



LIFELONG READERS: driving civic engagement

AN NAA FOUNDATION RESEARCH STUDY

Newspapers Play a Role in Encouraging
Young People to Get Involved With Their Communities





“I don’t think it is that teens are disinterested in politics or don’t want to know about it, but the two-party system is just not set up for our generation. Our generation is a much more independent generation.”

~ TRICIA FAULKNER ~

Young People Are Turned off by Politics? Not These Teens

Tricia Faulkner joined the staff of The Voice, the teen section of The State Journal-Register in Springfield, Ill., when she was 14 years old and a high school freshman. She was interested in writing when she applied for the staff, but not in newspapers.

As soon as Faulkner started working for The Voice, however, she started reading both the teen section and the rest of the newspaper. Before long, she turned into a news and political junkie.

“That’s when I started having my daily ‘NewYorkTimes.com’ binges. When I started reading more, I became more interested in politics,” says Faulkner, now 18, a 2007 graduate of Springfield High School who is majoring in journalism and Middle Eastern studies at Northwestern University.

In her senior year of high school, Faulkner served as a page for the Illinois State Senate. With two friends, she co-founded Springfield High’s chapter of Junior State of America, an organization devoted to preparing students for lifelong involvement and responsible leadership in a democratic society. The chapter sponsored debates on various current affairs topics, including the Iraq war, gun control and laws banning smoking in restaurants.

She disagrees with those who say young people are turned off by politics.

“I don’t think it is that teens are disinterested in politics or don’t want to know about it, but the two-party system is just not set up for our generation,” she says. “Our generation is a much more independent generation. A couple of people in our JSA chapter say they are anarchists, and two are libertarians. Of course, you are talking about youth, and you are going to have a good majority not interested in politics or civic matters.”

Abigail Vanim, 17, a correspondent for Voices at the Reading (Pa.) Eagle, says she understands why many of her fellow teens are skeptical about the current political system, but she has little time for those who won’t get involved.

“Teen-agers right away are prone to thinking that all authority is bad,” Vanim says. “When someone tells me to do something or not [to] do something, I am going to do the opposite or at least consider doing the opposite because it has been told to me. The system now has a lot of flaws, but most things have flaws. It angers me when teen-agers complain about what is wrong with the system when we could be fixing it.

“We are the next generation,” she adds. “If we sit around and talk about it and don’t do anything, we are as much to blame as anyone else. We need to take a proactive role. I am registering to vote as soon as I am 18. Most of my friends are registering to vote. They want to vote and take part in things.”

Rachel Molenda, 18, a 2007 graduate of South Charleston (W.Va.) High School, also has been active in politics. But right now, she says, “I’m not happy with either political party, mostly from the standpoint that I feel one political party isn’t doing things that I morally agree with, and the other one isn’t doing anything at all.”

However, the former photographer for FlipSide at The Charleston (W.Va.) Gazette aims to participate in the 2008 presidential campaign.

“I think you can be active even if you are disillusioned with both parties,” says Molenda, now a student at Shepherd University. “You just have to talk to people and voice your opinions. I will be voting. The politicians don’t know what to do unless you tell them what you think.”

“Lifelong Readers: Driving Civic Engagement” was undertaken by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation to examine the role of newspapers in developing and shaping future community leaders.

This research is part of a continuing initiative aimed at helping newspapers attract and keep young readers.

In 2006, a related study conducted for the NAA Foundation by MORI Research of Minneapolis provided the first solid evidence that newspaper content for teens has the ability to attract young people to the printed word and keep them as newspaper readers as they age.

Now, the NAA Foundation is looking at how the use of newspapers in the classroom, the use of newspapers for homework assignments and access to a teen section or teen-focused content in newspapers encourages young people to get involved in volunteer work to better their communities, and to remain civically engaged as adults.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of newspapers in shaping positive future

habits – in this case, the types of constructive actions that make solid contributions to the community as a whole.

In this report, the NAA Foundation and MORI Research have moved beyond the traditional focus on voting rates to measure civic involvement. Although the voting rate among young adults has increased in recent years, they still have the lowest turnout of all age groups. Yet the number of young people volunteering and engaging in significant efforts to better communities is higher than ever.

Because of that seeming contradiction, we decided to look beyond voter turnout to find the true measure of commitment to community and civic engagement. As you review these findings, you will find it heartening that young adults are indeed demonstrating the traits of solid citizens, regardless of voter turnout rates, and newspapers are helping to make that happen.



“Recent research suggests that newspapers play an important role in helping all readers — young and older — become active and informed citizens. Young readers first learn about their community and about public issues through such reading. We learn about elections, candidates and public issues from newspapers in more depth than from other media. Along with a sound education in civics and government, newspapers are an essential resource in guiding the younger generation to fulfill their civic responsibilities.”

SANDRA DAY O’CONNOR :: Associate Justice (Retired), U.S. Supreme Court



“I had a very comfortable, lucky childhood, and I think it is a responsibility to give back if you are in such a position.”

