"Millennials Talk Politics:
A Study of College Student Political Engagement"

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**The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement**

Contents

"Politics right now, a lot of
talk, no action."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Why Investigate College Students' Civic Engagement?

Young people are the future of our democracy, and a large body of research shows that their experiences in adolescence and early adulthood permanently shape their attitudes, values, and habits in relation to politics and civil society.

Over the past two decades many organizations and networks have formed in support of the "civic mission of higher education" in various forms and around many disciplines. This report examines whether the civic mission is prominent and effective today.

By no means are all young Americans college students. In fact, about half of Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 are not enrolled in college and have not completed college.[1] That half of the population should be studied more intensively and offered more structured opportunities for civic engagement. It is equally important to look at the civic and political engagement of those 18-to-25-year-olds who are enrolled in institutions of higher education. Their education often gives them access to leadership positions in major institutions in the United States and around the world.

The Project

In 1993, The Charles F. Kettering Foundation published *College Students Talk Politics*, a national study conducted by the Harwood Group and based on focus groups on ten American campuses. The study found, among other things, that students considered politics "irrelevant" to their lives and saw little purpose in ever actively participating in the political system.

We wanted to know whether and how college students' civic engagement had changed after almost 15 years of tumultuous political events and work by colleges and universities. Therefore, in 2006 and 2007, we interviewed college students, the majority of whom belong to the Millennial Generation (born after 1985). We designed our methodology to produce a comparable sample to the 1993 Harwood Group report. We spoke with undergraduates in focus groups on 12 four-year college and university campuses across the United States. In total, 386 student participants were involved in 47 focus groups (three to five groups on each campus). We also asked the students to complete a brief written survey at the conclusion of each focus group.

Findings

1. Today's College Students are More Engaged than Generation X Was

Our focus groups revealed a generation of college students who have a great deal of experience with volunteering (mostly face-to-face and local) and who believe in their obligation to work together with others on social issues. They are neither cynical nor highly individualistic.

2. Millennials are Involved Locally with Others but are Ambivalent about Formal Politics

The Millennials appear to be much more comfortable and experienced with direct service than with politics, yet their feelings toward government, politicians, and the media are complex. They do not want to write off politics, despite their many criticisms; instead, they seek ways to engage politically.

3. Millennials Dislike Spin and Polarized Debates and Seek Authentic Opportunities for Discussing Public Issues

Students perceive politics, as it currently exists, as a polarized debate with no options for compromise or nuance. They do not like the competitive and confrontational atmosphere created by the parties and many do not seem to want their beliefs and identity limited by party affiliation. Many have not developed opinions quite yet, and this may factor into their aversion to political parties.

The focus groups uncovered a distinct sense that students find it hard to be informed about pub-

lic issues, but want to know more, and especially want to understand issues. The problem is not a lack of information, but an overload of news and opinion that they do not trust. Students are especially distrustful of information that comes with a partisan bent because they do not want to be vulnerable to manipulation; they say they want reliable information so that they can critically develop their own opinions. They rely on people whom they trust—family, friends—to filter information. They are eager for opportunities to talk about issues with a diverse group of people in open and authentic ways.

4. Differences Among the Millennials: Colleges and Universities are Providing Very Unequal Levels of Opportunity for Civic Participation and Learning

Although we identified characteristics that today's college students share, equally compelling are the differences in civic opportunities they experience. Students on different campuses and types of campuses have had very different kinds of opportunities to develop civic skills, interests, and confidence.

In some groups, mostly on campuses that have explicit civic missions, students have had many opportunities for engagement. They have frequently been recruited for political and civic action. They have high efficacy, and some are quite knowledgeable. In other groups, students can report little recruitment and few political opportunities; they have little knowledge and very low efficacy; and many express fear, outrage, or bewilderment about politics and government.

Recommendations

All Students Need to have Opportunities for Civic and Political Participation, and Students Need Opportunities and Space for Deliberation on Public Issues

PARTICIPATING CAMPUSES

BOWDOIN COLLEGE
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PROVIDENCE COLLEGE
TOUGALOO COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND COLLEGE PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA TWIN CITIES
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Students are seeking opportunities for discussion that are authentic, not competitive or partisan. They appreciate discussions in which no one is trying to sell them on anything. Often, students spontaneously cite the atmosphere created in the focus groups as very desirable and attractive. We speculate that they like the informal, peer-to-peer discussion in a non-hostile and non-divisive atmosphere.

Given the disparities in civic opportunities that this study has uncovered, it seems especially important to provide opportunities for discussion and reflection on campuses whose student bodies are less engaged.

REPRESENTING STUDENTS

We made a deliberate effort to involve students at each stage of this project—one is a co-author of this report (see Acknowledgements on the inside back cover for the list of students who contributed). Students helped us to understand their peers' lived experiences, decide which questions to ask, how to recruit students for focus groups, and how to talk about civic and political participation.

We have tried to represent students' words and the intentions behind those words as accurately as possible. This report is full of quotes, most of which are unedited in an effort to capture the spirit of the focus group conversations. We cannot, however, reproduce the uniqueness of each two-hour conversation.

"Politics right now, a lot of talk, no action."

MAIN FINDINGS

1. Today's College Students are More Engaged than Generation X Was

2. Millennials are Involved Locally with Others but are Ambivalent about Formal Politics

3. Millennials Dislike Spin and Polarized Debates and Seek Authentic Opportunities for Discussing Public Issues

4. Differences Among the Millennials: Colleges and Universities are Providing Very Unequal Levels of Opportunity for Civic Participation and Learning

MAIN FINDINGS

1. Today's College Students are More Engaged than Generation X Was

THE IMPETUS FOR this project was to learn from college students how civic and political attitudes and experiences have changed (if at all) since the early 1990s, when there was evidence of deep alienation from the political system.

We found that students live in a different world from those who attended college in the early nineties. Students communicate differently today and have many new opportunities. Millennials are more involved in both civic and political life than their predecessors, and this may be the result of their increased likeliness to see political engagement as important. Yet we also found significant differences of experience *among* the Millennials as a generation (see Main Finding 4).

FROM THE 1990s TO TODAY

In 1993, The Charles F. Kettering Foundation published *College Students Talk Politics*, a national study conducted by Richard C. Harwood and John A. Creighton of the Harwood Group. The authors conducted focus groups on ten American campuses from 1991 to 1992 and found, among other things, that students considered politics "irrelevant" to their lives. According to the report, many college students equated citizenship with individual rights, not with responsibilities for collective action. Stu-

dents drew "tenuous" connections (if any) between citizenship and politics and saw little purpose in actively participating in the political system. These findings were consistent with contemporary news reports about "Generation X," then the predominant group in college, which depicted them as individualistic, cynical, and alienated.

In 2006 and 2007, we interviewed college students, the majority of whom belong to the Millennial Generation (born after 1985). We designed our methodology to produce a comparable sample and our findings are substantially different from the 1993 study.

Today's students are eager to get out into their communities and put their acquired talents and abilities to work. One Minnesota student says, "You sit in a classroom and you read your dusty books with your dusty professors about dusty things, and then you don't learn anything about what you can do with it, and then you go into the community and all of a sudden you're like, wow, this is who I am and this is where my skills can go."

DEFINING GENERATIONS

A generation is typically defined by a 20-year period.

1965 – 1985

GENERATION X

People born between 1965 and 1985 are considered a part of Generation X.

1985 – 2004

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

People born between 1985 and 2004 are considered a part of the Millennial Generation.

It is very important to note that this study is limited to undergraduate students at four-year colleges and universities. More than half of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are not enrolled in such institutions.

In the survey that accompanied the focus groups, we ask whether it is the respondents' choice or their responsibility to "get involved to make things better for society." Only 22 percent say that it is simply a choice. Furthermore, 92 percent of the students in our sample believe that "people working together as a group" can make "some" or "a lot" of difference in solving the problems they see in their community. This is not much different from the 85 percent of college students who gave the same answer in our national survey in 2006.[2]

The students in our focus groups do not write off politics as irrelevant or unchangeable. By a ratio of almost eight to one, they say that government policies *are* relevant to the issues that concern them. In the words of a Maryland student: "If individuals themselves don't take it upon themselves to do something about issues that are actually about policy change, then nothing is going to be done."

Many students in our focus groups see politics as a vehicle for change, albeit an inefficient and difficult one. Many of these college students want to be involved and consider it important to participate, although often they do not know how to engage or doubt their ability to have a great deal of impact.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the 1990s, many observers became alarmed about decreases in political engagement among youth. Surveys showed that between 1972 and 1992, there were substantial declines in the proportion of college students who discussed politics,[3] considered it important to keep up with current affairs,[4] voted,[5] read a newspaper,[6] and trusted other human beings.[7]

Values had changed, too. In the late 1960s, when the Higher Education Research Institute began surveying incoming college freshmen, most said that "developing a meaningful philosophy of life" was a top priority, whereas they ranked "becoming well off financially" much lower. By 1992, those two priorities had switched. Either because of declining idealism or an increased sense of economic risk and vulnerability, members of Generation X appeared focused on getting ahead as individuals, not developing personal philosophies or participating as citizens. To the extent that they engaged civically, it was often through individual acts of service, not political organizing or engagement with large institutions.

As the 1990s progressed, two further developments became evident. First, it turned out that

GRAPH 1: CHANGING PRIORITIES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Develop Meaningful Philosophy of Life

Become Well Off Financially
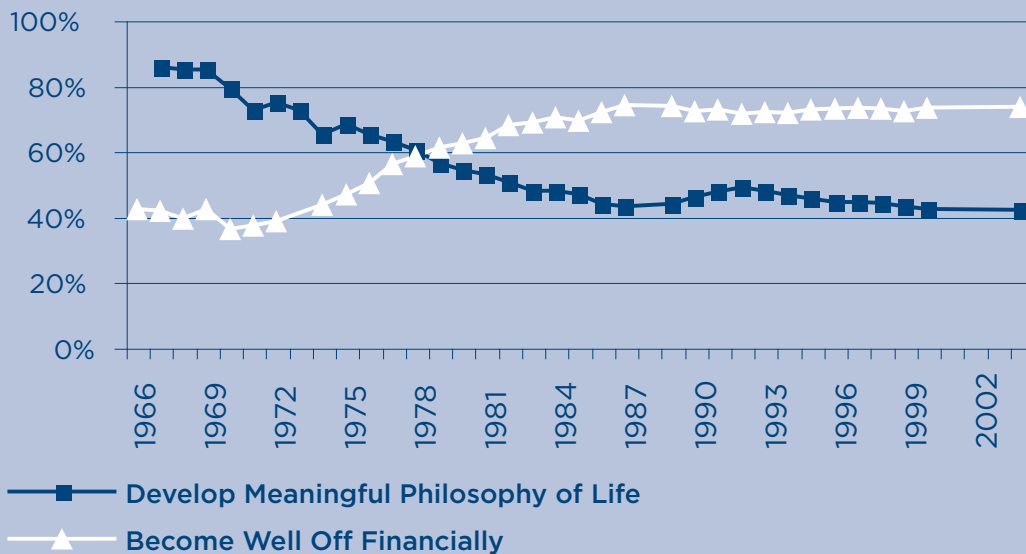
Source: Higher Education Research Institute

2. Lopez, M.H., Levine, P., Both, D., Kiesa, A., Kirby, E.H. & Marcelo, K.B. (October 2006). *The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Detailed Look at How Youth Participate in Politics and Communities. College Park, MD:* CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org).
3. Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., Saenz, V.B., Santos, J. L., & Korn, W. S. (2007). *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends.* Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.
4. Ibid
5. Lopez, M.H., Kirby, E.H., Sagoff, J. & Kolaczkowski, J.P. (July 2005). *CIRCLE Fact Sheet: Electoral Engagement Among Non-College Attending Youth.* College Park, MD: CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org).
6. General Social Survey analyzed by CIRCLE.
7. DDB Needham surveys analyzed by CIRCLE.

1992 had been a *peak* in youth voter turnout. The turnout rate of young college students fell to 48 percent in the presidential election of 2000, down one third compared to the 1970s. Meanwhile, volunteering increased substantially, until almost four out of five American high school seniors reported volunteering—a rate substantially higher than in previous decades.[8]

Nicholas Longo and Ross Meyer wrote that the trends in voting and volunteering split apart during the 1990s like the blades of a pair of open scissors.[9] Perhaps students turned to service in retreat from major political institutions, reflecting the individualism—and the alienation from large-scale politics—that the Harwood report had already detected in 1992. Or perhaps young people volunteered because opportunities for service and service-learning were rapidly expanding during the 1990s, whereas little effort was made to recruit them into politics.

In any event, by the early 2000s, volunteering had become commonplace, but connections to formal politics remained tenuous. By 2000, when youth voter turnout reached its lowest point for presidential elections,[10] only 28 percent of incoming college freshmen considered it important to keep up with public affairs.[11] But then, as a result of deliberate organizing by civic organizations or a more intense political environment—or both— the tide seemed to turn. Youth voter turnout rose substantially in 2004 and again in 2006, despite modest increases among older voters. Young people reported rising interest in the news and public affairs. As seen in Graph 2, the gap between volunteering and voting narrowed, largely because voting rose (along with interest in the news and political discussions).

These changes in civic behavior are also reflected in our focus groups. It is not that today's college students are fully engaged with the political system; they do not feel adequately informed or able to make a difference as individuals. For the most part, however, these students are aware of the importance of policy and politics, conscious that it is desirable to be informed and engaged, and fairly optimistic about the power of collective actions.

COMPARING RESEARCH

One should always exercise caution in comparing the generalizations from two research studies, because any differences could be caused (or at least amplified) by variations in the sampling methods, the questions asked, the interviewers' or moderators' styles, the methods used to analyze the data, or the authors' biases. However, the differences between the 1993 Harwood report and our findings from 2007 are quite pronounced and match major changes in college students' behaviors and attitudes as measured in national surveys.

GRAPH 2: VOTING AND VOLUNTEERING RATES AMONG 18-TO-25-YEAR-OLDS
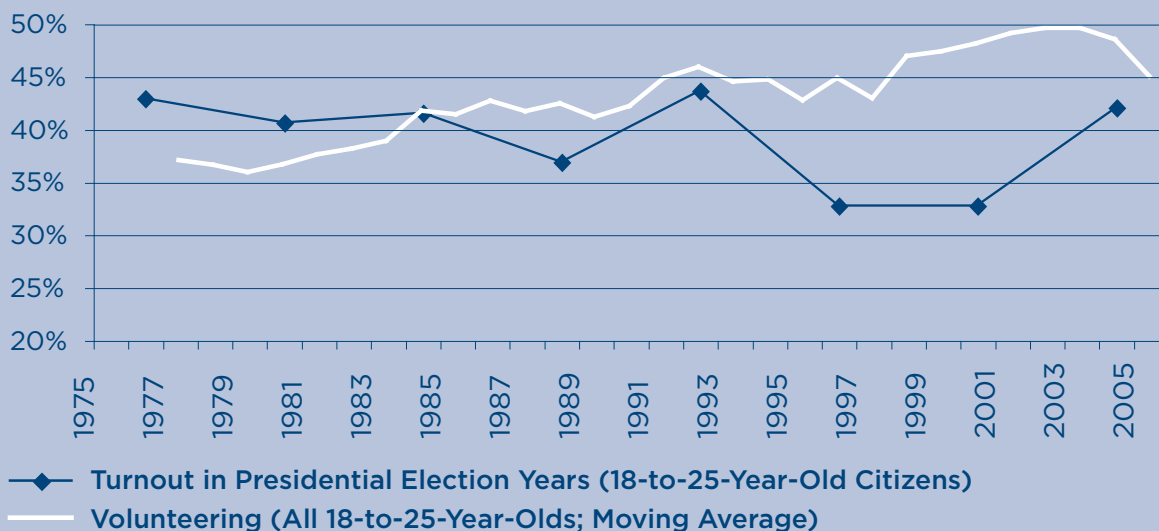
Sources: Voting: U.S. Census, Current Population Survey analyzed by CIRCLE; Volunteering: DDB Needham surveys analyzed by CIRCLE.

