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Youth Voter Turnout in the States during the 2004 Presidential and 2002 Midterm Elections: Ages 18-29

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Youth voter turnout among citizens varies substantially across states, in both the 2004 presidential election and the 2002 midterm election, though the vast majority of states experienced a dramatic decline in turnout between 1972 and 2002 followed by one of the largest turnout increases in recorded history in last November's election. However, youth turnout still remains substantially below turnout for adults 30 and older.² For youth between the ages of 18 and 29, turnout rates have generally declined by 7 percentage points in midterm election years between 1978 and 2002. In presidential election years between 1972 and 2000, the turnout rate had declined by 15 percentage points among young citizens before rebounding by 9 percentage points in the 2004 election. It remains to be seen if the increase in youth turnout in 2004 is part of a new trend or is instead a spike in youth electoral participation like the 1992 election.

State by State Voter Turnout for 2004

Youth voter turnout was highest in 2004 in Minnesota (71%), Wisconsin (65%), Kentucky (60%), and Iowa (60%). Youth voter turnout in 2004 was lowest in Hawaii (34%), Vermont (39%), Tennessee (40%), and Arkansas (40%). Young people voted at a much higher rate in contested, "battleground" states.³ In the ten most contested states, youth turnout was on average 55%, up 13 percentage points from 2000. In the non-battleground states, youth turnout was on average 49%, up eight percentage points from 2000. One explanation for the higher rates of participation in the battleground state is that there was greater voter outreach and political advertising in these states. Current research shows that youth participate when they are asked to do so.⁴

Across all states, voter turnout rates among adults 30 and older ranged from a low of 55 percent in Hawaii to a high of 81 percent in Minnesota. Nationally, youth voter turnout in 2004 was 49 percent, and voter turnout among adults 30 and older was 68 percent.

Across all states, youth voter turnout was almost 20 percentage points lower than voter turnout among adults ages 30 and older. For 2004, Kentucky exhibited the smallest turnout gap between young and older voters (6 percentage points), while Vermont showed the greatest difference (32 percentage points).

Most states saw significant increases in youth voter turnout in the past election, some of more than fifteen percentage points. These states include: Minnesota (20 points), South Dakota (18 points), Arizona (17 points), Kentucky (17 points), and Utah (16 points). However, not all states saw their youth voter turnout rates rise. Three states experienced a turnout decrease from 2000:

North Dakota (-5 points), Virginia (-4 points), Arkansas (-1 point), Connecticut (-1 point), and Vermont (-1 point).

State by State Voter Turnout for 2002

In 2002, youth voter turnout rates among citizens were highest in Minnesota (45%), South Dakota (36%), Alaska (34%), and North Dakota (33%), but were very low in West Virginia (15%), Delaware (15%), New Jersey (17%), and Texas (17%). Youth voter turnout was lowest in Arizona, with a youth turnout rate among young citizens of 14 percent. Across all states, voter turnout rates among adults 30 and older ranged from a low of 41 percent in Virginia to a high of 75 percent in South Dakota. Nationally, youth voter turnout in 2002 was 22 percent, and voter turnout among adults 30 and older was 50 percent, both up slightly from 1998.

Nationally, youth voter turnout was on average 30 percentage points lower than the adult voter turnout rate. The smallest voter turnout gap, at 19 percentage points, was in Kentucky, and the largest gap, at 41 percentage points, was in Vermont.

Between 1978 and 2002, youth voter turnout rates had declined from a national youth voter turnout rate among citizens in 1978 of 29 percent to a youth voter turnout rate among citizens in 2002 of 22 percent. Between 1978 and 2002, only eight states saw a rise in their youth voter turnout rates, with the greatest gain in Kentucky at 14 percentage points. Across all other states, some substantial declines in youth voter turnout among citizens between 1978 and 2002 were observed. In particular, North Dakota (-17 point), Michigan (-15 point), and Montana (-15 point) saw the greatest declines in youth voter turnout among citizens over the 24-year period during midterm elections.

