexuality and more positive towards immigrants. One area where they are not distinctive is in cynicism about politics and politicians; but given the anti-political climate in which they have grown up, it is perhaps noteworthy that they are not even more cynical than they are. Their relatively high level of participation in the civic realm holds hope for the future.

THE 19 CORE INDICATORS OF ENGAGEMENT

Civic indicators

- *Community problem solving.* Have you ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live? IF YES, Was this in the last 12 months or not?
- *Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization.* Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven't you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay. IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months? I'm going to read a list of different groups that people sometimes volunteer for. As I read each one, can you tell me if you have volunteered for this type of group or organization within the last 12 months? An environmental organization; A civic or community organization involved in health or social services. This could be an organization to help the poor, elderly, homeless, or a hospital; An organization involved with youth, children, or education; Any other type of group. Thinking about the work for (type of group) over the last 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?
- *Active membership in a group or association.* Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally? Are you an active member of this group/any of these groups, a member but not active, or have you given money only?
- *Participation in fund-raising run/walk/ride.* [Now I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not. (FOR EACH YES, PROBE: And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?)] Personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause -this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event?
- *Other fund raising for charity.* And have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause?

Electoral indicators

- *Regular voting.* We know that most people don't vote in all elections. Usually between one-quarter to one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote. Can you tell me how often you vote in local and national elections? Always, sometimes, rarely, or never?
- *Persuading others.* When there is an election taking place do you generally talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, or not?
- *Displaying buttons, signs, stickers.* Do you wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house, or aren't these things you do?
- *Campaign contributions.* In the past 12 months, did you contribute money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates?
- *Volunteering for candidate or political organizations.* From volunteering sequence, respondent indicated having volunteered for "A political organization or candidates running for office"

Indicators of political voice

- *Contacting officials.* [Now I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not. (FOR EACH YES, PROBE: And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?)] Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to ask for assistance or to express your opinion?
- *Contacting the print media.* Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?
- *Contacting the broadcast media.* Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air?
- *Protesting.* Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?
- *E-mail petitions.* Signed an e-mail petition?
- *Written petitions.* And have you ever signed a written petition about a political or social issue?
- *Boycotting.* NOT bought something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces it?
- *Buycotting.* Bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it
- *Canvassing.* Have you worked as a canvasser - having gone door to door for a political or social group or candidate.

Introduction

For a nation whose history begins with *We The People* it seems self-evident that *Citizen Engagement Matters*.¹ First and fundamentally, citizen participation is integral to our form of government. To sustain itself, to meet challenges and thrive, democracy demands much from its citizens.

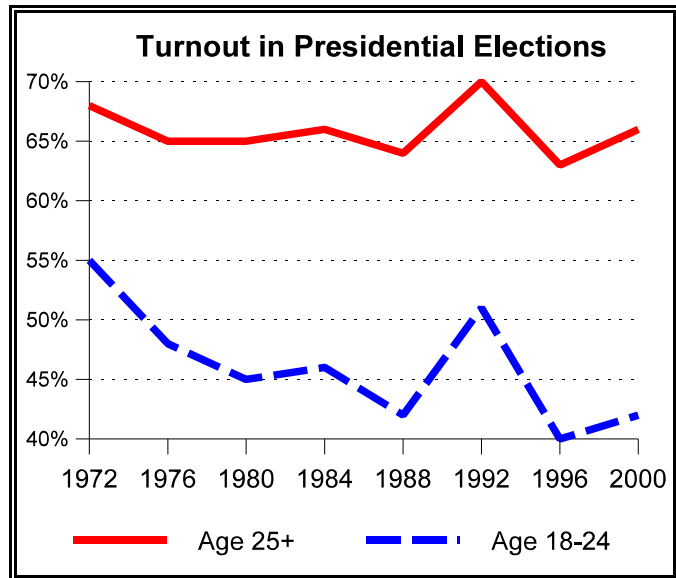
At a minimum, citizens are charged with the selection of leadership in a representative government. Engagement, even at this most basic level, can contribute to the nation's political and civic health in other important ways. When people participate, their voices are heard by our elected leaders. Since our system affects "who gets what," it matters if some voices are louder than others. When a large number absent themselves, extreme viewpoints may be over-represented to the detriment of the middle, removing precious ballast and stability. There is good reason to think that engagement is positively tied to the functioning and representativeness of the political system. In many ways, it is the glue that holds us together.

President Bush's August 31 radio address calling for a "September of Service" highlights other important reasons why civic and volunteer activities matter. In addition to teaching young people "valuable lessons about responsibility, community and selflessness" to benefit the country, in the president's words, this type of engagement may also benefit individuals of all ages. Civic behavior increases awareness of collective interests and breaks down walls of insularity, leading to greater understanding and trust. It may also provide a sense of identity, community, purpose and place, which many strive for in pursuit of a rewarding life.

But we are in a time when doubts have been raised about the civic and political health of the country. The problem is evident in figures documenting a decline in youth political participation over the last three decades. Voter turnout among Americans 25-years and older has been relatively stable, while turnout among those younger has declined nearly 15 percentage points since 1972.

¹ In this report we use the term "citizen" in the broad sense of those living in the country and having a stake in it, rather than the narrower legal definition of formal status.

The past president of the American Political Science Association, Robert Putnam, has decried the loss of community and challenged the nation to make new deposits in our social capital bank to bolster trust, civic virtue, individual productivity, and the effectiveness of institutions. Putnam carefully documents the membership decline of many civic associations and articulates numerous ways in which he thinks the civic and political health of the country is in decline.²



Source: Current Population Survey data analyzed by CIRCLE

There are many targets for blame: structural changes in the family, decline of political parties, increased pressures of time and money in daily life, suburbanization, immigration, politicians’ scandalous behavior, television, and other media. All have been identified as villains in the story, among others. But, according to Putnam, the biggest culprit is *generational change*. He attributes half of the downward spiral of engagement to a failure in passing a commitment to involvement from parent to child.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001 are often said to be reminiscent of Japan’s surprise attack on Pearl Harbor of December 7, 1941. That call to arms was met by what has been called the “greatest generation” in the popular press.³ But that generation is now mainly a romantic memory. Most of those Americans are long buried, along with their immigrant histories, their commitments and values. We are now close to being four times removed from the World War II generation.

This report, the result of a year and a half of research, attempts to tell a chapter in the story of how subsequent generations have done, to look at civic and political engagement at the millennium from a generational perspective. In the remainder of this opening section we introduce the cast of characters and present the goals of the research.

² Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

³ Tom Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998).

The Cast of Characters

- **Matures**, born before 1946, are about 49 million strong in the country. Driven by duty and sculpted by sacrifice, this generation was forged by the experiences of World War II and the Depression, even though many experienced them indirectly through their parents while growing up.
- **Baby Boomers**, born between 1946 and 1964 and constitute the largest age cohort — just over 71 million. Parented by prosperity, with a presumption of entitlement to their world view, the Boomer cohort has always been big enough to force the culture to adapt to them. Shaping political experiences were the Civil Rights movement, Viet Nam and Watergate, not to mention the “sexual revolution.”
- **Generation X**, or Xers, born between 1964 and 1976. Just slightly smaller than the Matures (44 million), the two generations have virtually nothing in common. This group’s formative experiences were framed by familial and financial insecurity. They grew up amidst divorce and recession. Where the sexual revolution of the Boomers brought free expression and experimentation, the threat of AIDS brought Xers fear and caution. During adolescence and early adulthood, their political world view was shaped by, well, pretty much nothing. The biggest external disruption was the Persian Gulf War, which ended quickly and without many American casualties, with computer-aimed smart bombs falling on targets like a video arcade game.
- **DotNets**, the almost 40 million young adults now between 15- and 25-years of age, born after 1976. They have gone by many labels — Millennials, Generation NeXt, Generation Y — but calling them a true generation remains premature. Generations are shaped by shared experiences and are clear only in history’s rear view mirror. We call them the DotNets because we think one of their defining characteristics will be having come of age along with the Internet. Information has always been virtually costless and universally available to them; technology cheap and easily mastered; community as much a digital place of common interest as a shared physical space. They came of age in the Clinton era of scandal amid a booming economy — now in retreat — and a refocus on the family.

Study Goals

The main goal in undertaking this research was to understand and document the ways in which citizens participate in civic and political life. We received funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts to provide a comprehensive picture of the civic health of America. To do this, we gathered data through focus groups and several surveys, including a large national survey which will provide a baseline measurement against which future progress can be measured. It is our hope that the scope

and design of the research will allow us to better understand the pathways to participation for all Americans, and for each generation.

A second goal was to employ new measures of political and civic engagement in order to understand aspects of younger generations that may have been understudied. Many leaders of youth-focused organizations told us that they believe young people were active in ways that earlier surveys had not measured. We took their ideas and looked for activity under many of the stones they pointed to. Some were barren; others suggested emerging life.

Third, we wished to take a first systematic look at what may be a new generation. The inclusion of DotNets provides insight into the future health of the body politic by allowing a comparison of today's youth to their elders. We started with a consuming interest in the question of whether GenX's lack of interest and attention to politics was an aberration or a new normal. Looking at their successors may provide an answer to this question, preliminary as it is.

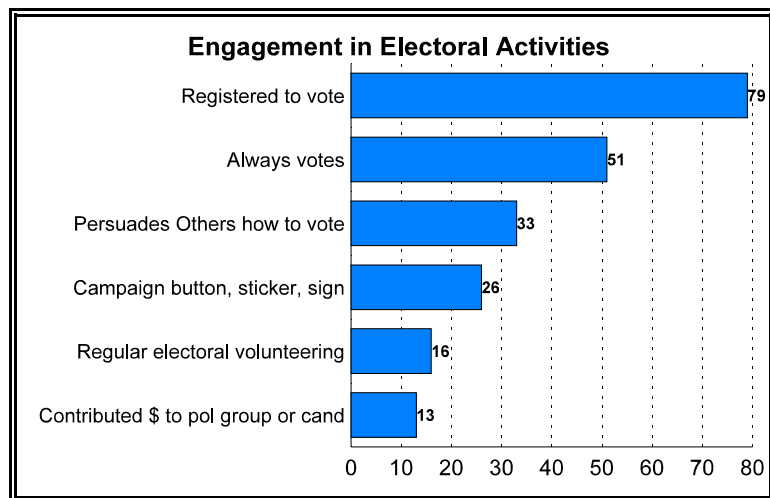
Finally, a key component of this study is the development of a set of *best indicators* that will provide a reliable measurement of civic engagement. The final questionnaire can be used to identify problems in a community, to compare the health of one community to that of the nation at-large, or as a mechanism for measuring the before-and-after effects of different civic engagement programs. A companion volume to this report contains the questionnaire and complete tabulation of responses. A methodological report on the index of civic and political engagement and a guide to its use will be published later this fall.

Section 1: Overview of the Civic and Political Health of the Nation

It is an overstatement to assert there is a crisis facing citizen life in America today, yet only an ostrich would be unable to see potential troubles on the horizon. To assess how those living in the country participate in weaving its political and civic tapestry, a nationwide sample of 3,246 U.S. residents — including 1,001 from the DotNet cohort and 1,000 from the GenX cohort — were interviewed in the spring of 2002. The survey covered attitudes about government and politics, attention to public affairs, and participation in 19 different activities representing ways in which citizens can get involved. This section presents an overview of the findings.

How Much Engagement?

Americans' level and type of engagement in the electoral arena runs the gamut. About four-in-five of those over 18 (79%) say they are registered to vote, although there is considerable variation by generation. Only about half (51%) of those old enough to have experienced an election (age 20 and older in our survey) say they “always” vote in local and national elections.

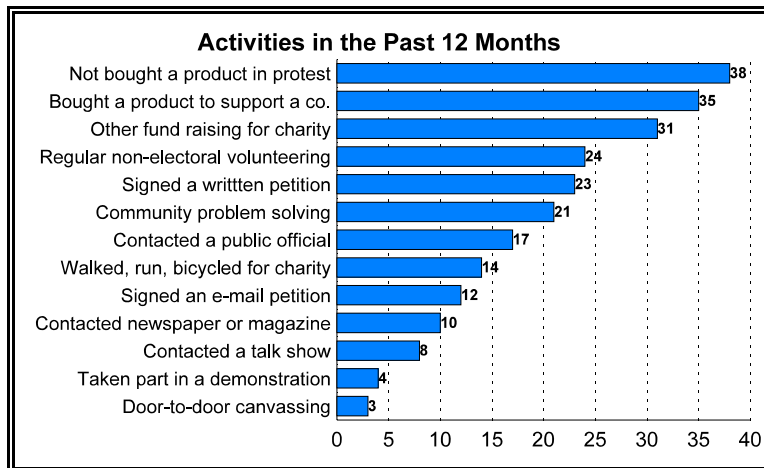


Involvement drops with the level of commitment and effort required by each additional activity asked about. One-third (33%) say they generally talk to people and try to show them why they should vote for or against a candidate or party. One-quarter (26%) say they demonstrate their support through posting a house sign, wearing a campaign button or putting a sticker on their car. Half as many (13%) report having contributed money to a political party, organization or candidate. A slightly greater number (16%) claim to do volunteer work in the electoral realm.

