



LeRoy Collins Institute: Exposure to Different People Acts as Catalyst for Political Activeness

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Exposure to a politically active roommate can be an effective catalyst to get college students to participate in an election, a finding that could have significant impact as tens of thousands of young Floridians head to college this fall ahead of the 2022 midterm elections. A research report by the LeRoy Collins Institute suggests that political mobilization on campus can make a difference, as one active student likely will have a positive influence on others.

The report, “Parents, Peers, and Political Participation: Social Influence Among Roommates,” analyzes political behaviors, including the impact of exposure to previously unfamiliar points of view among college freshmen attending Florida State University. It found that young college students with roommates who vote are significantly more likely (68%) to also vote than are those whose roommates abstain from voting (54%) – in other words, students who have politically active roommates are 14 percentage points more likely to vote themselves.

“This report shows that when young voters come from a home where no one votes, living with someone who is politically engaged encourages voting even when that person is not similar to you politically,” said Brad T. Gomez, an author of the study. “And it’s not just a one-time impact – those students who came from families that didn’t vote continue to vote at least two years later, when they may no longer have the same roommate. This suggests that once civic engagement is activated, it stays active into the future.”

The report analyzed the voting histories of college freshmen, their families, and their roommates to determine whether meeting and living with a politically active stranger can spur action.

The study found that a large number of students rebel from their parents’ voting practices. Over half (52%) of students whose parents never vote do participate themselves by voting. Among those students whose parents voted in all prior elections in the data, 75% are politically active.

“Young voters are the least likely to be mobilized and participate in our election system,” explained Dr. Lonna Atkeson, director of the LeRoy Collins Institute. “The findings of this report show how social networks, even when those networks are in disagreement, can have positive

effects on our democracy. This study suggests that political contact on campus makes a difference and that networks of friends and neighbors mobilize.”

The full report is linked [here](#).

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About the LeRoy Collins Institute

Established in 1988, the LeRoy Collins Institute is a nonpartisan, statewide policy organization that studies and promotes creative solutions to key private and public issues facing the people of Florida and the nation. The Institute, located in Tallahassee at Florida State University, is affiliated and works in collaboration with the State University System of Florida. Named in honor of former Florida Governor LeRoy Collins, the Institute is governed by a distinguished board of directors, chaired by Lester Abberger. Other board members include executives, local elected officials, and other professionals from throughout the state.