

CIRCLE

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Civic Learning & Engagement

Young Voters in the 2006 Elections

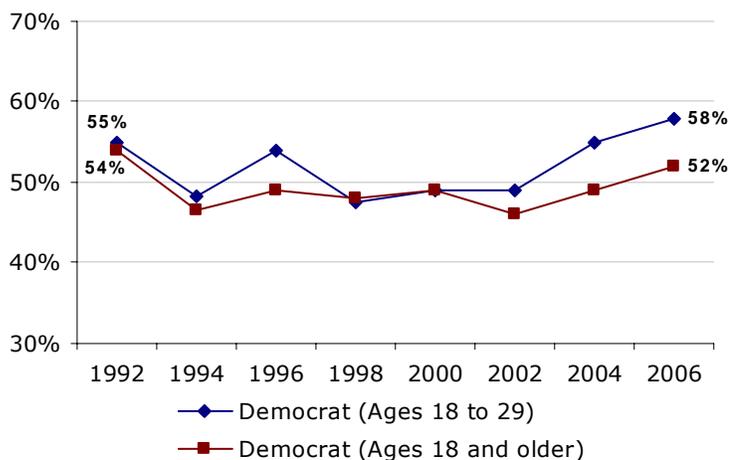
By Emily Hoban Kirby and Karlo Barrios Marcelo¹
December 12, 2006

On November 8th, CIRCLE released preliminary estimates showing that youth voter turnout rose to approximately 24% of eligible young voters between the ages of 18 and 29. This fact sheet presents information about young voters' political preferences, the issues that concerned them, and updated turnout estimates. Most of the information presented in this fact sheet is based on the 2006 National Election Pool's National Exit Poll.

Young Voters Continue Recent Strong Shift toward the Democratic Party

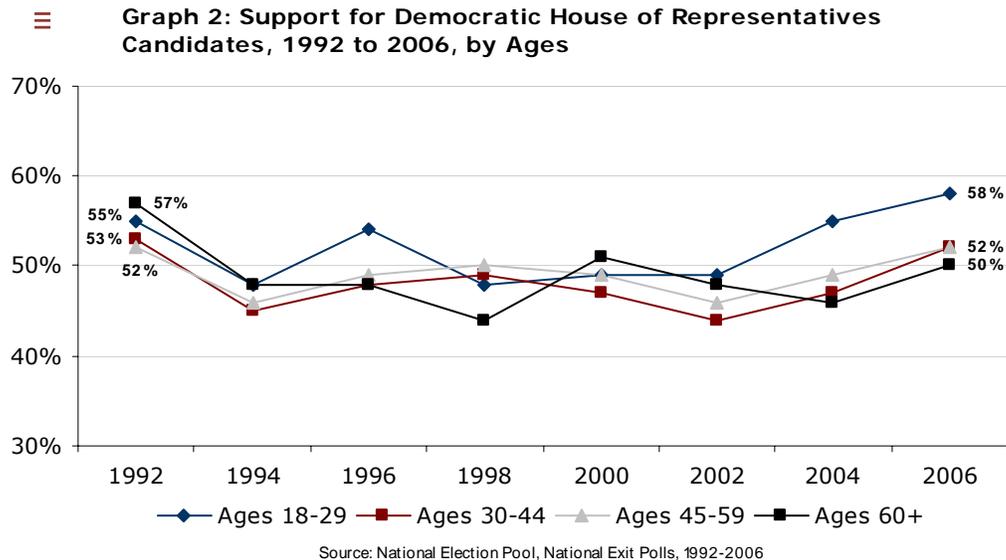
In the 2006 mid-term elections, nearly six in ten young voters chose the Democratic candidate for the House of Representatives elections, which was higher by six percentage points when compared to the entire electorate (see Graph 1). This represents the greatest level of support for House Democratic candidates among young people in the last eight elections. This recent shift towards the Democratic Party began in 2000, as indicated by exit polls. In 1998, young voters split their support almost evenly between Republican and Democratic candidates (48 percent each).

Graph 1: Support for Democratic House of Representatives Candidates, 1992 to 2006



Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Polls, 1992-2006

Graph 2 shows the support for Democratic House candidates by age groups. Young voters, ages 18 to 29, are the only cohort to show an increase in support for Democratic House candidates over time, from 1992 to 2006—three percentage points. Furthermore, young voters have witnessed the largest increase in support of Democratic House candidates since 2000—nine percentage points.