~ THAIS-LYN TRAYER ~

Former Teen Writer Uses Her Journalism Experience in Peace Corps Work

Thais-Lyn Trayer, a Peace Corps volunteer in the Republic of Georgia, is drawing upon her experience as a writer for her local newspaper’s teen section to teach young people the art of critical thinking, a skill that was not particularly encouraged in the former Soviet Union.

Trayer, 23, recently started a journalism club with her host sister. She asks students to choose topics to write about, and then helps them figure out how best to get information on those topics. Often, she brings in experts in students’ fields of interest for question-and-answer sessions.

“We teach them the vocabulary to use, help them write, [to] ask open-ended questions and the right questions, and even work on skills like note-taking during interviews and typing at a computer,” she says.

Trayer, a 2006 graduate of New York University, says the impetus for the club was her work for Voices, the teen section of the Reading (Pa.) Eagle.

“To me, journalism was such a great learning experience – how to ask questions, interact with people – and I can use that now to help my students,” she says.

While in high school, Trayer was active in several education-related programs and also participated in various extracurricular activities. But it wasn’t until college that her volunteer work really took off.

“I tutored other students and worked for international organizations and for political campaigns,” she says. “I worked for the John Kerry campaign and I worked at the United Nations for a year, and then I worked for the former head of the New York City housing system.”

When she returned to teach at the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for International Studies, which she attended in high school, Trayer talked to a number of former Peace Corps volunteers, and they convinced her to join the Peace Corps after college.

Trayer plans to enroll in law school after her two-year stint in the Peace Corps. Whatever the future brings, she says, volunteering will always be part of her life.

“I had a very comfortable, lucky childhood, and I think it is a responsibility to give back if you are in such a position. I am interested in international politics and law. Wherever that field may take me, I want to be of service to other people.”

Voter turnout among young people ages 18 to 29 increased for the second major election in a row, according to a report on the 2006 mid-term elections from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. But that age group is still the least likely to show up at the polls.

Low voter turnout often is taken as *prima facie* evidence that young people are turned off by the political process and, by extension, civic affairs. In fact, that same group of young adults has a tremendously high volunteer rate, and that generation – known as “Generation Y” or “The Millennials”^{*} – is actively involved in a number of civic activities that make important contributions to communities.

The Newspaper Association of America Foundation, in its continuing effort to gauge the long-term impact of programs that encourage newspaper reading among children and teens, contracted with MORI Research of Minneapolis to study the role of newspapers in fostering a commitment to civic involvement among young adults.

Between May 15 and June 3, 2007, MORI Research conducted telephone interviews with 1,506 young adults between the ages of 25 and 34 to find out about their volunteer activities and their involvement in politics and public affairs. The research sought to determine whether their use of newspapers in the classroom or at home may have affected their civic commitment.

To measure civic engagement, this study looked at three areas:

- **Civic activities** that focus on improving the local community, primarily by volunteer work and fund-raising

- **Voice activities** that offer people a way to speak their minds and make their feelings known on political and social issues
- **Voting behavior**, which includes not only actual voting, but also the degree of involvement in campaigns as measured by support of candidates and activity aimed at encouraging others to vote.

Respondents were asked about 26 separate activities involving volunteering in their communities or contributing resources, expressing themselves in public forums on social or political issues, and participating in election campaigns.

The link to newspapers was established by responses from people who remembered newspapers being used in their high school classes, those who had homework assignments that included reading newspapers, and those who remembered reading or looking at teen-focused content in their local newspapers.

The findings are clear: Programs that encourage newspaper reading by teens also facilitate civic engagement 10 to 15 years later when the young people have moved beyond high school and/or college and are taking their place in their communities. The impact of newspapers on future civic engagement is more pronounced if the respondents had two or more of the newspaper-related experiences as teens.

News-related activities, such as talking about current events during the teen years with parents and peers, also have a significant impact on a person’s later involvement in and knowledge of public affairs.

In addition, the use of online news sources as teens is a strong predictor of future civic engagement. This is more pronounced for those ages 25 to 29 than those ages 30 to 34, primarily because the Internet was not such a dominant force during high school for the older group. For example, 38 percent of the 25- to 29-year-olds visited online news sites as teens, compared with 11 percent of the 30- to 34-year-olds.

The message for newspapers is equally clear:

- Find ways to ensure that teens are encouraged to use newspapers in both classrooms and homework assignments, and reach out to the same group with teen content
- Encourage and promote discussions of current events between teens and their parents or guardians, as well as with other teens
- Give the newspaper Web site the same priority as the print product, because young people are turning more and more to online for their news.

By taking these steps, not only will newspapers be more likely to develop a solid core of future readers, but their communities also will benefit from the efforts and commitment of those young adults to make their world a better place.

^{*} Age definitions for Generation Y/The Millennials vary. MORI Research currently uses ages 11-30 for this group.



“Young voters don’t vote because candidates don’t talk about their issues, and candidates don’t talk about their issues because young people don’t vote. In order for younger people to be recognized as a power in politics, they are going to have to start voting.”

~ JUSTIN WILSON ~

‘I Looked Forward to My First Vote’

At 28, Justin Wilson is the newest member of the Alexandria (Va.) City Council, winning a special election in July 2007 with 52 percent of the vote. He is married and has a 2½-year-old son, enough to keep him plenty busy outside of politics.

