

Quick Facts about U.S. Young Voters: The Presidential Election Year 2008

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October 2008

This year's general election follows a primary season in which more than 6.5 million young people under the age of 30 participated. Moreover, youth voter turnout in the 2008 primaries and caucuses nearly doubled compared to the 2000 primary.²

In 2004, turnout among 18-to-29 year-olds was up nine percentage points over 2000. Whether the voter mobilization momentum of 2008 primary season—which witnessed a eight percentage point increase in youth voter turnout from 9 percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2008³—continues into the general election remains unpredictable.

This fact sheet reports the characteristics of young voters for the nation, including estimates of the number of young voters and voter turnout in 2004 and 2000 for various sub-groups of young people, as well as selected statistics from the 2008 presidential primaries and caucuses.

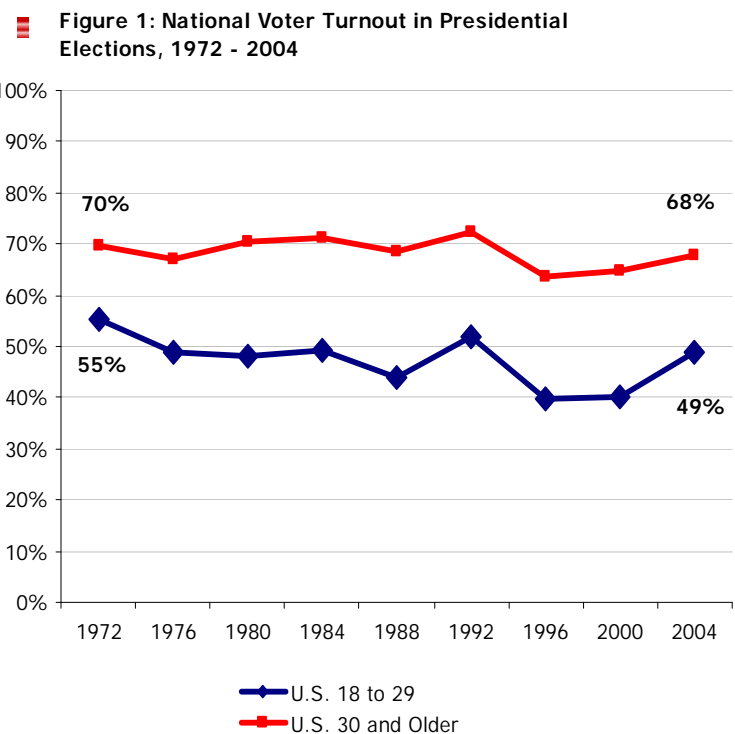


Table 1: Summary of Young Voters in the State Primary, 2008 ⁴

Young Voters by Party			
		2008	
Democratic	Number of Primary Participants	5,027,000	
	Share of Primary Participants	14 percent	
Republican	Number of Primary Participants	1,766,000	
	Share of Primary Participants	11 percent	

Youth Vote Choice by Party					
		Democratic Choice		Republican Choice	
Clinton	38 percent	Huckabee	31 percent		
Edwards	1 percent	McCain	34 percent		
Obama	60 percent	Paul	10 percent		
		Romney	25 percent		

Estimates of Eligible Young Voters, 2008

In 2008, a Presidential election year, there are an estimated 44 million young people in who are eligible to vote in U.S. elections—22 percent of all eligible voters. Table 2 shows voting statistics for the years 2004 and 2000.⁵

Table 2 – U.S. Voter Turnout Statistics, 2008, 2004, and 2000

	Young People 18 to 29	Adults 30 and Older
2008		
Number of Citizens Eligible to Vote in 2008	44 million	161 million
2004		
Number of Votes Cast	20 million	106 million
Voter Turnout Rate	49 percent	68 percent
Share of Actual Voters	16 percent	84 percent
Share of Voter-Eligible Population*	21 percent	80 percent
2000		
Number of Votes Cast	16 million	95 million
Voter Turnout Rate	40 percent	65 percent
Share of Actual Voters	14 percent	86 percent
Share of Voter-Eligible Population*	21 percent	79 percent

Source: Author's Tabulations, Current Population Survey, March Supplement 2008 and November Supplement 2004 and 2000. *Total is greater than 100 percent due to rounding.