◆ Turnout in Presidential Election Years (18-to-25-Year-Old Citizens)

— Volunteering (All 18-to-25-Year-Olds; Moving Average)

8. Monitoring the Future survey of high school seniors, analyzed by CIRCLE. See also DDB Life Style Surveys, analyzed for the youth population in National Conference on Citizenship, Broken Engagement: America's Civic Health Index (2006).
9. Longo, N.V. & Meyer, R.P. (May 2006). *CIRCLE Working Paper 46: College Students and Politics: A Literature Review.* College Park, MD: CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org).
10. Lopez et al. (2005).
11. Pryor, J.H., Hurtado, S., Saenz, V.B., Santos, J. L., & Korn, W. S. (2007). *The American Freshman: Forty Year Trends.* Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.

WHY THE DIFFERENCES?

Although our focus groups cannot explain the reasons for the significant changes in college students' civic attitudes since the 1990s, we can speculate about two major causes. One is a shift in the political environment. The Millennials have come of age at a time of closely contested national elections, ideological polarization, terrorist attacks, and war. The parties and other groups are making deliberate efforts to mobilize young people to vote and to participate in other ways. The major news events and political outreach efforts have no doubt caught college students' attention and made them aware that politics matters and that they ought to form opinions about it. Their opinions are in flux, as shown by the ambivalence of many of their answers in our focus groups. But they are trying to pay attention and are actively learning.

Second, the institutional environment has changed. Schools, colleges, and government agencies built an impressive infrastructure to support voluntary service during the 1990s, a decade when youth volunteering rates rose. (See text box "Organized Opportunities for Student Civic Engagement, 1984-2007.") Although some volunteering programs were episodic and individualistic, a significant proportion of the community service work of the 1990s involved teamwork and group reflection on social issues. Then, around 2000, many of the organizations that were concerned about youth civic engagement broadened their attention from volunteering or community service to politics, and indicators of youth political engagement—such as voting—began to increase.
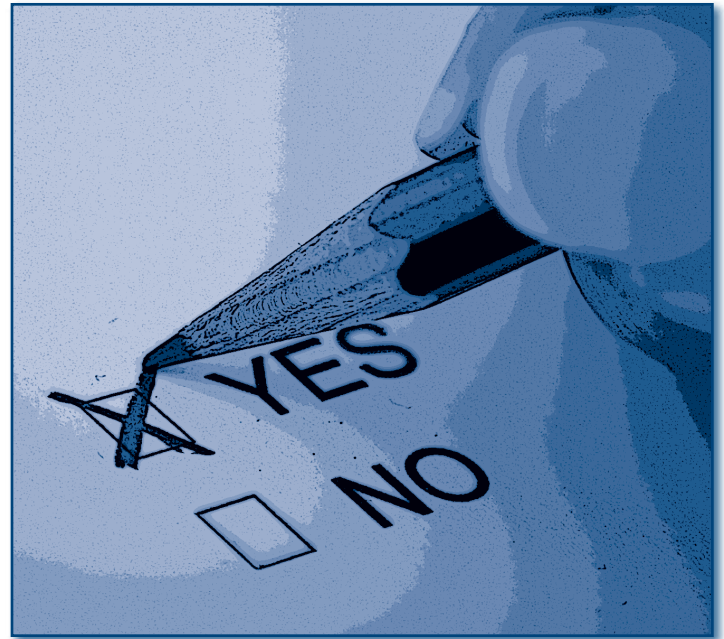
We cannot conclude that deliberate civic programs between 1993 and 2007 were directly responsible for a greater degree of civic and political engagement in the Millennial Generation. However, it is clear that today's college students, compared to college students from Generation X, have more structured opportunities to engage in community service and are presented with more messages about the importance of civic participation.

ORGANIZED OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, 1984-2007

The Federal Government created the Points of Light Foundation in 1990, passed the National and Community Service Act the same year, and launched the Corporation for National Service in 1993. All of these programs supported service by young people, which rose substantially during the 1990s. Service-learning was available in about half of all high schools by 1999, whereas the term had been virtually unknown a decade earlier. Organizations like the Center for Civic Education, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, Earthforce, Public Achievement, Streetlaw, and the César E. Chávez Foundation provided widely-used curricula for service-learning and other community projects.

Meanwhile, higher education organized to promote community service, service-learning, and other forms of civic engagement, such as public deliberation and youth-led research. One can trace the strengthening of this movement by observing the launch of the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (or COOL) in 1984, Campus Compact in 1985, and Youth Service America in 1986. Campus Compact began with four members (university presidents) in 1985 and enlisted its 1,000th president in 2007. The organization gradually shifted from a focus on service to a broad view of youth civic engagement. For example, its Raise Your Voice Campaign emphasized civic and political participation and reached 300,000 students on 450 campuses.

MAIN FINDINGS

2. Millennials are Involved Locally with Others but are Ambivalent about Formal Politics

A LARGE MAJORITY of college students are volunteering in a wide spectrum of areas (although some of the volunteering we perceive to be episodic). The most common fields in which students are volunteering are education, youth, healthcare, and poverty/welfare issues; however, students also report volunteering in many other areas, such as the environment, technology, and human rights. Students most often report that their volunteer work is through an educational institution, such as their high school or college.

WHY THEY ENGAGE

Most students think it is their responsibility to get involved to make things better for society. A Minnesota student says, "There are a lot of places in the world that are really nasty, where you could get killed by the government if you do something they don't like. So it's like, I better get out there and do my part to keep this country a good place." And a Providence student says, "I kind of feel obligated to do service."

When asked for the fundamental purpose, or reason, for their engagement activities, the most popular response is "to help others." A Maryland student says, "I think volunteering is beneficial because you take it upon yourself to go out and do something then and there, and it's every person on their own actually trying to do some-

thing..." Similarly, a Kansas State student says, "Out of volunteering comes good. Period."

A Dayton student says, "I'm just trying to give somebody else the same things that I had in life." A UMass Boston student says, "This whole world, the whole reason for this world is not just about ourselves, it's never just me for me to grow, for me to this, for me to that. But it's what about my neighbor; what about the people after me..."

CIRCLE's 2006 *Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey* (CPHS) also showed that a majority of college students volunteer to help others (not to address a social or political problem).

However, many students in our study also note that they volunteer to *change* something. A Bowdoin student points out, "I feel as though we're all very lucky to be here and life is pretty great most of the time, but at the same time there's a lot of stuff that can be improved, and I think it's kind of my rent for living on earth to try and do stuff when I see problems and make it a little bit better."

REASON FOR VOLUNTEERING AMONG 18-TO-25-YEAR-OLD COLLEGE STUDENTS

To Address a Social or Political Problem	11%
To Help Other People	74%
Some Other Reason	14%
Don't Know	1%

Source: 2006 CPHS

Students use the language of "change," however, in two distinct ways: the first is a desire to effect systemic change, and the second (which is more common) is to address immediate needs in the community.
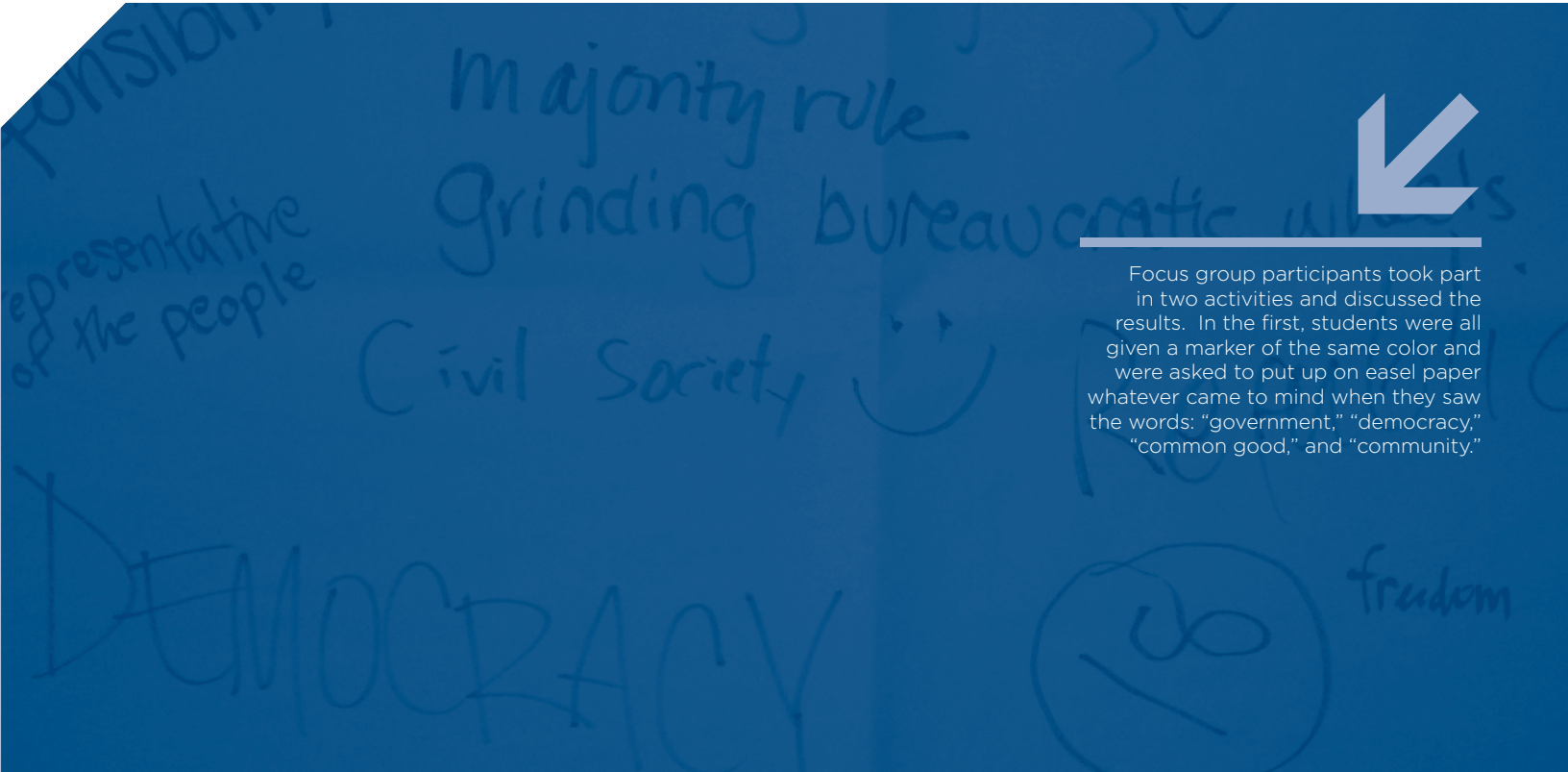
Some trace their civic engagement in college back to high school civics requirements such as required community service and required civics and government courses. A Providence student says, "Most high schools now have community service requirements and it's come to the point where they've trained you so much into it, it becomes second nature and habit to do service." That is a favorable view of high school service requirements. About equal numbers of students report positive experiences *and* negative experiences in high school civics and government classes. Both the positive and negative experiences influence their likelihood of being civically engaged, but in opposite ways. A Kansas State student says, "As a senior in high school I took a government class and I also took a global affairs class and that really got me started thinking about the way our government is working and the way it's affecting the issues that are going on in the world today. So that really got me started thinking and I've been able to recognize those same stories and follow them throughout college and that's really been helpful." However, another Kansas State student says, "I think back in high school about

my history classes. Our history teacher had us do essay exams. And so I'd go home and memorize the information and stuff and then spit it back out. And, of course, the next day it was gone."

Students were asked if there is anything in their life that makes them more or less likely to follow or participate in the political system. In response, almost one in six students say that their parents' engagement has made them more likely to engage in the political system. Students also bring up, though to a lesser extent, personal experience as a reason they are more likely to follow or participate in the political system.

VOLUNTEERING AND PUBLIC POLICY

When given the opportunity, students can make links between their volunteer activities and public policy, some very passionately. Some students say that they volunteer to correct problems caused by public policy. Concerned with education, some students argue that specific No Child Left Behind policies negatively affect some schools around the country. Students also mention the inadequate amount of governmental aid after Hurricane Katrina. One Dayton student says, "I think a lot of the issues we're coping with across any sphere, have a lot to do with bad law and bad public policy." A Kansas State student says, "Whenever I volunteer, help, or sign a petition, or donate money, it may not always be for,

Focus group participants took part in two activities and discussed the results. In the first, students were all given a marker of the same color and were asked to put up on easel paper whatever came to mind when they saw the words: "government," "democracy," "common good," and "community."

I hope this directly changes the law. But there is that kind of notion of something is not quite, either not quite right or maybe not as good as it could be. So hopefully that, you know, the volunteering or some measure[d] action will help rectify the policy." But for the majority of students, their original motivation for volunteer work is not a concern about specific public policies.

STUDENTS SEE ORGANIZING PEOPLE AS THE MOST BENEFICIAL STRATEGY FOR ADDRESSING PUBLIC ISSUES

Throughout the focus groups a theme began to emerge that was only reinforced by each consecutive conversation: Students seek to be involved *with others* and believe in the power of collective actions to address public issues.

In the focus groups students were asked whether they believe volunteering, advocating for policy change, voting, organizing people, or giving money is most beneficial to address public issues. The "organizing people" option was meant to be broad and generic and was not intended to imply only historic "community organizing" practices often used by the political left. That being said, we did not ask students to explain in detail what they meant when using the term.

Students maintain that organizing people is the best first-step to social change. A UMass Boston student says, "The more people you get, the more awareness you raise, and then comes the money, and then comes the policy changes, so organizing the people is the most important one, hands down." Other students make the same point, stating that once people are organized, it is easier to get financial and volunteer support, and therefore easier to advocate for policy change.

When presented with a large pile of images and asked to choose one that most represents the term "politics," a Maryland student picks a photograph of citizens. He says, **"This, to me, like, grassroots little local town, you know, doing their thing, to me, that's like the heart of politics. Whereas they might not have the same kind of power, you know, each person individually as someone who is sitting there, but, you know, as a whole, they can make it change, and they can do it themselves."**

According to the survey given at the end of the focus groups, while most students believe that they individually can make some difference in their community, a larger percentage of students believe that groups of people working together can make a great deal of difference.