Table 1 – Voter Turnout Among Citizens in 2004, by State

<i>State</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year old Citizens in 2004</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 30 year old and older Citizens in 2004</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year old Citizens in 1972</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year old Citizens in 2000</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout between 2000 and 2004⁵</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout Between 1972 and 2004⁶</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout Between 1972 and 2000⁷</i>
Alabama	47%	67%	46%	45%	+ 2% points	+ 1% point	-1% point
Alaska	58%	68%	52%	52%	+ 6% points	+ 6% points	0% points
Arizona	46%	69%	46%	29%	+ 17% points	0% points	-17% points
Arkansas	40%	63%	44%	41%	-1% point	-4% points	-3% points
California	46%	66%	65%	40%	+ 6% points	-19% points	-25% points
Colorado	50%	72%	62%	37%	+ 13% points	-12% points	-25% points
Connecticut	44%	67%	63%	45%	-1% point	-19% points	-18% points
Delaware	50%	70%	63%	42%	+ 8% points	-13% points	-21% points
D.C.	59%	70%	42%	55%	+ 4% points	+ 17% points	+ 13% points
Florida	49%	68%	51%	40%	+ 9% points	-2% points	-11% points
Georgia	49%	59%	45%	40%	+ 9% points	+ 4% points	-5% points
Hawaii	34%	55%	64%	23%	+ 11% points	-30% points	-41% points
Idaho	49%	65%	65%	40%	+ 9% points	-16% points	-25% points
Illinois	50%	70%	61%	45%	+ 5% points	-11% points	-16% points
Indiana	41%	63%	58%	35%	+ 6% points	-17% points	-23% points
Iowa	60%	75%	67%	50%	+ 10% points	-7% points	-17% points
Kansas	45%	70%	60%	38%	+ 7% points	-15% points	-22% points
Kentucky	60%	66%	44%	43%	+ 17% points	+ 16% points	-1% point
Louisiana	52%	68%	50%	50%	+ 2% points	+ 2% points	0% points
Maine	59%	74%	44%	52%	+ 7% points	+ 15% points	+ 8% points
Maryland	50%	69%	57%	40%	+ 10% points	-7% points	-17% points
Massachusetts	51%	74%	62%	43%	+ 8% points	-11% points	-19% points
Michigan	55%	71%	56%	41%	+ 14% points	-1% point	-15% points
Minnesota	71%	81%	70%	51%	+ 20% points	+ 1% point	-19% points
Mississippi	52%	65%	48%	45%	+ 7% points	+ 4% points	-3% points
Missouri	52%	73%	58%	39%	+ 13% points	-6% points	-19% points
Montana	51%	76%	72%	42%	+ 9% points	-21% points	-30% points
Nebraska	46%	71%	60%	39%	+ 7% points	-14% points	-21% points
Nevada	43%	63%	44%	32%	+ 11% points	-1% point	-12% points
New Hampshire	58%	74%	45%	46%	+ 12% points	+ 13% points	+ 1% point
New Jersey	51%	69%	58%	41%	+ 10% points	-7% points	-17% points
New Mexico	47%	68%	52%	32%	+ 15% points	-5% points	-20% points
New York	49%	63%	60%	39%	+ 10% points	-11% points	-21% points
North Carolina	45%	66%	40%	40%	+ 5% points	+ 5% points	0% points
North Dakota	56%	77%	67%	61%	-5% points	-11% points	-6% points
Ohio	54%	69%	55%	41%	+ 13% points	-1% point	-14% points
Oklahoma	45%	67%	59%	37%	+ 8% points	-14% points	-22% points
Oregon	55%	79%	55%	48%	+ 7% points	0% points	-7% points
Pennsylvania	48%	68%	47%	34%	+ 14% points	+ 1% point	-13% points
Rhode Island	44%	69%	70%	43%	+ 1% point	-26% points	-27% points
South Carolina	46%	68%	41%	42%	+ 4% points	+ 5% points	+ 1% point
South Dakota	49%	72%	73%	31%	+ 18% points	-24% points	-42% points
Tennessee	40%	60%	48%	30%	+ 10% points	-8% points	-18% points
Texas	42%	62%	50%	35%	+ 7% points	-8% points	-15% points
Utah	56%	72%	70%	40%	+ 16% points	-14% points	-30% points
Vermont	39%	71%	35%	40%	-1% point	+ 4% points	+ 5% points
Virginia	43%	67%	44%	47%	-4% points	-1% point	+ 3% points
Washington	53%	71%	58%	42%	+ 11% points	-5% points	-16% points
West Virginia	49%	59%	55%	38%	+ 11% points	-6% points	-17% points
Wisconsin	65%	80%	58%	51%	+ 14% points	+ 7% points	-7% points
Wyoming	53%	69%	60%	47%	+ 6% points	-7% points	-13% points
National	49%	68%	55%	40%	+ 9% points	-6% points	-15% points

Source: Authors' tabulations from the CPS November 1972- 2004 Supplements.

