



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Youth Demographics

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After several years of decline, the population of young people has begun to grow, and in the coming years will grow to rival the size of the baby boomer generation. The estimated number of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 in 2000 was 42.2 million. And young citizens between the ages of 0 and 17 in 2000 numbered close to 72.4 million, rivaling the size of the baby boomer generation in 2000 which numbered an estimated 77.6 million adults between the ages of 36 and 54, though young people continue to represent a declining share of the resident population.<sup>2</sup>

The population of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 today is more racially and ethnically diverse and better educated than the population of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 in 1972. Young people today are also more likely to be single than their counterparts in 1972. Table 1 contains estimates of the number of young people by age category between 1972 and 2000. As can be seen, the number of young people has grown in recent years, and is likely to continue growing in the foreseeable future.

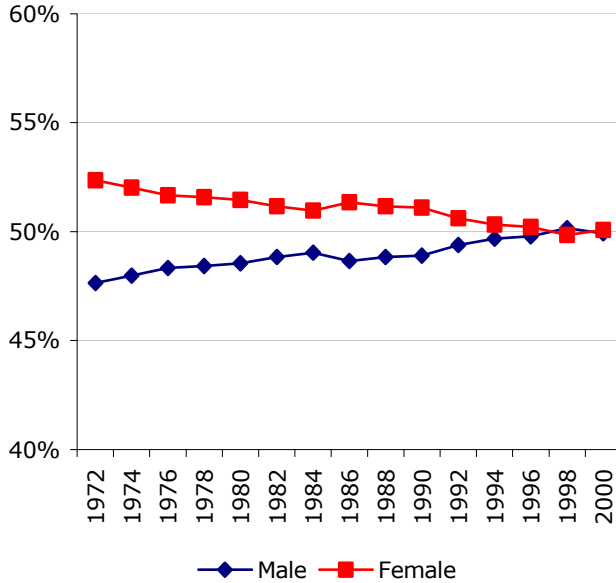
**Table 1 – Resident Youth Population Estimates, In Millions**

	Ages 15-25	Ages 15-17	Ages 18-19	Ages 20-21	Ages 22-25	Ages 0-17
1972	***	***	7.5	7.0	13.6	***
1974	***	***	7.8	7.5	13.8	***
1976	43.0	12.5	8.1	7.8	14.5	***
1978	43.7	12.3	8.2	8.1	15.1	62.9
1980	43.7	11.8	8.1	8.1	15.7	61.7
1982	44.1	11.1	8.0	8.2	16.9	62.5
1984	42.9	10.7	7.4	7.9	16.8	62.5
1986	41.7	11.1	7.1	7.3	16.1	63.3
1988	40.2	10.5	7.3	7.0	15.4	63.7
1990	38.6	9.9	7.1	7.4	14.2	65.0
1992	38.2	10.1	6.6	6.8	14.7	66.9
1994	40.1	11.1	6.9	7.0	15.2	70.4
1996	40.2	11.6	7.3	6.9	14.4	71.5
1998	40.6	11.8	7.9	7.2	13.7	71.7
2000	42.2	12.3	8.0	7.6	14.5	72.4

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.<sup>3</sup>

## Gender Splits

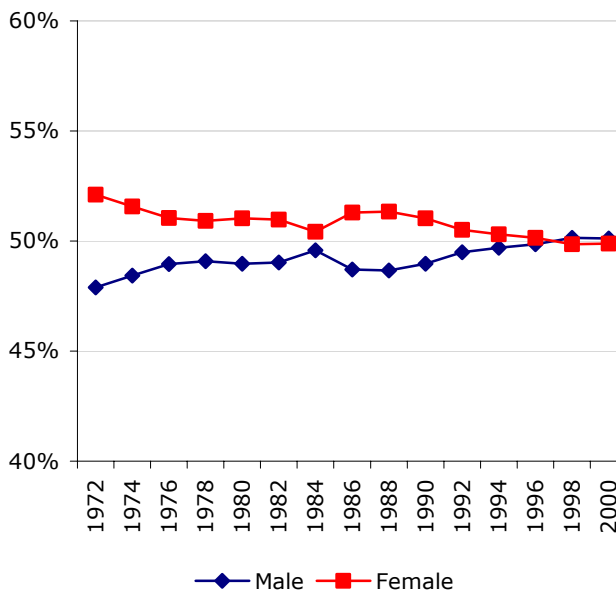
**Graph 1: Gender, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

The population of young people ages 18-24 has become more evenly split between men and women in recent years. Graph 1 shows the trend in the gender split over the past 30 years.