The political use of consumer power is a rarely studied form of engagement, one individuals often make-up as they go. We are unaware of any other large-scale, nationally representative study of consumerism, but our data suggest that it has the potential to become a potent form of political behavior. Nearly four-in-ten (38%) say they have not bought a particular product in the last 12 months because they dislike the conditions under which it was made or disapprove of the company that produced it — a boycott, for all intents and purposes. Nearly as many (35%) say they have

boycotted — that is, purchased a particular product or service because they like the political or social values of the company that produces it. Participation in these two individualistic activities, although admittedly a low bar of involvement, leads the list of the 13 non-electoral activities in the survey.

Of course, it takes much more commitment and effort to give time. One-quarter of those living in the country (24%) report *regularly* volunteering time to a non-electoral organization, such as a religious, environmental, youth or community organization. About one-in-five (21%) reports being active locally — working with others to solve a problem in their community. A



similar number (23%) say they have signed a written petition on behalf of some interest or cause in the last year. Slightly fewer say they have contacted a public official (17%), participated in a walk, run or bicycle event for charity (14%), signed an e-mail petition (12%), contacted a newspaper or magazine to register an opinion (10%), or tried to contact a TV or radio talk show (8%). Finally, just a very few report having taken part in a protest or demonstration in the past year (4%) or gone canvassing door-to-door (3%).

Across the Generations

Looking at differences in engagement across age groups in the survey provides at least a hint about what the future will look like. GenerationX has earned a reputation for non-involvement in the world of politics and elections, trailing Baby Boomers, who themselves trailed Matures.

This is a first look at those who follow GenX. We call them the DotNet Generation, though we will not know for sure whether they will become a true generation until they accumulate more history. But what of this first look: Will we see a continued generational slippage in voting turnout? Will DotNet mirror GenX and represent a bottoming out of the slide? Or, will this new cohort look more like earlier generations, suggesting GenX was an aberration produced by a unique period?

For this generational look we have organized the 19 activities into three different dimensions or clusters of similar behaviors. They are:

- **Electoral Action:** Things people do around campaigns and elections.
- **Civic Action:** Things people do to help in their communities or ways in which they contribute to charities.

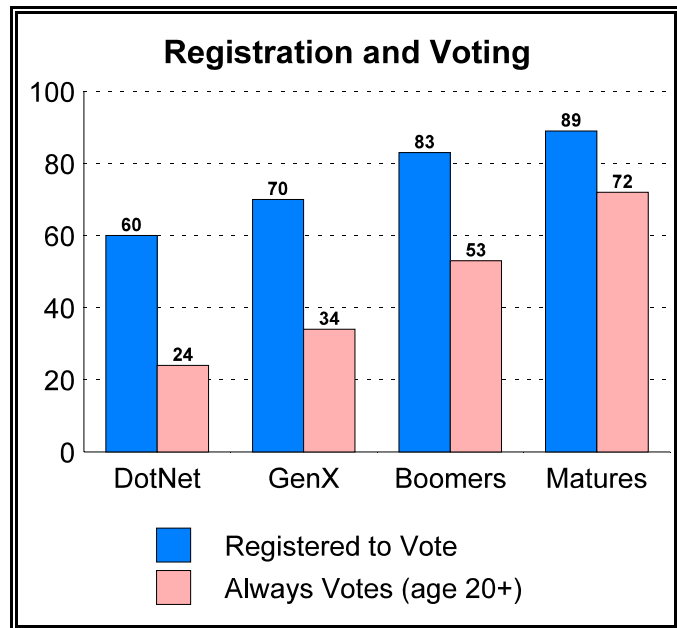
- **Political Voice:** Things people do to give expression to their political and social viewpoints.

In addition, behaviors related to keeping up with politics fall into a fourth dimension:

- **Attentiveness:** Things people do to follow and stay current with political and newsworthy happenings.

Electoral Activities

Looking first at the primary and fundamental act of citizenship — voting — the news is not comforting. On two basic indicators of health, being registered to vote and “always” voting in elections, a downward generational spiral continues. Fewer Baby Boomers are registered or habitually vote than the generation that came before them, and there is an even larger fall off from Boomers to the generations that have followed them. Whereas almost three-fourths (72%) of Matures say they always vote, just over half (53%) of Boomers do, and only about one-



third (34%) of Xers do. While DotNets have had less opportunity to form a voting habit, currently only one-quarter (24%) of those who have been eligible to vote for at least a couple of years (age 20 and older) say they always vote, even though “always voting” for most of them spans a very limited number of elections. And, among DotNets who are old enough to vote, just 60 percent say they are registered. Additionally, Matures (34%) and Baby Boomers (28%) are considerably more likely than GenXers (18%) and DotNets (20%) to display a candidate or party preference by wearing a button, putting up a yard sign or slapping a bumper sticker on their cars.

There is also a significant generational difference in contributing to campaigns: 17 percent each of Matures and Boomers report contributing money to a party or organization that supports candidates in the last 12 months, compared

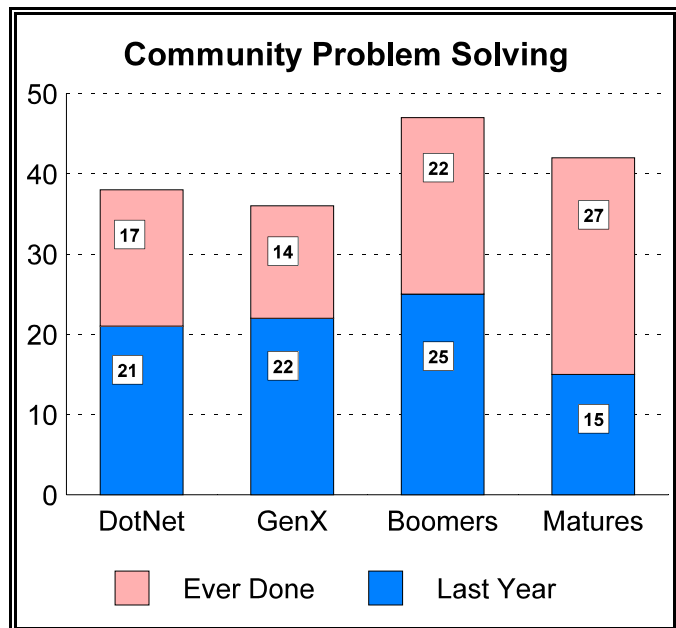
	<u>DotNet</u>	<u>GenX</u>	<u>Boomers</u>	<u>Matures</u>
Tries to Persuade Others	36	33	32	32
Displays Campaign Button/Sticker/Sign	20	18	28	34
Contributes Money to Political Group	4	11	17	17
Volunteers for Political Group	6	14	22	22

to just 11 percent of Xers and 4 percent of DotNets. However, it is also true that in addition to having less money, fewer younger folks have been *asked* for a contribution by a party or candidate: 34 percent of Matures were asked in the past year; 32 percent of Boomers; 23 percent of Xers; and 12 percent of DotNets. Finally, very few DotNets (6%) report volunteering for a party or candidate in the last 12 months. The rate among GenX is over twice as high (14%), and over three times as high for Boomers and Matures (22% each).

It is only with efforts to persuade others in elections that we find rough parity across age cohorts: about one-third of each group say they try to persuade others to vote for a party or candidate.

Civic Activities

In contrast with the electoral world, the youngest cohort is holding its own in the civic world of volunteering, organizational activity, fund raising, and the like. In fact on many measures of civic engagement, younger people are among the most active. We consider participation in five activities in this section: working with others in one’s community to solve a problem; participating in a walk, run or bicycle ride for charity; other activities to raise money for charitable causes; doing volunteer work for non-electoral groups on a regular basis; and active participation in a group or organization.

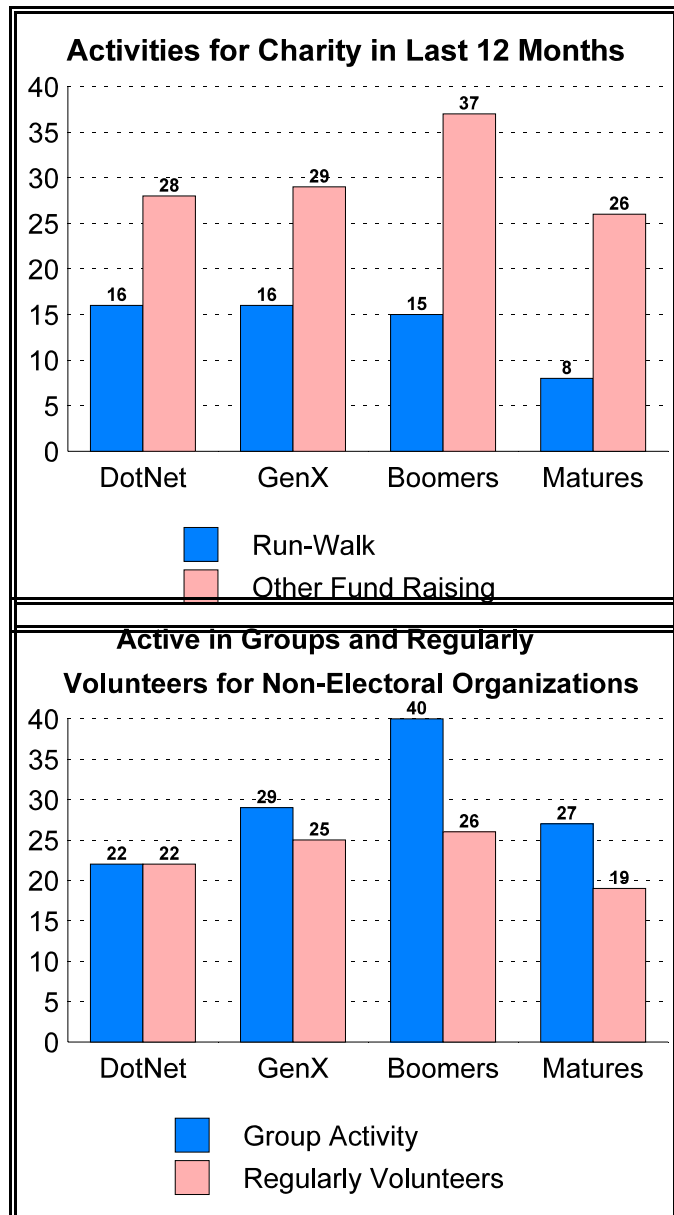


Community involvement goes to the heart of civic engagement, and one of the most telling indicators may be having “worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live.” On this question, despite younger people possibly having fewer reasons to be invested in their communities (being more mobile and less likely to own their own homes), GenXers and DotNets are very much like Baby Boomers in recent activity. This is an impressive hallmark and one that portends continuity in the tradition of involvement.

One-quarter of Boomers say they have worked in their communities in the last year, as have 22 percent of Xers and 21 percent of DotNets. Indeed, it is Matures (15%) who have been the least active in this area in the last year, although another 27 percent of them report doing this at some point in their lives.

Members of the three younger generations are also equally likely to have participated in a walk, run or bicycle event for charity — some 15-16 percent of each group in the last year, with roughly another quarter (25%-29%) reporting having done so at some previous point in their lives. Moreover, DotNets match GenX and the Matures in other activities to raise money for charities (Baby Boomers are most likely to have done this in the past 12 months). About half of Matures, Xers and DotNets have done this at some point in their lives and over a quarter in the last year. The figures for Boomers are 37 percent in the last year and a total of 60 percent at some point in their lives.