Students note that finding groups to volunteer with is a big motivator for them. A Dayton student says, "What I found to be really helpful, especially here, is just that there are so many service clubs. If you have something that you want to get involved in, there are opportunities." Students sometimes perceive a lack of something concrete to do or believe their individual efforts cannot have a significant impact, but believe people working in groups can create a great deal of difference.

HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE DO YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN PERSONALLY MAKE IN WORKING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS?		HOW MUCH DIFFERENCE DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER AS A GROUP CAN MAKE IN SOLVING PROBLEMS?	
Great Deal of Difference	18%	Great Deal of Difference	62%
Some Difference	45%	Some Difference	30%
A Little Difference	33%	A Little Difference	7%
No Difference at all	2%	No Difference at all	1%
Don't Know	1%	Don't Know	1%

Source: Survey of Millennials Talk Politics Focus Group Participants 2007

STUDENTS DO NOT SEE VOTING AS AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF INFLUENCING CHANGE

Very few students say that voting is the most beneficial vehicle for addressing public issues; in fact, voting by far receives the least support. Students overwhelmingly testify that voting is not a vehicle for change. A Bowdoin student argues, "It's funny, when you're little you learn about the 'one vote' and this is how democracy works, but when you get older and you actually go and vote, you feel like those votes do not matter."

Students think that voting is necessary, but view it more as a "symbolic gesture" than a means of creating change. A Wake Forest student says, "I think voting is important, but I think it would probably be the least beneficial if you wanted to make a change happen." A Berkeley student says, "I think voting is the least you can do in terms of showing that you're political."

Another Wake Forest student says, "I don't know how it should be changed, but I think it should be changed that when people vote, that their vote actually counts. You know, that people who vote actually feel like change can be made. I think it should be set up so that voting actually changes things…Because maybe more people would vote, and then maybe what goes on in the government would be a reflection of what the common people wanted." A Dayton student says, "Your one vote isn't enough to change anything." Perhaps students' conception of voting can be best

expressed by a Maryland student who reports, "I have voted every time I've been given an opportunity, but I do it more as a symbolic gesture than an actual means of changing something."

DISSATISFACTION WITH POLITICS

A Princeton student summarizes college students' general frustrations with the political system by stating, "Politics to me has, no I wouldn't call it a negative connotation, but it does not have an idealistic connotation; whereas rallying and activism and going for a cause has more of that idealistic undertone, while politics is marred by bad deals."

Today's college students express dissatisfaction and irritation with the current political system, which they find inefficient, corrupt, inaccessible, and counter to the genuine welfare of the nation's citizens. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, students have not given up on the potential of the political system to address public issues. They find and make their own civic opportunities and some make connections between these experiences and public policy.

After a free-association activity where students were asked to write or draw on a poster whatever came to their minds when they heard the word "government," a Princeton student reflects, "There's more negative under government, but, I mean that's to be expected." A classmate added, "Government is something that's very bureaucratic. It's sort of stale. It's not moving. It's there. It's frustrating." In most focus groups, "government" prompted such comments. The students noted their own frustration and sometimes observed that they would like to engage the system but find it disappointing.

"Let's stop looking at some of these petty issues. Let's look upon what's really affecting us."

Adding to students' frustrations with politics is a belief that the government is not currently fulfilling its proper role, and therefore should not be trusted; a Kansas State student says, "Government should be [about the] common good. I don't think we naturally feel that fit right now." A Princeton student similarly says, "Politics should be people's voices being heard, but I don't really feel like it is being heard right now." Consequently, students seem to look at the current political system with skepticism. As a Berkeley student says, "I think politics is seen as untrustworthy, and might be something that always has to be taken with a grain of salt. Double-check your race card, your resources, and always question. I think college students question politics." A Tougaloo student says, **"Let's stop looking at some of these petty issues. Let's look upon what's really affecting us."**

However, this is not to say that students completely disregard politics. In fact, many students differentiate between politics as it is currently practiced and their ideal practice of politics. A Minnesota student says, "When I think of politics, I think it has to do with humanity, the common good, the government, and all those things really."

DESPITE THEIR DISSATISFACTION, STUDENTS WANT TO ENGAGE

Combating a negative perception of collegiate student civic engagement, a Berkeley student says, "I think college students are really actively involved in politics, actually. I think we're led to think that they don't [participate], when in fact everything that I've witnessed has shown me otherwise."
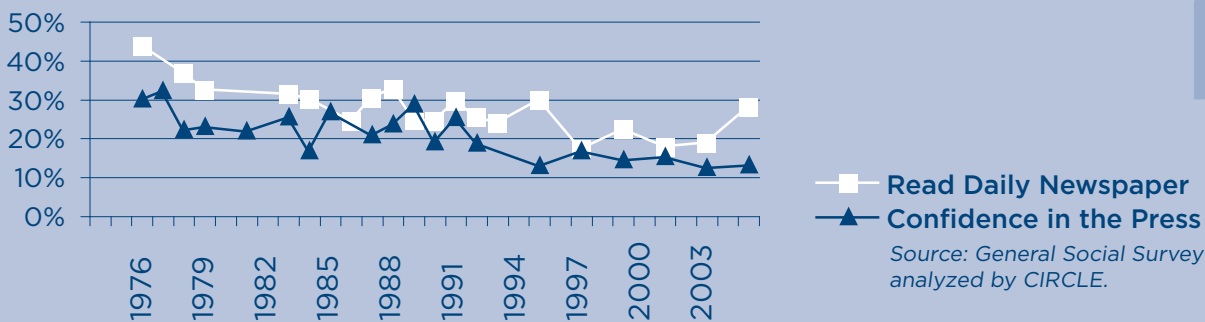
We heard many stories of action related to public policy. A strong minority of students is engaged in various facets of political life. A Kansas State student says, "Our school district here in town, was just, they've been debating for a couple years whether to start a new administrative position called a diversity coordinator, which would be the first one in Kansas. And I had a professor on campus ask me to come speak on behalf of the position and talk about the benefits it would have on the community and the school district." A UMass Boston student told us about how he has "been working on housing issues for three years now," and, "got a friend of [his] to put up a bill in front of the State House."

Some students do prefer individual acts of service to politics. For instance, a student from Dayton says, "But in everything I have to do in a school day, the last thing I'm going to care about is politics. Like, that—that's just the way I am. I mean, I'd rather go and help that kid read than, than see what's going on." A New Mexico student says, "Like, the government is, like, really far away and something that you can't really affect or change, but something that you can actually do in your community and see the results of might be more, like, motivating, like, for people."

However, we also met students who say, in the words of a Minnesota undergraduate, "I think 'politics' is talking to one another and strategically organizing, working together to a common goal." A Tougaloo student says: "We're our own politics."

The students we spoke with are frustrated with the political system and with the media. But although they do not trust these major institutions, they try to engage with them. This finding is consistent with trends in national surveys. For example, youth have consistently lost trust in

GRAPH 3: NEWS CONSUMPTION AND CONFIDENCE AMONG 18-to-25-YEAR-OLDS

- □ Read Daily Newspaper
- ▲ Confidence in the Press

Source: General Social Survey analyzed by CIRCLE.

the news industry, yet their actual consumption of newspapers and other media has risen since 2000 (see Graph 3). A Minnesota student says,

"People are talking about the whole system is screwed up, it doesn't represent us. On some I agree, but on the other hand, I also definitely have confidence that there are mechanisms built in the system to change it, move it."
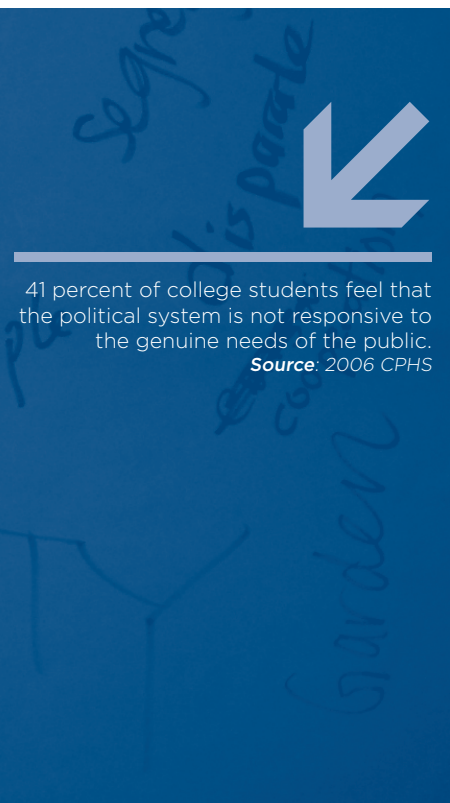
STUDENTS DO NOT VIEW THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AS ACCESSIBLE

Despite any convictions that the political system is corrupt, inefficient, and bureaucratic, college students do not completely dismiss politics from their lives. In fact, students want to engage the political system, but largely find it inaccessible. A Wake Forest student says, "I just get this feeling about politics as this inaccessible realm that people don't really have that much participation in." In the survey given at the end of the focus groups, most students (42 percent) indicate that they view politics as a way for the powerful to keep power to themselves. Only 12 percent indicate that politics is a way for the less powerful to compete on equal footing with the powerful.

Students express two reasons why they feel that the political system is inaccessible to them: a lack of resources and a lack of perceived importance. A Providence student says, "As college students, we don't really have a lot of the resources that you need to get your voice heard." A classmate agrees, adding, "We just feel like there's almost no point in trying when you can only do so much and you don't have the essential resources to actually make a big cause."

Students also feel that their representatives and other government officials do not consider them important. A Berkeley student explains, "Politicians really don't see students as a very viable or active population, simply because they're not the donors." A Maryland student feels the university's Student Government Association better represents him than any other political body because it is composed of students: "SGA is for the students, and I'm a student. I feel like presidents and delegates [are] for people older than me, younger than me, they have a broad range of people they have to serve." Some students also note that if they could make one change to the political system, they would like to be able to speak and interact with elected officials or have politicians pay more attention to young people.

The survey accompanying the focus group discussions affirms that students feel that the public is distant from the political process (see Survey Toplines in the Appendix for more details). When asked whether or not they feel the political system

41 percent of college students feel that the political system is not responsive to the genuine needs of the public.
Source: 2006 CPHS

is responsive to the genuine needs of the public, an overwhelming 58 percent of students respond that the political system is not responsive to the genuine needs of the public, compared to only 28 percent of students who feel that it is responsive. Students are also more likely to feel that the government needs to do more to solve problems (42 percent) rather than feel that the government does too many things that should be left to businesses and individuals (12 percent).

FRUSTRATIONS WITH POLITICIANS

Students see no shortage of corruption within the halls of government, beginning with politicians. A Berkeley student explains that, as individuals climb the rungs of the political ladder, they forget why they began climbing in the first place: "When people are running for city council, you find people who really are interested in doing good for the community. When you get to statewide or national politics, you find people trying to better themselves to get to the top, to get this one more promotion, on their way to having a career in politics, and that is very disappointing to someone who's younger and more idealistic." A UMass Boston student adds, "Once that person that['s] in charge...once that person gets to that place, their eyes are, like, covered and, like, they see something else...Their mind is totally changed and they forget about the little people who want[ed] to help him get there."

Students also blame politicians for the inaccessibility of the political system. They assert that because they lack the financial resources to contribute to political campaigns, politicians often turn a deaf ear to the college population. Students view politicians as self-serving, rather than true representatives of the people. A Maryland student says, "I think oftentimes policy-makers and politicians set the issues for the public rather than the public setting the issues for the policy-makers and politicians."

As mentioned earlier, in the middle of each discussion, we offered a large set of visual images to the group and asked them to find the one that most represents politics to them. Many students describe their chosen picture as an exclusive conversation at a table composed of people whom they describe as white men, and often as overweight and bald. As one Bowdoin student says, "I chose this [picture] because I've always imagined politics as something that rich, white, slightly plump men do." They see a few powerful people making decisions for the entire nation behind closed doors, inaccessible to the general public. As a Dayton student says, "I think a lot of students feel very disconnected."

UNDERSTANDING THE SYSTEM

In the focus groups, students readily discuss issues that concern them. A Tougaloo student shares concern about Hurricane Katrina: "I never seem to see how we could always go over there and help other countries, but really our own country here, I mean, our own brothers and sisters here suffer[ed] for three days without any food." They are often aware of the role that policy plays related to issues that they care about, either contributing to or attempting to resolve the issue.

Yet many students are not able to articulate how those policies are put into place and what levels of government have authority in a given area. Some are forthright with their lack of knowledge in how the system works. A UMass Boston student says, "My cousins, they're all in the Boston Public School System. They don't have textbooks. The books that they have are photocopies of things or they have textbooks that they have to keep inside the classroom to then pass back, you know, to the next group of kids but they can't take them home. I don't understand that. It's all the money, all the taxes that they're taking from us, where's it going?" The students who are not involved civically or politically are the least likely to have knowledge of how the political system works.

Students do pick up on various aspects of the political process and many, though not all, have learned basic information about Congress and elections in high school. A Tougaloo student says, "Republican always wins in Mississippi, it's a Republican state." They know about the electoral college and the predisposition of a state's

electoral votes to go Republican or Democratic in an election, they know that constructing policy is a long-term process and can identify political "spin" when they hear it. A Berkeley student explains to the rest of the group the details of her work related to Darfur, Sudan: "The idea is if enough people divest, then there will be a lot of government pressure on the Sudanese government and they'll have to take some sort of action and some sort of reaction to the international community, as opposed to what's going on right now."

At the conclusion of each focus group we asked students what would make the political system more appealing for them to participate in or follow. A range of ideas surfaced that included:

● *"If change could be more attainable, good change, that would affect people positively"*
● *"Sincerity"*
● *"Making politics less commercialized"*
● *"I'd like my voice to be heard on more than just election day"*
● *"If it felt more close to us than far away"*
● *"A really easy way to give your input"*

However these ideas more often than not lacked specificity. While some students did apply their comment to a particular process, system, or policy, more did not.

This lack of specific knowledge about how the political system works probably decreases students' likeliness to engage in the system because they do not know where or how to plug in and try to make an impact.

THE GAP BETWEEN ISSUE CONCERNS AND ACTION

Even though students report volunteering in a large variety of areas, only a very small handful of participants note any volunteer experience related to the war in Iraq or the current genocide in Darfur, Sudan. However, when asked what current issues spark their attention, both of these topics are common responses. It seems that these issues are a deep concern among college students, but there is a gap between their noticing such problems and taking personal action.

Other issues that frequently spark students' attention—but not necessarily their personal action—include healthcare, HIV/AIDS, access to college, immigration, the environment, poverty/welfare issues, and (above all) education (including everything from college tuition to the No Child Left Behind Act). A Kansas State student says that, "For me, like focus in on such a global issue, it's, like, where do you begin, you know, because the problem is so huge."

Many students list national or international issues as sparking their attention, but many more report taking volunteer action in local areas.

37 percent of college students believe it is their *responsibility* to get involved to make things better for society. 61 percent believe it is their *choice* to get involved.
Source: *2006 CPHS*

VOLUNTEERING AS A WAY TO BECOME INFORMED

In an era when numerous media sources inundate students with an excess of information, some students indicate, in looking back on their volunteer activities, that community service is a way to filter information and gain more informed perspectives on public issues. A Maryland student says, "I think that civic engagement is very important whether you help others or to make a statement about society or helping a culture or a group or an organization. That engagement brings with it an awareness of issues in society that makes us all better citizens." A Dayton student says, "I think the more you are involved in things, the more you understand what's going on."

