Trends in Political and Civic Behavior in Emerging Adults

*James Youniss**

The Catholic University of America

Hugh McIntosh

Consultant

When two 20-something conservative activists, armed only with a video camera, roused national ire against the community activist group ACORN, they not only moved Congress to question the group's funding but flew in the face of the conventional wisdom that emerging adults are aloof and uninvolved with the political controversies of our times. Indeed, for over four decades the majority of 18- to 29-year-olds have stayed away from the ballot box, leading scholars to ask whether voting might be unsuitable for them. Such aversion to participation in everyday politics, however, stands in vivid contrast to emerging adults' well-known capacity for the kind of political fervor demonstrated by these two political activists.

With this essay, we try to unravel these contradictory tendencies by offering a review of available empirical data and explanations of why and how emerging adults become actively engaged in democratic citizenship. By looking at life-cycle changes and the ways political leaders allocate mobilization resources to emerging adults, we offer explanations for (*a*) the decline in political engagement among emerging adults from the mid-1970s through 2000, (*b*) their rising rates of voluntary service since the mid-1980s, (*c*) why increased service did not bring more emerging adults into political

---

* James Youniss is the James and Wylma R. Curtin Professor of Psychology at Catholic University of America; he is also co-principal investigator of the Changing SEA Project. Hugh McIntosh received his PhD in developmental psychology from Catholic University of America and works as an independent consultant.

participation, and (*d*) likely causes for the recent upturn in political involvement in this age group.

The big picture involves two stories. The first tells about political engagement that begins with the activism of emerging adults in the 1960s, gives way to a severe retreat from politics from the mid-1970s to 2000, and then reverses direction with an upturn that continues in the present. The second story describes the course of voluntary and school-initiated community service, which rises in the mid-1980s, quickly grows into a signature of the nation's young population, and progresses still today.
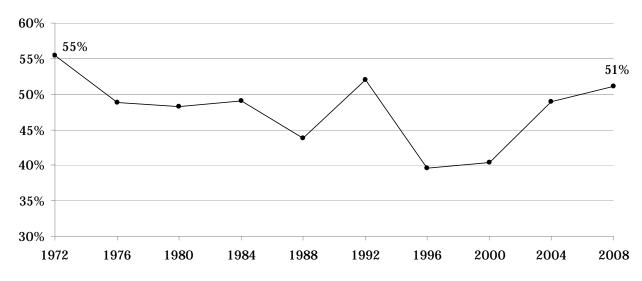
Political Engagement

Engagement in the 1960s

What do we know about political activism of the 1960s? First, emerging adults' well-known involvement in the civil rights, antiwar, feminist, and other movements was not spontaneous, but was highly organized. Sit-ins, demonstrations, registration of Black voters, and the like were initiated and supported by Black Southern churches, Northern churches and synagogues, national labor unions, the U.S. Department of Justice, and private philanthropies. These organizations encouraged emerging adults to participate by offering them material, moral, spiritual, and legal resources that were unavailable to previous generations. Many campuses remained uninvolved and a minority of college students actually protested, but the generation as a whole was politically aroused. Voting rates were high. A majority of young people attended to the news of the day. And political movements on both the left and the right prospered.

Second, we know that young participants in these activities continued their civic involvement as they moved on into full adulthood. Contrary to the oft heard claim that participation was simply youthful enthusiasm that rapidly faded, a substantial literature documents that emerging adults who engaged in these activities remained active citizens well into midlife. As a group, they voted at exceptionally high rates and joined voluntary organizations that enriched local political and civic life. These facts highlight the significance of emerging adults' subsequent retreat from public political life.

Decline, 1975–2000

Activism in the 1960s was partly responsible for securing 18-year-olds the right to vote in 1972, and in that year's presidential election, about 55% of eligible emerging adults (ages 18–29) appeared at the polls. It is startling then, that except for a spike in 1992, the proportion of emerging adults who voted declined steadily over the next quarter century. In the 2000 presidential election, only 40% of eligible young persons actually voted (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Voter turnout, ages 18–29

Note: Data from E. H. Kirby and K. Kawashima-Ginsberg (2009), The youth vote in 2008, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_youth_Voting_2008_updated_6.22.pdf (retrieved September 30, 2009).