DotNets are much less likely than other cohorts to belong to a group or association (41% versus 60% for the sample as a whole), but the gap in *active* membership is smaller: 22 percent of DotNets are active members, compared with 29 percent of GenX and 27 percent of Matures. Boomers (at 40%) are the most likely



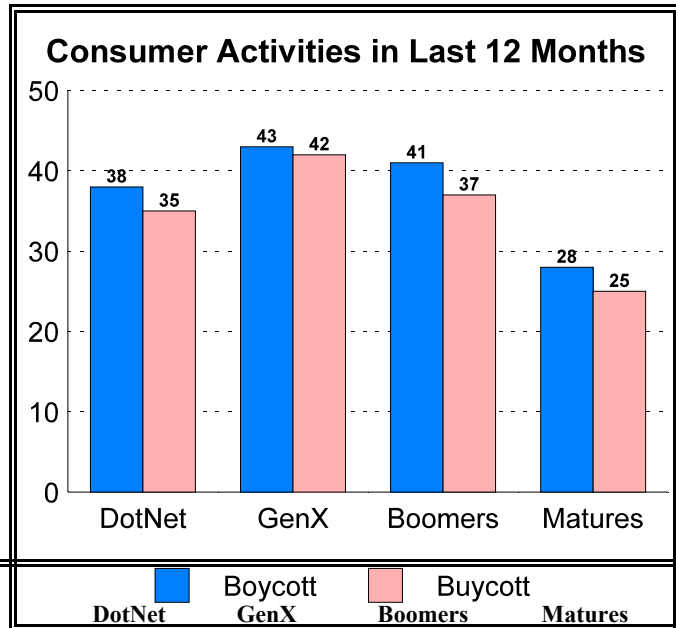
cohort to report active group membership. Similarly, when looking at reports of *regular* volunteering for non-electoral groups, DotNets (22%) are pretty much *starting* where GenXers (25%) and Baby Boomers (26%) are now, and slightly ahead of Matures (19%). More about this below.

Political Voice

People sing a variety of songs to make their voices heard. Little studied but dramatically apparent in our data is a form of *consumer activism*: In the last year, over one-third of the public reports not buying something from a company they do not like in order to punish them, and a similar number say they have purchased a product from a particular company to reward them for some corporate behavior.

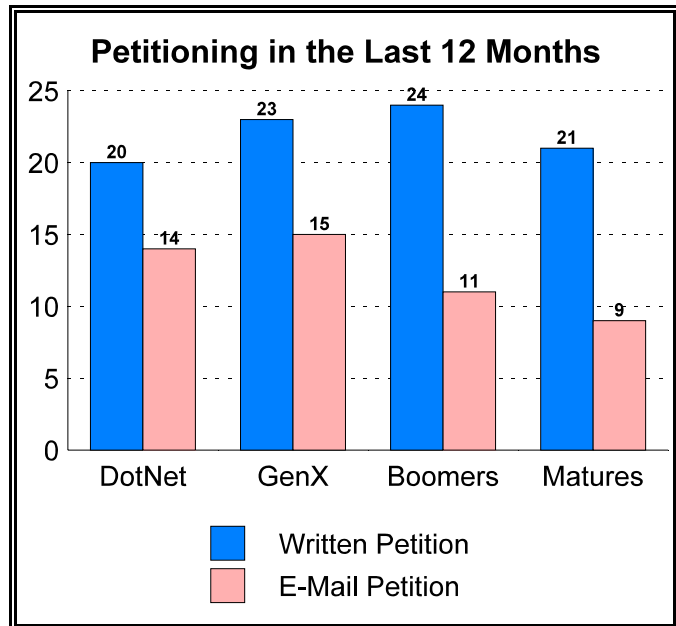
An impressive number of Americans in each cohort express their views through their behaviors as consumers, although Matures do it less than others. In the last year, about 40 percent of DotNets, GenXers and Baby Boomers say they have engaged in boycotting behavior — “not bought something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces it.” And just

slightly fewer in each group say they have *buycotted* — “bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it.” As noted earlier, consumerism is an under-studied form of participation that may offer potential as a vehicle for mobilizing citizens by simply putting a framework around on-going activities.

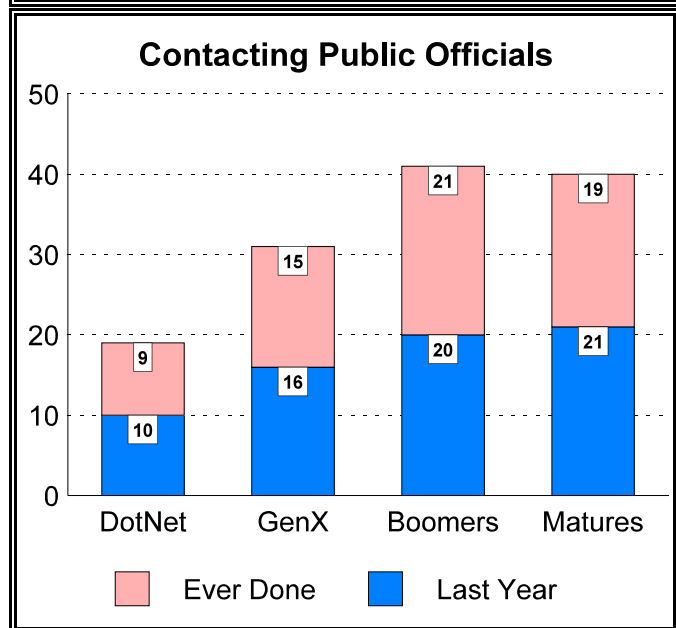


	DotNet	Boycott GenX	Buycott Boomers	Matures
Contacted newspaper or magazine	10	8	12	12
Attempted to contact TV or radio	7	7	10	8
Demonstrated, Marched, Protested	7	5	3	3
Worked as Canvasser	2	2	3	4

A significant number of citizens also petition their government or other groups. Between one-in-five and one-in-four in each cohort report having signed a petition in the past year, with at least as many reporting they have done so at some point in their lives, except for the DotNets. Petitioning through the Internet is an avenue of participation more heavily traveled by the two younger generations. About 15 percent of Xers and DotNets have signed an e-mail petition at some point in the last year.



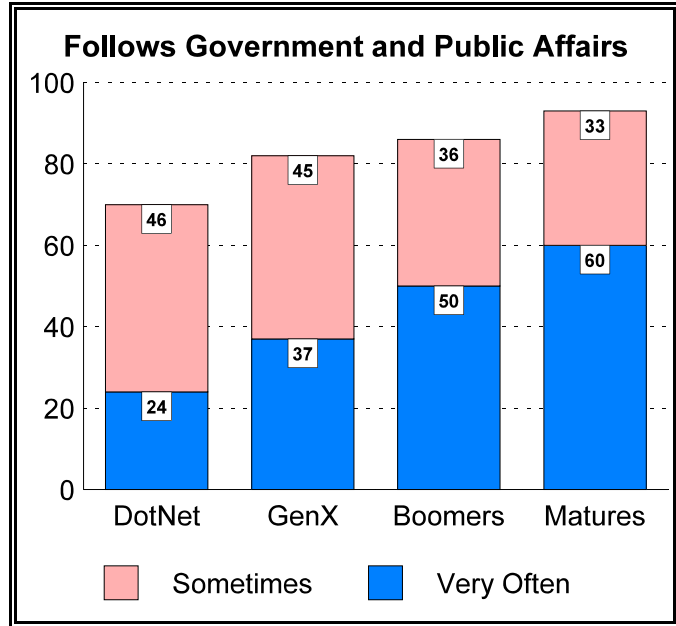
Older generations have an edge in contacting public officials. Perhaps feeling more confident and with more understanding of paths to power, Baby Boomers and Matures are more likely to have contacted or visited a public official at some level of government. One-fifth of each group (20% of Boomers, 21% of Matures) reports having done so in the last year, with about the same percentage saying they have done it at some earlier time. These figures shrink by a quarter for GenX and by half for DotNets. However, when looking only at the last year there are



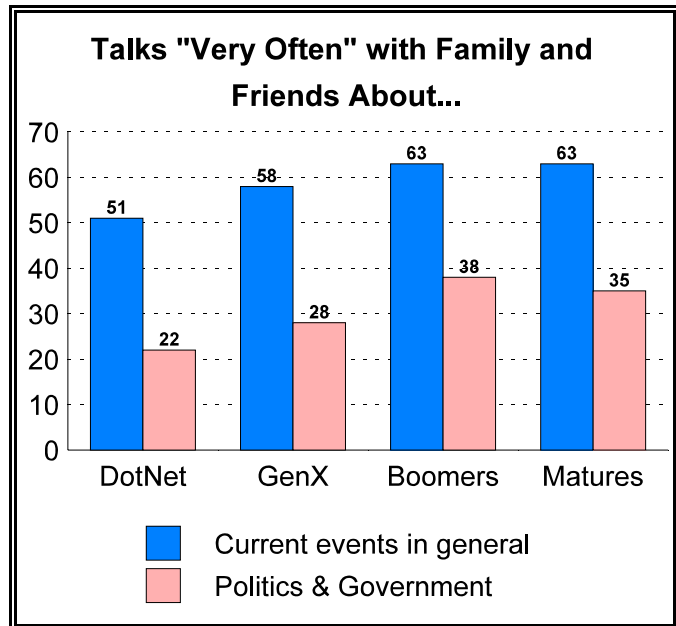
few generational differences in trying to contact the electronic media (a TV or radio talk show), or in having actively taken part in a demonstration, protest or march, and in door-to-door canvassing.

Attentiveness

Americans are not terribly attentive to politics. Less than half (45%) acknowledge they follow politics and government most of the time. And while 60 percent say they talk about current events with family and friends very often, just one-in-three (32%) say they have discussions with political content. Accordingly, levels of political knowledge about many topics are low. For example, only about half of the public (49%) can name the Republicans as the more conservative of the two major parties. DotNets (at 40%) fall below the other cohorts (51% for GenX, 56% for Boomers, and 46% for Matures).



Generational differences in basic attention to politics are striking. Whereas 60 percent of Matures and 50 percent of Baby Boomers claim to follow politics and government “most of the time,” just 37 percent of GenXers do so, falling to an even lower 24 percent of DotNets. While some of this ground is made up among those who take an interest in what is going on in government and public affairs “some of the time,” generational differences persist even when the bar is reset to this lower standard.

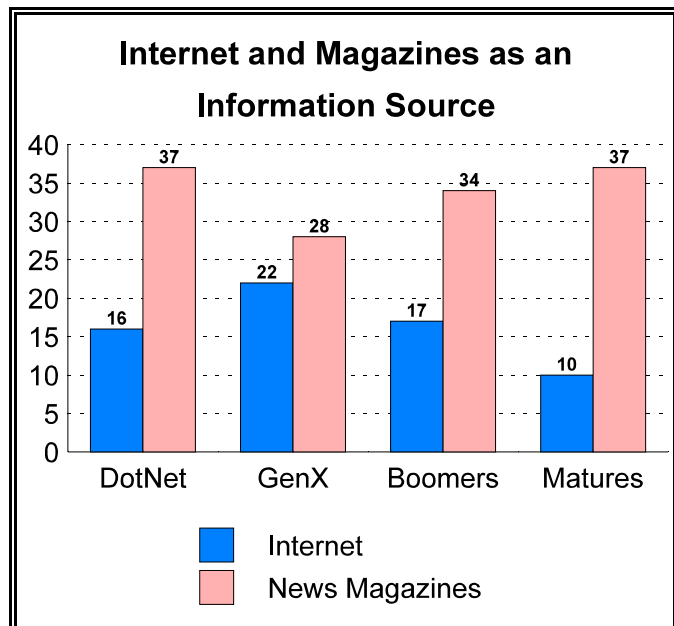
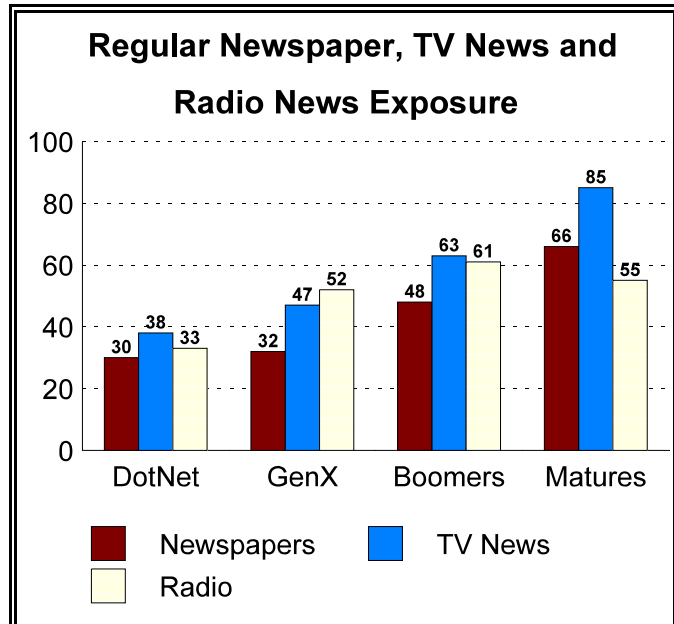


It is unclear at this time how much of the gap between the two older and younger cohorts is due to the life cycle (where a greater number will tune in as they get older and take on a wider variety of roles) or true generational differences, but the gap signals danger on two levels. First, this is a lot of ground to make up. The gap between 25 and 60 percent having public affairs as part of their daily diet is enormous. Second, this disjuncture is in a critical area. Basic attentiveness is a harbinger of interest in the subject area,

and public affairs should be the domain of all citizens. Paying attention is fundamental to nearly every other aspect of effective citizenship.