VOLUNTEERING AS A COMPLEMENT TO POLITICS

In 2002, a statement entitled *The New Student Politics* suggested that some college students defined their volunteer or community service work as political, that their activity was a form of politics. This report, published by Campus Compact, was based on a conversation among a select group of engaged students from across the country.

In hopes of shedding light on this relationship several years later, we asked students in our survey whether they viewed volunteering and community service as a form of politics, an alternative to politics, a complement to politics, or as something unrelated to politics. A majority of the students respond that volunteering is a complement to politics.

Students also say that because they view the political system as inefficient and inaccessible, they turn to volunteering. A Minnesota student says, "I know for me in some ways it's about challenging the system in a lot of ways, and that's why I volunteer." A Princeton student says, "Policy and politics is this thing that's kind of hard to move, it's very easy to get fed up and just turn to something like volunteer work." And a Providence student says, "So obviously, this is an issue and a concern for Americans. I think community service has sort of taken the spot of politics for a lot of people."

However, when asked, students overwhelmingly maintain that their volunteer efforts do relate to public policy. Some students seem to talk themselves, in a circular fashion, into believing that their volunteer activities relate to public policy. In this section of the focus groups, it was clear that some students are still piecing their experiences and knowledge together, and that these students do not have many experiences to reflect on this aspect of their volunteer activities. In the end, very few college students said their volunteer activities did not relate to public policy. A Kansas State student says that, "When you volunteer it's kind of like you're pointing out a space that's not being addressed by public policy, almost."

Students are seeking civic opportunities that are authentic, rather than competitive or partisan. For many, volunteering is an outlet to help others and "make change" on an individual level. They also see it as a neutral activity that is unlikely to provoke conflict. Students do not enter into volunteer activities with the intention of becoming involved politically. In hindsight, they report that

DO YOU VIEW VOLUNTEERING/ COMMUNITY SERVICE AS...

A Form of Politics	16%
An Alternative to Politics	10%
A Complement to Politics	51%
Has Nothing to do with Politics	22%

Source: Survey of Millennials Talk Politics Focus Group Participants 2007

volunteering has helped them to become aware of issues and learn how issues affect people, yet often do not know what they can do with this new awareness.

BARRIERS TO MORE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

While a significant majority of students can list the community service activities that they are or have been involved in, there is a solid minority of students who are also engaged in activities focused on public policy and/or elections. The focus groups shed light on several barriers students perceive to political engagement.

In several of the focus groups, students were directly asked to help explain why community service is common and political engagement is not. For many, the answer is clear and they provide a variety of reasons. As one student from Dayton says, "When I see a senator for the U.S. government, I see someone who has never served in a soup kitchen before. So if he's talking about an increase in minimum wage or something, he's not going to know exactly what he's talking about. So that's motivation for me to not be like that at all." A Princeton student says,

"I just thought it was so boring and dull and that the entire government was corrupt, so why bother?"

Some students' answers suggest that they are not faced with a choice. For many, political engagement is not as available an opportunity as volunteering and other civic activities. Students are not eschewing politics as much as they do not see politics as an option. They see no clear access points, and their perceptions and experiences with the political system suggest to them that they cannot have an impact, which is what they seek.

WANTING TO HAVE AN IMPACT

Second only to the time they have available to get involved, students report that the most important factor in deciding whether or not to get involved in an activity is the impact they think it will yield. A New Mexico student says, "One thing that, I guess kind of dissuades me from taking action is, I guess I would call it impatience or just general frustration…If I work at it, if I volunteer, if I join a group—a progressive group, you know—is it going to make a dent, is it going to make a difference? And it feels like it won't. And I feel like, for me, if I'm going to do something I want it to have a dramatic effect. I want to change, you know, a lot of people's lives, make them better, but it feels like I'm working from the bottom

"I think oftentimes policy-makers and politicians set the issues for the public rather than the public setting the issues for the policy-makers and politicians."

and you know it's like this drastic inverted pyramid." Students want to know that the time they spend is productive and will directly assist others or directly change something—often, the life of one individual. They do not see how they can influence issues and even doubt that someone with access to the system will hear their opinions. Overwhelmingly, they perceive politics as slow-moving as well as messy and hard to understand.

A Providence student says, "If you were to write a letter to the President, it's probably not going to make a big difference. But when I can just sit and talk to a kid, then I feel like I'm actually doing something." A Maryland student says, "So for me, if I volunteer and help this child out, that's a little step, and I know I've made a little bit of effect in somebody's life." And a Princeton student says, **"If I don't think I can influence the change, then I feel like there is no point in getting involved."**

Again, while many students report that they are concerned about various international issues like the war in Iraq or the genocide in Darfur, their involvement most often focuses on the U.S., and largely on a local and regional level. Students do not see how they can influence international issues.

"A LOT OF TALK, NO ACTION"

Students believe public issues can be solved by people taking action and being engaged with others. They are frustrated with what they perceive as just "sitting around talking" and want to see more action being taken by public figures. A Tougaloo student summarizes this by saying, "Politics right now, a lot of talk, no action." Action, in students' perspectives, seems to center around decisiveness and activities that will have an immediate impact on alleviating problems. As one student from Wake Forest says, "The government has all these things going on, and it's kind of like—I don't know. They kind of play hot potato. They just kind of, like, pass it around while the people are suffering, so people just have to—that's why volunteering is important."

A New Mexico student says, "Like the government is, like, really far away and something that you can't really affect or change, but something that you can actually do in your community and see the results of might be more, like, motivating, like, for people and more of the focus."

Today's college students, having grown up with fast-paced electronic entertainment, hate being bored, are frustrated with inefficiency, and want the instant gratification of seeing the results of their actions. As one Princeton student says, "People in our generation grew up getting really used to immediacy. You know, video games, everything coming at you all the time...here, [in college] I had one friend who just worked her butt off in the 2004 election. She worked so hard and then the side she was working for lost, and she just became really disenchanted with politics after that."

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES

Students report that while opportunities to participate in political activities exist, they are not often widely known. A student's major, focus group participants reported, has a significant in-

fluence on whether he or she is exposed to discussions of other issues and to other students who are passionate about political issues and causes. More often than not, if students want to get involved or want to know more about an issue they do not find easy entry points on their campus. A New Mexico student says, "[College students] don't know where the access is to get involved with the government in a sense. So they don't want to get involved in politics because they don't really know where to go."

When students do find out about issues and causes, they tend to hear about them through friends, flyers, chalking (writing information on the sidewalk with chalk) or stories about an issue as it affects someone they know. They also report that they learn about issues and the political system through courses.

Many students also perceive political involvement to be intimidating because it is complicated and they do not feel qualified, they do not know enough, and they are not in a position to be listened to. A personal connection to an issue has a strong influence on students' likelihood to get involved in work related to that issue. Those who are engaged politically have had the opportunity to take concrete action. A Kansas State student says, "In high school I had the experience of being in my dorky service clubs and like [student government] and that kind of stuff...that kind of gave me faith in something larger, like I could, you know, be involved in [student government]

and get, I don't know colder water in the water fountains. And then so when I see a larger government I feel like I can make an actual change in that." Another Kansas State student adds, "I think even on a small scale when you see that a voice can make a difference, I think that instills that feeling that I can continue this and then grow into larger incidences of making change."

Regardless of the campus, many students talk about "living in the now" or just trying to keep up with classes, in addition to work and family responsibilities. A Minnesota student says, "It is difficult to actually get out there and take political action when there are so many other things that you have to deal with and you can't ignore them." While students want to be informed and want to be involved, they often do not know how to integrate more regular civic or political involvement into their schedules beyond one-day projects. A Providence student says, "You go to high school, you go to college, you get a job and sometimes you just feel so trapped by that." A disconnect does exist in a few places as students, however, also do not seem to be fully aware of all of the opportunities on campus to be engaged and take action, though less of these opportunities are related to the political system.
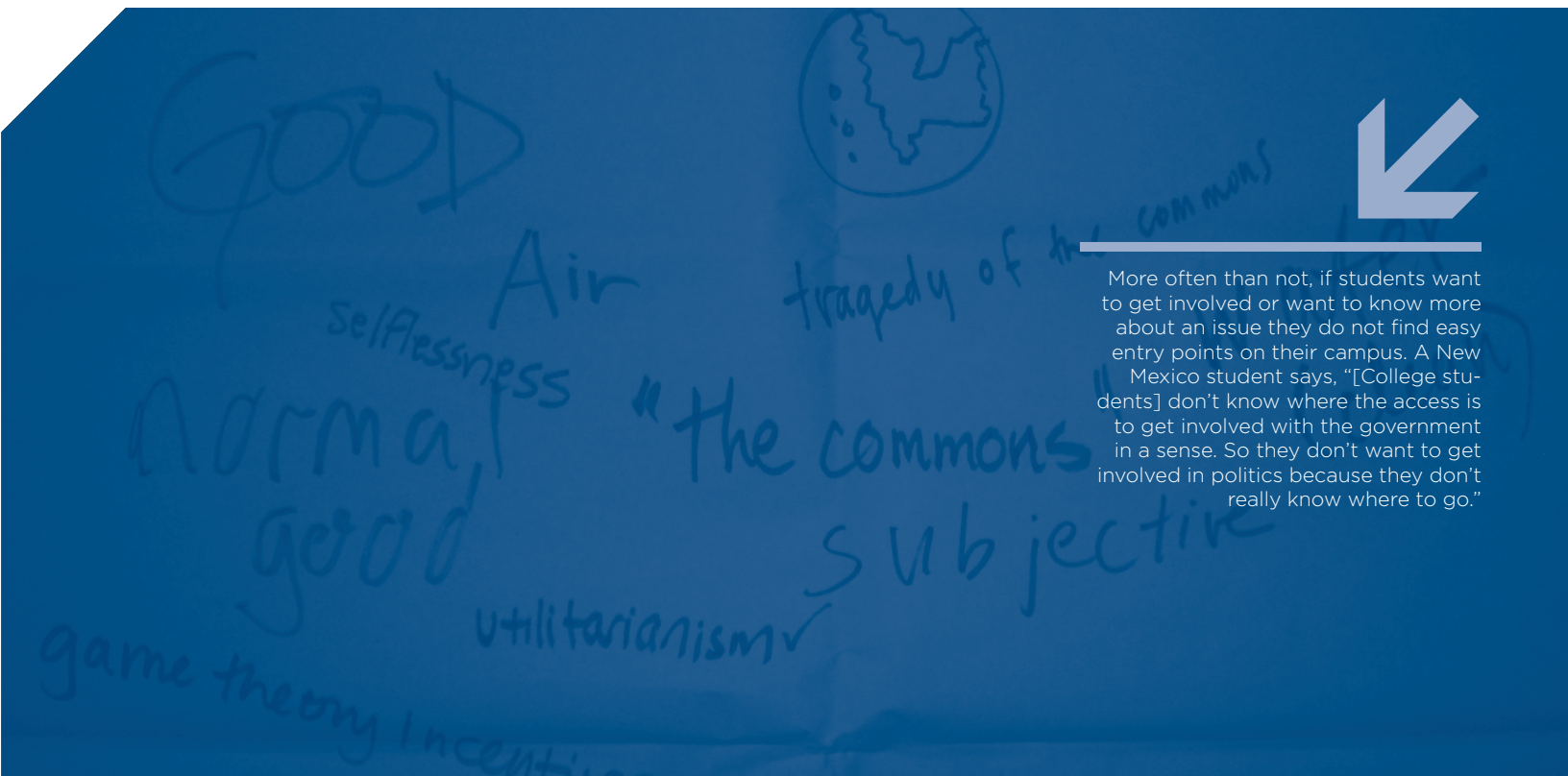
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MAIN FINDINGS

3. Millennials Dislike Spin and Polarized Debates and Seek Authentic Opportunities for Discussing Public Issues

SEEKING THE MIDDLE GROUND

STUDENTS PERCEIVE POLITICS, as it currently exists, as always an "either/or" debate with no other options. A Providence student says, "I think everyone is just too afraid to agree with one another because there's this mindset where you have to either be completely Democratic or completely Republican. You have to be one or the other." They seek more middle ground with regard to both policies and political parties. However, students in the focus groups do recognize that politics cannot avoid conflict: 41 percent of students indicate that they believe there are so many competing groups in politics that conflict is unavoidable. Significantly fewer, 25 percent, say that the political system is full of unnecessary conflict.

College students' aversion to joining a particular political party stems from the fact that they do not want to be limited in their personal beliefs by a party label. A significant proportion of students (48 percent) indicate in the survey accompanying the focus groups that they are not affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican party. Students feel if they subscribe to a particular party, then their beliefs will be confined to that party's platform. A Princeton student explains, "I'm trying to figure out what's right, what's wrong, what's ethically acceptable, and pulling my views from so many different places, it's hard to put myself into one particular party." A Maryland student says that subscribing to a particular political party or mindset would limit her political autonomy: "If I adopt certain rigid views, then it takes away some of my personal freedom."

Many students are looking for middle ground on campus too. A Bowdoin student says, "It's pretty

divided and there doesn't really seem to be a lot of good debate. I work for the opinion section of the newspaper and...none of the pieces I get basically...ever like make a new argument that isn't like something that someone from the other side...would ever, like, look at and think about and be convinced by."

TRYING TO BE INFORMED

When asked whether or not they have informed perspectives on public and societal issues, focus group participants fall into two groups of equal size: (1) those who feel they are informed or at least try to be informed, and (2) those who do not feel informed and/or recognize that they are not as informed as they should be. Regardless of which group they fall into, students seem motivated to learn more about issues, but they are overwhelmed by the amount of information available and are distrustful of many media sources. When obtaining their news information, students want the basic story, without media spin, so that they can critically develop their own opinions.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not lack of time that keeps some college students from following the news—roughly one in ten participants say that "lack of time" is a reason they are not informed. Instead, the focus group conversations suggest that students feel overwhelmed by the amount of information from competitive news sources that is available to them. In the words of a Minnesota student, "There's definitely an information overload." Another student from Berkeley says, "I almost feel like the more I inform myself, the less I know, and I think that's relative to the general population." One New Mexico student says, "There's just so much coming at you at once. Maybe when you're watching a TV show you hear people argue, argue argue, so it's like the words become cluttered or the opinions...There's just so much going on...Like

in politics, you know, you're like, it's overwhelming, I guess."

One commonly cited problem is that today there are so many competing sources of news that it is difficult to know which sources provide the best information. For example, a student from Providence says, **"It's really tough when you get so much information from so many competing sources in the media and whatnot, and you don't know what's fact and what's fiction."** As a student from Princeton says, "I read *The New York Times* every day, but whether that's adequate to keep me informed is debatable."