The decline in voting was accompanied by other signs of a lack of political interest. During the same period, progressively fewer emerging adults read daily newspapers or watched the evening news on television. Concurrently, young persons earned low scores on national tests of knowledge of American history and government. It is no wonder that as the 20th century was ending, commentators on the political left and right worried about preserving the political culture needed to sustain our democracy. Young people were less knowledgeable about political affairs, and fewer of them shared knowledge in common with the older generation.

The foregoing implies that a cultural divide separates younger and older generations. We see it, for instance, in diverging preferences and uses of technology, including daily use of the Internet, cell phones, and texting. We also see it in attitudes about politics and politically related social issues. In the 2008 presidential election, emerging adults favored Democrat Barack Obama 2-to-1, whereas a majority of voters over age 60 voted for Republican John McCain. A 2009 Pew Research Group poll on social and demographic trends found generational differences on such social issues as gay marriage and interracial relationships. Indeed, the poll's authors concluded that the generation gap—"a major difference in the point of view of younger people and older people"—is wider today than in the 1960s.

Surge since 2000

After decades of low voter turnout, the emerging-adult vote began to rise, reaching 49% in 2004 and 51% four years later. This increase of 11 percentage points since 2000 contrasts with a rise of only 2 percentage points for older adults during the same years. By 2004, emerging adults' trust in government exceeded their trust during the 1990s. Further, the proportion of incoming college freshmen who kept up to date with political affairs rose from 28% in 2000 to 37% by 2006, the highest level ever found in this annual national survey of freshmen.

These signs of political awakening were accompanied by other notable actions when emerging adults joined older adults in civic responses to the 9/11 tragedies and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Whether together these manifestations signify a new long-term trend toward civic engagement remains to be seen. But if we understood the forces behind the upturn, we might be able to make a projection for the near-term future. We now turn to an analysis of these factors.

Explaining Political Engagement

We think two general factors best account for shifts in emerging adults' political engagement: life-cycle changes and political mobilization (or lack thereof). We readily see the former in the theme of the Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults (Changing SEA) forum: For the past three decades, the standard steps in the transition to adulthood have gradually been extended and repatterned, thereby altering the phase of

life between adolescence and adulthood. We argue that this prolongation has hindered emerging adults' integration into their communities and, therefore, their engagement in the political process. We propose also that resources that could have been allocated to mobilize emerging-adult engagement were, instead, focused on older adults. As a result, emerging adults tended to vote less than older Americans. In a self-fulfilling prophecy, the more that emerging adults did not vote, the more political parties ignored them and, therefore, the less reason they saw to vote.

How does the prolongation of emerging adulthood bear on political engagement? Scholars believe that owning a home, starting career employment, or having children facilitates entry into civic life. Accomplishing these milestones helps individuals define their interests and, in turn, brings them into the political process for strategic purposes. Individuals who settle into communities care about schools, public safety, waste collection, and taxation. Thus, they attend to politics and government to protect their interests. In addition, civic organizations, from business groups to garden clubs, recruit individuals to help promote community interests. Places of employment function similarly by encouraging employees to participate out of economic interest. If emerging adults are unattached to place or are not involved in stable employment, they are probably less likely to become politically engaged.

The second factor, mobilization, is less visible but equally compelling. Beginning in the mid-1970s, political parties focused resources on older adults and shied away from emerging adults. This shift is symbolized by the passage in 1976 of the Older Americans Act, which changed the economic plight of aging adults and helped to make them a force in politics. In elections thereafter, candidates from both major parties featured the preservation of Medicare and Social Security as important issues in their campaigns.

Meanwhile, the interests of young people did not capture the attention of either party. For example, Congress tried to pass the Younger Americans Act, comparable to the Older Americans Act, but the attempt failed in committee in 2000. Congress also failed to maintain the value of Pell grants, which at their maximal levels covered about 72% of education costs in the mid-1970s but today cover only about 38%. Its attempts to raise the minimum wage, which affects mainly young people, repeatedly failed passage
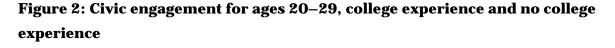
as being too costly for "small businesses."