Table 2 – Voter Turnout Among Citizens in 2002, by State

<i>State</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year old Citizens</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 30 year old and older Citizens</i>	<i>Difference in Voter Turnout between 18-29 year olds and 30+ citizens^a</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year old Citizens in 1978</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout between 1978 and 2002^a.</i>
Alabama	31%	54%	+ 23% points	31%	0% points
Alaska	34%	61%	+ 27% points	41%	-7% points
Arizona	14%	51%	+ 37% points	21%	-7% points
Arkansas	21%	52%	+ 31% points	25%	-3% points
California	22%	49%	+ 27% points	34%	-12% points
Colorado	29%	56%	+ 27% points	28%	+ 1% point
Connecticut	23%	52%	+ 29% points	32%	-9% points
Delaware	15%	53%	+ 37% points	27%	-12% points
D.C.	32%	60%	+ 28% points	22%	+ 10% points
Florida	23%	54%	+ 30% points	28%	-5% points
Georgia	22%	48%	+ 26% points	16%	+ 6% points
Hawaii	20%	51%	+ 31% points	34%	-14% points
Idaho	24%	53%	+ 29% points	29%	-5% points
Illinois	23%	53%	+ 30% points	28%	-5% points
Indiana	19%	45%	+ 26% points	26%	-7% points
Iowa	23%	59%	+ 36% points	31%	-8% points
Kansas	23%	55%	+ 32% points	33%	-10% points
Kentucky	30%	49%	+ 19% points	16%	+ 14% points
Louisiana	28%	56%	+ 29% points	26%	+ 2% points
Maine	31%	64%	+ 32% points	43%	-12% points
Maryland	24%	56%	+ 32% points	28%	-4% points
Massachusetts	23%	60%	+ 37% points	35%	-12% points
Michigan	25%	57%	+ 33% points	40%	-15% points
Minnesota	45%	74%	+ 29% points	47%	-2% points
Mississippi	21%	50%	+ 30% points	32%	-11% points
Missouri	26%	59%	+ 34% points	36%	-10% points
Montana	26%	60%	+ 34% points	41%	-15% points
Nebraska	24%	53%	+ 29% points	29%	-5% points
Nevada	22%	49%	+ 27% points	26%	-4% points
New Hampshire	24%	57%	+ 33% points	26%	-2% points
New Jersey	17%	48%	+ 32% points	25%	-8% points
New Mexico	18%	52%	+ 34% points	29%	-11% points
New York	21%	50%	+ 29% points	29%	-8% points
North Carolina	18%	52%	+ 34% points	16%	+ 2% points
North Dakota	33%	65%	+ 32% points	50%	-17% points
Ohio	21%	50%	+ 29% points	27%	-6% points
Oklahoma	25%	55%	+ 30% points	28%	-3% points
Oregon	30%	63%	+ 33% points	40%	-10% points
Pennsylvania	21%	49%	+ 28% points	30%	-9% points
Rhode Island	20%	57%	+ 37% points	34%	-14% points
South Carolina	27%	51%	+ 25% points	24%	+ 3% points
South Dakota	36%	75%	+ 39% points	42%	-6% points
Tennessee	21%	54%	+ 33% points	35%	-14% points
Texas	17%	48%	+ 31% points	21%	-4% points
Utah	22%	54%	+ 32% points	35%	-13% points
Vermont	20%	61%	+ 41% points	19%	+ 1% point
Virginia	18%	41%	+ 23% points	24%	-6% points
Washington	20%	59%	+ 39% points	22%	-2% points
West Virginia	15%	42%	+ 27% points	22%	-7% points
Wisconsin	24%	56%	+ 32% points	38%	-14% points
Wyoming	30%	61%	+ 31% points	43%	-13% points
National	22%	50%	+28% points	29%	-7% points

Source: Authors' tabulations from the CPS November 1978- 2002 Supplements.

NOTES

¹ Research Director and Research Associate respectively. We thank Carrie Donovan, Jared Sagoff and Emily Kirby for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

² For a full discussion of the different ways voter turnout can be calculated please see CIRCLE Working Paper 35: Youth Voter Turnout 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.

³ Battleground states include Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Nevada, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The percentages of voters age 18-29 is obtained from state exit polls. 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 CPS.

⁴ See Donald Green and Alan Gerber's book, *Getting out the Vote: How to Increase Turnout in 2004*, available through the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C.

⁵ This is obtained by taking the 2000 voter turnout figure and subtracting it from the 2004 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 2000 and 2004. A positive number represents an improvement between 2000 and 2004.

⁶ This is obtained by taking the 1972 voter turnout figure and subtracting it from the 2004 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 1972 and 2004. A positive number represents an improvement between 1972 and 2004.

⁷ This is obtained by taking the 1972 voter turnout figure and subtracting it from the 2000 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 1972 and 2000. A positive number represents an improvement between 1972 and 2000.

⁸ This is calculated by taking the 25+ voter turnout rate and subtracting the 18-24 voter turnout rate.

⁹ This is obtained by taking the 1978 voter turnout figure and subtracting from it the 2002 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 1978 and 2002. A positive number represents an improvement between 1978 and 2002.