Additionally, a clear pattern is that focus group participants complain about the quality of the media. In their eyes, many media sources cannot be trusted because they present information with a partisan spin. A student from Wake Forest says, "I think politics is very shady. I don't think that you can trust what politicians say, but you can't really trust what the news says." They feel that it is often difficult to get the full story because different media outlets such as Fox News, NBC, and the BBC can all present the same story but from different angles. For example, a Princeton student says, "I think that all the information we get, like, from the media, it's always going to be biased in some way. I mean, the media chooses what they emphasize in the news stories and what information they reveal and what they don't." A New Mexico student says, "I feel that the news is biased or it's even kind of got some other undertone to it and I just don't even watch it because I'd rather not, you know, get polluted with that kind of information. So I really feel like in the dark about a lot of things that the general public should know about." A Berkeley student adds, "I don't really trust too many sources, and I feel like when I take everything into account, then it's hard to formulate the kind of opinion that you can really strongly support."

Other students are completely distrustful of the media. A student from the UMass Boston says, "Sometimes the truth doesn't make it into the newspapers." A Dayton student says, "I want to know what's really going on. I don't want to know how someone feels about it. So then

I could form my own opinion instead of hearing this skewed version of the truth."

FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND SERVICE HELP STUDENTS FORM OPINIONS

Many students echo the comments of a Providence student: "You have to filter the media sources." Students seek out family, friends and roommates to help them filter information and form their own opinions about public and societal issues. As a Wake Forest student says, "My roommate's very political; and if I have a question or don't understand something or see something on the news, she's able to explain it to me from her perspective." A New Mexico student shares, "I learn from my dating pool. I mean I think that politics and social action have always been really social for me. And I've always been really drawn to people who have convictions and similar values to mine. And so a lot of how I stay informed is through my friends and the people I care about."

A subset of students appreciates what they learn about public issues through community service activities. A Dayton student says, "I don't know if it's possible to be informed about every important topic that there is out there. I think it would require a lifetime of studying, and even then I don't know. But I, I think that you can be prepared to, to take a net and assimilate that information through the service you do." Similarly a Maryland participant says, "I think that civic engagement is very important whether you help others or to make a statement about society or helping a culture or a group or an organization, whatever...that engagement brings with it an awareness of issues in society that makes us all better citizens."

THE BUBBLE EFFECT—DISENGAGING FROM PUBLIC AND SOCIETAL ISSUES

While some students are struggling to find a trusted news source, a small group is resigned to spend their college years largely disconnected from outside issues. One Princeton student

admits, "Once I got to college I have been really disconnected from the world at large." Another notes, "I feel really shielded from news."

On several campuses students cite a "bubble effect." Students talk about two kinds of "bubbles": some say they have emerged from a bubble where they grew up by being exposed to diverse issues and ideas during college but many more say they live in a bubble on campus where they are isolated from daily news and current events.

Students from many different campuses echo the following comments of a Wake Forest student, "Yeah, we have a term. We call it the 'Wake Forest bubble.' Where people don't really pay attention to what's going on in the world off campus." Another Wake Forest student elaborates: "That's true. I had to go home to find out about things that happened two or three months ago." Being in the college "bubble" doesn't necessarily suggest that students are apathetic but in many cases it simply means they are consumed with local issues that are within their reach.

There seems to be a divide on campuses between the informed and uninformed students. For example, a Berkeley student notes, "There's a lot of people [who] don't really know what's going on, but more disturbing than that is that they don't want to know what's going on around them. It scares me." On several campuses students argue that the divide between the informed and uninformed serves as a barrier to dialogue on important societal issues. As one Dayton student says, "I'm just selective about whom I have conversations with about politics usually, because a lot of times I don't like arguing with uninformed opinions."

Students do mention opportunities to break the "bubble" while in college. One UMass Boston student says, "You're going from high school, you're making that transition into college and you're kind of just living in this bubble so you still haven't been, you know, exposed to the "real world" yet. And when my professors, a lot of them, you know they pushed us out to do a lot of these things, like, you need to go out there, find an issue that you're really passionate about. Go find out, you know, what that entails. I think that was when I really started to see government and a whole new perspective."

RESISTANCE TO SPIN

Today's young people are barraged with messages that have been designed to persuade them to do things that someone else wants. They experience an unprecedented amount of commercial advertising: companies spent $17 billion to advertise to children in 1992 (when our college student sample was entering grade school)—up from $100 million in 1983.[12] Commercial advertisers use increasingly sophisticated techniques of persuasion, based on detailed public opinion research. The government, political candidates, parties, interest groups, reporters, and pundits also use such techniques. For example, some political messages are now pre-tested in randomized experiments to measure their impact on specific demographic groups.

On the basis of our focus groups, we believe that college students are aware that they are targets of manipulation; they resent it, and this is one reason that they are reluctant to engage in politics. A Kansas State student says, **"I'm a lot more guarded if I know somebody is trying to change my mind on something. I'm going to be a lot more critical of them and at the same time if somebody is just preaching to me what I want to hear, I'm really wary of that too."** Students see such manipulation at work in several domains:

● *The news media: In our focus groups, at least 39 students spontaneously argue that they cannot be adequately informed about public issues because the news media is biased and untrustworthy. As one student from UMass Boston says, "The media, like, builds up certain things and tells us certain things but doesn't say a lot of things."*

● *Candidates and politicians: Many of the students complain that candidates give only part of the story in order to manipulate voters. One Kansas State student recalls watching political commercials: " [The candidates] weren't like, this is [what] I'm for and this is what, like, I want our country to be and our*

12. CBS News (May 17, 2007). Resources: Marketing to Kids. Retrieved May 17, 2007, from www.cbsnews.com.

state to be. They were, like, this is what the other guy's not for and what the other guy's done wrong…I was, like, bombarded with that, like, the little, like, exposure that I got to was all negative. And I was, like, I don't even know what politicians represent." Another Kansas State student, also describing political campaigns, observes: "And there just isn't really; nobody really values giving their reasoning behind things. Nobody really values trying to reach some sort of dialogue. It's all just sides spouting off, like, one-liners at each other."

● *Activist students: Some participants in our focus groups also complain about their own peers who seem to use facts and arguments selectively to advance their own agendas. As a student from Kansas State says, "Where if somebody comes up to you and says 'I'm opposed to the death penalty because it's just wrong,' you know, that there's no, you know what I mean, there's no back-up, you know, to that. There's no, you know, I can't understand, you know, this side of it. This is something that, you know, you need to be able to want to learn about something and when somebody tells you something that you need to believe, it's hard to accept that."*

In contrast, we spent almost 100 hours in focus groups sitting with students talking about the political system and very few heated moments of conversation arose. A Kansas State student says, **"I think that's why people don't feel like their voice matters because rarely do we see discussions or something where you feel non-threatened and able to voice your opinion."** A classmate adds, "Some of the people at the table might not have even thought about some of these things ever, or rarely. And just having this conversation is so important. I think it's too bad it's just a focus group. Why can't we just do this any time?"

Some students recall conversations about political issues that seem authentic. A Kansas State student says, "Like, for example, my roommate was talking about the death penalty. And she was not trying to persuade me either way. She was just giving me facts and it really intrigued me. And that night, I went on the internet and went to a creditable source and looked up some more information about it." A New Mexico student says, "Just being more open to discussion kind of the atmosphere right now—like there isn't one right answer, but just learning about what other people's thoughts are can be very educating from your peers."

College students value such conversations and see them as a form of politics. In one of the focus groups at Tougaloo, the interviewer asks, "Do you think that you've ever engaged in an act that you think of as a political act?" A student replies, "I think this discussion right here could be considered a political act…definitely hearing my fellow students and their opinions on the topic." This comment provokes a discussion in which another man remarks, "That's why I think they should [start] having more open conversations, let us know what they're talking about, don't just come and tell us what they're going to do. Have an open conversation, let everybody hear what's being said…Like they said, democracy, everybody should have their opinions. Let us hear that conversation." A third student draws a connection to the focus groups themselves:

"We used to have town hall meetings and I would go…but, you know, they only really have them when it's a big problem on campus, but I think we need to have more conversations like this to get the students involved. And it's not necessarily the gift card or the food that got me here, I just wanted to come and express my opinions so somebody else will know. And, you know, maybe it'll come back to when more students will have this opportunity to be well-rounded and to hear what other people are thinking, and to be comforted in their thoughts because other people are thinking just like you."

"Once I got to college I have been really disconnected from the world at large."

MAIN FINDINGS

4. Differences Among the Millennials: Colleges and Universities are Providing Very Unequal Levels of Opportunity for Civic Participation and Learning

WE ENTERED THE focus groups wanting to find out more about what students' experiences are like on campuses today: Do they talk about current issues? Do they follow political events? Are they asked to get involved in any policy-related activities? Our work at CIRCLE is largely about identifying trends among all young Americans, and we did find differences between the Millennials and Generation X, as described in the report so far. We also found a great diversity among today's college students, who are not a homogeneous group.

CIVIC PARTICIPANTS AND BYSTANDERS

While today's generation of students is arriving on campus after two decades of efforts to integrate civic engagement into campus culture, our study reveals the enormous differences in their civic trajectories. In some groups, participants are able to recall numerous civic experiences, starting in high school or earlier and continuing on campus. Often students with high efficacy have had experiences that have shown them that they can have a voice and substantive role in civic and political life. A Bowdoin student says:

> When I was a junior in high school...we went out, like, the week before voting for—I don't know what it was, for one of the elections, just to tell people to vote and not—it was really—it was kind of fun and it was interesting, like, the responses we got...And when I got to Bowdoin, I decided to do something similar just trying to get kids to vote. So I thought...I don't know because it was pretty much a good experience in high school, I wanted to do it here too.

Some Berkeley students complain that it is difficult to cross their campus without being recruited for a political cause. Students like this are relatively confident, interested, knowledgeable, and engaged. They expect to participate—or even to be leaders in the civic sphere—as older adults. They are critical of major political institutions and leaders, but their criticisms are analytical and mixed with some optimism. They are able to take the position of policymakers and some defend the government for doing a reasonably good job of balancing conflicting interests.

In other groups on other campuses, participants can report very few civic opportunities either in high school or in college (other than face-to-face volunteering). These students often express deep alienation or confusion about major institutions and do not expect to play roles in civic affairs. Their attitudes toward politics and the government range from bewilderment to anger and fear.

Among a group of Princeton undergraduates whom we recruited through student organizations the level of efficacy is extraordinary. One woman in this group says, "Our concern for these global issues or domestic issues is why we're at college in the first place." Their main job is to educate themselves for "later, when we're, like, fifty and running the world." A man in the same group "strongly disagrees." Princeton students don't have to wait until later to be effective. "I called up a company before my junior year [in high school] and said, 'I'm going to work here.'" Now he writes 90-page papers on bio-fuels that are "passed around Congress."

In contrast, students in some of the other groups express views like those of a Tougaloo student: **"I mean it's like okay, you're sitting here, absorbing all this money from us, while I'm sitting here wondering what are you all doing inside those big buildings?"**

MAIN FINDINGS

[4. Differences Among the Millennials: Colleges and Universities are Providing Very Unequal Levels of Opportunity for Civic Participation and Learning]

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Sometimes these students appear to have an undifferentiated conception of the powerful ("they"), which includes the national government, elected politicians and candidates, the college administration, and the mass media.

We cannot use our focus groups to draw conclusions about the overall culture of any particular campus; our samples are too small and are not completely random. However, putting the results from all the campuses together, it appears that some students attend institutions that have explicit and prominent civic missions and provide opportunities and resources for civic engagement. Students on these campuses are more likely to have civic engagement built into their formal college experience—in a class, as a research project, or through an internship. Whether deliberately or not, these institutions attract students who are already engaged in high school. They give their students additional opportunities and encouragement to develop civic skills and interests.

For example, students at Bowdoin have a common civic experience that allows them to talk concretely about the term "common good" (which most other students find baffling). One student says, "'The common good' is such a buzzword at Bowdoin," implying that it is used a great deal. Common Good Day is an annual event at Bowdoin when, as one student explains, "we all go out to do service projects." A broad cross-section of the campus is involved and the event receives institutional support. This ex-

perience likely informs a Bowdoin student who says that, "common good and community are something you can do." This concrete experience, supported by the institution, provides students with a lesson that it is important to their education.

Other institutions do not enroll students who are nearly as engaged in high school, nor do they provide many opportunities for civic learning and development. (In general, these institutions have fewer resources overall than the more engaged campuses.) A New Mexico student shares a story about how she "did an internship at a different school that was a lot more—I just saw a dramatic difference where we actually got handed newspapers that were free like *The New York Times* or, you know, these different ones that really I—just because it was given to me, I read it and I felt informed. And there's also news programs that I could see going on at this school everywhere that kept me informed, you know, if I was walking by or even sat down to have a coffee for five minutes."

The result of these differences is likely to be an increasing polarization of Americans into civic participants and bystanders, those who have had opportunities to learn "how the system works" and those who have not. To make matters considerably worse, this study is limited to students currently enrolled at four-year colleges and universities, who are much more engaged and efficacious than their peers who have no college experience.
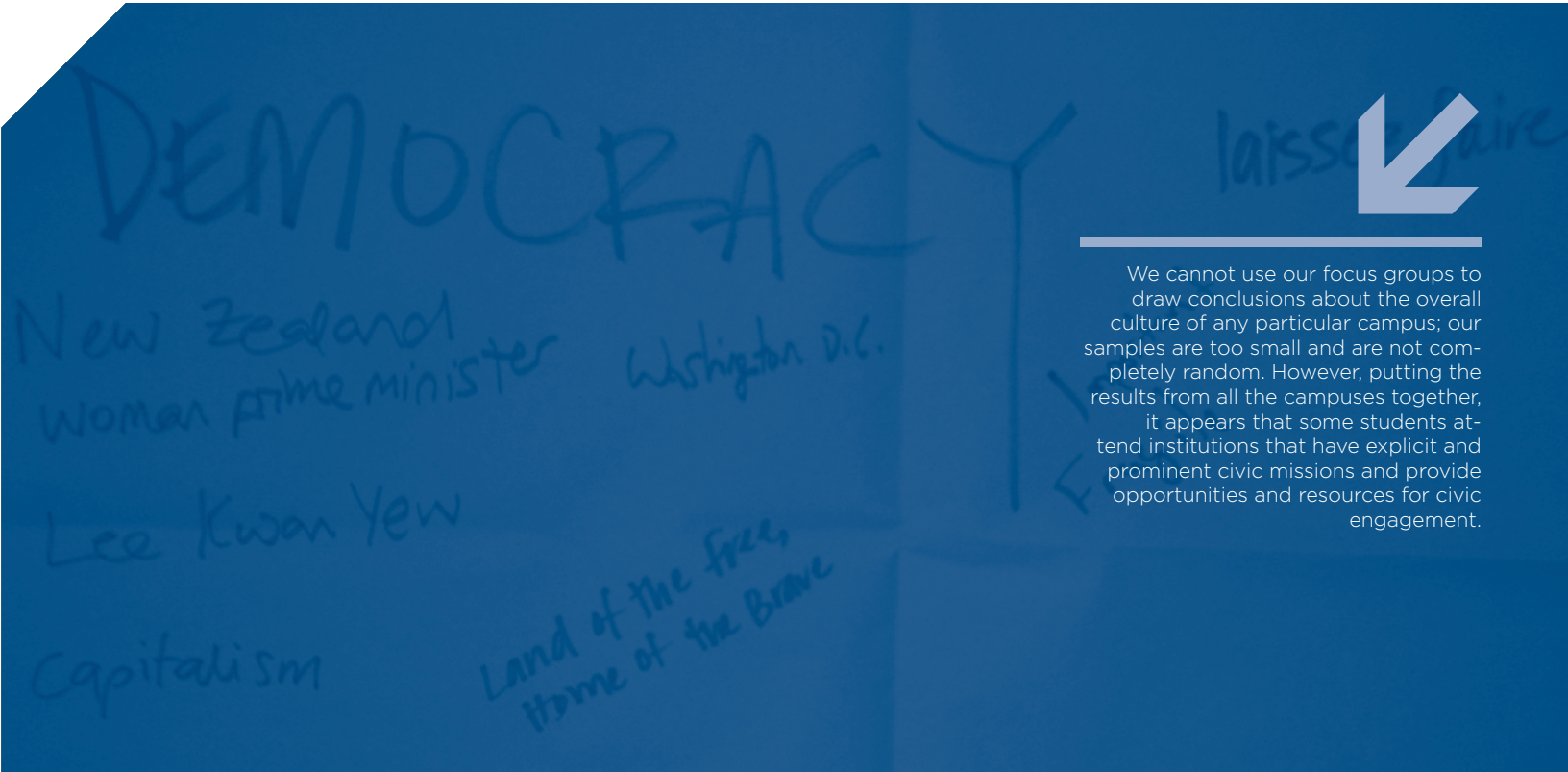
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"Politics right now, a lot of talk, no action."