Other evidence comes from a study of county chairs of the two major political parties. When asked which voters they targeted and how they allocated resources, most chairs said they focused on older adults because they were the likely voters. Few of the chairs bothered to risk scarce resources on emerging adults.
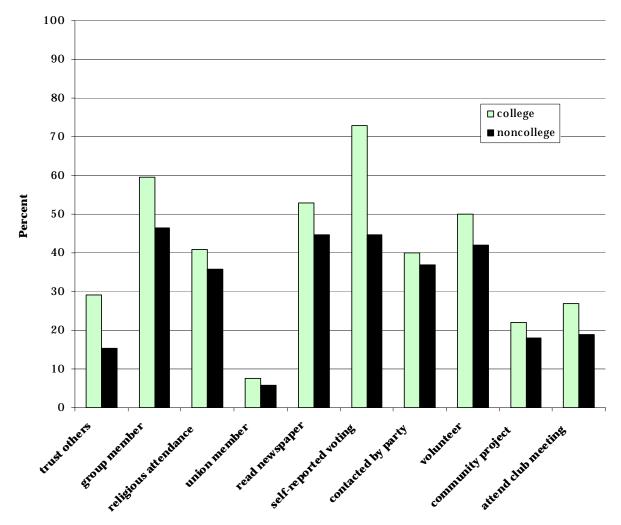
These data reflect a pivotal moment in political history, because around the time of the presidential election of 2004 both parties had an epiphany. Having previously focused on the nation's older voters, the parties discovered that they could effectively mobilize emerging adults by using their own culture as a tool. For example, political activists organized entertainment-registration rallies on and near college campuses, and MTV, the Hip Hop Summit, and others used emerging adults' own popular culture as a tool to mobilize them for political action. These efforts seemed to bear immediate fruit, as the 2004 and 2006 elections witnessed an upturn in the emerging-adult vote. And in response, Congress passed a minimum wage increase and bolstered the higher education student loan program.

This brings us to the recent 2008 election and a further rise in the emerging-adult vote, part of which we can attribute to Congress's responsiveness. Another part we attribute to the Obama campaign's use of technology and employment of emerging adults in on-the-ground campaign organizing. In the 2004 election, Democrat John Kerry had received 57% of the emerging-adult vote. In the 2008 election, Obama obtained 61%. The party's focused mobilization of emerging adults, its attention to issues relevant to them, and its employment of emerging adults in campaign work brought young people back into the political process in numbers not seen since the 1970s.

An Education Gap in Political Engagement

Up to this point, we have treated emerging adults as a unified entity. There are, however, substantive differences in political behavior between emerging adults who attend college and emerging adults who don't. A recent study reported that emerging adults with college experience scored higher on 10 measures of civic engagement than did those with no college (Fig. 2). The differences are particularly large for voting. The

widely cited statistic showing a 51% turnout for emerging adults in the 2008 presidential election hides the fact that those with college experience voted at nearly twice the rate of those with no college.

Figure 2: Civic engagement for ages 20–29, college experience and no college experience

Note: Data from C. Flanagan, P. Levine, and R. Settersten (2009). Civic engagement and the changing transition to adulthood, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/ChangingTransition.pdf (retrieved September 2, 2009).

One explanation for the differences is that emerging adults with college experience have more opportunities to be recruited into political participation through community institutions. Recruitment differences begin on college campuses, where

emerging adults congregate. Recall the entertainment-registration rallies on college campuses, mentioned above. Emerging adults not enrolled in college, who are more dispersed geographically, were left out of this recruiting effort.

Additionally, the organizational richness of the college environment provides more opportunities to recruit college students into political activity. College students often live in places with an abundance of civic and political organizations that offer opportunities for participation, whereas emerging adults not in college often live in places lacking such organizations or without an efficient means of publicizing themselves. The significance can be seen in the disparity between the average rates of service for emerging adults with some college experience and those with none (Fig. 2).

Another difference in recruitment opportunities is linked to the decline of jobs supported by labor unions. As these better-paying and benefit-providing jobs have disappeared, low-income emerging adults have struggled to find self-sustaining work. Moreover, labor unions mobilize members and their families. Declines in union membership have lessened this opportunity while helping to widen an economic gap between higher and lower income groups.