Echoing these cohort differences, DotNets are less likely than older cohorts to say they often talk about current events with friends and family, and especially unlikely to say these conversations focus on politics. While 38 percent of Boomers and 35 percent of Matures say their discussions with friends and family include items about politics or government “very often,” just 28 percent of Xers and 22 percent of DotNets say the same.

The age differences in political interest manifest themselves in big differences in exposure to news via the mass media. In data that will come as no surprise to media organizations, there is a tremendous generational drop off in regularly following the news through the daily paper and through TV news, and to a lesser but still significant extent, radio. Defining “regularly” as having been exposed five of the last seven days — having a news habit — newspaper readership drops from two-thirds (66%) of Matures to half (48%) of Boomers, and then to 32 percent of Xers and 30 percent of DotNets. Regular TV news viewing declines from a committed 85 percent of Matures to a healthy 63 percent of Baby Boomers. However, just 47 percent of Xers and 38 percent of DotNets have this level of exposure. The fall off for radio news is smaller, but still dramatic. By contrast, the news about news magazines is somewhat better. Nearly 4-in-10 DotNets (37%) read a news magazine at least once a week, compared with 28 percent among GenX, 34 percent among Boomers, and 37 percent among Matures.



Some suggest the Internet could be a great leveler, allowing young people to get as much news as their elders, just from a different source. But we see no such ray of optimism in this data. There are relatively small age differences in regular use of the Internet for news (again, 5 days or more per week): 22 percent of Xers, 17 percent of Boomers, 16 percent of DotNets, and 10 percent of Matures. And looking only at people who use the Internet on more than an occasional basis (three or more times per week), DotNets are actually the *least* likely to report regular newsgathering on the Net — 25 percent, versus 35%-37% for the other cohorts.

A Closer Look at Volunteering

A sizeable number of Americans give their time and energy to a wide range of service projects. They spend evenings and weekends working on education issues, volunteering for environmental organizations, and helping out community groups. Much of this volunteering is episodic, initiated by third parties or volunteer organizations, and decidedly nonpolitical in motivation. Young adults epitomize these trends: They are the most episodic in their efforts, most apt to be volunteering because of the assistance of an outside group, and least likely to turn to volunteer work to address social or political problems.

Yet, among the population in general, and young people in particular, there is also a committed core of volunteers who defy this trend. In addition to regularly giving their time and effort to service projects, they are involved in a host of other political and civic activities. Despite pressures of family and work, these committed volunteers are efficacious, dutiful and involved.

Regular Volunteers

Overall, while one-third (33%) of the public has volunteered for a group over the past 12 months, only one-in-four (24%) does so on a regular basis. Regular volunteers do not necessarily have a lot of free time on their hands. Married people, full time workers, and those who attend religious services at least once a week all volunteer regularly at rates that surpass their counterparts.

Individuals who watch three or more hours of television a day, on the other hand, are much less likely to be regular volunteers than are those who tune in for less time. Interestingly, the opposite is true for Internet use. People who spend more time on the Web are both more likely to volunteer and to do so regularly than are those who spend little or no time online.

Regular volunteers had good role models. One-third (33%) of those who grew up in a home where someone volunteered or where politics was a common topic volunteer regularly. In contrast, just 18 percent of those who did not live with someone who volunteered, and only 17 percent of those who grew up in homes where politics was never discussed are regular volunteers.

Importantly, regular volunteers believe they can and should make a difference in their communities. About two-thirds (69%) of regular volunteers say they can make at least some difference in their community; among episodic volunteers, just over half (54%) say so. Just four-in-ten (40%) non-volunteers feel this way. A solid majority (59%) of regular volunteers think they have a responsibility (not a choice) to make things better. Significantly fewer episodic volunteers (46%) or non-volunteers (42%) agree.

Finally, regular volunteers are very active across a host of other activities. Compared to people who volunteer, but not regularly, they are significantly more likely to have worked on a community problem, raised money for charity, or served as an active member of a group. They are also more likely to have contacted a public official or the news media, signed a written petition, or worn a button or displayed a bumper sticker or yard sign.

	<u>Episodic</u> <u>Volunteers</u> %	<u>Regular</u> <u>Volunteers</u> %
Worked on Problem	31	51
Active in Group	31	60
Raise Money for Charity	36	51
Button/Sticker/Sign	23	35
Contact Public Official	18	30
Contact News Media	9	20
Boycott	37	44
Boycott	43	48
Written Petition	24	36

Invitations Please

While a substantial number of volunteers have sought out service opportunities, most give their time because they were asked to do so — either by the organization itself or a third party. This is more true for environmental volunteers. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) in this group said that they were either contacted by the group (35%) or that someone else connected them

<u>Type of vol activity</u>	<u>I asked</u> <u>them</u> %	<u>They asked</u> <u>me</u> %	<u>Someone</u> <u>else</u> %
Civic	45	27	24
Environmental	36	35	23
Religious	42	28	20
Political	41	38	17
Youth	48	30	18

(23%). Only 36 percent sought out their service opportunities themselves. Those who volunteer for youth and community groups are more likely to be self-starters.

Volunteering—A Non Political Statement

Most volunteer work is considered by volunteers to be non-political. Political groups draw only a small proportion of volunteers — and political solutions are the goal of a small minority of those involved with other kinds of groups.

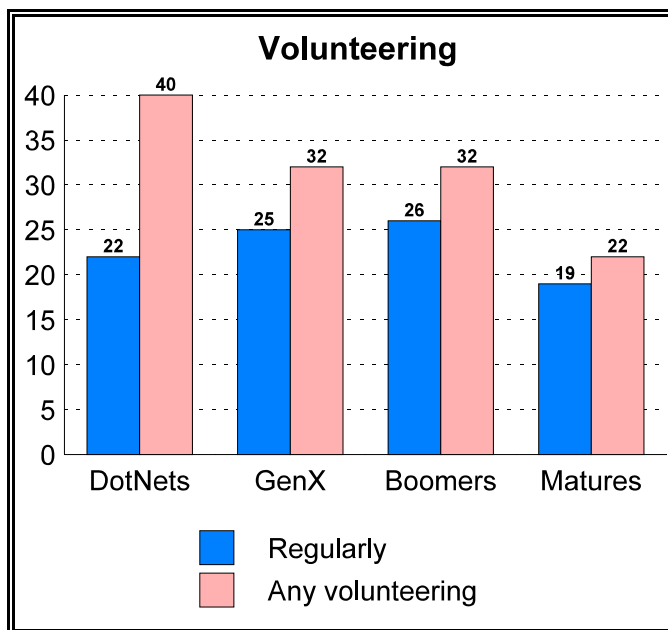
Among all volunteers, groups working with youth, children or education are the most popular. Over two-thirds (69%) of volunteers spend time with these groups. About half of volunteers choose to spend their time with religious groups (51%) or civic and community organizations (51%). Just 16 percent of volunteers spend time working for either environmental groups or political organizations or candidates.

Political and social goals do not drive most volunteer efforts. All volunteers were asked which of three options was the main rationale for their service. Just 20 percent opted to describe their work as a way to address “a social or political problem.” Even among volunteers for political groups, less than half (46%) chose this description; among environmental volunteers, 22 percent said so. Instead, most volunteers are motivated by their desire to help others, particularly those who work with religious organizations (71%) or youth groups (75%).

Young Adults: A Mirror of Broader Trends

If the volunteer work of the American public is episodic, apolitical and reliant on the assistance of facilitators, young adults are the standard bearers for these trends.

Today’s 15- to 25-year-olds post the highest rates of volunteering. Fully 40 percent have given time to a group in the past year, compared to one-third of Xers and Boomers (32% each) and just 22 percent of Matures. Much of their advantage, however, is due to the influence of high schools and colleges. Among high school students — many of whom are encouraged or required to do community service work — over half (54%) have volunteered for a non-political group. That number falls to 41 percent among college students, and just 25 percent of young adults who are not in high school or college.



When it comes to regular volunteering, the DotNet advantage evaporates. Approximately equal numbers of DotNets (22%), Xers (25%) and Boomers (26%) volunteer regularly for a non-political group. Fewer (19%) Matures do.

DotNets are not turning to political volunteering in large numbers either. Just 3 percent say that they volunteered for a political group in the past year (the lowest rate for any age group). Nor are they citing any of their volunteer work as a means to address a political or social problem. Just 10 percent say so, compared to 21 percent of Xers, 26 percent of Boomers, and 22 percent of Matures.

Finally, one-in-five (21%) of DotNets report getting involved in volunteering because “someone else put us together.” This compares to 14 percent of Xers, 6 percent of Boomers and 11 percent of Matures. These outside facilitators are especially important for the youngest cohort, since — especially when compared to Boomers — they do not appear to be targeted for recruitment by a group. Fully 57 percent of Boomers said they responded to an invitation from a group, compared to 40 percent of DotNets (and 43% each of Xers and Matures).

Consumerism: The Unexplored Path of Engagement

A surprising finding of the study is that nearly half of Americans are currently engaged in some form of consumer activism. That is, 49 percent say they have made retail decisions based on political and social concerns in the last year. With the exception of registration and voting, consumer activism is practiced by more people than any other civic or political behavior asked about in this survey.

While boycotts and “buycotts” may be sporadic and largely unorganized, they show potential as an unexplored path to citizen engagement. A growing body of research suggests individual consumer activism has received less scholarly attention than might be warranted.⁴ In this section, we look at those who reward and punish companies’ business practices through their daily activities as consumers.

How much consumer activism is taking place today?

Over half (55%) of survey respondents report boycotting a company or product at some point in their life, with 38 percent saying they have used their stick as a consumer in the past 12 months. And buycotting — buying a product or service because they like the social or political values of the company which produces it — is only slightly less prevalent. Just under half (45%) report having

⁴ For a review of the history of consumer activism, see Caroline Heldman, “Consumer Activism in American Politics.” Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2002.

done so at some point in their life, while 35 percent have used the consumer carrot in the past 12 months. Half of the public has done one or the other in the past year, and nearly one-in-four people (23%) report doing both.

Who are the consumer activists?

Somewhat surprisingly, age has little to do with consumer activism. Some form of consumer activism has been practiced by half of all age groups in the last year, with the exception of the Matures, who noticeably lag on this dimension.

	Did <u>Neither</u>	Only <u>Boycotted</u>	Only <u>Buycotted</u>	Did <u>Both</u>	
All	51	15	12	23	=101
DotNets	50	15	12	24	=101
GenX	45	14	13	29	=101
Boomers	48	15	11	26	=100
Matures	60	15	12	13	=100

And it is those with more buying

power — the better educated and more affluent — who are the most active on this score. Those having some college experience are 11 percentage points more likely than others to engage in boycotting or buycotting; those with yearly household incomes of \$65,000 or more (approximately the most affluent one-fourth of the population) are 12 percentage points more likely to be consumer activists than those who live in households with less money.

What else do consumer activists do?

People who are more plugged into the political and civic life of their communities are also more likely to be consumer activists. Specifically, a greater share of those who have done volunteer work in the past 12 months, taken part in political group activity, or worked in their community with others to solve a problem have engaged in consumerism than their less active counterparts.

	Boycotted or <u>Buycotted</u> %	<u>Neither</u> %	
Volunteered (last 12 months)	59	41	=100
No volunteering	45	55	=100
Active in political group	64	36	=100
Not active in political group	43	57	=100
Worked on comm. problem	59	41	=100
No comm. problem solving	47	53	=100

In addition, people who incorporate politics and public affairs into their daily life are more likely to be consumer activists. Boycotting and buycotting happen more frequently among those who are attentive to politics, report Internet usage, and use a variety of media sources for news and information. Thus while our data are

preliminary, there are a number of links between consumer behavior and other political and civic activities, making it a ripe area for future inquiry.

Section 2: The Engaged Citizen

Concerned, outwardly focused citizens can find a host of opportunities to “make a difference.” From shoveling snow off a neighbor’s walkway to running for national office, from donating time or money to a local food bank to advocating legislation to change government policy, opportunities abound for those dedicated to making their world a better place.

Fully half of those sampled embrace the role of active citizen, and in this section, we explore the nature and forms of their participation. Some people choose involvement in the political process. Others work to effect change through direct action and non-governmental means. Still others are active in both the electoral and civic arenas.

