AROUND THE CIRCLE

RESEARCH & PRACTICE

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YOUTH TURNOUT UP SHARPLY IN 2004

CIRCLE analysis shows that young people turned out to vote in the 2004 presidential election at a level not seen for more than a decade. Currently, the most accurate estimates of youth turnout range from 42 to 47 percent for 18-24 year olds and 48 to 52 percent for 18-29 year olds. Table 1 compares youth turnout estimates using both the National Election Pool (NEP) state and national exit polls and a vote tally as reported by the Associated Press two days following the presidential election.[1] For more information see CIRCLE Fact Sheets "Youth Voting in the 2004 Election" and "Youth Voter Turnout 1992 to 2004: Estimates from Exit Polls" which can be downloaded from www.civicyouth.org.

While exit polls indicate that the under thirty share of the total vote stayed about the same as in 2000, at around 17 percent, their turnout rate went up from 2000 by at least five percentage points. Overall, turnout increased dramatically this year.

BATTLEGROUND STATES AND NEW VOTERS PLAYED A LARGE ROLE IN THE TURNOUT INCREASE

Youth voter turnout was especially high in the battleground states. In initial estimates, CIRCLE put youth turnout at 64% in the battleground states, up 13 percentage points from 2000. Young voters were the only age group to prefer the Democratic ticket over the Republican, albeit by a fairly narrow margin of 54 percent to 45 percent for those under 30.

TABLE 1: YOUTH TURNOUT ESTIMATES, NEP STATE AND NATIONAL EXIT POLLS

AGES 18-24					AGES 18-29				
	Aggregated State		National			Aggregated State		National	
Year	Turnout	Votes Cast (in millions)	Turnout	Votes Cast (in millions)	Year	Turnout	Votes Cast (in millions)	Turnout	Votes Cast (in millions)
2004	47%	11.6	42%	10.3	2004	52%	21.1	48%	19.5
2000	36%	8.6	37%	8.7	2000	42%	16.6	43%	16.8
1996	32%	7.2	35%	7.2	1996	38%	14.9	39%	15.6
1992	48%	10.3	50%	10.3	1992	53%	20.4	54%	20.9

[1] CIRCLE turnout estimates are based on the NEP national and state exit polls as well as the AP vote tallies two days after the election. At this time, exit polls are the only source of data for estimating youth voter turnout; however, 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 2005 when the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey November Supplement is released.

An important point to note about current youth turnout estimates is that they all rely on NEP exit polls, and there are two ways of calculating turnout from the exit polls. Each state has an exit poll and there is a separate national exit poll. Therefore, youth turnout can be calculated by aggregating all 50 state exit polls along with the District of Columbia poll or it can be calculated using the national exit poll. CIRCLE has estimated turnout using both sources.

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According to Dr. Mark Hugo Lopez, CIRCLE Research Director, "Not only did more young people vote in this election, but many of them voted for the first time." About 8 million of the under-30 voters, or 42 percent, voted for the first time. They represent 64 percent of the 13 million first-time voters.

YOUNG VOTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAME VOTING ISSUES, BUT EXPRESS DISTINCT ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Young voters generally had the same concerns as older voters. Of the under-30 voters, for example, 22 percent said "moral values" were the most important issue, the same percentage as all voters. But on some prominent issues, they differed dramatically. Notably, 41 percent favor gay marriage, compared to 25 percent of all voters. They were 12 percentage points more likely than older voters to identify as liberal, and seven percentage points less likely to call themselves conservative. Voters under 30 were also 10 percentage points more likely to believe that "government should do more to solve problems."

COLLEGE STUDENTS VOTED AT HIGHER RATES, FOUND VOTING EASY AND BACKED KERRY

Shortly after the election, CIRCLE also released the first post-election survey of college students with three quarters of students saying they had voted. College students chose John Kerry over George W. Bush by 55 to 41 percent. Much of Kerry's support among college students came from those who identified as Independent. Independent college students preferred him by 62 to 27 percent. The poll toplines, a press release, and a summary Fact Sheet can be downloaded from CIRCLE's Web site (www.civicyouth.org).