Voluntary and Community Service

Whereas political engagement waned sharply after the mid-1970s, voluntary and school-based community service picked up during the 1980s and has remained a hallmark of contemporary young people (e.g., see Fig. 3). Insofar as service is coupled with and organized around social justice goals, it has staying power beyond the early years. This was true of engagement in the 1960s and is still true today. For example, a recent study showed that emerging adults who gave two postcollege years to Teach for America, 5 to 10 years later voted at very high rates (87%) and persisted in volunteering for educational improvement.
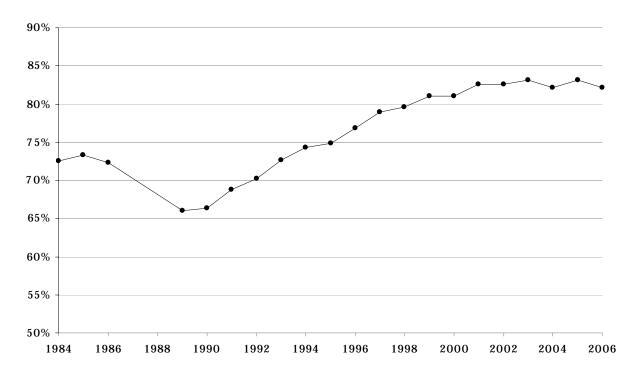
Figure 3: Entering college freshmen who did volunteer work in previous year

Note: Data from J. H. Pryor, S. Hurtado, V. B. Saenz, J. L. Santos, and W. S. Korn (2007), The American freshman: Forty-year trends (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles).

Why, then, has increased service among emerging adults not brought more of them into the political arena? We believe the answer lies in the kinds of service that most young persons do. Before addressing this matter, though, we need to present a few basic facts.

During the 1980s, the proportion of entering college freshmen who had done service in the previous year declined from 73% to 66% but then started climbing. By 1999 more than 80% did service, and that level has been maintained to the present.

What happened in the 1980s to bring about this jump in service? A key event occurred when presidents of elite universities formed Campus Compact to encourage and sponsor volunteering by students. Campus Compact was part of an effort to counteract a growing dismay with emerging adults that was fueled by claims of young people's deteriorating moral character as seen in low academic achievement, teenage pregnancy, and a host of other problems. The college presidents believed that emerging

adults were not profligate but needed organized direction to bring out their latent sense of social responsibility. The fact that by 2009 Campus Compact had grown to over 1,000 member institutions underscores the wisdom of that initiative. Further, once high school administrators, students, and parents saw the emphasis on service by colleges, they encouraged adolescents to do service, in part, to enhance their credentials for college entrance.

Growth in voluntary service since the 1980s was helped along by the political philosophy of successive U.S. presidents, starting with Ronald Reagan, who encouraged individuals, rather than government, to solve society's problems. Programs that were previously managed by government were switched to the private nonprofit and for-profit sectors. As they took over programs, the organizations relied increasingly on assistance from volunteers.

As suggested earlier, the kind of service that young people do influences their subsequent civic participation. In the most astute analysis of service over the past several decades, sociologists Musick and Wilson make a distinction between service that helps people in need, say, providing food for the homeless, and service directed at the causes of homelessness, such as working for affordable housing or providing mental health services. Studies of the kind of service that young persons typically do report that perhaps less than 5% of service is directed toward policy and political change.

Service is a broad term. It can be episodic or long-term, done individually or mobilized by sponsoring organizations, and can range in content from cleaning a park to weekly shifts at a church-based homeless shelter. Only recently have surveys identified precisely what people do when they volunteer. It is clear that most service does not occur through spontaneous individual choice, but is sponsored, recruited, and managed by organizations that persist through time. The likelihood of any individual doing service depends largely on whether he or she is a member of the sponsoring organization or an affiliated group.

What have we learned from this array of new data? First, sponsors of service recruit volunteers and organize the doing of service, which ripples out to affiliated organizations. Second, whereas the character of young people probably does not vary

over time, mobilization efforts by colleges, churches, and nonprofit organizations have made decided impacts on rates and quality of service. Third, emerging adults who do service for the sake of social justice are likely to remain engaged well into the future.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout this essay, we have presented the view that mobilization efforts and life-cycle changes account for the rise and fall of emerging adults' political and civic engagement. Together, these factors help to explain a broad set of facts and their historical trends.

