

GENERATIONAL SHIFTS AND THE CREATION OF POLITICAL SELVES: A
FOCUS GROUP INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

A preponderance of research in political communication has centered on the lack of voter mobilization and indicates that the youth of the nation do not participate in the democratic process. In 2000, national research teams collected data about this problem and the results indicated that there is a generational difference in how citizens define their roles in civic engagement. In an effort to explore those differences, this study seeks to answer questions about how citizens talk about their involvement or lack of involvement. By talking with small groups of citizens that represented different generations, it is clear that the problem with civic engagement is not *only* that citizens are not voting, but that citizens view themselves as political participants in different ways that traditional measures suggest. This study is based on a social constructionist perspective and utilizes Post-Modernization and Generational Replacement Theory to further understand the political talk of citizens. The results indicate that new definitions of civic engagement and political involvement are necessary to truly understand why democracy seems to be changing and what pro-involvement researchers and movements can do to ensure the health of our democracy.