In 2006, strong support for Democratic candidates extended beyond the House of Representatives races. The majority of young voters under the age of 30 chose the Democratic candidate over the Republican candidate in races for the Senate (60% vs. 33%) and governor (55% vs. 34%). See Table 1.

Table 1: Support for Candidates Among Voters in 2006

<i>Race</i>	<i>Democratic Candidate</i>		<i>Republican Candidate</i>	
	<i>Ages 18-29</i>	<i>All Ages</i>	<i>Ages 18-29</i>	<i>All Ages</i>
House of Representatives	58%	52%	38%	45%
Senate	60%	54%	33%	40%
governor	55%	51%	34%	42%

Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Poll 2006

In addition to a shift in voting behavior, exit polls also indicate a change in political party identification among young voters. In 2004, regardless of age, voters were evenly split between the Republicans, Democrats and Independents. However, in 2006, young voters diverged from older voters with a sizable plurality of young voters reporting they were members of the Democratic Party. Forty-three percent of young voters identified as Democrats, 31% as Republican, and 26% as Independent (see Table 2).

Table 2: Voters' Party Identification by Age

	2006		2004	
	Ages 18-29	All Ages	Ages 18-29	All Ages
Democrat	43%	38%	37%	36%
Republican	31%	35%	35%	37%
Independent/Other	26%	27%	29%	26%

Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Polls 2006 & 2004

In many of the mid-term races this year, the Democratic Party won a sizeable number of young Independent voters. This is significant given that one quarter of young voters identify as "Independent/something else." Thus, while 58% of young people voted for Democratic candidates in the 2006 U.S. House races, only 43% of young voters considered themselves "Democrats." The Republican Party likely drew votes from young Independents as well, albeit by a smaller margin. Thirty-eight percent of young people voted for Republican candidates in the 2006 U.S. House races, while only 31% of young voters consider themselves "Republicans."²

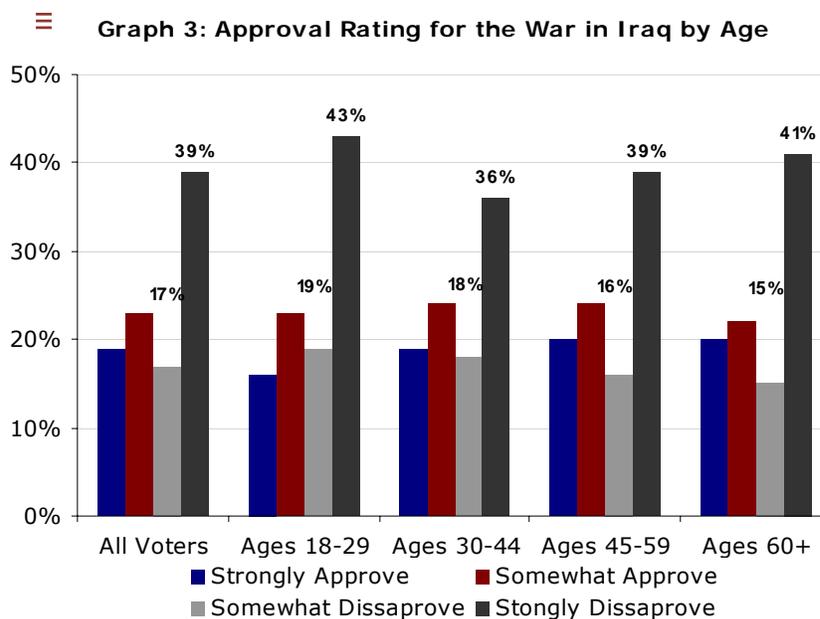
Views of Young Voters

Young voters in 2006 held views of politics and policy issues that differed substantially from older voters. This was particularly true about views of the Iraq war and the Bush administration.

Critical of the U.S. Handling of the War in Iraq

Sixty-two percent of young voters reported they somewhat or strongly disapprove of the U.S. war in Iraq, with a strong plurality of those voters (43%) reporting that they "strongly disapprove" of the war. This is in comparison to the electorate as a whole, 56% of whom disapproved of the war (see Graph 3). Young voters under the age of 30 are the most likely to believe that the U.S. should begin withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq (65% vs. 55% of all voters).