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

All Students Need to have Opportunities for Civic and Political Participation, and

Students Need Opportunities and Space for Deliberation on Public Issues

FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS:

Non-College Youth

Opportunities on Other Campuses

Achieving a Civic Mission in Resource-Limited Contexts

Filtering the Media

RECOMMENDATIONS

All Students Need to have Opportunities for Civic and Political Participation and Students Need Opportunities and Space for Deliberation on Public Issues

OUR STUDY CANNOT prove that particular programs or policies would increase the quality and level of civic engagement on campuses. However, many of the problems that we identify in this report—for example, an overload of untrustworthy political information, confusion about formal political institutions, and uncertainty about how to achieve social change—could be mitigated if students had more opportunities to discuss current issues or had experiences that stimulated discussions. They especially need conversations that draw diverse participants and that are open and authentic, not dominated by people or organizations that have political agendas. Such opportunities are unevenly distributed—plentiful at some institutions but apparently quite rare elsewhere.

Specifically, students at elite private institutions and flagship state universities often mention their experiences engaging current public issues through discussion, internships, an academic project, or a student organization. For example, prominent campus visitors are stimuli to discussion and reflection. At Princeton, a student observes that undergraduates show up when Nobel Laureates and heads of state visit. (Attendance can be disappointing when less prominent people come to campus.) Meanwhile, at some of the less selective and less wealthy institutions, no student mentions any visitors or speakers at all.

Students report learning about and experiencing politics through courses on social issues; activist student groups; networks of friends; speakers on campus; and fliers, table tents, and chalk signs on sidewalks. Again, these experiences appear more common at institutions with a prominent civic mission than elsewhere. It would be well worth considering the introduction of courses on social issues at all colleges and universities as one outlet for political engagement, among many others.

We believe that if students were given more opportunities to discuss current events, many would respond enthusiastically. Several recent studies have argued that Americans are resistant to controversy. Therefore, they tend to avoid voluntary opportunities to exchange ideas with people who are different from them.[13]

Our study supports a different hypothesis: College students are hungry for a particular kind of conversation that is serious and authentic, involves diverse views, but is free of manipulation and "spin." They want discussions that are open-ended in the sense that everyone is truly trying to decide what should be done. In short, we see evidence that there is substantial demand for deliberation on college campuses.

13. Eliasoph, N. (1998). *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.; Hibbing, J.R. & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.; Mutz, D.C. (2006). *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative Versus Participatory Democracy*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

Non-College Youth • Opportunities on Other Campuses • Achieving a Civic Mission in Resource-Limited Contexts • Filtering the Media

OVER THE COURSE of conducting the focus groups many question arose that require more examination. We note a few broad areas here.

Non-College Youth

Roughly half of young Americans who are 18-to-25-years-old are not attending college.[14] This group deserves as much focus as college students. This study finds that institutional opportunities and resources are important to facilitating engagement. Young people who are not enrolled in an institution should also be offered structured opportunities for civic engagement.

Opportunities on Other Campuses

We intentionally limited this project to a focus on undergraduate students enrolled in four-year colleges and universities. There is much to be learned about student political engagement at other types of institution, such as two-year colleges, community colleges, and technical schools. An investigation of these campuses would test our finding that opportunities are largely dependent upon institution.

Achieving a Civic Mission in Resource-Limited Contexts

We speculate that the presence of civic and political opportunities on each campus is related to its civic mission, resources (for instance, endowment, tuition per student, state support) and its reputation (which allows institutions to draw from large applicant pools of students, staff, and faculty). That said, there is no institution in our sample that has an explicit civic mission but limited resources. An examination of such institutions would help us to understand whether a campus culture of engagement can be built without extensive resources.

Filtering the Media

It was very clear in the focus groups in this study that students can identify media "spin" and actively try to filter out what they see as unduly biased information. Much remains to be learned about what methods and sources students use to filter information. While many students say that they trust family and friends for reliable information, we do not know specifically where else they go to gain the information in order to develop informed opinions on particular issues.

14. Lopez, M.H. & Elrod, B.A. (October 2006). *CIRCLE Fact Sheet: College Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 18-to-25-Year-Olds*. College Park, MD: CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org).

In 2004, an estimated 53 percent of (or 15 million) 18-to-25-year-old U.S. citizens had college experience while an estimated 47 percent (13.4 million) had not attended college. This is an increase in the percent of young people who have college experience of more than seven percentage points since 1972. ***Source***: Lopez, M.H. & Elrod, B.A. (October 2006). CIRCLE Fact Sheet: College Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 18-to-25-Year-Olds. College Park, MD: CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org).

"Politics right now, a lot of talk, no action."

APPENDIX

Methodology

Demographics

Survey Toplines

APPENDIX
Methodology

THE FINDINGS IN this report are based on focus group discussions that occurred between October 2006 and July 2007. Pilot focus groups occurred at the University of Maryland College Park in May 2006. After the pilot, in June 2006, CIRCLE and the Kettering Foundation brought together students from many campuses to get their input on the focus group questions, language, and overall flow. Many of these students went on to help organize focus groups on their respective campuses.

Forty-seven focus groups were held, and a total of 386 students participated in the project. All focus group participants were 18-to-25-year-old undergraduates. Campuses were selected to represent a range of higher education institution types with as much geographic diversity as possible. Focus groups occurred on 12 four-year college campuses across the country:

BOWDOIN COLLEGE
KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
PROVIDENCE COLLEGE
TOUGALOO COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BERKELEY
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND COLLEGE PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA TWIN CITIES
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Each focus group lasted two hours. Students received compensation for participation, which they were made aware of at the time of recruitment. Students completed a brief survey at the end of the focus group (see questions in Survey Toplines).

CIRCLE worked directly with a team of students, staff, and faculty on each campus to construct a student recruitment strategy. The team's intimate knowledge of the specific campus culture was crucial to developing a group of students from each campus that represented a broad range of students. As a result, recruitment was tailored to each campus. A majority of campuses used a random list of students for recruitment obtained from the Registrar's Office on their campus. Many campus teams targeted campus organizations and groups in order to attract students from different corners of campus.

Focus groups occurred during the fall 2006 or spring 2007 semester with the exception of the University of New Mexico where focus groups occurred during the 2007 summer session.
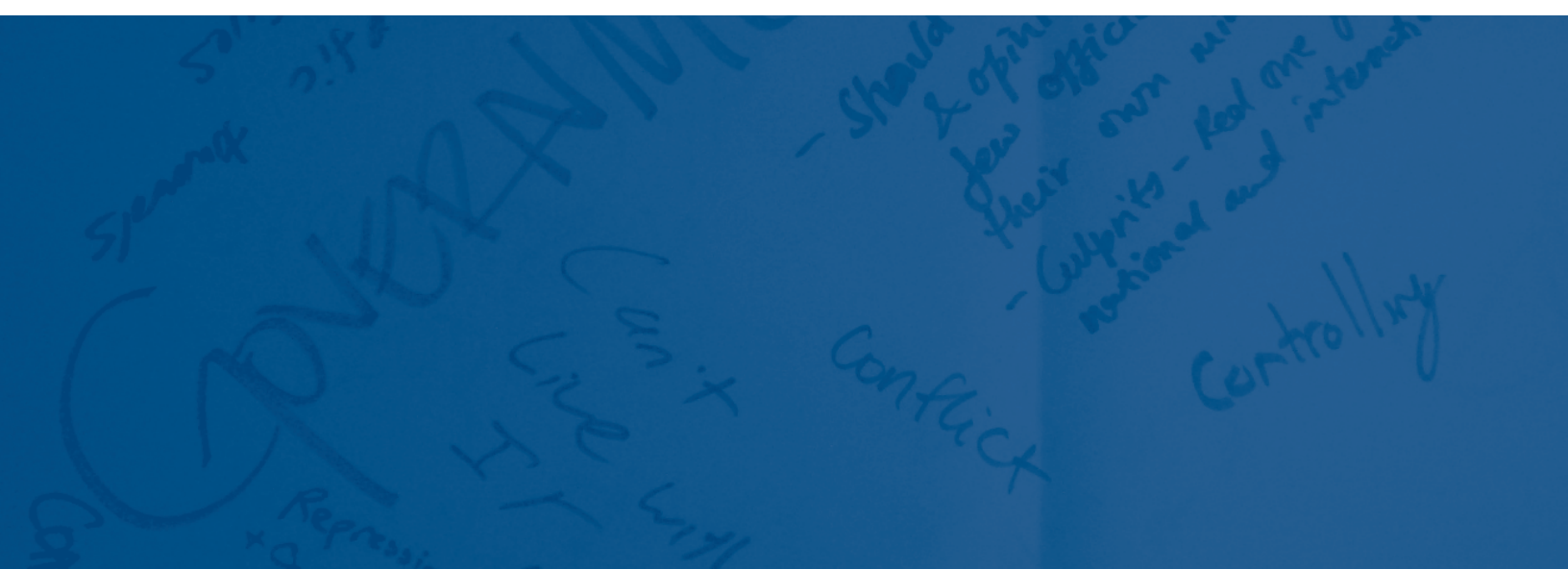
A SAMPLING OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WERE ASKED IN THE FOCUS GROUPS:

Have you ever volunteered your time for something? If yes, what?

Is there a public issue or cause that has really sparked your attention more so than others? Is there a public issue or cause that has motivated you to take action?

What factors influence your decisions to do more research on an issue, get involved in a group, take action or not to?

What do you see as the most fundamental purpose of the activities you have spoke of so far?

Do you think the activities that you have spoken of so far relate to public policy? If so, how?

Do you have informed perspectives on public and societal issues?

What public policies affect your life most on a regular basis and how did you learn about these policies? (Not campus-based policies)

What do you think college students think about politics?

Have you ever engaged in an act you think of as a political act? What was it? What made it political?

Do you think there's anything in your life that makes you more or less likely to follow or engage in the political system?

Do you think that it is more beneficial to address public issues by...volunteering, advocating for particular changes in the way government works, voting, organizing people, or giving money? Why? Would your answer change if 'effective' were used instead of 'beneficial'? If so, How? What is the least beneficial?

Do you think that the political system is addressing the genuine needs of the public?

Where would you say you learn about politics and the political system?

What has influenced or currently influences your opinions about politics and the political system?

How do you think your experiences in high school affect your engagement in college?

How do you learn about and experience politics on campus? What does your campus do and do you think it works? What more could your campus do to promote political engagement?

What is one thing that would make following or engaging in the political system more appealing to you? Why are you in favor of that?

Focus group participants also took part in two activities and discussed the results. In the first, students were all given a marker of the same color and were asked to put up on easel paper whatever came to mind when they saw the words: "government," "democracy," "common good," and "community." The second activity asked students to look through large stacks of images and pick the image that most represents what comes to mind when they hear the word "politics."

College attendance is highly correlated with voter participation. Since 1984, those who have completed college and those who are either enrolled in college or at least attended some college are more likely to vote than young people who have never attended college.
Source: *Lopez, M.H. & Elrod, B.A. (October 2006). CIRCLE Fact Sheet: College Attendance and Civic Engagement Among 18-to-25-Year-Olds. College Park, MD: CIRCLE (www. civicyouth.org).*
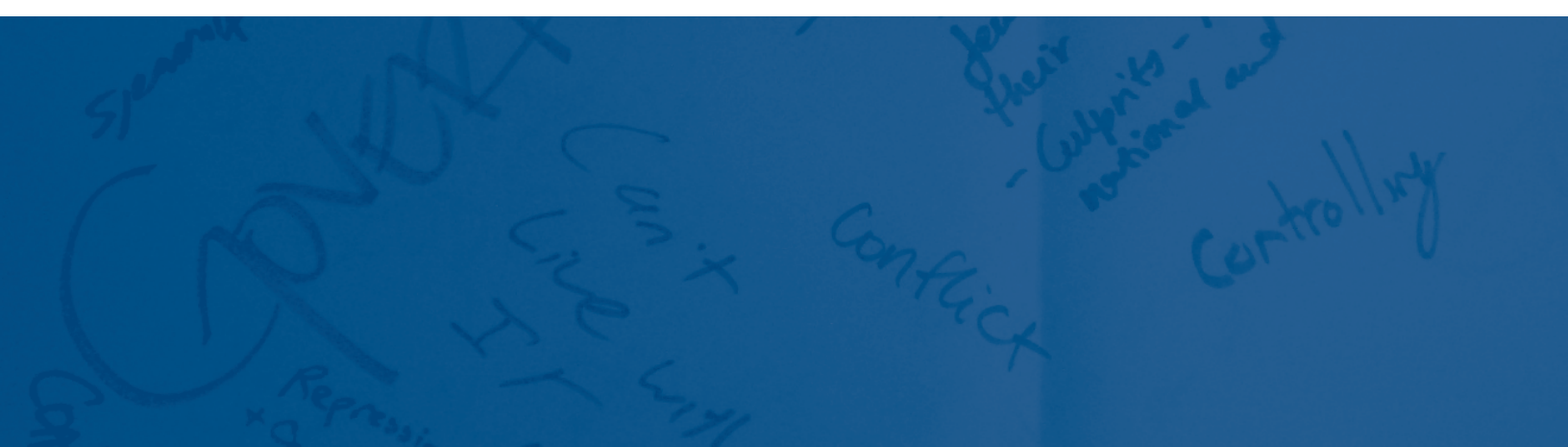
APPENDIX
Demographics

THE SAMPLE FOR this study included 386 undergraduate students participating in 47 focus groups on 12 campuses nationwide. As discussed in the methodology section, obtaining a nationally representative sample was a key concern during the recruitment process on each of the campuses. After assimilating all the demographic data taken from survey responses, the student demographics that made up this study were strikingly similar to the current four-year undergraduate population.

Obtaining nationally representative data is difficult in any research study, especially when that research is primarily based on qualitative analysis. These demographic similarities help to authenticate the students' voices and general findings heard throughout this study.