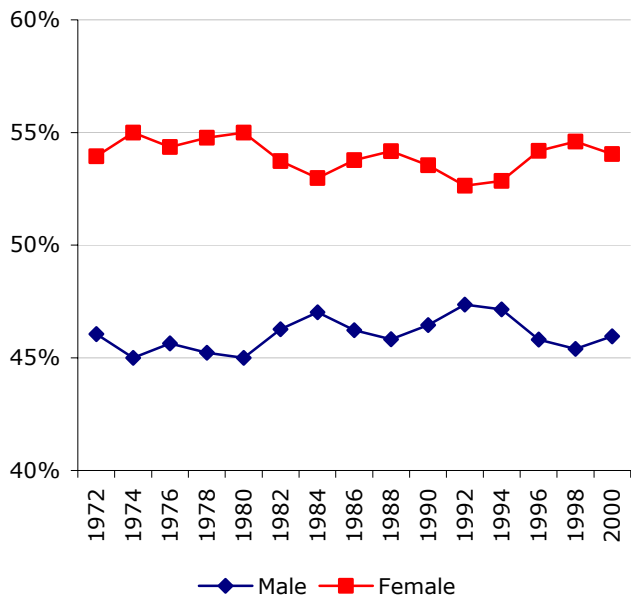
**Graph 2: White Gender, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

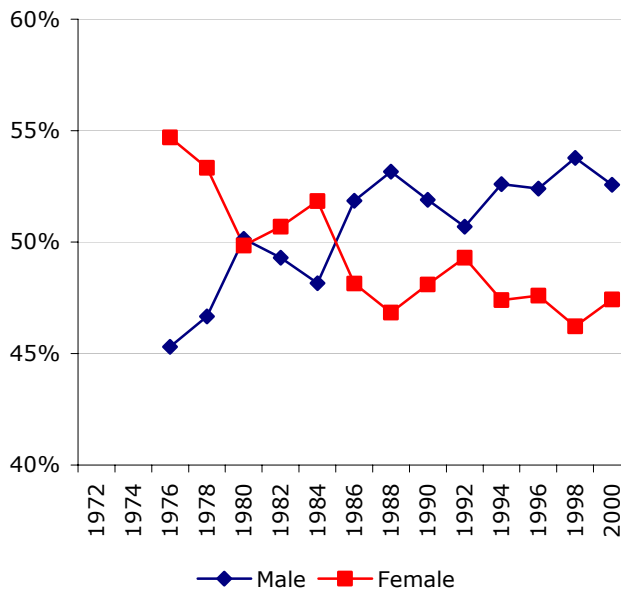
This coming together of the gender distribution is not necessarily true for all ethnic groups. Graph 2 shows the distribution of gender for white young people, and suggests a closing of the gap in the number of male and female young white people.

**Graph 3: African American Gender, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

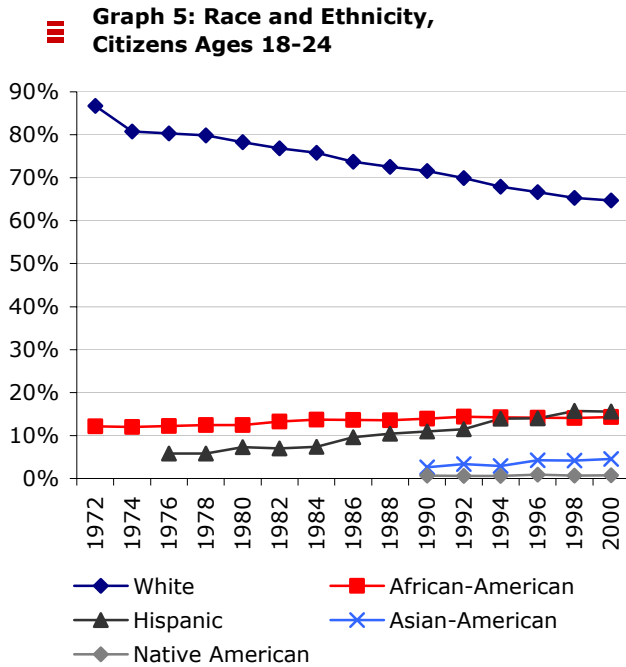
**Graph 4: Hispanic Gender, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

However, for African Americans, Graph 3, and Hispanics, Graph 4, a different picture emerges. First, young African Americans are more likely to be female, with over 55 percent of the population of young African Americans female in 2000. For Hispanics, Graph 4, a different picture is evident. In 2000, over 55 percent of young Hispanics were male.