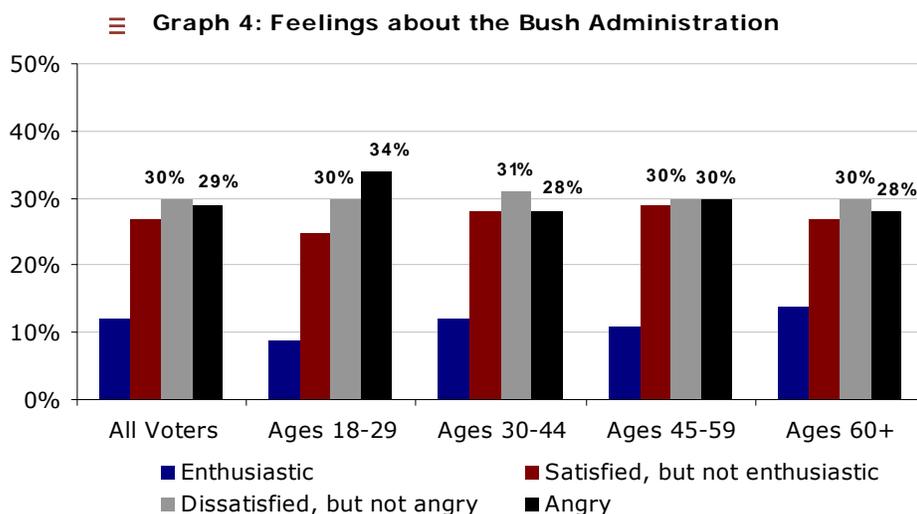
Furthermore, a majority of young people feel that the war in Iraq has failed to improve the long-term security of the U.S.



Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Poll, 2006

Dissatisfied with the George W. Bush Administration

Similar to young voters in the 2004 presidential election, young voters in the 2006 mid-term elections were the most likely to express either anger or dissatisfaction with the administration of George W. Bush. When asked “Which comes closest to your feelings about the Bush Administration,” about one-third expressed anger while another third expressed dissatisfaction (see Graph 4). Additionally, almost one half of young voters “strongly disapprove” of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president. While a majority of adult voters (57%) also disapprove of the Bush administration, their level of dissatisfaction is not as high as young voters (65%).



Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Polls, 1992-2006

A sizable number of young voters viewed their vote for members of Congress as a statement about their dissatisfaction with the Bush administration. Thirty-nine percent of young respondents said their vote for Congress was meant to express opposition to George W. Bush; this compares to 36% of all voters. A similar proportion said that their views of Bush did not play a role in their voting decisions.

Ballot Initiatives

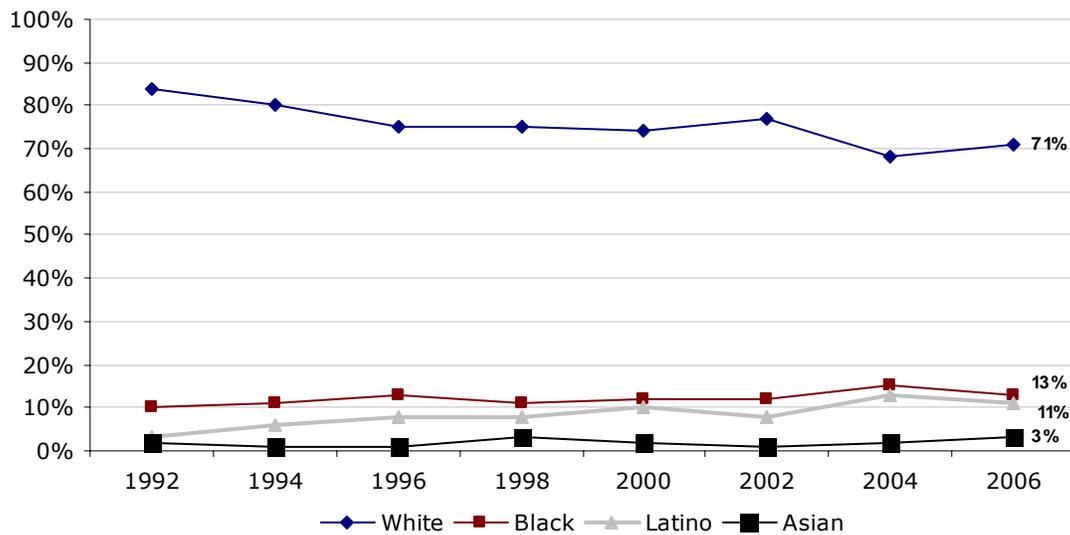
In several states voters had the opportunity to vote on a proposal to increase the minimum wage and/or a proposal to ban same-sex marriage.