Voter Turnout Rates in 2004 and 2000 Among Eligible Young Citizens

Table 3 displays voter turnout rates for various groups of young people in 2004 and 2000; the population share of each sub-group is also shown. 2004 was a year of high voter turnout—third highest turnout since 1972—for all youth groups relative to 2000. In fact, all sub-groups saw an increase in voter turnout from 2000 to 2004. Youth that work full-time and attend school had the largest percentage point increase (16 points), but only constitute 4 percent of all eligible youth voters in 2008.

Table 3 – U.S. Voter Turnout Rates Among Young Citizens ages 18 to 29, 2004 and 2000

2008 Population Share	Voter Turnout Rate	2004	2000	Percentage Point Change from 2000 to 2004
N/A	All Youth	49%	40%	+9 % points
***	Registered Voter	82%	74%	+8 % points
	Sex			
50%	Female	52%	43%	+10 % points

50%	Male	45%	38%	+8 % points
Race/Ethnicity				
67%	White	52%	42%	+10 % points
14%	Black	49%	42%	+7 % points
13%	Hispanic/Latino	35%	29%	+6 % points
3%	Asian	32%	32%	+0.5 % points
2%	Mixed	46%	N/A	N/A
1%	American Indian	35%	30%	+5 % points
Marital Status				
72%	Single	49%	39%	+10 % points
22%	Married	52%	46%	+5 % points
4%	Other Married	38%	32%	+6 % points
Student Status				
72%	Non-student	46%	39%	+7 % points
22%	College Student	60%	48%	+12 % points
6%	High School Student	36%	24%	+12 % points
College experience				
57%	At Least Some College Experience	61%	52%	+9 % points
43%	No College Experience	34%	27%	+7 % points
Educational Attainment				
38%	Some College	57%	46%	+11 % points
29%	High School or Equivalent	38%	30%	+8 % points
19%	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	69%	65%	+5 % points
14%	Less Than High School	23%	18%	+5 % points
Region				
36%	South	46%	40%	+6 % points
23%	Midwest	54%	43%	+11 % points
23%	West	48%	39%	+9 % points
18%	Northeast	49%	37%	+13 % points
Urbanicity				
40%	Suburban	50%	41%	+9 % points
30%	Urban	51%	43%	+8 % points
15%	Rural	45%	37%	+7 % points
Nativity Status				
84%	U.S.-born to U.S.-born parents	50%	41%	+9 % points
4%	U.S.-born to at one foreign-born parent	53%	41%	+12 % points
7%	U.S.-born to two foreign-born parents	36%	33%	+3 % points
4%	Foreign-born to two foreign-born parents	37%	31%	+6 % points
Employment Status				
45%	Full-Time Work and Non-student	50%	42%	+8 % points
13%	Not in the Labor Force and Student	50%	38%	+12 % points
12%	Not in the Labor Force and Non-Student	36%	29%	+7 % points
10%	Part-Time Work and Student	65%	52%	+13 % points
9%	Part-Time Work and Non-student	46%	39%	+7 % points
6%	Unemployed	41%	28%	+13 % points
4%	Full-Time Work and Student	59%	42%	+16 % points

Notes

¹ We thank Mark Hugo Lopez for his 2006 fact sheet series on which this fact sheet is based. We also thank Peter Levine, Abby Kiesa, and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet.

² Comparisons to other caucuses and primaries must be made with caution, because turnout is affected by the date of the primaries and by the nature of the Democratic and Republican Presidential campaigns, which are different in every state. In the case of Florida, the Democratic primary was not formally contested, and that fact may have lowered turnout.

³ The share of youth votes received by each presidential candidate is an estimate. It was calculated by first estimating the number of young people who voted in both the Republican and Democratic primaries/caucuses in each state. To estimate the number of youth votes each Democratic candidate received, the total youth vote estimate for the state's Democratic primary was multiplied by the share of all votes that each Democratic candidate received from young voters (source: Edison/Mitofsky exit polls). To estimate the number of youth votes each Republican candidate received, the total youth vote estimate for the state's Republican primary was multiplied by the share of votes each Republican candidate received from young voters (source: Edison/Mitofsky exit polls).

⁴ There were no Republican exit polls for the following states: DE, IN, KY, MT, NM, NC, OR, PA, RI, SD, VT, and WV. These same states were excluded from the Republican youth share.

⁵ For a full discussion of the different ways voter turnout can be calculated please see "CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Voter 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 1972-2004." All voter turnout estimates presented in this fact sheet are calculated for U.S. citizens only, and according to the "Census Citizen Method" described in CIRCLE Working Paper 35.