### Racial and Ethnic Composition of Young Citizens

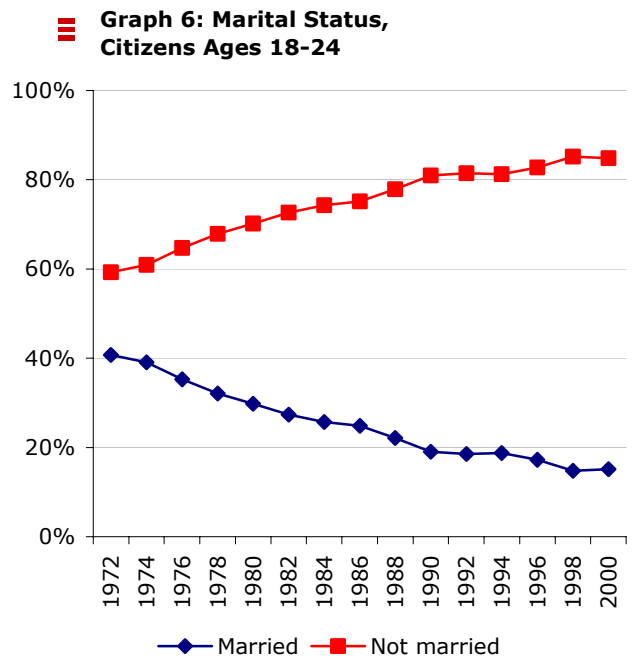


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

The racial/ethnic composition of the youth population has shifted in recent years. Between 1972 and 2000, the percentage of young citizens who are white has steadily fallen from approximately 88 percent in 1972 to approximately 65 percent in 2000. During the same period, the percentage of young citizens who are Hispanic has grown over 10 percentage points from 5 percent in 1976 to 16 percent in 2000. Graph 5 displays the trend in the composition of the youth citizen population since 1972.<sup>4</sup>

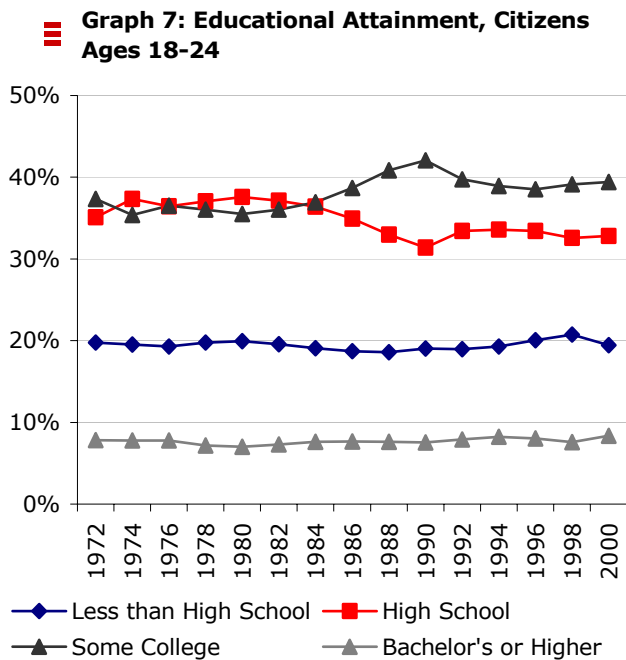
### Marital Status of Young Citizens

Over the past thirty years, young people have become more likely to delay their time to first marriage. Graph 6 shows the trend in marital status for young citizens ages 18-24.<sup>5</sup>



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

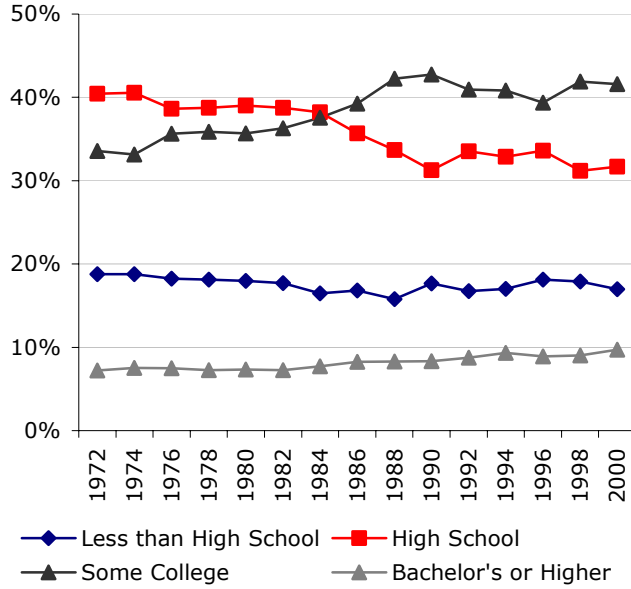
### Educational Attainment



More young people today are enrolled in college or have completed a bachelor's degree than in 1972, though the percentage of young people who have completed less than a high school diploma remains steady between 1972 and 2000 at approximately 20 percent.<sup>6</sup>