These activists — whom we will call *dual activists* — stand out. Like those engaged in either the electoral arena or the civic arena, dual activists speak out through the media, in petitions, boycotts, protests, and the like. But the volume of their voices is louder, and their means of communication more varied. If there is a citizen ideal, these individuals approach it. They participate in the selection of representatives and other elected officials, they search for solutions to community problems through individual and collective action, and they frequently express their opinions to leaders and fellow citizens.

The Civic and Electoral Arenas, and Beyond

The public expresses a wide range of opinion about government and the political process — from faith, hope, optimism, and support, to skepticism, cynicism, resignation, and outright opposition. And many people simply ignore government and the political process altogether, even while expressing concern about the problems of others.

With such varied world views and limitless choices for engagement, it is not surprising that active Americans take different pathways to participation. This report looks at ten specific activities in the electoral and civic arenas to serve as indicators of engagement and to provide a basis for categorizing citizens. Significantly, the data show that civic activities tend to cluster together as do electoral activities. That is, people who engage in one civic activity are more likely than the average citizen to participate in other civic actions. The same pattern exists in the electoral arena.

Looking at these different activities, the public can be sorted into groups based on their types and levels of engagement. People are considered to be civically engaged if they participated in two or more of the following civic activities:

- Regular volunteering for an organization other than a candidate or political party;
- Working with others to solve a community problem in the past year;
- Raising money for charity, through a run/walk or any other means in the past year;

- Actively participating in a group or association.

About one-third of the public qualifies (32%) as civically active under this standard. The DotNets (28% active) fall below the average, but not by much, and are three percentage points higher than the Matures on this dimension.

	All	DotNet	GenX	Boomer	Mature
	%	%	%	%	%
2 or more civic activities	32	28	34	39	25
2 or more electoral activities	36	26	26	39	48

Similarly, people are considered electorally engaged by

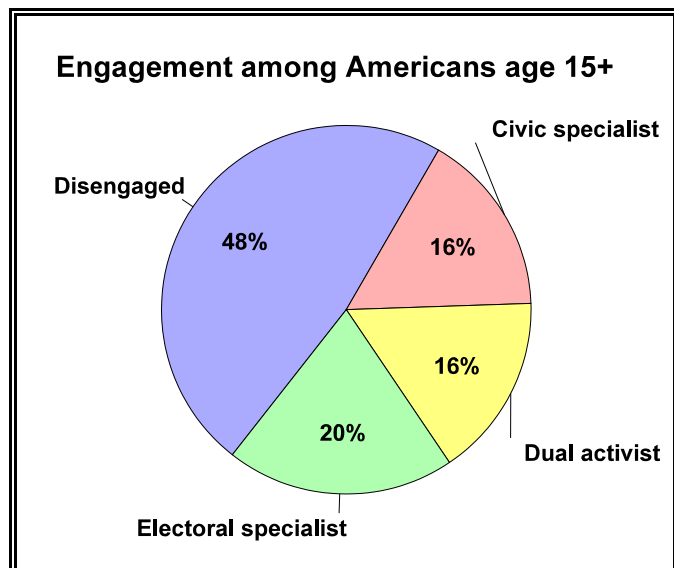
the same standard: two or more activities from among the following:

- “Always” voting (or, for youth under 20 who have not yet had an opportunity to vote, intention to always vote);
- Volunteering for a political organization or a candidate;
- Trying to persuade someone how to vote;
- Displaying a button, bumper sticker, or sign on behalf of a candidate;
- Contributing money to a party or candidate in the past 12 months.

Just over one-third of the public (36%) meets this standard. DotNets (at 26%) fall further behind the average in this sphere, and especially far behind Boomers (39% active) and Matures (48%).

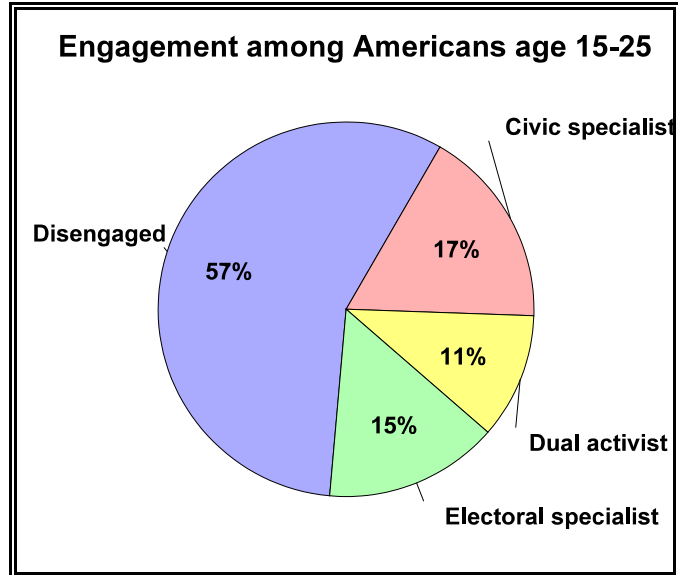
Typology of Engagement

The civically and electorally engaged groups overlap: 16 percent, or about one of every six Americans, meet the standard in both arenas. They are the *Dual Activists*. The same percentage — 16 percent — are civically active but do not meet the standard for electoral activity. These are the *Civic Specialists*. A slightly larger group — 20 percent — is electorally but not civically active. These are the *Electoral Specialists*. Finally, in these two arenas at least, nearly half of the public — 48 percent — meet neither standard. They



are labeled the *Disengaged*.

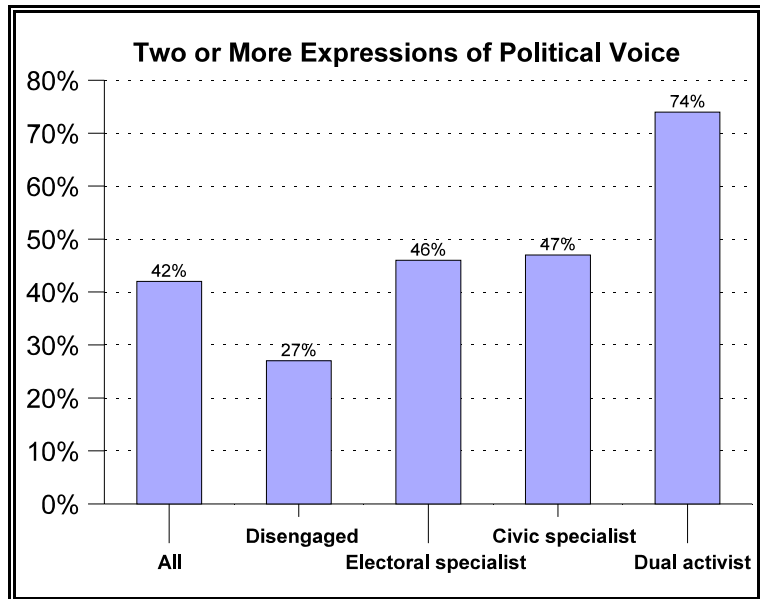
As we saw earlier, young people lag behind in many but not all forms of engagement. Given their relatively good performance in volunteering, working with others on community problems, fundraising, and group membership, it is not surprising to find that 17 percent of youth ages 15-to-25 qualify as Civic Specialists (compared with 16 percent for the country as a whole). They are underrepresented among Electoral Specialists (15 percent among youth, 20 percent overall) and Dual Activists (11 percent among youth, 16 percent in the general population), and overrepresented among the Disengaged (57 percent versus 48 percent overall).



The Expression of Political Voice

Activities in these two arenas – the civic and the electoral – are largely collective. They are instigated, planned, and managed with others through organizations such as nonprofits, schools, or political parties. But they are not the only ways a citizen can be heard.

Earlier we reviewed nine activities labeled *political voice*: that is, the means of political expression outside of the electoral channel and reaching beyond the nonpolitical activity that characterizes much of the civic world. Political voice goes hand-in-hand with *both* electoral and civic engagement.



Significantly, the volume is louder and the range of ways in which citizens communicate their ideas is wider among Dual Activists than among either of the specialist groups. The Dual Activists function as a bridge between the civic world of voluntary associations and activities, and the electoral world of our representative democracy.

Nearly two-thirds of the public (64%) engaged in at least one form of expression involving political voice. Among Dual

	<u>All</u>	Dis- <u>engaged</u>	Electoral <u>Specialist</u>	Civic <u>Specialist</u>	Dual <u>Activist</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
Boycotted	38	30	39	42	55
Buycotted	35	27	37	37	52
Written petition	22	12	24	26	48
Contacted official	18	9	18	17	45
E-petition	12	7	12	17	24
Contacted media	16	7	17	21	36
Protested	4	3	3	5	10
Canvassed	3	1	2	3	10

Activists, 88 percent have done so. But only 42 percent of the public overall have done two or more activities (the standard we used for civic and electoral engagement). We find that three-fourths of Dual Activists have met this standard of two or more activities (74%), compared with 47 percent and 46 percent among Civic and Electoral Specialists, respectively, and 27 percent among the Disengaged. A loud voice is very much the province of the Dual Activists, and to a lesser extent, the Electoral and Civic specialists.

The Dual Activists are remarkable for particular activities that are uncommon among the public at large. Although contacting an official is a relatively rare occurrence for the general public (only 18% say they have done this in the past 12 months), nearly half (45%) of the Dual Activists have done so, far above the rate for Electoral or Civic Specialists (18% and 17% respectively), or for the Disengaged (9%). Nearly half of the Dual Activists (48%) have signed a written petition in the past year, compared with 22 percent overall.

Dual Activists are also over twice as likely as the average citizen to have contacted the media to express an opinion (either through a letter to a newspaper or magazine, or a call to a talk show). Among the Dual Activists, 36 percent have done this, compared to 21 percent among Civic Specialists and 17 percent among Electoral Specialists. Only 7 percent of the Disengaged have done either of these activities.

Who are the Activists, Specialists, and the Disengaged?

With the exception of income and education, these groups are not highly differentiated by demographic characteristics. Women are slightly underrepresented among Electoral Specialists (47% are women, compared with 52% in the population as a whole), and slightly overrepresented among Civic Specialists (55% female). By contrast, blacks are overrepresented among the Electoral Specialists (14% versus 12% nationally), but no more

	<u>All</u>	<u>Dis- engaged</u>	<u>Electoral Specialist</u>	<u>Civic Specialist</u>	<u>Dual Activist</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
Female	52	54	47	55	53
Black	12	12	14	9	11
Hispanic/Latino	10	11	11	10	5
B.A. degree or more	23	15	20	34	41
Income \$80,000 or more	18	13	17	20	33
Average age	44	42	49	40	45

likely than non-blacks to be among the Disengaged. Latinos in the survey were underrepresented among Dual Activists (5%, versus 10% in the sample as a whole). The average age of the Dual Activist is 45-years, compared with 40-years for the Civic Specialist and 49-years for the Electoral Specialist. Average age for the Disengaged is 42-years.

Education and income, however, do facilitate engagement. Civic Specialists and Dual Activists are better educated than the other groups, with 41 percent of Dual Activists and 34 percent of Civic Specialists having earned at least a bachelor's degree (compared with 20% among Electoral Specialists and 15% among the Disengaged). One-third (33%) of Dual Activists have family incomes of \$80,000 or more, compared with 20 percent among Civic Specialists, 17 percent among Electoral Specialists, and 13 percent among the Disengaged. One-third (33%) of the Civic Specialists and 35 percent of Dual Activists use the Internet every day, compared with 20 percent for the Electoral Specialists and 19 percent for the Disengaged.

Civic Specialists and Dual Activists frequently attend religious services: 60 percent of the Dual Activists do so every week, as do 51 percent of the Civic Specialists. This compares with 40 percent for Electoral Specialists and 33 percent for the Disengaged. Notably, one-quarter of the Dual Activists are highly committed white evangelical Protestants, who represent only 15 percent of the overall population.

Partisanship and Values

Dual Activists are more partisan than the rest of the public, but are equally balanced between the two parties. In the public as a whole, only about 28 percent identify strongly with the Democratic or Republican parties. Among Dual Activists, 45 percent identify strongly with a political party, dividing equally between Democrats and Republicans.

In overall party affiliation, Electoral Specialists tend to tilt Democratic (52% Democratic or lean Democratic, to 37% Republican or lean Republican), while Civic Specialists (40% Democratic and 39% Republican) and Dual Activists (47% Democratic and 45% Republican) are evenly balanced. Among the Disengaged, Democrats outnumber Republicans 46 percent to 32 percent.

This partisan balance among the activists extends to specific political values and opinions on issues. Being active is not the sole province of either liberals or conservatives.