We end this essay on a note of optimism by remarking on the role of social justice in emerging-adult engagement and the importance it has played in mobilization since the 1950s. Besides material and legal resources, a concern for fairness, equality, and the rights of others has been a force in emerging adults' response to political and civic mobilization. It was a decided factor in young people's participation in the civil rights movement for African Americans and was capitalized on by Black churches in the South. The justice theme has been implicit also in the volunteerism that followed the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when thousands of college students spent their spring breaks working in the Gulf region. Young people have been on the forefront of efforts to stop overseas sweatshop manufacturing and attempts to influence world financial managers to address structural poverty. They are engaged in promoting environmental stewardship. And they continue to volunteer in organizations that focus on educational equality for disadvantaged children. The facts contradict the charge that emerging adults on the whole are selfish, inveterate consumers who care little about others. They volunteer when asked, and they participate in politics when properly recruited. The challenges of economic disadvantage and a prolonged transition to adulthood are real. But young people can rise above them when offered adequate resources that include compelling rationales grounded in justice.

In the midst of the 1960s turmoil, Erik Erikson called on society's major institutions to articulate their principles and ideals so that youth might assess how they could join efforts to reform society and shape the future. These institutions, which include political parties and churches, can offer to young people the intellectual and

moral resources that are needed to form healthy and productive identities. Erikson's message five decades ago remains relevant today. In fact, it may be even more needed, as emerging adults face hurdles to standard life tasks that are confounded further by global dynamics and severe economic conditions that have lengthened pathways to adulthood.
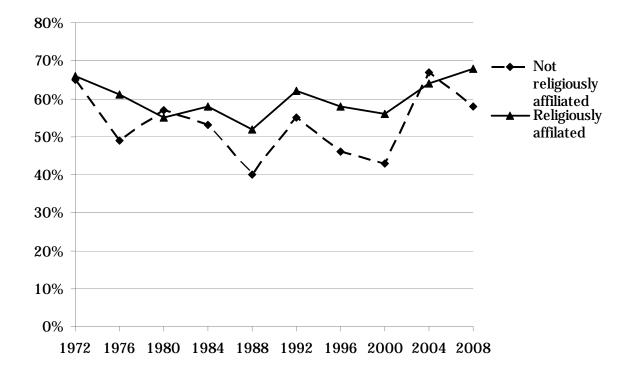
Figure 4: Voter turnout and religious affiliation, ages 18–29

Note: American National Election Studies (2009), Cumulative dataset and time series data sets for 2000, 2004, and 2008, www.electionstudies.org/studypages/download/datacenter_all.htm (retrieved September 3, 2009).

We emphasize Erikson's point with the finding that people who affiliate with religious institutions have much higher voting rates than those who don't (Fig. 4). We can interpret this finding in many ways, and one of them reinforces Erikson's argument. Youth who are integrated into society's major value systems are likely to participate in politics. For them, politics is not something apart from daily interests and concerns, it is part of their lives. And their lives are lived within larger communities that have invited these young people into membership.

Annotated Bibliography

Allahyari, R. A. (2000). *Visions of charity: Volunteer workers and moral community*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

> The author studied the operations of two soup kitchens in Sacramento, California, one run by the Salvation Army, the other by the Catholic Workers. She documented how the sponsors conveyed their religious belief systems to the people who came for food and to the volunteers who helped serve food. The two sponsors differed in their rationale for charity, and the differences were evident in the management of their kitchens.

Chaves, M., and Tsitsos, W. (2001). Congregations and social services: What they do, how they do it, and with whom. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 30*, 660–683.

> The author sampled congregations by working backward from respondents to the General Social Survey who identified the churches they attended. Among other things, Chaves and Tsitsos show the degree to which congregations consciously seek to influence the civic and cultural life of the communities in which they are situated. Churches are not only parts of neighborhoods, but many of them help to shape their civic character.