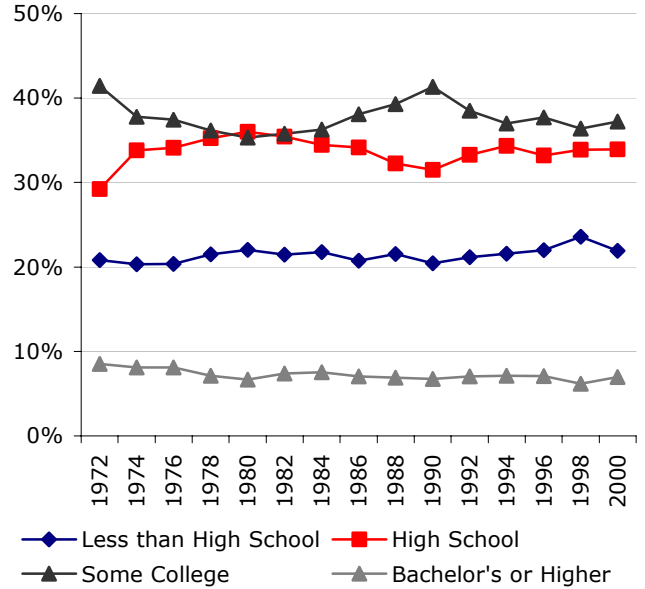
Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 8: Female Educational Attainment, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 9: Male Educational Attainment, Citizens Ages 18-24**

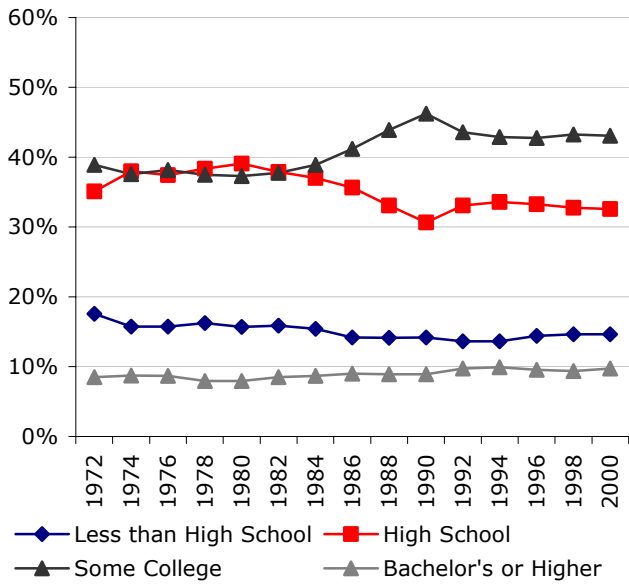


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

Educational attainment among young women has grown as more are attending college today than in 1972. However, among young men, educational attainment has remained relatively stable over the past thirty years. In 2000, a greater percentage of women ages 18-24 were attending college or had a bachelor's degree than men ages 18-24. Graphs 8 and 9 compare young female and male citizens in educational attainment.

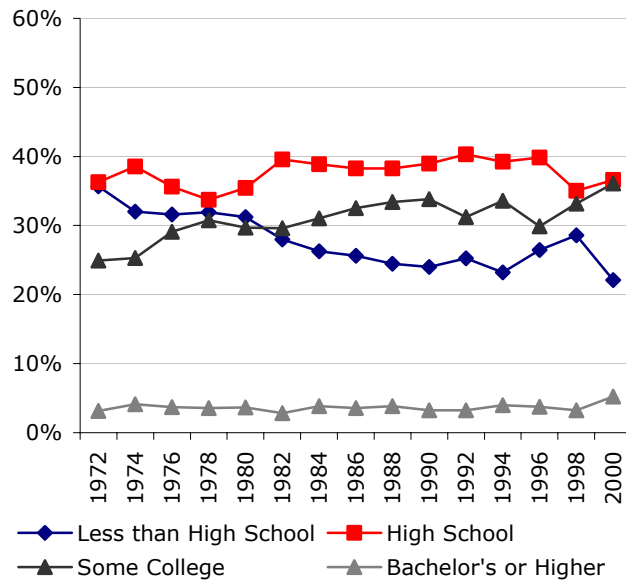
Educational attainment across racial/ethnic groups for young people is very different. Whites and Asian American 18-24 year old citizens are more likely to be attending college or have attended college than their African American and Hispanic counterparts, though educational attainment is up across all groups. Young Hispanic citizens ages 18-24 are most likely to have not completed a high school diploma, though the percentage of young Hispanics without a high school diploma has dropped in recent years.