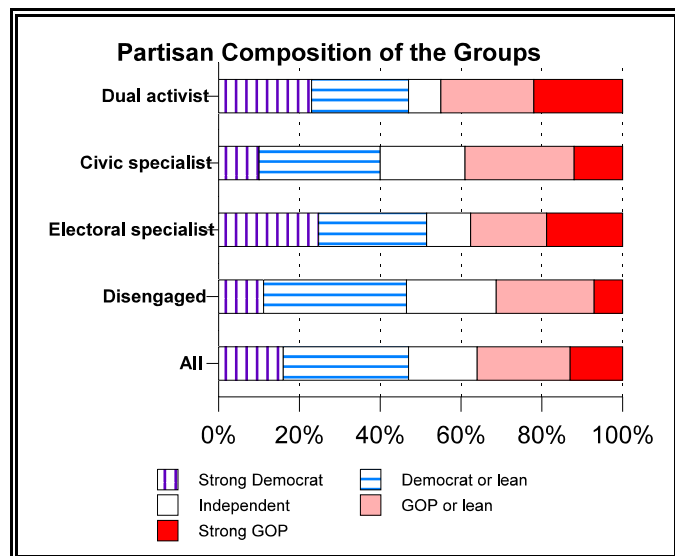
On the question of government regulation of business, Dual Activists are no more or less likely than the Disengaged to believe that regulation is necessary to protect the public interest (59% feel this way). Similarly, there are no differences across the groups in the belief that government is wasteful and inefficient

(about 40% think this, while about 51% disagree). However, more active groups are more wary about government doing too much. Only 40 percent of Dual Activists think the government should be doing more to solve problems, compared to 52 percent of the Disengaged, the most supportive of government doing more.

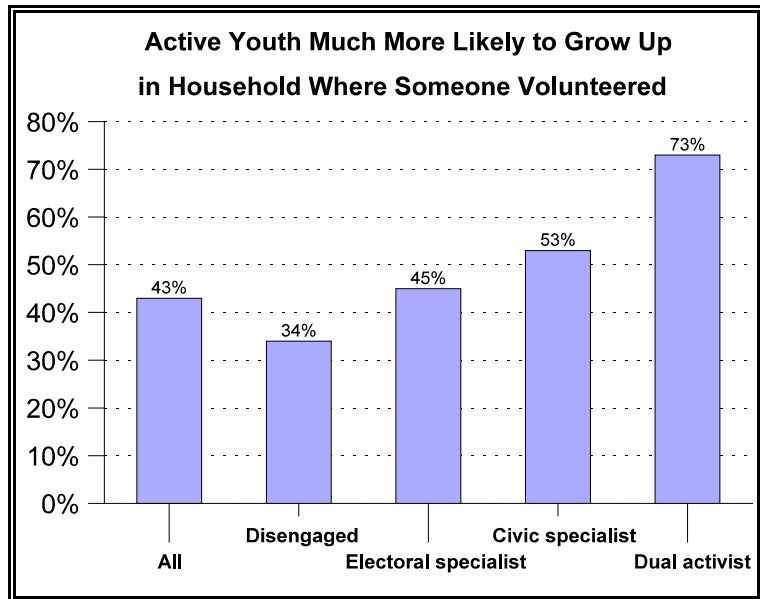
Opinions about whether homosexuality should be discouraged or accepted by society do not vary by levels or types of engagement. Civic Specialists and Dual Activists are slightly more positive toward immigrants than are Electoral Specialists and the Disengaged but the differences are small.

The Making of Active Citizens

Engaged citizens are made, not born. The next section discusses the many influences on young people that affect their development as citizens, but a preview look through the lens of our four groups is instructive.



Compared with the Disengaged, the more active groups were much more likely to have observed engagement first-hand while growing up, either through a volunteer in the household, frequent political discussion at home, or both. Over half (56%) of the Dual Activists reported that someone in the household had volunteered, compared with only 31 percent among the disengaged. Among youth, the difference is even greater: 73 percent of Dual Activist youth saw the example of volunteering at home, compared with 34 percent among the Disengaged.



Dual Activists are especially likely to be the targets of mobilization. Nearly six-in-ten (58%) say that they have been contacted in the past year to work for or contribute to a candidate or party. By comparison, only 34 percent of Electoral Specialists and 26 percent of Civic Specialists say this. Only 14 percent of the Disengaged report such a contact.

Not surprisingly, people who are engaged have a much stronger sense of civic duty than do the Disengaged. Over two-thirds (69%) of Dual Activists say that being a good citizen means having special obligations; only 43 percent of the Disengaged feel this way (Electoral and Civic Specialists fall in between, at 58% and 60% respectively). Similarly, 65 percent of the Dual Activists say it is their *responsibility* to get involved to make things better; 38 percent of the Disengaged say this. And the Dual Activists have a stronger sense of collective efficacy: 71 percent feel that, working with others, they can make at least some difference in their communities. Only 36 percent of the Disengaged express this confidence (49% of Electoral Specialists and 59% of Civic Specialists feel efficacious).

Section 3: Paths to Participation

Youth engagement won't be boosted in a single stroke. There is no simple solution to apply, no magic tonic to administer, no engagement gene to alter. The pathways to participation are too wide and too varied, and they are influenced by too many factors — families, schools, clubs, groups, churches, even friends. But if this means civic involvement is unlikely to be spurred by a lone strike, it also suggests that there are multiple prods to encourage participation.

Families can be important role models. Engaged parents tend to raise engaged children. For some young people, schools can open the doors to civic and political life as well as teach specific civic skills. Individual teachers can play vital roles by encouraging students to talk openly and to debate ideas. Religious institutions, policy organizations and other groups can also invite young adults to participate in specific acts such as protesting, political campaigning and community service. Together, these individuals and institutions can hold sway over the public participation of today's youth.

Charity Begins at Home

Many of the important lessons for engagement are learned at home. Young adults who grow up amid regular political discussions are much more involved in a host of activities. For example, more than one-third (35%) of those who often heard political talk while growing up are regular volunteers, compared to just 13 percent of those raised in homes where political talk

	Political Talk		Someone Volunteered	
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Yes</u>
Regular Volunteer	13	35	15	31
Active in Group	16	10	15	32
Always Vote	20	38	26	41
Follows Politics	18	44	18	33
Boycotted	25	54	30	47
Signed Paper Petition	11	30	17	25

never occurred — a finding that also suggests an interesting spillover from the political world to the civic. Similarly, among young people who are eligible to vote, 38 percent of those from homes with frequent political discussions say they always vote, compared to 20 percent of those without such dialogue. By talking about politics, families teach their children that it is important to pay attention to the world around them — and to take the next step of doing something.

Parents and guardians, even siblings, provide critical role models for civic behavior as well. Young people who were raised in homes where someone volunteered (43% of all youth) are highly involved themselves — joining groups and associations, volunteering, wearing buttons, or displaying bumper stickers at rates higher than of those who did not grow up with such examples. Youth with engaged role models are also more attentive to news of politics and government and more likely to participate in boycotts or buycotts.

Lessons from the Schools: Practice, Practice, Practice

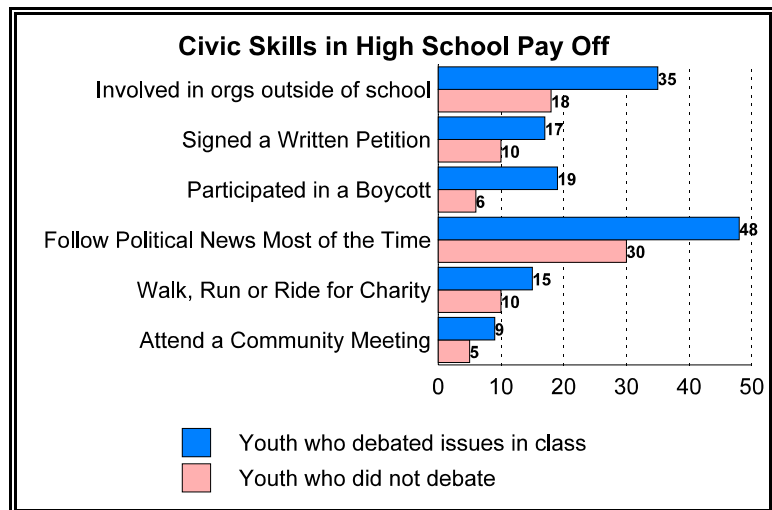
Family influences are augmented by lessons learned in high schools and colleges. Schools can provide training grounds for civic involvement, offer opportunities for open discussions and create avenues for service work — all of which lead to higher levels of youth involvement. Students who attend schools that provide civic training in the classroom or reward service opportunities are more involved than are students whose schools do not.

Civic instruction is commonplace at the high school level, though it varies from current events requirements in classes to mandated service work in the community. Nearly three-quarters (70%) of current high school students took a course that required them to pay attention to government, politics or national issues in one of the two

previous school years. A slight plurality report that such courses had a positive impact on them. Half (48%) said that their interest in politics and national issues increased as a result, while 41 percent report that these courses had no impact. Only eight percent said that their interest decreased. Among college students, fewer have taken such courses (40%), although almost as many (47%) said that their interest increased as a result.

Classrooms Open for Ideas and Debate		
	<u>High School</u>	<u>College</u>
<i>Teachers offer open discussions...</i>		
Often	49	47
Sometimes	27	32
Rarely	18	11
Never	4	4
Dk/Ref	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
	100	100
<i>Students are encouraged to make up their minds...</i>		
Often	54	70
Sometimes	32	21
Rarely	12	6
Never	1	2
Dk/Ref	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100

However, simply requiring attention to politics and government is not enough to foster greater involvement among high school students. Instead, it is when students report that teachers encourage open discussions about these matters that their scores on scales of civic behavior climb. This finding holds up even when other important influences are taken into account, which suggests that when teachers promote lively classroom participation, they can encourage involvement outside class walls as well.



Open discussions are a regular part of the classroom experience for about half of today’s high school students. Fully 49 percent report that teachers often encourage the class to discuss political and social issues in which people have different opinions; another 27 percent say that teachers sometimes do so. Slightly over half (54%) say that teachers encourage them to make up their own mind about issues; 31 percent say they sometimes do. Very few students say that open discussions and independent thinking are never encouraged (4% and 1%, respectively). Among college students, about half (47%) say that teachers often promote open exchanges and fully 70 percent say they are encouraged to make up their own mind about issues.

Teachers can have a greater impact on engagement when they require students to develop specific civic skills, but not all students are being taught such skills. Eight-in-ten high school students have given a speech or oral report, but only half (51%) have taken part in a debate or discussion in which they had to persuade someone about something and just 38 percent have written a letter to someone they do not know.

Students who have been taught these skills, especially letter writing and debating, are much more likely than those lacking such education to be involved in a range of participatory acts inside and outside the school environment. Again, the link between these skills and participation is much stronger than is the more generic course requirement to follow politics and national affairs.

Schools and Volunteering: The Impact of Carrots and Sticks

Many of today's students are active volunteers in part because high schools and colleges have facilitated such efforts and provided reinforcing classroom support. Three-quarters (75%) of high school students say that their school arranges or offers service activities or volunteer work for students; 65 percent of college students say so. A much smaller number of students say that volunteer work is required for graduation — 21 percent of high school students and 7 percent of college students say so.

Student involvement rises when schools facilitate volunteer work, and participation steps up again when schools mandate it. Some 45 percent of students at high schools that arrange service work volunteered, compared to 33 percent of students who attend schools that don't provide such assistance. Fully 59 percent of students whose high schools required volunteer work actually volunteered last year, compared to 37 percent of students without such requirements.⁵ Among

Encouraging and Requiring Service	
	<u>% Who Volunteer</u>
HS Arranges Work	45
HS Does Not Arrange Work	33
HS Requires Work	59
HS Does Not Require Work	37
College Arranges Work	38
College Does Not Arrange Work	13

college students, 38 percent whose schools arrange work volunteer, compared to 13 percent whose schools do not do so. (Too few colleges require such work to allow for an analysis of this effect.)

Again, classroom discussion can play a critical role in youth involvement. Student volunteers who are encouraged to talk about their volunteer work in class are much more likely to stick with it. Fully 63 percent of high school students and 58 percent of college students who volunteered within the last year had an opportunity to talk about their service work in the classroom. This group is twice as likely to volunteer regularly as those who don't get the chance to talk about their experiences (64% vs. 30%, respectively). They are also much more likely than those without such discussions to work on a community problem (47% vs. 32%), to participate in a run, walk or bike ride for charity (27% vs. 15%), or to influence someone's vote (50% vs. 34%). These findings remain valid even when a host of other factors are taken into consideration.