But before his win, Wilson’s résumé already included a list of volunteer and political activities that would be amazing for someone twice his age:

- President of his civic association in the Alexandria neighborhood of Del Ray
- An appointee to the Virginia Board of Juvenile Justice, and before that, a member of the Governor’s Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice
- Chairman of the board overseeing Alexandria’s bus system
- Board member of a small nonprofit organization that serves low-income adults
- A member of the Alexandria Commission on Information Technology.

“I have a very understanding wife,” he says with a laugh.

Wilson has volunteered and been involved in political activities since he was a youngster.

“My dad was involved in politics when I was very young, and he kind of dragged me into it,” he says. “Both of my parents were federal employees. Politics and public service – we talked a great deal about it at the dinner table, and it was part of our family life.”

Wilson also was an avid newspaper reader and television news watcher as a youth, and he recalls using the newspaper as a classroom tool.

“I was very much a news junkie as a kid,” he recalls. “Some of my earliest memories are watching the news at home. I loved current events and following the news, reading both the newspaper and watching the television news.

“I’m quite certain that in school, we had to report on different newspaper articles we read. And in government class, we had to read articles from *The Economist* and report on those. We had to use both periodicals and newspapers in our classes,” adds Wilson, who attended Robert E. Lee High School in Springfield, Va.

His youthful devotion to newspapers and current events has continued as an adult, but it is now the Internet that primarily supplies his news. “There are

probably five or six newspaper Web sites I check out throughout the day,” he says. “I am still quite a news junkie.”

He finds it unfortunate that young adults in his age range have such a low voting percentage.

“I think it is kind of a chicken-and-egg thing,” he says. “Young voters don’t vote because candidates don’t talk about their issues, and candidates don’t talk about their issues because young people don’t vote. In order for younger people to be recognized as a power in politics, they are going to have to start voting. Elected officials are a clever bunch. If their survival depends on certain issues, they are going to talk about those issues.”

The best way to spark an interest in politics is through “political socialization at home,” Wilson says.

“I looked forward to my first vote, and my parents voted in every single election. It was just not an option. You always voted,” he says. “I worry that parents are not raising their children with that kind of commitment. But this I can tell you: When my son turns 18, he will certainly be out at the polls, or there will be a serious problem!”

attitudes about civic engagement

Analysis of historical data by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement has found that Millennials are more active in volunteerism than the Generation Xers who preceded them, and that the Millennials take their responsibilities seriously.*

More than half of the survey respondents (52 percent) said participation in civic activities was “very important” to them, and 43 percent said participation in those activities was “somewhat important.” Only 5 percent said civic involvement was “not very” or “not at all important.”

The 95 percent who consider civic participation to be “very” or “somewhat” important cited these benefits of civic activities and volunteering:

- Enable them to get involved in the community (36 percent)
- Let them help others or make a difference (26 percent)
- Let them be more aware of the government and the way the world works (13 percent)
- Enable them to be a voice or catalyst for change (11 percent)
- Give them a learning experience and/or a good way to teach children (6 percent)
- Keep them grounded (5 percent).

Slightly more than two-thirds of those questioned also said they believed their activities were making a difference in solving community problems. Twenty-three percent said they thought civic participation could make a “big difference,” while 45 percent said it could make a “moderate difference.”

Among those who said they did not engage in volunteering or other civic activities, the most common reasons for not participating were having other priorities, being too busy, lacking personal resources or having doubts about what could be accomplished.

Not only do young adults volunteer, but many also follow news about government and public affairs (although not to the extent typical of older adults). Nearly three-fourths said they follow government and public affairs news “most of the time” (33 percent) or “some of the time” (41 percent). Those who said they currently read a newspaper at least four days weekly are well above those averages, as are frequent consumers of online news.

Those who said they believe that civic participation is important and that their work can make a difference are the most likely to volunteer and follow the news. Forty percent of those individuals said they follow government and public affairs news most of the time, compared with 26 percent of the other respondents.

Although men are more likely than women to follow public affairs in the news, women are more likely to say it is important to be active in civic affairs.

* MORI Research defines Generation X as those currently between the ages of 31 and 42.



“I think it is a matter of newspapers putting a lot more creative energy into attracting teens and the need to have some teens involved in thinking about the content as well as producing it. I think that is a battle that is winnable. Drawing teens to news, both in the newspaper and the newspaper’s online area, is a rich area. It just needs to be better mined.”

KAREN BROWN DUNLAP, PH.D. :: President and Managing Director, The Poynter Institute, St. Petersburg

giving time and money

Almost all respondents reported doing some volunteering or donating at some point in their lives, and three-fourths did so in the last year. “Past year” statistics are the best indicator of current behavior.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents said they had volunteered or engaged in community service for no pay at some point in their lives for projects such as tutoring or youth mentoring, community improvement, arts, political or environmental work, charitable efforts or disaster relief. Forty-six percent said they had done so in the past year.

The same number, 78 percent, reported donating money to a group or an association involved in civic activities at some point in their lives, with 62 percent donating money in the past year.