Fendrich. J. M. (1993). *Ideal citizens: The legacy of the civil rights movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

> The author is a sociologist who studied student participants in sit-ins and demonstrations in Tallahassee, Florida, during the civil rights movement. The African American students were enrolled at Florida A&M University, and the white students were enrolled at Florida State University. Ten years after the students graduated and again 10 years after that, Fendrich interviewed the participants, who

were well into their adulthood. He found that participants showed major signs of retaining their political activism; For example, they voted at extremely high rates and were joiners and leaders in local voluntary organizations. Contrary to popular portrayals, participants did not at middle age recede into the comfort of suburban affluence but remained "ideal citizens" who continued to actively contribute to the civic well-being of their communities. This study has several reinforcing counterparts, most notably the work of Doug McAdam, who interviewed former participants in the 1964 Freedom Summer project in Mississippi, and Kent Jennings, who followed youth who participated in the antiwar movement in the early 1970s. In each case, the former youth activists retained their active roles as adults. The causes they later advanced shifted to new focuses but were still based in seeking social justice.

Flanagan, C., Levine, P., and Settersten, R. (2009). Civic engagement and the changing transition to adulthood. CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) paper. Available at http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/ChangingTransition.pdf.

This paper describes the gap in civic engagement between emerging adults (ages 20–29) with college experience (at least one year of attendance) and emerging adults with no college experience. It goes on to explore factors contributing to the gap and recommends steps that might be taken to close it. Flanagan and colleagues argue that the changing nature of emerging adulthood (e.g., marrying at increasingly later ages) represents a postponement, but not abandonment, of civic engagement by emerging adults. They suggest that unequal educational and economic opportunities contribute to the civic-engagement gap between emerging adults with and without college experience. They also recommend that institutions and policies serving youth who do not go to four-year colleges—especially community colleges and national service programs—make greater efforts to enhance civic engagement in these youth. The authors draw on data from the General Social Survey and other sources to support their argument.

Galston, W. (2001). Political knowledge, political engagement and civic education. *Annual Review of Political Science, 4*, 217–234.

> This well-known political philosopher reviewed the empirical evidence regarding the state of youth's political knowledge and signs of their active political engagement. He carefully considered reasons for deficits in knowledge and for declines in engagement in recent youth cohorts. This study offers a rounded, balanced view of evidence and theory and is presented in nontechnical language.

Lopez, M. H. (2007). Media use among young people in 2006. CIRCLE, Fact Sheet. Available at http://civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS07_MediaUse.pdf.

> This fact sheet presents media-use data showing that newspaper readership among emerging adults has fallen in recent years and that they now turn more frequently to television and radio for news. The report also documents the differences between emerging and older adults in terms of their use of media for news. The data are drawn from CIRCLE's 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey and the General Social Survey.

Musick, M. A., and Wilson, J. (2007). *Volunteers: A social profile*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

> The authors offer the most comprehensive and up-to-date review and analysis of volunteering in America. They summarize findings from recent surveys that show the kinds of persons who volunteer and what they do. By analyzing the data astutely, the authors further show that volunteering is less a spontaneous act of individuals and more the result of group membership, both formal (e.g., church affiliation) and informal (e.g., network of friends). They add to this understanding a deeper distinction among types of volunteering, for instance, helping, such as serving food in a soup kitchen, and political, such as working to minimize homelessness and its effects.

Rosenstone, S. J., and Hansen, J. M. (1993). *Mobilization, participation, and democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

The authors present a strong demonstration of the role that resources and their targeted mobilization play in bringing people to act politically. The more popular view was that engagement followed from broad characteristics such as years of education or membership in an ethnic group. The authors call on a wide array of data to show, for example, that voter turnout can be sharply increased by the provision of material and cognitive resources. For instance, the voter turnout of African Americans is less a function of their ethnicity than of mobilization such as after the Civil War and after passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1964. (The 2008 turnout on behalf of Barack Obama supports this position clearly.) The book serves as a primer for the role of resource mobilization theory in political engagement.