Both partisan and non-partisan groups helped get college students to the polls, especially in the battleground states. Almost half (47%) of all students – and 57 percent of those who attend college in a "battleground" state – said they were contacted by a political party during the campaign. Of those contacted, 56 percent voted for Kerry, while 39 percent voted for Bush. Moreover, close to half (46%) said they were encouraged by their colleges or a group at their college to register.

Despite concerns that college students would face barriers when casting their votes, nearly nine in ten reported that they thought

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 with a generous grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts and is now also funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is based in the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy.

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voting was easy. Less than four percent said they tried to register but were unable to do so. Less than 1 percent claimed that they went to the polls but were not allowed to vote.

One possible reason for the infrequent voting problems may be that many college students chose to register and vote in their hometowns. Two-thirds of students opted to register in their hometowns and vote either in person or by absentee ballot. The further along in school students are the more likely they are to prefer to be registered using their college address. About one-fifth of students who registered at home reported that they would prefer to register in their college town. Moreover, the poll found that students who registered in their college town were more likely to vote than those registered at their home address.

The poll of 1,200 college students was designed by Professor Richard Niemi of the University of Rochester and Professor Michael Hanmer of Georgetown University, with the assistance of John Della Volpe, whose firm Schneiders/Della Volpe/Schulman conducted the survey, and by David King of Harvard University. It is among only a few studies of college students that includes students living both on and off campus. Funding was provided by CIRCLE.

2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION POLLS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

There are several organizations who have sponsored polls of young people during and after the 2004 presidential election. Following are a few of the polls with links to the results.

Post-Election Polls

The Emerging Electorate Survey: What Young Americans Say About the 2004 Election
November 9-10, 2004
http://www.declareyourself.org/
The survey was conducted by Global Strategy Group and Luntz Research Companies on behalf of Declare Yourself. A nationally representative sample of 1,201 18 to 29 year-olds was interviewed by phone on November 9 and November 10, 2004. The overall margin of error is plus or minus 2.8 percentage points.

The Pace University/Rock the Vote New Voter Study Post-Election Exit Survey
November 4-11, 2004
http://www.pace.edu/PacePoll
The poll was fielded nationwide and by telephone among 520 new registrants since 2000. The findings are statistically significant within a ±4.3% margin of error at a 95% level of confidence. Respondents were randomly selected from a list of new registrants in 43 states and the District of Columbia.

The Vanishing Voter Survey by the Joan Shorenstein Center at the Kennedy School
November 3-7, 2004
http://www.vanishingvoter.org/Releases/release111104.shtml
A nationwide telephone survey of 1,010 adults conducted November 3-7, 2004. The survey has a sampling error of ±4%. The Vanishing Voter Project is a study by the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Pre-Election Polls

The Harvard Institute of Politics College Student Polls
http://www.iop.harvard.edu/research_polling.html
Since 2000, the Institute has been conducting frequent polling of America's college students. The surveys—generally one is published in the fall semester and one in the spring semester—track students' political views and seek to understand what drives these new voters.

Ipsos/GENEXT Polls (fee for access)
http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=2411
The Newsweek.com/GENEXT Poll is conducted by Ipsos-Public Affairs. The polls are mainly of registered voters age 18-29.

MTV Choose or Lose: PRElection Poll
September 8-13, 2004
http://www.civicyouth.org/whats_new/index.htm
The poll was conducted by CBS News on behalf of MTV and The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) among 876 18 to 29 year-olds by telephone from September 8-13, 2004. The margin of error for this survey is ±3%. These respondents were part of nationwide representative sample identified in households previously interviewed by CBS News Polls.

National Youth Survey 2004
November 17-24, 2003
http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/national_youth_survey2004.htm
CIRCLE, in collaboration with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Council for Excellence in Government, released a survey of 1,000 Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. The survey was conducted by Democratic pollsters Lake Snell Perry & Associates and Republican pollsters The Tarrance Group. It was in the field November 17-24, 2003, and has a margin of error of ± 3.1 percent.