The next most popular civic activities were walking, running, riding a bicycle or donating blood for a charitable cause (66 percent ever, 27 percent in the past year), and volunteering for a religious group or organization (59 percent ever, 35 percent in the past year). Nearly half also reported “doing anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause besides donating money” (48 percent ever, 25 percent in the past year).

The research shows that volunteerism is the leading type of civic participation that carries over from the teen years to young adulthood. Sixty percent of the survey participants said they had volunteered as teens. Of that group, 62 percent said they had been involved in volunteer activities in the past year.

Teen involvement in charity walks, runs, biking or blood donation drives or working informally to solve a community problem also tended to continue into young adulthood for around half of the respondents.

Individuals who said they had experience with newspapers as teens, either in conjunction with their class studies and homework or with special teen content, were more likely than the average respondent to engage in civic activities. Seventy-five percent of all respondents said they used newspapers in classrooms while in high school, and 58 percent recalled using newspapers on homework assignments. Twenty percent of the total said they saw or read teen sections or teen pages in their local newspapers.

Individuals who said they used newspapers for both classroom work and homework had a higher volunteer rate than those who did neither.

Teen readership of newspapers also promotes volunteerism among young adults. Those who said they read both their local newspaper and that paper’s teen section as teens were more likely to have engaged in volunteer civic activities in the past year than those who read only the newspaper or the teen section as teens. Members of the “both” group also have volunteered more often than those who read neither a newspaper nor a teen section.

The impact on future volunteerism soars when teens have all three newspaper-related experiences. For example, 74 percent of young adults who used newspapers in the classroom, used newspapers for homework and read a teen section as teens said they had donated money to a civic cause in the past year, compared with 51 percent who had no newspaper contact. Sixty-two percent of the young adults who had the three newspaper experiences as teens said they had volunteered or done community service during the past year, compared with only 37 percent who had no newspaper experience as teens.

Civic Indicators: Volunteering and Donating

ACTIVITY	Ever	Past Year	As Teens*
Net Any	94%	78%	72%
Donated money to any groups or associations	78	62	--
Volunteered or done community service for no pay for organizations such as those supporting school or youth activities, tutoring, community improvement, arts organizations, political groups, environmental organizations, charities, disaster relief or other groups of this nature	78	46	60
Personally walked, ran, bicycled or donated blood for a charitable cause	66	27	45
Volunteered for a religious group or organization	59	35	--
Worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community	49	22	46
Done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause besides donating money	48	25	--
Been an active member of any community or national voluntary groups	43	23	--
Served on a committee or as an officer for a local voluntary group or organization	22	11	--
AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES	4.4	2.5	1.5

Base: total :: *Not all questions asked for teen years.

Past Year Civic Activities by Number of Teen-Oriented Newspaper Programs

(Newspapers in classroom, newspapers as homework, read teen section)

ACTIVITY (Past Year)	Total	None (16%)	One (28%)	Two (44%)	Three (12%)
Donated money to any groups or associations	62%	<u>51%</u>	<u>56%</u>	66%*	74%*
Volunteered or done community service for no pay for organizations such as those supporting school or youth activities, tutoring, community improvement, arts organizations, political groups, environmental organizations, charities, disaster relief or other groups of this nature	46	<u>37</u>	<u>40</u>	50*	62*
Volunteered for a religious group or organization	35	<u>26</u>	34*	36*	48*
Done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause, besides donating money	25	<u>19</u>	22	27*	35*
Personally walked, ran, bicycled or donated blood for a charitable cause	27	22	26*	26*	36*
Been an active member of any community or national voluntary groups	23	<u>17</u>	<u>17</u>	26*	31*
Worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community	22	<u>17</u>	21	22	35*
Served on a committee or as an officer for a local voluntary group or organization	11	8	9	11	16*
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE BY ACTIVITY	31.4	24.6	28.1	33.0	42.1
ANY ACTIVITY	78	69	74	81	89

Base: total :: Bold numbers indicate statistically higher than other respondents (0.05 level); underlined numbers are below average. :: *Significantly different than "none."

voice and civic expression

Expressing an opinion publicly on matters of public interest is a second form of civic engagement. Writing a letter to a public official or to the newspaper, signing a petition, attending a rally, calling a talk show, posting viewpoints about political or social issues in a blog and using the power of the purse to support or reject a particular product all involve expressing an opinion.

Asked about various forms of civic expression, 84 percent said they had engaged in such activity at some point in their lives, with 68 percent having done so in the past year. Thirty-nine percent said they engaged in civic expression during their teen years.

Signing a petition about a political or social issue and boycotting a product based on disagreement with the social or political values of the company that produces it were the most likely forms of civic expression overall, with slightly more than 60 percent saying they had done these activities at some point.

However, in terms of current activity, boycotting a product or buying something out of support for the company that produces it were the two most likely activities in the past year at 45 percent and

43 percent, respectively. Signing a petition, selected by 31 percent, was the third most likely “voice” activity in the past year.

Young adults who used newspapers in the classroom and newspapers for homework assignments were more likely to engage in civic expression than those who did neither.