Salamon, L. M. (2001). *The resilient sector: The state of nonprofit America.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

The author of is one of the nation's experts in bringing public attention to the nonprofit sector in its many guises. Salamon and his research group regularly provide a kind of census of this sector, its composition, funding, and relationship to government. This group has tracked shifts in the sector over the past several decades, for example, how it has come to utilize government funding for programs mandated by government, but whose operation is left open to a broad competitive array of actors. The group's analyses help to give a grounded understanding of faith-based delivery of social services by putting it in context with such services in general.

Shea. D. M., and Green, J. C. (2008). *Fountain of youth: Strategies and tactics for mobilizing young voters.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

This book is a must read for anyone who wants to learn about the relationship of political parties to young citizens. The authors document the fact that at the county level, both major parties consciously neglected the "youth vote" until after the 2000 presidential election. They use the words of party chairpersons to demonstrate why resources were allocated to older adults rather than to youth. They describe also the change in tactics that increased the youth vote in 2004 and 2006. Youth did not suddenly become active and aware citizens. More plausibly, the parties and a host of

youth interest groups mobilized young people by reaching them in their own entertainment genres with the result that youth responded by turning out in large numbers.

Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., and Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Using information from a random telephone survey of 15,000 persons and in-person interviews with 2,500 of the most politically active of the respondents, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady constructed a "civic voluntarism model" to explain how people become politically engaged. The authors argue that three factors are critical to getting people engaged: they must want to participate, they must have the necessary resources (e.g., time, education), and they need to be involved in social networks through which they can be recruited. The authors propose that education and other advantages place many citizens in work settings or community organizations where they learn civic skills and are recruited into political activity. Religious institutions play an important role in this model in that they provide political-skill-building and recruitment opportunities that might not otherwise be available to individuals with few resources. The authors make a strong argument for the importance of community institutions in fostering political participation and provide a rich array of data to support their case.

Wattenberg, M. A. (2008). *Is voting for young people?* New York: Pearson, Longman.

This book offers an unparalleled comprehensive review of evidence regarding patterns of political behavior in America's young people since the 1960s. The data are presented in a readable form for voting, newspaper readership, television news watching, and more. The reader is almost entranced watching the declines across these several domains. For added clarity, the author provides comparative data from older adults. For example, as young people gave up watching the evening network news, older adults continued to make this vehicle a nightly staple. The book gets even meatier when Wattenberg considers and tests hypotheses about young people's declining engagement.

Youniss. J., and Levine, P. (2009). *Engaging young people in civic life.* Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press

> Thirteen original essays are designed to suggest public policy for increasing young people's participation in political and civic life. These suggestions are based on research findings and pertain to a wide range of institutions: schools, after-school programs, municipal governments, public safety, political parties, and churches. Three of the essays focus explicitly on policies that have already been enacted in the United Kingdom, Scandinavian countries, Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The intent of these policies goes beyond voting to attempting to bring young people more fully into the compact that sustains democratic societies.

Youniss, J., McLellan, J. A., and Yates, M. (1997). What we know about engendering civic identity. *American Behavioral Scientist, 40*, 620–631.

> Youniss, McLellan, and Yates reviewed several empirical studies that have documented sustained political engagement in activist youth. The authors propose that participation in organized activities, such as 4-H or student government, during the formative time of adolescence helps individuals develop the skills and civic identity that make them more likely to participate in political and other civic activities in adulthood.

Zaff, J. F., Youniss, J., and Gibson, C. (2009). *An inequitable invitation to citizenship.* Washington, DC: Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement.

> As with Flanagan et al. (2009), the authors document differences in civic engagement between young people with college experience and their peers without college experience. The focus here is on policy that would help to equalize resources and opportunities that are now distributed unevenly. College-bound and college-educated young people tend to receive multiple and redundant supports, whereas their noncollege peers suffer from a paucity of these supports. For example, youth not bound for college are likely to attend high schools with weak civics classes, either no or ineffective student governments, and a limited array of extracurricular activities. Thus, at a crucial moment in their development, these youth lack key

opportunities that would advance their political development. This deficiency continues into emerging adulthood as youth without college experience are relegated to work that barely sustains them economically, tend to live in areas that lack lively political competition, and are typically disregarded by elected officials (who do not perceive them as a valued constituency). No single policy initiative is likely to alter this inequality, but recognizing the problem and consciously redistributing resources and opportunities would go far in balancing the scale for full participation.