⁵ A school requirement for volunteer work might not specify the year in which the work had to be done; thus it is not illogical that some students faced with this requirement did not actually volunteer this year.

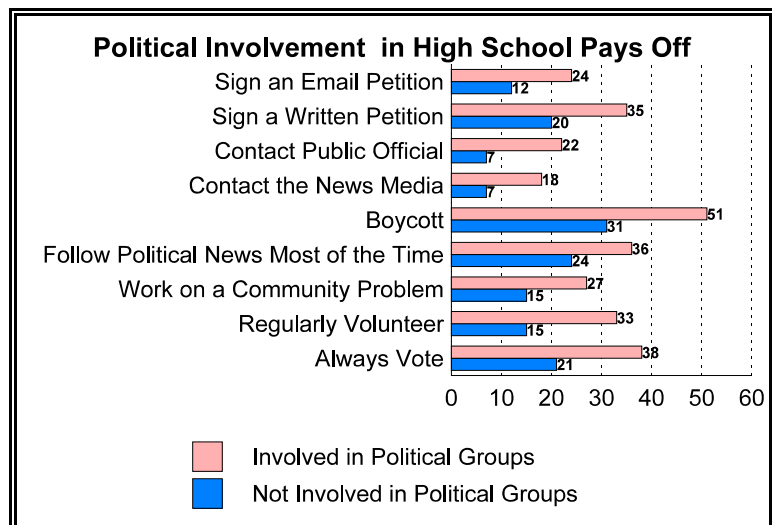
In college, the breadth of opportunity for involvement increases but the requirements decrease. The result is that despite their age and experience, college students today are less likely to volunteer, and no more likely to pay attention to news about politics and government than high school students.

School Organizational Affiliations: Political Training Grounds

Civic lessons are not limited to classroom settings. Many high school students are gaining significant training through their participation in extra-curricular activities, especially when they are involved with political groups. Students who participate in political groups in high school continue to be disproportionately civically and politically active after graduation.

Two-thirds of current high school students (66%) participate in some kind of organized group or club, and most are involved in more than one group. The participation rates for student government or service clubs are much lower (12% and 9%, respectively).

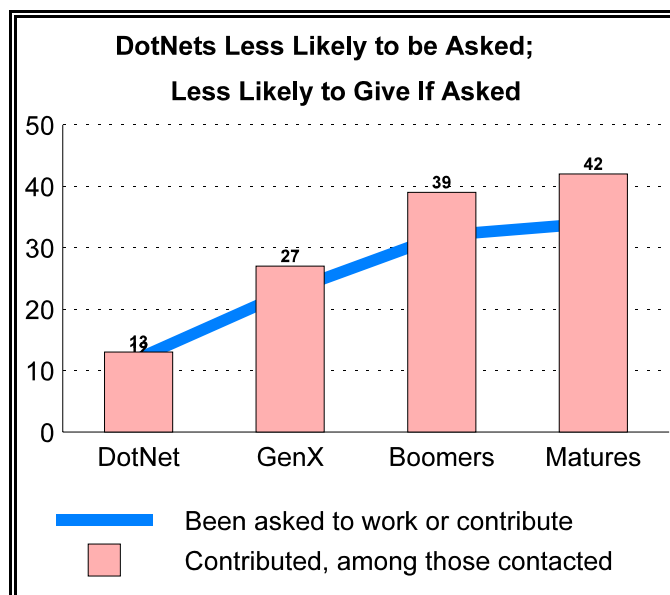
When high school students are active outside of school, it's usually with sports or religious groups. Fully 44 percent say they participate in organized sports; 37 percent are active with religious youth groups. Participation in these two arenas far outstrips activity in other entities such as Model United Nations (1%), political clubs (1%) and 4-H (3%). Even scouting draws only 14 percent of today's high school students.



The content of student groups matters. Simply being involved in high school organizations does not lead to greater involvement after graduation, but involvement in political groups does. Among high school graduates, those who participated in political organizations vote more frequently (38% vs. 21%), are more attentive to news (36% vs. 24%), and they volunteer regularly at twice the rate (33% vs. 15%) as those without experience in these organizations. They are also more likely to give voice to their concerns through boycotting, signing petitions, or contacting public officials or the news media.

Notably, the different levels of engagement between those who participated in political organizations in high school and those who did not, hold up even when other factors that are also associated with participation (such as parental influences, income and advanced education) are taken into account.

Student involvement in college associations is less common than it is in high school, and more diffuse when it does occur. Fully 60 percent of college students are not involved with *any* campus groups, and no organization draws even a large plurality of college students. The largest draws are sports and Greek organizations (13% and 11%, respectively), although almost as many report being involved with subject oriented groups (9%) and honor societies (8%). Ethnic or religious groups pull in another six percent. Student governments garner six percent, while political organizations attract only three percent.



Other Intermediaries: Creating Connections

Young adults are not affected solely by the push and pull of families and schools. Outside groups and institutions also play key roles in boosting their engagement. A simple but direct invitation to participate can make a critical difference for those ages 15- to-25-years.

As noted earlier, current volunteers were asked how they first began working with their volunteer groups, that is if they made the first contact, if the group contacted them, or if someone else put them together. Most of those in the DotNet cohort were active through outside initiatives, either “someone else put us together” (20%) or they were recruited by the group (39%).

The tendency of youth to need a facilitator suggests that an obvious mechanism for increasing involvement among this age cohort would be to ask them more often. Especially in the political world, youth today receive fewer invitations to participate than their elders. Just 12 percent of DotNets have been personally contacted by a campaign, party or group to work for or contribute to a candidate. Almost twice as many (23%) GenXers have received such requests and fully 32 percent of Boomers and 34 percent of Matures have.

Across a range of activities, DotNets who were targeted by outside mobilizers were much

more active than were those who did not receive such attention. The exception is fundraising, which some use to argue that young people are targeted less often than their elders because they are less likely to respond positively. Indeed, just 13 percent of DotNets actually gave money in response to a request — compared to 22 percent of Xers, and 39 percent of Boomers and 42 percent of Matures. But, this may simply be an indication that, as young adults, they have less money than older cohorts.

Among those aged 15- to-25-years who were contacted by a political group in the past year, almost one-third (31%) volunteer regularly for a nonpolitical group, 42 percent worked to raise money for charity, 36 percent worked to solve a community problem. For DotNets who were not contacted, the figures are 21 percent, 26 percent and 19 percent, respectively. Indeed, mobilized DotNets outstrip those who haven't been contacted across almost every participatory measure — and these differences persist even when other factors (such as income, education, or family influences) are taken into consideration.

Other research has shown that churches and synagogues provide effective training for civic engagement. This survey reinforces that finding for young adults. DotNets who attend religious services regularly are much more active in both the civic and political realm than are those who do not take part in any religious activities. Presumably, by attending religious services youth are coming into contact with individuals who provide volunteer opportunities, encourage them to get involved in their communities, or offer them political buttons and bumper stickers to display.

The Engaged Worldview: Efficacious and Dutiful

Activists are also driven from within. Individuals who feel they can make a difference in their communities or believe they have a responsibility to get involved are more active than are those who don't hold these views. For example, those who say that citizenship carries responsibilities vote more frequently (57% vs. 42%), are more apt to work on a problem in their community (26% vs. 16%), and pay closer attention to news of politics and government (57% vs. 42%) than do those who say that being a good person fulfills the obligations of citizenship. Similarly, those who believe they can make a difference are voting (57% vs. 45%), working on problems in their community (32% vs. 12%), and following news about politics and government (51% vs. 39%) at rates that surpass those who do not feel as empowered.

This is especially true for older individuals, suggesting that these attitudes harden over the course of one's life serving to either reinforce or erode an ethic of engagement. Thus, families, schools and other groups wishing to influence young adults long after they have left the home or graduated from school can lay the groundwork for later engagement by encouraging positive attitudes early on.

Section 4: The Millennials Rising

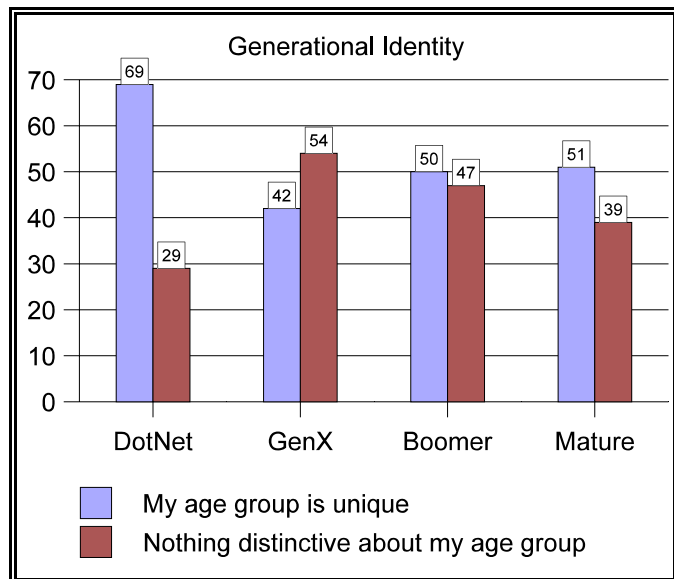
DotNets are just now beginning to carve a unique generational identity. While the full story their contribution to citizenship cannot be told until they all reach adulthood and go through whatever formative experiences lie ahead, the early indications bring mixed, but hopeful news. In many ways, in the words of the rock band The Who: “The kids are all right.”

The evidence presented so far suggests DotNets are not bashful about expressing their voice and are quite active in the civic realms of group membership and volunteering. In the world of electoral politics, however, these young Americans are not yet players. This section of the report looks at the attitudes of this youngest group, presenting ways in which they seem distinctive from those who have come before them.

Before proceeding, another caution about calling those ages 15- to 25-years a generation. As noted earlier, generations are age cohorts shaped by shared experiences, and for this age group most of their experiences lay ahead rather than behind. In this cross-sectional survey we are not prepared to argue whether current differences between age groups represent true generational effects, which lead to permanent distinctive characteristics of a group of people, or whether we are capturing aging effects, which are eroded by life-cycle changes such as marriage, family, careers, home ownership, among others.⁶

Generational Identity

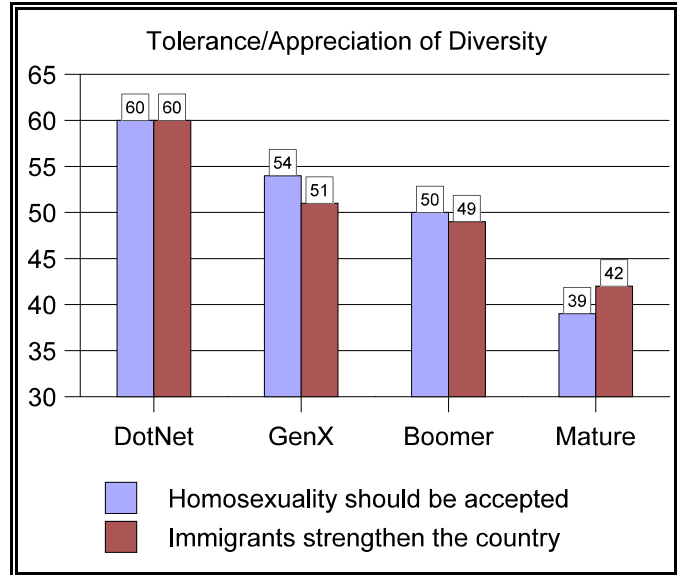
Some who have looked at generational trends in attitudes have found that the young appear to be more socially liberal than youth in earlier eras. In particular, The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press has found that some of the increase in racial liberalism and egalitarianism toward women in the population overall is the result of generational replacement, along with an ongoing attitude shift among all Americans. There are a number of interesting ways in



⁶ See Michael X. Delli Carpini's *Stability and Change in American Politics* for an informed discussion of these, and "period" effects. (New York: NYU Press, 1986).

which DotNets seem different than their elders at the turn of the Millennium.

First, in comparison to others, they have a great awareness of themselves as a cohesive group. About seven-in-ten (69%) of DotNets feel some sort of kinship with others their own age, saying their age group is distinct. The norm for both Boomers and Matures is about half of each cohort. Moreover, when we look at GenX, a generation labeled for the *absence* of any such cohesion, only 42 percent of this immediately preceding generation feels any sort of common age-bond. This suggests a generational difference in identity rather than a life cycle pattern. If it was the latter, and generational identification declined with age, we would expect GenX to fall between DotNets and Boomers.