Teen readership of newspapers or newspaper teen sections also increased the likelihood of continuing “voice activities” as young adults. And the 12 percent of young adults who had experienced all three of the newspaper activities – classroom, homework and teen sections – in their teen years were by far the most engaged in all eight voice categories during the past year.

“It is exciting to see that using newspapers in classrooms has a positive and lasting effect on a broad range of political and civic activities. For the future of our democracy, we need young people to participate, and newspapers help substantially.”

PETER LEVINE, PH.D. :: Director, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, College Park, Md.

Past Year Voice Indicators by Newspaper Usage in School

ACTIVITY	Neither (19%)	Classroom Only (24%)	Homework Only (6%)	Both (51%)
Made a point not to buy something because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it	<u>39%</u>	<u>38%</u>	37%	51%*
Bought something because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it	<u>34</u>	38	39	48*
Signed a petition about a political or social issue	<u>25</u>	<u>24</u>	23	37*
Contacted or visited a public official, at the local, state or national level, to express your opinion	<u>10</u>	<u>11</u>	14	18*
Posted your views to an online group or blog about a community or a political/social issue	12	<u>10</u>	14	17
Called a radio or TV talk show to express your opinion on a political or social issue, even if you did not get on the air	<u>5</u>	8	11*	13*
Written or sent an e-mail to a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue	<u>6</u>	8	6	11*
Attended a political rally or taken part in a protest, march or demonstration	5	6	8	7
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE BY ACTIVITY	17.0	17.9	16.1	25.3
ANY VOICE INDICATOR, PAST YEAR	55	60	67	75

Base: total :: Bold numbers indicate statistically higher than other respondents (0.05 level); underlined numbers are below average. :: *Significantly different than "neither."

Past Year Voice Activities by Number of Teen-Oriented Newspaper Programs

(Newspapers in classroom, newspapers as homework, read teen section)

ACTIVITY	Total	None (16%)	One (28%)	Two (44%)	Three (12%)
Signed a petition about a political or social issue	31%	<u>25%</u>	<u>24%</u>	34%*	41%*
Made a point not to buy something because you disagree with the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it	45	40	<u>39</u>	46	56*
Bought something because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it	43	<u>34</u>	40	44*	54*
Contacted or visited a public official, at the local, state or national level, to express your opinion	14	11	<u>11</u>	16	21*
Written or sent an e-mail to a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue	9	<u>5</u>	8	10*	14*
Attended a political rally or taken part in a protest, march or demonstration	6	4	7	<u>5</u>	12*
Posted your views to an online group or blog about your community or a political/social issue	14	<u>9</u>	13	16*	18*
Called a radio or TV talk show to express your opinion on a political or social issue, even if you did not get on the air	9	<u>5</u>	9	9	18*
AVERAGE	21.4	16.6	18.9	22.5	29.2
AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES	1.7	1.3	1.5	1.8	2.3

Base: total :: Bold numbers indicate statistically higher than other respondents (0.05 level); underlined numbers are below average. :: *Significantly different than "none."

political activities

The final indicator of civic engagement relates directly to political campaigns and elections. Included in this category are registering to vote, voting, trying to convince others to vote a particular way, donating money to campaigns, and volunteering to help a candidate or campaign organization.

Despite the general low voter turnout for this age group, 84 percent of the young adults said they had taken part in at least one of the political activities they were asked about. The highest activity, picked by 75 percent, was registering to vote, with the least likely activities being volunteering for a political organization or candidate (13 percent) and donating money to a candidate, party or political organization (18 percent).

One-third (32 percent) of the respondents said they had actively participated in the 2004 presidential campaign and 43 percent said they always or some-

times try to convince other voters to vote for or against a particular candidate or party. Around one in four of those surveyed (27 percent) reported making their political feelings known through campaign buttons, car stickers or yard signs.

Young adults who had all three newspaper experiences as teens – classroom, homework and teen section – were more likely to engage in political activities. Their average participation rate for each of the nine activities was 45.8 percent, compared to 34.6 percent for those who had none of the newspaper experiences as teens.



“While I am not surprised with the findings, I am delighted to see that this research reinforces the newspaper’s important role in civic participation and civic responsibility. Also, I find these data actionable on a local level, which enhances the usefulness of the research.”

SUSAN CLARK-JOHNSON :: President, Newspaper Division, Gannett Co., McLean, Va.
2007 Chairwoman, Newspaper Association of America

Voting Indicators

NET ANY	84%
Would state records show that you are currently registered to vote in elections?	75
Did you vote in the 2004 presidential election?	65
Did you happen to vote in the 2006 local election?	53
When there is an election taking place, do you try to convince people to vote for or against one of the parties or candidates? (% always or sometimes)	43
Specifically, during the last presidential elections in 2004, did you try to convince others to vote for or against a party, or wear a button, place a sign, etc., supporting a candidate?	32
Do you ever wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car or place a sign in front of your house? (% always or sometimes)	27
Specifically, during the last local elections in 2006, did you try to convince others to vote for or against a party, or wear a button, place a sign, etc., supporting a candidate?	21
Have you ever given money to a candidate, political party or an organization that supported candidates?	18
Have you ever volunteered for a political organization or a candidate running for office?	13
AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES	3.5