The chart to the right shows the demographic comparisons between the 2007 *Millennials Talk Politics* study with undergraduate demographics from the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey*, the *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study*, and the *Current Population Survey*.

	MTP*		CPHS^	NCES**	CPS^^
Gender					
Male	140	36%	48%	42%	44%
Female	242	63%	52%	58%	56%
Transgender	1	0%	0%	0%	
Other	1	0%	0%	0%	
Race/Ethnicity					
White	228	60%	62%	63%	68%
Black	38	10%	16%	14%	13%
Asian	41	11%	7%	6%	6%
Latino/Hispanic	28	7%	9%	13%	10%
Other	43	11%	3%	4%	3%
Don't Know	5	1%	2%	0%	0%
Year in College					
First	63	16%			22%
Second	96	25%			24%
Third	94	24%			29%
Fourth	104	27%			25%
Fifth	17	4%			
Other	10	3%			
Country of Birth					
Born in US	315	89%	90%		
Born Somewhere else	40	11%	8%		
Don't Know	2	1%	2%		
Authors' tabulations from the 2007 Millennials Talk Politics Study					
^Authors' tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey, weighted sample of all 15-to-25-year-old U.S. College Students					
**U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study					
^^Current Population Survey, Bureau of the Census, October 2005 Supplement					

APPENDIX

Survey Toplines

The charts below show the toplines from the survey given at the end of each focus group (identified as MTP) compared with the toplines of the 18-to-25-year-old undergraduate college student sample of the 2006 *Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey* (CPHS) conducted by CIRCLE. A portion of the differences can be explained by different survey methodologies. While the MTP survey was conducted on paper after each of the focus groups, the CPHS was conducted over the phone. Additionally, for the questions that asked students to choose between "statement #1" and "statement #2," the MTP paper survey listed every possible response, while the CPHS phone survey conductor only prompted the first two options; "depends," "both," and "neither" responses were grouped together and only recorded if the student volunteered such a response, unprompted by the survey conductor. Finally, students may have altered their views after spending two hours discussing civics and politics in the focus groups. This means that we have investigated student opinions after deliberation and reflection in groups, rather than raw responses.

1. Thinking about the problems you see in your community, how much difference do you believe you can personally make in working to solve the problems you see?

Question 1	MTP		CPHS	
Great Deal of Difference	74	19%	38	10%
Some Difference	174	45%	169	47%
A Little Difference	125	32%	120	33%
No Difference At All	9	2%	33	9%
Don't Know	4	1%	.31	0%

2. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

   Statement 1: It is my Responsibility to get involved to make things better for society.
   Statement 2: It is my Choice to get involved to make things better for society.

Question 2	MTP		CPHS	
Statement #1	124	32%	134	37%
Statement #2	83	22%	219	61%
Depends	39	10%	7	2%
Both	132	34%		
Neither	0	0%		
Don't Know	7	2%	0	0%
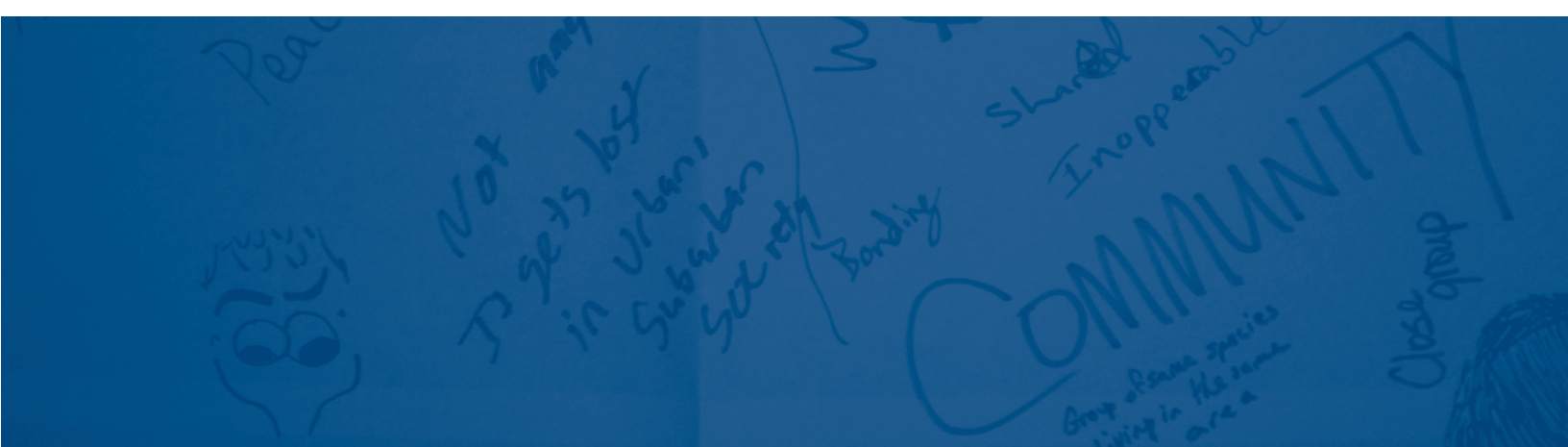
3. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement 1: Government should do more to solve problems.
Statement 2: Government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals.

Question 3	MTP		CPHS	
Statement #1	164	42%	222	62%
Statement #2	47	12%	121	34%
Depends	90	23%	15	4%
Both	45	12%		
Neither	21	5%		
Don't Know	19	5%	2	0%

4. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement 1: Politics is a way for the powerful to keep power to themselves.
Statement 2: Politics is a way for the less powerful to compete on equal footing with the powerful.

Question 4	MTP		CPHS	
Statement #1	161	42%	219	61%
Statement #2	47	12%	128	36%
Depends	76	20%	9	3%
Both	57	15%		
Neither	36	9%		
Don't Know	8	2%	4	1%
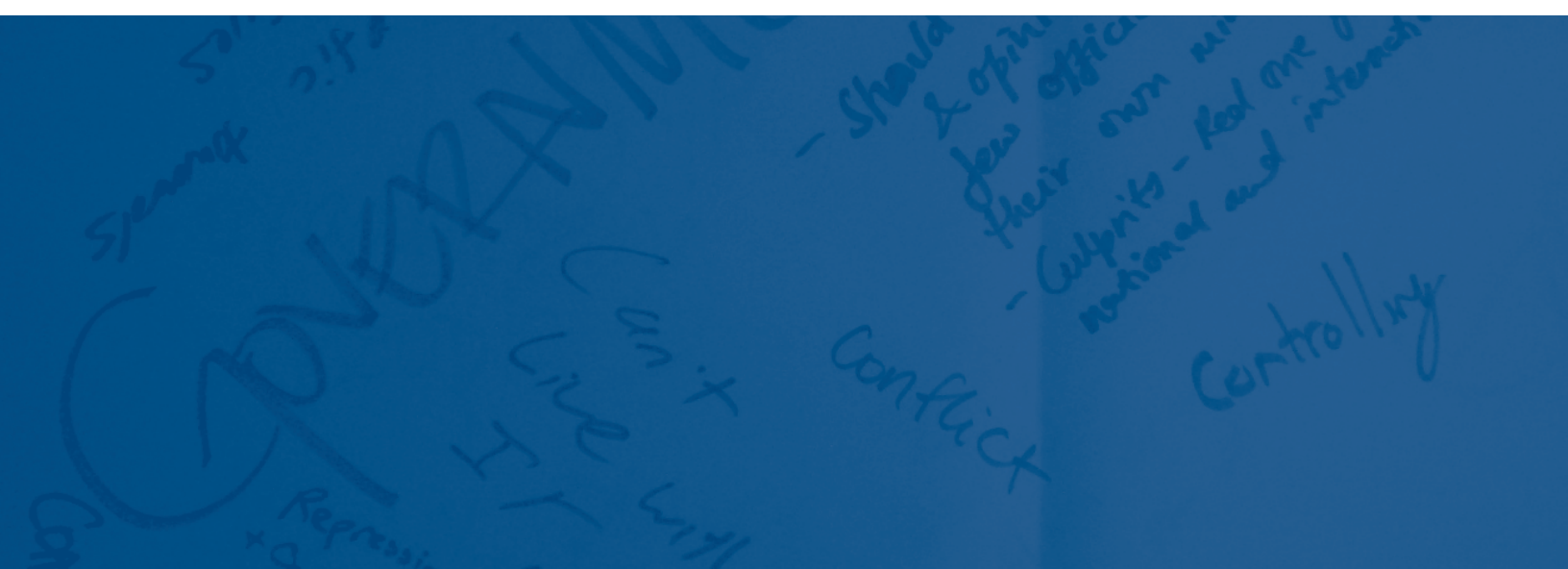
5. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement 1: The political system is filled with unnecessary conflict.
Statement 2: There are so many competing groups in politics that conflict is unavoidable.

Question 5	MTP		CPHS	
Statement #1	100	26%	165	46%
Statement #2	152	39%	187	52%
Depends	15	4%		
Both	98	25%	8	2%
Neither	16	4%		
Don't Know	4	1%	0	0%

6. How much difference does it make whether the Democrats control the government or the Republicans do?

Question 6	MTP		CPHS	
A Lot	124	32%	113	32%
Some Difference	144	37%	127	35%
A Little Difference	55	14%	40	11%
No Real Difference	40	10%	74	21%
Don't Know	22	6%	6	2%

7. On the whole, would you say the political system in this country is or is not responsive to the genuine needs of the public?

Question 7	MTP		CPHS	
Is Responsive	99	26%	109	30%
Not Responsive	227	60%	148	41%
Haven't Thought About It	28	7%	96	27%
Don't Know	27	7%	7	2%
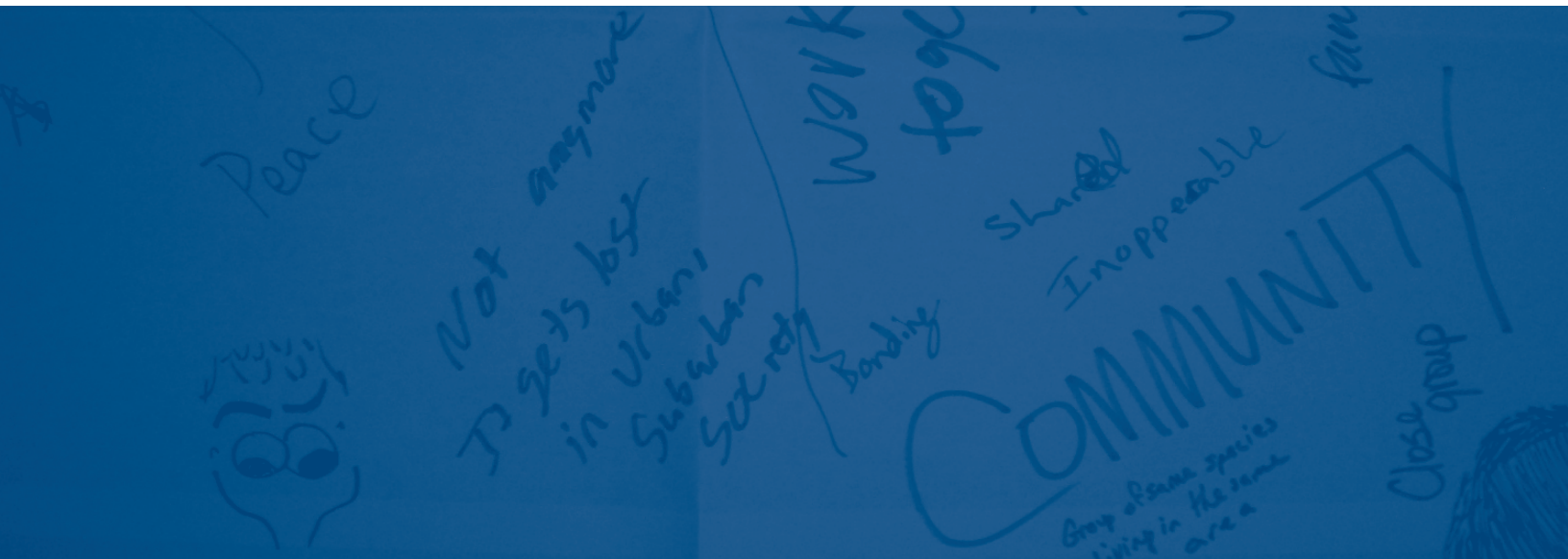
8. Thinking about problems in your community, how much difference do you believe that people working together as a group can make in solving problems you see?

Question 8	MTP		CPHS	
Great Deal of Difference	243	63%	154	43%
Some Difference	114	30%	153	43%
A Little Difference	24	6%	42	12%
No Difference At All	2	1%	11	3%
Don't Know	2	1%	1	0%

9. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement 1: My age group is unique and distinct form other generations.
Statement 2: There is nothing particularly unique or distinct about my age group.

Question 9	MTP		CPHS	
Statement #1	241	63%	237	66%
Statement #2	54	14%	118	33%
Depends	59	15%		
Both	18	5%	4	1%
Neither	4	1%		
Don't Know	9	2%	1	0%

10. Please read the following statements and choose which one you agree with more:

Statement 1: Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient.
Statement 2: Government often does a better job than people give it credit for.

Question 10	MTP		CPHS	
Statement #1	75	19%	173	48%
Statement #2	114	30%	168	47%
Depends	108	28%		
Both	47	12%	13	4%
Neither	30	8%		
Don't Know	10	3%	4	1%
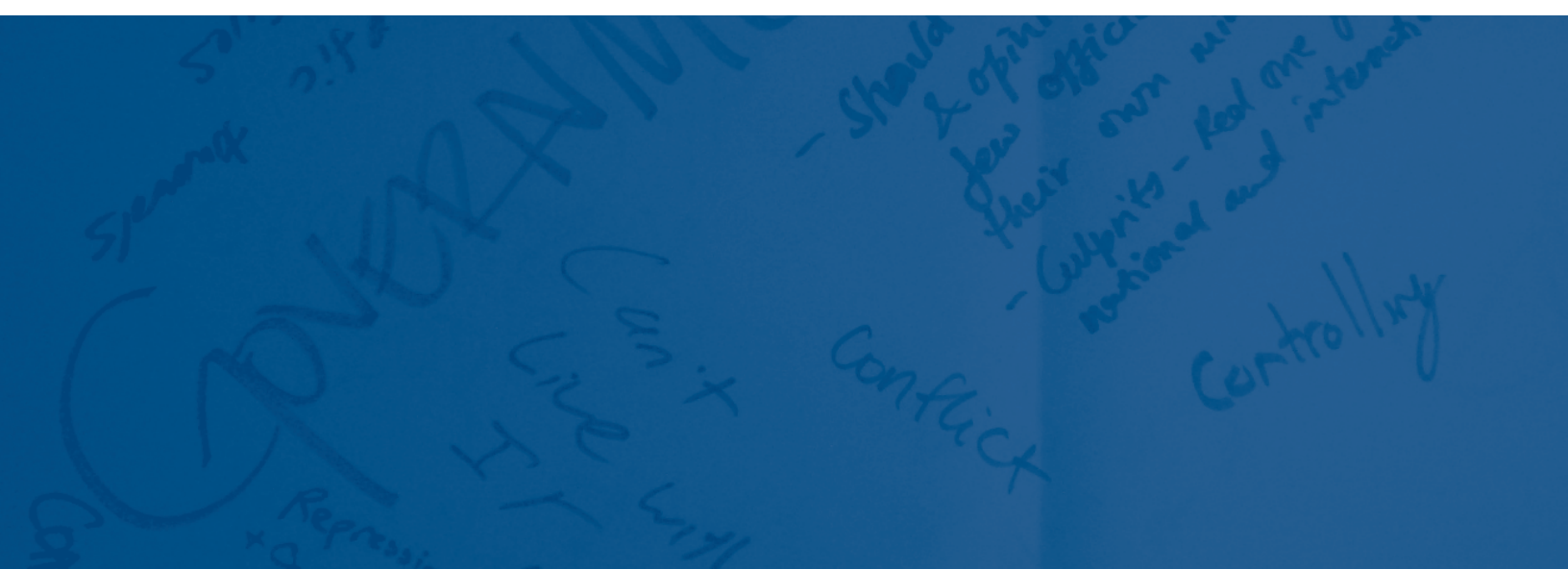
11. In politics today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?