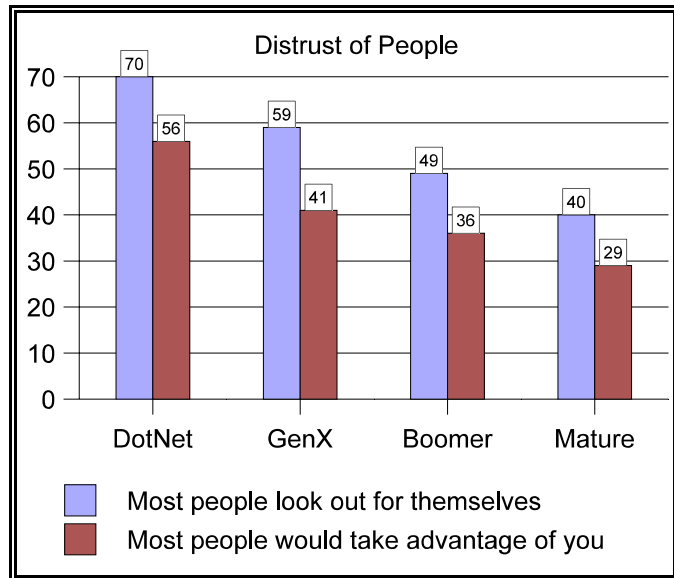
Tolerance

A second way DotNets appear distinctive is in their tolerance for or appreciation of diversity, although this is a continuation of a trend in American society. When asked whether homosexuality is a way of life that ought to be either *accepted* or *discouraged* by society 60 percent of DotNets opt for acceptance, compared to 54 percent of Xers, 50 percent of Boomers and just 39 percent of Matures. A similar pattern holds when faced with the question of whether immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents, or if they are a burden on the country by taking jobs, housing and health care. On both of these indicators of tolerance or acceptance of diversity, there is a separation between DotNets and other age cohorts.

Interpersonal Trust

Distrust is one way in which GenX differs from those who came before, and the data suggests this was not an abnormality, but a harbinger. The survey included two indicators of interpersonal trust. First, all were asked to choose whether: *Most of the time people try to be helpful, or Most of the time people are just looking out for themselves.* The second question was whether *Most people try to take advantage of others if given the chance, or Most people try to be fair in their dealings with others.*

Our data reveal a continuing pattern of decline in interpersonal trust among DotNets. Seven-out-of-ten DotNets (70%) believe that “most of the time, people are just looking out for themselves,” compared to 59 percent of Xers, 49 percent of Boomers, and 40 percent of Matures. A majority of DotNets (56%) believe that others would take advantage of them if they could, a major increase from the 41 percent of Xers, 36 percent of Boomers and 29 percent of Matures.



Views of Government

It is ironic then, that despite being less trusting of their fellow citizen, or perhaps because of it, DotNets appear to be more trusting of their government. For now, at least, they are more willing than older cohorts to see government play a more active role in public affairs.

The survey included three questions in this area, the pro-government answer to each is represented by a bar in the next graph. The bars trend downward, indicating that successive generations have become less hostile to government, if not actually supportive of an interventionist role. The following is the text of the questions asked:

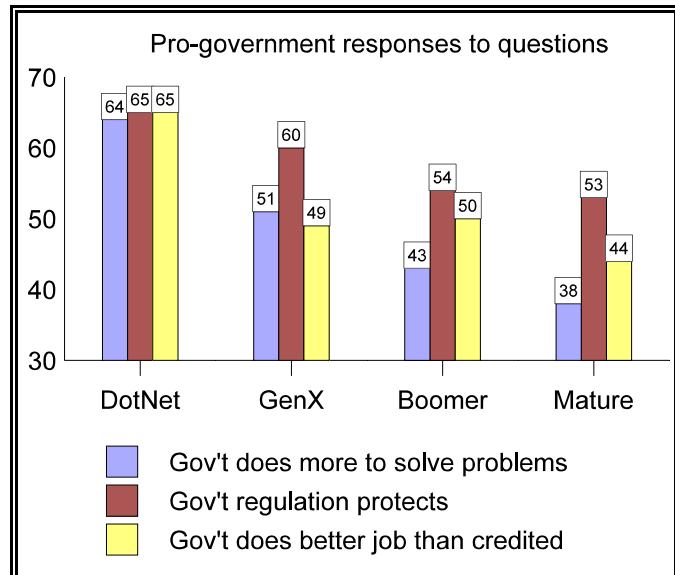
- *Government should do more to solve problems; or Government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals.*
- *Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest; or Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.*

- *Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient; or Government often does a better job than people give it credit for.*

Almost two-thirds of DotNets think that government should do more to solve problems (64%), about as many (65%) who support government regulation of business as necessary and say that the government deserves more credit. No other age cohort is this pro-government in their responses.

Citizen's Role

Finally, DotNets, those aged 15- to 25-years, differ from their elders in their understanding of the obligations of citizenship. While this is clearly something that may change over time, the difference today is stark. Survey respondents were asked whether they thought that being a good citizen includes special obligations or if “simply being a good person is enough to make someone a good citizen.” Generation DotNet shows continued slippage from GenX, which itself represented a significant break from older generations. Just 38 percent of DotNets say that citizenship has special obligations, compared to 48 percent of GenXers, 60 percent of Boomers, and 59 percent of Matures.



Certain Similarities

Along with differences between age cohorts, basic continuities are also evident. On some attitudinal items, generational similarities are compelling. For instance, there are few differences in perceptions of the political system, and, with one exception, the role and responsibility of citizens in the polity. Views of the political system are by and large negative, with more Americans than not saying that the system encourages favoritism and has a negative coloration to its functioning.

Conclusions are hazardous enough to draw when looking at the past; it is foolhardy to draw them looking ahead. However, in some ways it is encouraging that the DotNet cohort is not more cynical than GenX, given that the youngest cohort has come of age in a climate of exceptional

	<u>DotNet</u>	<u>Gen X</u>	<u>Boomers</u>	<u>Matures</u>
The political system works to give special favors to some at the expense of others.	54	59	64	53
The political system is filled with unnecessary conflict.	40	41	37	37
Politics is a way for the powerful to keep power to themselves.	51	61	61	49
The political system in this country IS responsive to the genuine needs of the public.	32	33	35	32
It is my RESPONSIBILITY to get involved to make things better for society.	47	50	47	43

political cynicism. DotNet's history is just emerging, and at this point, it looks like it will be an interesting one indeed.

Acknowledgments

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William Galston, Peter Levine, Deborah Both, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Demetria Sapienza of The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement have also provided guidance throughout the various stages of this project. In many ways, we have seen ourselves as partners with CIRCLE, and have benefitted from their important commentary and generous help in producing this report.

Relatedly, the CIRCLE advisory board was helpful in our questionnaire development. Those who provided comments include Harry Boyte, Tom Ehrlich, Connie Flanagan, Jane Junn, Sheilah Mann, Richard Niemi, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Judith Torney-Purta. Others who provided help with the construction of our final questionnaire include Elizabeth Beaumont, Richard Brody, Michael Dimock, Robert Dudley, Caroline Heldman, Debra Henzy, Mary Kirlin, Andrew Kohut, Celinda Lake, Laura Merritt, Henry Milner, Amanda Moore, Wendy Richardson, Lonnie Sherrod, Susan Sherr, Merrill Shanks, Doug Strand, and Diane Ty.

We are also grateful to those who attended our two expert panel discussions. Their participation was helpful in all stages of the project, but particularly in regard to identifying youth political behavior that was not being measured in survey research. They are: Mallory Barg, Rick Battistoni, Amy Cohen, Julia Cohen, Steve Culbertson, Marco Davis, Alison Byrne Fields, Ivan Frishberg, William Galston, Vina Nguyen Ha, Sandy Horwitt, Adrienne King-McCorkle, Kimberly Roberts, Peter Schurman, Stephanie Seidel, Susan Blad Seldin, Vicki Shabo, Robert Sherman, Diane Ty, Lisa Wernick, and Mara Vanderslice.

Chintan Turakhia, Dean Williams, and Mark Schulman of Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc., went well beyond the call of duty in collecting the national telephone survey data. They gave us very helpful advice on the questionnaire, on sampling, and on dealing with minors as respondents. Mike Dennis and Michael Dender of Knowledge Networks provided similar help on behalf of their organization, which conducted our Internet survey. We appreciate the excellent service provided by both of these highly respected survey organizations.

Alison Eggers and Kelly Sand helped out in a variety of ways. Their invaluable contributions include reviewing literature and coding and analyzing data. Beyond these tasks, there were many other things asked of them, all of which were met with enthusiasm and competent assistance. Ann Ludwick provided valuable administrative support at George Mason University, and JoAnn Wray created a document warehouse on the web for the project team. Beth Ives, Rhonda Endicott, and Joanne Carter of the Office of Sponsored Programs managed our complicated grant with efficiency and good cheer.

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Needless to say, none of these individuals is responsible for our failure to follow their good advice, or for any errors of omission or commission that remain. That responsibility lies with the four of us, who feel lucky to have each other as such good colleagues, critics and friends.

Project Methodology

This report is the culmination of a two-year journey toward assessing the current state of civic and political engagement in the United States. It relies on two surveys – a national telephone survey and an Internet probability sample survey of youth. The telephone survey was informed by early phases of the project, which included group discussions with political and civic youth organizers, focus groups, and telephone survey experiments in New Jersey and Virginia. Our project goals were twofold. First, we intended to arrive at a questionnaire that accurately measures behaviors that are both consistent with political and civic motivations and being practiced by people today. Second, we sought to examine engagement through a generational prism. To do so, we divided the population into four age cohorts beginning with what we are calling the *DotNet generation* (born between 1977 and 1987), followed by *Generation X* (born between 1965 and 1976), *Baby Boomers* (born between 1946 and 1964), and finally the *Matures* (born in 1945 and before).

The Telephone Survey

Results for the national telephone survey are based on telephone interviews conducted by the firm of Schulman, Ronca and Bucavalas, Inc. among a nationwide sample of 3246 youth and adults, 15 years of age and older, during the period April 4 through May 20, 2002. Because of our special interest in youth, the two youngest cohorts were oversampled (DotNet, N = 1001 Generation X = 1000). A total of 604 Baby Boomers and 602 Matures completed the sample.

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus two percentage points. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias in the findings of telephone surveys.

The national telephone survey was a random digit sample of telephone numbers selected from telephone exchanges in the 48 contiguous United States. The random digit aspect of the sample is used to avoid “listing” bias and provides representation of both listed and unlisted numbers. The design of the sample ensures this representation by random generation of the last two digits of telephone numbers selected on the basis of their area code, telephone exchange, and bank number.

The telephone exchanges were selected with probabilities proportional to their size. The first eight digits of the sampled telephone numbers (area code, telephone exchange, bank number) were selected to be proportionally stratified by county and by telephone exchange within county. That is, the number of telephone numbers randomly sampled from within a given county is proportional to that county’s share of telephone households in the U.S. Estimates of the number of telephone

households within each county are derived from 2000 census data on residential telephone incidence that have been updated with state-level information on new telephone installations and county-level projections of the number of households. Only working banks of telephone numbers are selected. A working bank is defined as 100 contiguous telephone numbers containing three or more residential listings.

The sample was released for interviewing in replicates. Using replicates to control the release of a sample to the field ensures that the complete call procedures are followed for the entire sample.

At least seven attempts were made to complete an interview at every sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week in order to maximize the chances of making a contact with a potential respondent. All interview breakoffs and refusals were re-contacted at least once in order to attempt to convert them to completed interviews. For the two youngest cohort oversamples, interviewers asked to speak with the household member between the ages of 15 and 25 or 26 and 37 who most recently had a birthday. Prior to interviewing respondents 17 and younger, interviewers asked for permission from the parent or guardian. For the cross-section, interviewers asked to speak with the household member 15 and older who had the last birthday.

The disposition of all responses can be found at www.civicyouth.org.

The Internet Survey

The other data set we employ in our analysis is an Internet based survey of 15 to 25 year-olds conducted by Knowledge Networks. Between January 29, 2002 and February 25, 2002, 1166 members of the Knowledge Networks panel who met the age requirements for inclusion in our study (15 to 25) completed an on-line questionnaire.⁷ An email reminder was sent to the final 800 non-responders on February 12, 2002. Respondents completed the self-administered survey using an Internet Appliance provided by Knowledge Networks. Our sample was stratified by education, with one group consisting of those currently enrolled in high school (N = 312), a second group comprised of college graduates and those with some history of college attendance (N = 336), and a final group of individuals who did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the two previous groups (N = 518).

⁷

Knowledge Networks selects panel members using random digit dialing procedures. Respondents are invited to be panel participants and selected households are provided with free hardware and Internet access. This allows surveys to be administered using a WebTV browser.