Youth vote, strongly for Obama, determines outcome in key battleground states of PA, VA, FL, and OH

Medford/Somerville, Mass. – The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) - the preeminent youth research organization at Tufts University - this morning released an exclusive turnout estimate showing that 22-23 million young Americans (ages 18-29), or at least 49%, voted in Tuesday's presidential election, according to national exit polls, demographic data, and current counts of votes cast.

In Florida, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia, **if Romney had won half the youth vote, or if young people had stayed home all together, he would have won those key battleground states. A switch of those 80 electoral votes would have also changed the presidency, electing Romney as president.** To see more on this analysis, please visit:
http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=4905.
Young people represented 19% of the voters in yesterday's election, with President Obama winning the majority of those votes over Governor Romney by 60% to 37%, according to the early released NEP.

"Confounding almost all predictions, the youth vote held up in 2012 and yet again was the deciding factor in determining which candidate was elected President of the United States," said CIRCLE director Peter Levine. "Young people are energized and committed voters. Youth turnout of around 50% is the 'new normal' for presidential elections. Considering that there are 46 million people between 18 and 29, this level of turnout makes them an essential political bloc. Right now, they form a key part of the Democrats' national coalition. Republicans must find a way to compete for their votes."

According to CIRCLE's exclusive estimate, youth voter turnout was at least 49.3%, based on data from about 97% of precincts that have fully reported their votes as of Wednesday morning. Youth turnout may reach 51% when the remaining 3% of precincts report. The minimum CIRCLE estimated at the same point in time in 2008 was 48.3%, but our 2008 estimate rose to 52% as more precincts reported. That means that 2004, 2008, and 2012 have been three strong elections in a row for youth, with turnout in the vicinity of 50% each time, compared to just 37% in 1996 and 41% in 2000.

These estimates are subject to change, because in several states, less than 95% of precincts are reporting. Also, in some past years, the National Exit Polls (NEP), conducted by Edison Research, have adjusted their statistics in the first few days after an election. CIRCLE estimates youth voting after elections based on several variables, including the total number of ballots counted and the exit polls. These variables are subject to change in the hours and days after an election.

Young voters favored Obama by a 24-point margin. The average gap from 1976 through 2004 was only about two percentage points, as young voters basically supported the same candidate as older voters in most elections.

“Turnout” means the percentage of eligible citizens who voted, and youth voter turnout is the percentage of eligible 18-29 year olds who voted. CIRCLE’s final estimate will be based on the National Exit Polls conducted by Edison/Mitofsky, the number of ballots cast in the United States (aggregated from data provided by local election officials), and current Census data on the number of young citizens in the United States. CIRCLE has used precisely the same method to estimate youth turnout after previous elections since 1996. Using this consistent method, we estimate a historical trend that can be seen here: http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2012exitpoll.jpg

There is no official count of voters by age nationally immediately after the election. Therefore, any statistic on youth voter turnout is an estimate based on survey data. Like any survey, the National Exit Polls use methods that may introduce sampling bias. However, our estimates of youth turnout from the National Exit Polls (shown above) have produced a trend that closely tracks the trend in the Census Current Population Survey (CPS), which is the other reliable source for estimating youth turnout. CPS voting data for 2012 will not be available until spring 2013. Until then, our method produces the only reliable estimate of youth turnout.