**Graph 10: White Educational Attainment, Citizens Ages 18-24**



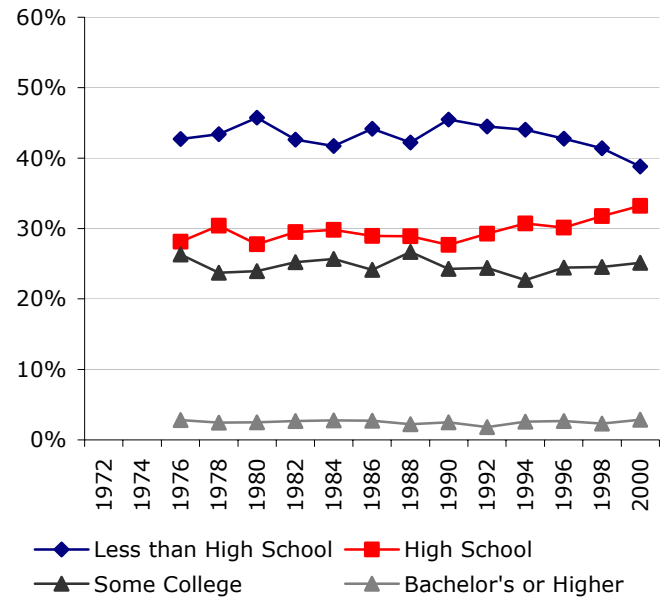
Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 11: African American Educational Attainment, Citizens Ages 18-24**



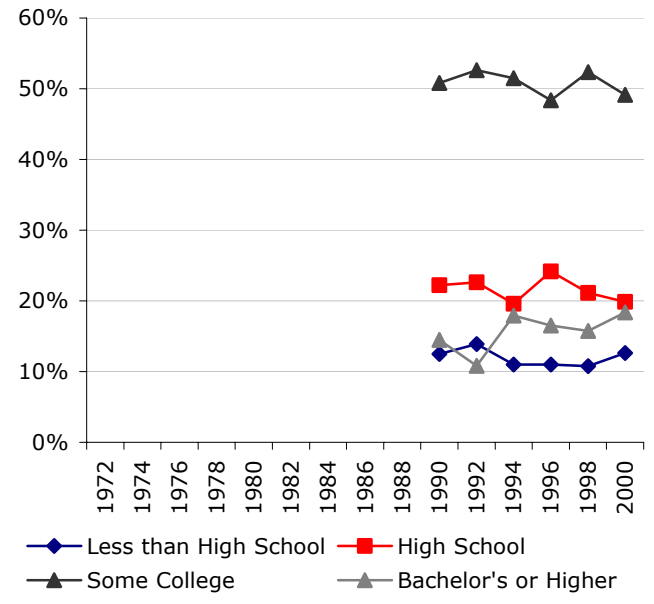
Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 12: Hispanic Educational Attainment, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 13: Asian-American Educational Attainment, Citizens Ages 18-24**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Peter Levine and Carrie Donovan for comments on a previous draft of this fact sheet. I also thank Micheal Olander for excellent research assistance. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See "Youth Voter Turnout has Declined, by Any Measure," by Peter Levine and Mark Hugo Lopez for the declining trend in the proportion of the population that is between the ages of 18 and 25.

<sup>3</sup> Data on young people less than 18 was not available in 1972 and 1974. Resident youth population estimates include both citizens and non-citizens. Unfortunately, citizen status is not determined for young people less than 18 until 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to 1990, the Current Population Survey allowed individuals to categorize their race/ethnicity as "other". Those classifications have been suppressed here since it is unclear what race/ethnicity people who identified themselves as "other" are.

<sup>5</sup> While not shown here, the trend in marriage rates is similar across all racial/ethnic populations.

<sup>6</sup> One should be cautious when interpreting the level of educational attainment among young people. Since young people are in transition, it is likely that many will eventually attain a bachelor's degree, and a reported bachelor's completion rate of 9 percent in 2000 among 18-24 year old citizens masks the eventual educational attainment of 20 year olds in 2000. Among 25-year-old citizens, in 2000, 26.9 percent had attained a bachelor's degree, 35 percent had some exposure to college, but no bachelor's degree, 30 percent had completed a high school education, but had not attended college, and 8.1 percent had not completed high school.