Base: total

Past Year Voting Indicators by Number of Teen-Oriented Newspaper Programs

(Newspapers in classroom, newspapers as homework, read teen section)

QUESTION	TOTAL	None (16%)	One (28%)	Two (44%)	Three (12%)
Did you vote in the 2004 presidential election?	65%	<u>58%</u>	63%	67%	72%*
Would state records show that you are currently registered to vote in elections?	75	71	74	77*	78*
Did you happen to vote in the 2006 local election?	53	<u>44</u>	49	56*	61*
Specifically, during the last presidential elections in 2004, did you try to convince others to vote for or against a party, or wear a button, place a sign, etc., supporting a candidate?	32	28	32	31	38*
When there is an election taking place, do you try to convince people to vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?	43	40	43	42	50*
Specifically, during the last local elections in 2006, did you try to convince others to vote for or against a party, or wear a button, place a sign, etc., supporting a candidate?	21	19	20	22	27
Do you ever wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car or place a sign in front of your house? (% always or sometimes)	27	27	25	25	38*
Have you ever given money to a candidate, political party or an organization that supported candidates?	18	13	16	18	24*
Have you ever volunteered for a political organization or a candidate running for office?	13	11	<u>10</u>	13	24*
AVERAGE PERCENTAGE BY ACTIVITY	38.6	34.6	36.9	39.0	45.8
AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES	3.5	3.1	3.3	3.5	4.1

Base total :: Bold numbers indicate statistically higher than other respondents (0.05 level); underlined numbers are below average. :: *Significantly different than "none."

predicting future civic engagement

Interaction with the news as a teen is an important indicator of future civic engagement. When researchers compared the civic involvement of young adults who had various news-related experiences with that of individuals who had none of the news experiences, there was a marked difference in civic engagement in every category.

The impact of the news was even greater when teens engaged in discussions of current events with others, including parents, other teens or classmates in a school setting.

The most significant factors among 10 news and current event-related items considered in terms of predicting future civic involvement were:

- Discussing current events with parents
- Discussing current events with other teens
- Interacting with the newspaper in classroom discussions, homework assignments or teen-oriented sections.

In fact, discussions of current events appear to reinforce information gained from news accounts and also the importance of news as a way to stay informed about public affairs.

For those young adults between ages 25 and 29, another major predictor was the number of online news sites they visited as teens.

Another type of predictor that researchers analyzed was volunteering and other civic activities specifically during the teen years. Those who participated in their teen years are much more likely to participate as adults, and this relationship is independent of other factors studied in the survey.

But what predicts teen engagement? The same teen newspaper exposure and discussion of current events with parents and other teens that predict engagement as adults.

Teen participation does not negate the impact of the newspaper and current events factors discussed here. Whether or not adults participated in civic activities as teens, they are more likely to in later years if they also were exposed to the teen newspaper factors and current events discussions noted here.

Similarly, education also is a strong predictor of adult civic participation, but teen usage of newspapers and current events discussions function

independently of education. For example, people with graduate degrees are more likely to participate in civic affairs if they have had this exposure as teens; the same is true of those whose formal education ended with high school.

In short, teen newspaper exposure matters.

Among the young adults questioned in the survey, 86 percent said they now get most of their news in an average week from television, followed closely by 79 percent who use the Internet. The Internet, however, beats out TV for the largest number of daily news consumers (37 percent).

Two-thirds of those surveyed (67 percent) said they currently read a local daily newspaper during an average week, but only 15 percent read the local paper all seven days. A slightly higher number said they listened to the radio for news at least once in an average week (69 percent) or daily (23 percent).

“One valuable tool for both educators and journalists is the newspaper, made available in the classroom. It can engage students in an interest in the politics and government of their communities, their country and their world. Daily exposure to news in classroom settings can help kill apathy. It can help cure ignorance about civic affairs. It can help turn young students into informed, aware, involved adults.”

JOHN SEIGENTHALER :: Veteran Journalist and Founder, First Amendment Center, Nashville

Teen Factors and Total Civic Engagement

(Sum of volunteer, voice and voting activities)

	Mean Total Engagement Score
Total Sample	11.0
Regularly Discussed Current Events With Parents	
Yes	13.5*
Never	8.1
Regularly Discussed Current Events With Other Teens	
Yes	13.5*
Never	8.3
Index of Newspapers in Classrooms/Homework/Teen Sections	
All Three	13.6
None	9.0
Visited Internet News Sites as Teens (Ages 25-29)	
Yes	11.4*
No	9.8
Visited Internet News Sites as Teens (Ages 30-34)	
Yes	11.6
No	11.2
Newspapers Used in Classrooms	
Yes	11.5*
Never	9.4
Parents Regularly Read the Newspaper	
Yes	11.4*
Never	9.0
Newspapers Ever Assigned as Homework	
Yes	12.0*
No	9.5
Read Local Newspaper in an Average Week	
Yes	11.9*
No	9.9
Ever Read Teen Section	
Yes	11.8*
No	10.7
Parents Regularly Encouraged Reading the Newspaper	
Yes	12.1*
Never	9.5

Base: total :: *Significant difference at .01 level



“I really learned a lot by being a Voices writer, interviewing people and listening to what they had to say. It shaped my interest in being more involved in the community.”