Question 11	MTP		CPHS	
Democrat	154	40%	89	25%
Republican	47	12%	118	33%
Independent	89	23%	81	22%
Something Else/Other	52	13%	32	9%
Don't Know/No Opinion	43	11%	33	9%

12. In general, would you describe your political views as…

Question 12	MTP		CPHS	
Very Conservative	8	2%	19	5%
Conservative	42	11%	79	22%
Moderate	128	33%	164	46%
Liberal	115	30%	59	16%
Very Liberal	62	16%	29	8%
Don't Know	28	7%	6	2%

13. Do you see volunteering and/or community service activities as… (Choose One)

Question 13	MTP		CPHS	
A Form of Politics	63	17%	-	-
An Alternative to Politics	41	11%	-	-
A Complement to Politics	191	51%	-	-
Nothing To Do With Politics	82	22%	-	-

51 percent of focus group participants view volunteering and/or community service activities as a complement to politics. 22 percent believe it has nothing to do with politics.
Source: *Survey of Millennials Talk Politics Focus Group Participants 2007*

14. Were you born in the United States, or in another country?

Question 14	MTP		CPHS	
Born in US	339	88%	324	90%
Born Somewhere Else	44	11%	30	8%
Don't Know	2	1%	6	2%

15. Do you consider yourself to be Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, some other religion, atheist, or agnostic?

Question 15	MTP		CPHS	
Catholic	97	25%	84	23%
Protestant	107	28%	157	44%
Jewish	22	6%	4	1%
Muslim	5	1%	7	2%
Other	47	12%	49	14%
Atheist/Agnostic	79	21%	32	9%
Don't Know	26	7%	17	5%

16. Do you consider yourself a Christian?

Question 16	MTP		CPHS	
No	145	38%	17	29%
Yes	222	58%	41	69%
Don't Know	18	5%	1	1%
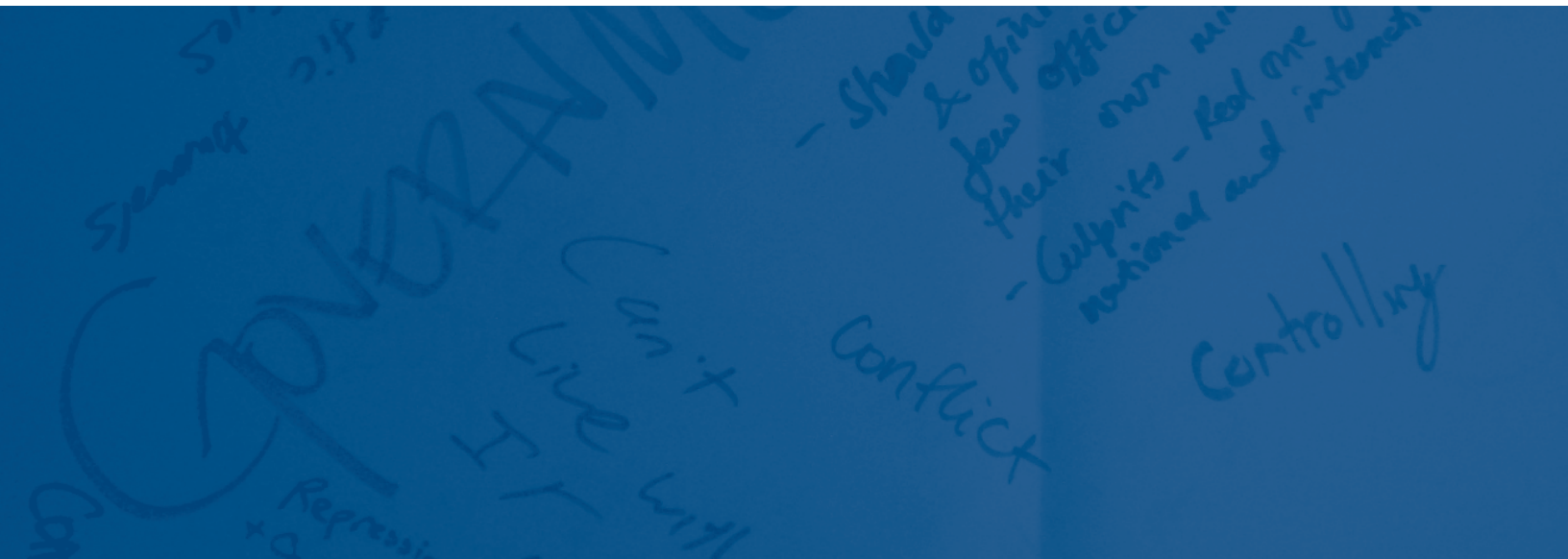
16b. If you answered yes to the above question, would you describe yourself as a born again or evangelical Christian?

Question 16b	MTP		CPHS	
No	125	38%	140	55%
Yes	70	30%	104	41%
Don't Know	39	17%	10	4%

17. Are you married, living as married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?

Question 17	MTP		CPHS	
Married	6	2%	26	7%
Living as Married	7	2%	22	6%
Widowed	1	0%	0	0%
Divorced	0	0%	1	0%
Separated	0	0%	4	1%
Never Been Married	364	95%	296	82%
Don't Know	4	1%	1	0%

18. Are you now employed full-time, part-time, or not employed?

Question 18	MTP		CPHS	
Full-Time	23	6%	114	32%
Part-Time	227	59%	136	38%
Not Employed	132	34%	76	21%
Don't Know	3	1%	-	-

59 percent of focus group participants are employed part-time. Six percent are employed full-time while 34 percent are not employed.
Source: *Survey of Millennials Talk Politics Focus Group Participants 2007*

19.   Were your parents born in the United States or in another country?

Question 19	MTP		CPHS	
Both in US	255	70%	279	78%
One in US/ One Another Country	34	9%	25	7%
Both in Another Country	76	21%	46	13%

20.   What was the last year of school your mother completed? If a stepmother or some other female relative raised you, please answer for that person.

Question 20	MTP		CPHS	
No High School	6	2%	11	3%
Some High School	16	4%	18	5%
High School Graduate	43	11%	74	21%
Some College	68	18%	107	30%
College Graduate	143	37%	92	26%
Grad or Professional School	102	26%	36	10%
Don't Know	7	2%	12	3%

21.   What was the last year of school your father completed? If a stepfather or some other male relative raised you, please answer for that person.

Question 21	MTP		CPHS	
No High School	15	4%	-	-
Some High School	15	4%	-	-
High School Graduate	33	9%	-	-
Some College	56	15%	-	-
College Graduate	107	28%	-	-
Grad or Professional School	148	38%	-	-
Don't Know	10	3%	-	-
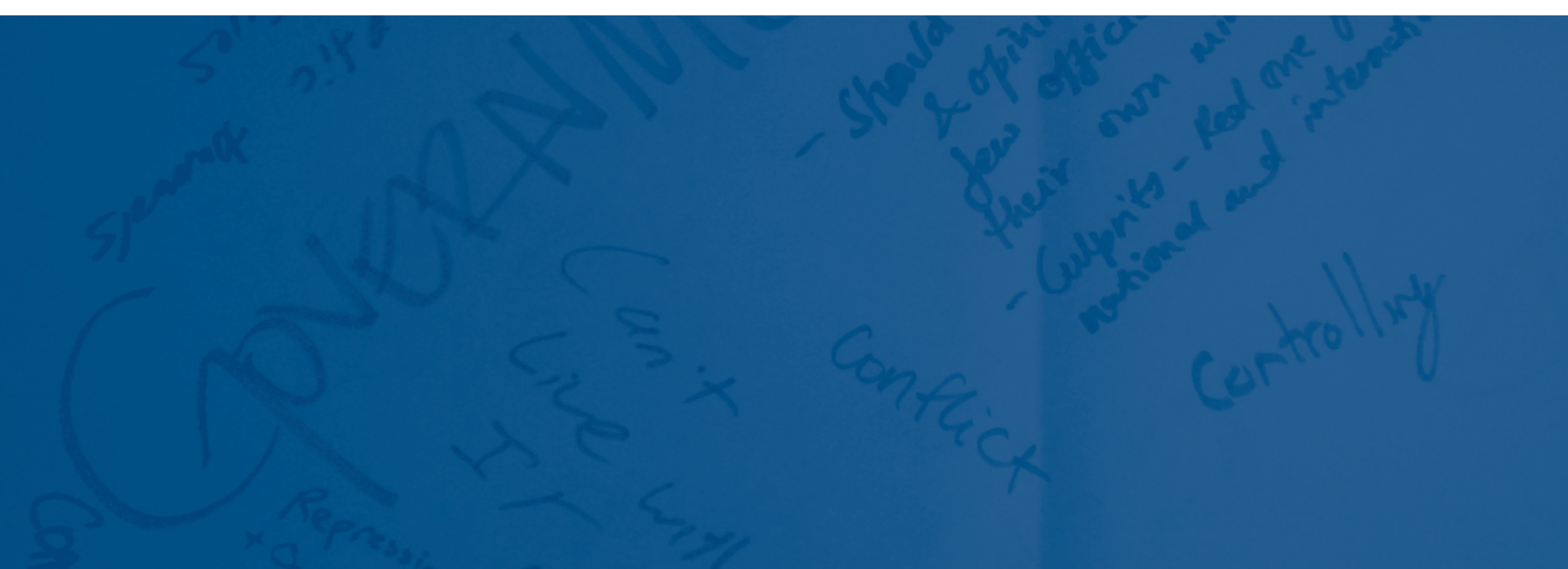
22. What is your race?

Question 22	MTP		CPHS	
White	228	59%	224	62%
Black	38	10%	60	17%
Asian	41	11%	26	7%
Latino/Hispanic	28	7%	31	9%
Other	43	11%	11	3%
Don't Know	5	1%	9	2%

23. Do you personally know or work with someone who is gay or lesbian?

Question 23	MTP		CPHS	
No	27	7%	120	33%
Yes	348	90%	221	61%
Don't Know	10	3%	8	2%

23b. If you answered yes above, is that person yourself, a member of your family, a close friend, co-worker, or an acquaintance? (Check all that apply.)*

Question 23b	MTP		CPHS	
Family	49	13%	110	17%
Close Friend	183	47%	219	43%
Co-Worker	43	11%	195	27%
Acquaintance	144	37%	222	41%
Self	18	5%	21	3%
Other	39	10%	16	2%
Don't Know	3	1%	-	-

*Note: Chart displays frequencies of number of times each category was checked and percentages indicate what percent of all 386 respondents checked each category.

90 percent of focus group participants personally know or work with someone who is gay or lesbian.
Source: Survey of Millennials Talk Politics Focus Group Participants 2007

24. What year in school are you?

Question 24	MTP		CPHS	
First	63	16%	-	-
Second	96	25%	-	-
Third	94	24%	-	-
Fourth	104	27%	-	-
Fifth	17	4%	-	-
Other	10	3%	-	-

25. What is your gender?

Question 25	MTP		CPHS	
Male	140	36%	173	48%
Female	242	63%	187	52%
Transgender	1	0%	-	-
Other	1	0%	-	-

26. What is your major?

5 Most Popular Majors	MTP		CPHS	
1. Political Science/ Government	47	13%	-	-
2. Psychology	31	8%	-	-
3. English	26	7%	-	-
4. Biochemistry	16	4%	-	-
5. Engineering	15	4%	-	-
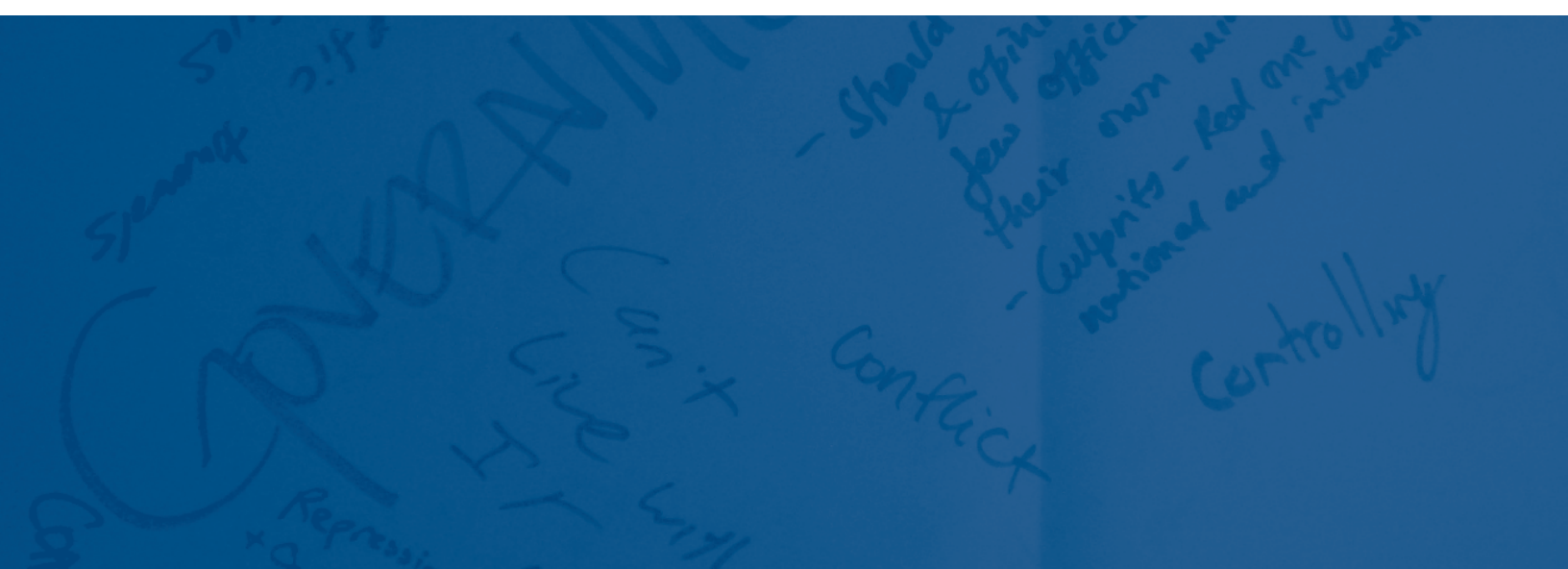
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