- **Minimum Wage:** Young people were more likely than any other age group to support an increase in the minimum wage (74% of under-30 voters supported an increase compared to 66% of all voters).
- **Same-sex Marriage:** On the issue of same-sex marriage, about two-thirds of voters of all ages, including young voters, voted to ban same-sex marriage.

A Diverse Cohort

Young voters (ages 18 to 29) are more racially and ethnically diverse than older voters, according to the exit polls. Eleven percent classified themselves as Hispanic/Latino, larger than the proportion in the electorate as a whole (6%). Thirteen percent of young voters self-identified as Black, compared to 10% of all voters. Five percent identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, compared to three percent of the whole electorate. Graph 5 shows the racial composition of young voters, ages 18 to 29, from 1992 to 2006. As Graph 5 indicates, the share of young voters who identify as white has decreased from 84 percent in 1992 to 71 percent in 2006—a 13 percentage point drop in voter share. Young Latinos have increased their voter share by eight percentage points since 1992, more than any other minority racial/ethnic group.

≡ Graph 5: Racial Composition of Young Voters, Ages 18 to 29



Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Polls, 1992-2006

Late to Decide

Young voters were relatively late to make up their minds. They were the most likely age group to make their voting decision on Election Day. Moreover, 44% of young voters decided for whom to vote in the U.S. House election within a week of Election Day, compared to 28% of the electorate as a whole.

Updated Statistics on Voters between the Ages of 18 and 29

In our November 8th press release, CIRCLE used the Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool exit polls for the House of Representatives races and the first day vote tally as reported by the Associated Press to estimate youth turnout. Based on these early reports, CIRCLE estimated that youth turnout was 24%. As new

data has become available, CIRCLE now estimates that the turnout of 18-to-29 year-olds was somewhere between 22% and 24%, clearly up from 2000 when youth turnout was 20%.

CIRCLE's estimates of youth turnout are based on three components:

- the number of votes cast in the election (from local election officials via the Associated Press),
- the percentage of voters who are in that age range (according to exit polls),
- and, the size of the citizen population between the ages of 18 and 29 (according to Census Bureau³).

The reported number of votes cast has risen since our November 8th release and will continue to be adjusted upwards as local election officials count absentee ballots and provisional ballots. Meanwhile, since our press release Edison/Mitofsky updated their exit poll results, changing the percentage of voters who were between the ages of 18 and 29. This percentage changed from 13% to 12%. These two changes affect our estimate of the number of votes cast by young people, and hence youth turnout rate estimates can be adjusted.

Table 4 below shows how the changing figures affect youth voting estimates. Each calculation generates slightly different results, but all calculations tell the same basic story. Youth turnout in mid-term elections was higher in 2006 than 2002 and certainly rivals turnout in 1994 (a midterm election with one of the highest youth turnout rates).

Table 4- Estimates for Youth Voting in Mid-term Elections⁴

<i>Year</i>	Youth Share of Electorate <i>Source: National Election Pool, National Exit Poll</i>	Youth Turnout Rate Estimate #1 <i>Source: 1st day vote tally and Youth Share Based on Exit Polls</i>	Youth Turnout Rate Estimate #2 <i>Source: 2nd day vote tally and Youth Share Based on Exit Polls</i>
2006 (A)	13%	24%	24%
2006 (B)	12%	22%	23%
2002	11%	20%	21%
1994	13%	22%	24%

Currently, exit polls are the only source of data for estimating youth voter turnout, but they may not be the best data source for comparing the turnout of different age groups over time. More information about youth voter turnout will be available in 2007 when the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, November Supplement is released.

Notes

¹ We thank Kate Howard, Tony Fleming, and Rafael Nieto for their excellent research assistance. All errors in interpretation are our own.

² At this time, we are unable to report the proportion of self-identifying "Independent" youth voters who voted for the Democratic and Republican House candidates. We will be able to provide those percentages when the exit poll data is made publicly available in January 2007.

³ Population estimates are taken from the Current Population Survey Annual Demographic File March 2006, 2002, and 1994.

⁴ The percentages of voters age 18-29 are obtained from national exit polls. The numbers of votes cast are obtained from the Associated Press as of 9am the day following the election. Estimated voter turnout is obtained by taking the estimated number of votes cast and dividing it by the estimated population of 18-29 year-old citizens from the March Current Population Survey.