~ CARMEN BLOOM ~

Newspaper Fuels Teen’s Volunteerism, Political Ambitions

Carmen Bloom was in need of a volunteer activity to meet her high school’s mandatory service requirement, and she didn’t have a clue how to find something she could do.

One day, she came across an article about the Lazy H Therapeutic Riding Academy.

“I had always ridden horses in my life, but I was pretty much terrified of people who were mentally and physically disabled,” she recalls. “So, I decided to take my love of horses and translate it to learning more about people I didn’t know or know about. I found it in the newspaper, and I have been hooked on volunteering ever since.”

At the academy, Bloom says, she “really learned to become less about myself and more about the greater community and the important things of life. I learned a great deal of patience ... and I also had a greater appreciation of my own life.”

Her volunteer work has snowballed since then. “I have volunteered for probably 30 to 35 organizations over the last two years. Some are just a one-day commitment, and others take a longer commitment.”

Bloom is 19 and heading into her junior year at Kutztown University. A local title holder in the Miss America competition, she was Miss Greater Berks County in 2006 and now is Miss White Rose City 2007. Her competition platform is volunteerism, and for that, she credits her work on Voices, the Reading (Pa.) Eagle’s teen section.

“Voices gave me the opportunity to reach out to community members and express how I felt about issues,” she says. “I really learned a lot by being a Voices writer, interviewing people and listening to what they had to say. It shaped my interest in being more involved in the community. I eventually would like to be a politician, and Voices gave me the opportunity to get myself noticed.”

Bloom is serving as the first-ever student ambassador to the Kutztown Borough Council. But her political plans are far more ambitious.

“We have never had a female governor of Pennsylvania, so I am setting my sights on that, and afterward, we will see what happens,” she says.

The NAA Foundation engaged MORI Research of Minneapolis to conduct this study.

MORI Research interviewed 1,506 young adults in the 48 contiguous United States by telephone from May 15 to June 3, 2007. The interviews averaged 13 minutes in length and were conducted in English.

Respondents' telephone numbers were selected using a standard random-digit dialing sample, and the data set was statistically adjusted to match updated U.S. Census estimates for gender within age categories, education, race, Hispanic/Latino ethnicity and census region.

The survey sample included 51 percent men and 49 percent women. The age groups 25 to 29 and 30 to 34 were equally represented. Twenty-five percent of those questioned had a high school education, 27 percent had some college or vocational-technical training, and 48 percent held a college or graduate degree.



“To me, the message in this report is that newspapers can affect the course of history with regard to how aggressively they do Newspaper In Education programs and have youth sections or youth pages in their papers. To the extent that they do those things successfully, they will have more young readers and more civically engaged readers in the future.”

BRUCE BRADLEY :: Publisher, The Virginian-Pilot, Norfolk
President/Publishing Group, Landmark Communications Inc.
Chairman, NAA Foundation Board of Trustees



“A newspaper is a tremendous resource. Young people need to look beyond the view of ‘They need to cover us’ and recognize it can be a long-term relationship.”

~ ROBERT BISI ~

Volunteerism Shows That Young People Do Care

Robert Bisi, director of communications and outreach for Youth Service America in Washington, D.C., runs a program called Service Vote 2008 aimed at harnessing the volunteer energy of young people and encouraging them to connect their community service to the political process.

“It is not enough to clean up a river, feed hungry children for a day or help kids read for a day,” he says. “They need to connect their service to the public policy implications of their work.”

Service Vote 2008 will hold a number of forums in cities around the country, including Denver and St. Paul, host cities for the 2008 Democratic and Republican conventions. During those forums, which Bisi hopes will feature presidential aspirants as well as candidates for other offices, young people will be able to question politicians on the issues they care about most.

“We are trying to raise the public awareness that young people do care about their communities because they are volunteering, and they are voting,” he says. “If young people see other young people caring about these issues, they are

more likely to get involved with volunteering and with the political process. Studies show that young people who are asked to volunteer will volunteer, and young people who are asked to get involved with the political process by their peers will get involved.”

Bisi, who got his own start volunteering and working in politics as a 13-year-old covering the 1984 Democratic and Republican presidential conventions for Children’s Express, is convinced projects like Service Vote 2008 – along with Service Vote 2004 and Service Vote 2000 before it – are working.

“More young people are volunteering now than in any generation before, and they are beginning to connect that volunteerism with the political process, as evidenced by the number of 18- to 30-year-olds who are voting,” he says.

Justin Wilson, 28, a longtime volunteer himself and recent winner of a city council seat in Alexandria, Va., says young adults will increase their political involvement when they realize they can have the same sort of impact through politics that they do with their volunteer work.

“I think younger voters do see in volunteer work an ability to make an impact,” Wilson says. “I think that is why they get involved. That is why you see so many people doing volunteer work but not being involved in politics and voting. Politics is about changing people’s lives, ultimately, and right now, these folks are getting that piece through volunteer service.”

Bisi notes that Youth Service 2008 also will encourage young people to use the local newspaper as a resource, both to educate and to promote their volunteer agendas.

“People need to see a newspaper is much more than just editorial content. There are many more advantages than that,” he says. “You can have a journalist come out to your service project and talk about the things going on in the community and talk about the things they know about.

“A newspaper is a tremendous resource. Young people need to look beyond the view of ‘They need to cover us’ and recognize it can be a long-term relationship. A newspaper in a community is an institution. If you build a relationship with the newspaper as a whole, you’re deepening the involvement of both the newspaper and the youth projects.”

“Most schools require some sort of community service every year, but I am continuing that even though I am now out of high school because I enjoy doing it.”

~ ABIGAIL VANIM ~



Teens Talk About What Motivates Them to Volunteer

When the pediatric unit at a West Virginia hospital closed, Rachel Molenda and four of her high school classmates became concerned about children with cancer who would have to travel long distances for treatment.

So they began Comfort for Kids, a project to sew quilts to keep the children warm and make their travels a little easier. The owner of a fabric shop helped them with the project, and by the end of the year, they had made 30 quilts.

A 2007 graduate of South Charleston (W.Va.) High School, Molenda participated in the International Baccalaureate program. Students must complete 150 hours of service activities to earn the IB diploma, and the program places a premium on starting original projects such as Comfort for Kids. Molenda also has served as a Habitat for Humanity volunteer, a counselor at an art camp and a photographer for FlipSide, the teen program at The Charleston (W.Va.) Gazette.

“I can’t say I that I wouldn’t have done it [volunteering], but the IB program motivated me more to do it,” she says.

Résumé-building is certainly part of the

reason teens volunteer. But many students regularly give of themselves for no money, no recognition and no high school credit.

Abigail Vanim, who attends the University of Pittsburgh, has volunteered at a soup kitchen from the time she was 13 as part of a church project. She also visits a nursing home the first Wednesday of every month to play bingo with the elderly.

“The soup kitchen was from the goodness of my heart, with no motivation behind it,” Vanim says. “My parents, when I was 13, wanted me to try it and said it was a good thing to try out. Bingo was for service hours for school. Most schools require some sort of community service every year, but I am continuing that even though I am now out of high school because I enjoy doing it.”

She notes that while both projects helped others, they changed her life, too.

“When I first went to the soup kitchen, I had the idea that all homeless people were the same, but I was struck by the fact that there were children there, and people who weren’t dressed terribly.

They were in the same situation as me, no difference. I got to see the face of

hunger in a more local way, and it made me wonder [if] I could be there, too. How far am I from that? What could I do to help them?”

Vanim began playing bingo with nursing home residents because she had visited her grandfather in a nursing home for many years and was concerned that he sat in his room a lot and basically did nothing.

“Helping out at the nursing home helps me see that a person can be active at that age, and they really like to see a young face and a young person taking an interest in them. I am a bright spot in their day,” she says.

Eric Petterson, like Vanim a former correspondent for Voices at the Reading (Pa.) Eagle, volunteered weekly at a children’s program run by his church and was a teacher in the program for two years.

“I actually hadn’t thought about the résumé part of it at all until this past year when I was getting things together to apply for college,” says Petterson, a student at LaSalle University. “I grew up in the program, and so when I was old enough,

I thought I would enjoy helping out, too.”

Tricia Faulkner, who worked on The Voice at The State Journal-Register in Springfield, Ill., says the newspaper actually started a “top teen” award program to recognize teens who volunteer solely to do good works. “We found a lot of interesting stories through that award,” she says.

Faulkner estimates that about half of her friends volunteer because they really like the organizations they are working with, and half do it for their college applications or to meet requirements for a class, degree or academic recognition. But although many teens do important volunteer work because of school requirements, Faulkner still objects to making volunteerism a “must” part of academic programs.

“You can’t force someone to do good things,” she says. “That in effect takes away what good it does for a person, and it could turn people away from volunteering later. If everyone does it, it doesn’t acknowledge the special effort of people who do it out of the goodness of their hearts.”

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The NAA Foundation strives to develop engaged and literate citizens in our diverse society through investment in and support of programs designed to enhance student achievement through newspaper readership and appreciation of the First Amendment.

The Foundation's programs and products emphasize the use of newspapers and other media by young people. Foundation support is concentrated in three primary focus areas:

NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION (NIE) – The Foundation maintains a nationwide system of cooperation between newspapers and schools designed to enhance student achievement and appreciation of the First Amendment in a variety of subject areas through the use of newspapers and other media. The Foundation provides resources and training on using newspapers in

schools and helps newspapers develop strategic plans for providing NIE services to educators.

YOUTH CONTENT – The Foundation supports the Youth Editorial Alliance, a nationwide coalition of newspapers dedicated to advocating the value of content targeted toward youth. The Foundation provides resources and training in the development of youth content in newspapers; serves as a clearinghouse for youth readership initiatives; and helps newspapers plan and evaluate youth features and content.

STUDENT NEWSPAPERS – The Foundation encourages collaboration between newspapers and schools to support student-produced media. The Foundation works with scholastic media associations nationwide to provide training and resources, with an emphasis on enhancing appreciation of the First Amendment.



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