Gains in Youth Voting Driven by Major Surge in Turnout by African-Americans and Latinos

Groups Account for Nearly 2.2 Million New Voters in 2004

The large increase in young people who voted last fall was driven by a huge surge in the turnout rates among African-Americans and Latinos, who accounted for more than half of the 4.3 million additional under-30 voters who went to the polls in 2004 compared to 2000. These two groups caused the overall youth vote to go for Senator Kerry over President Bush, by 54-45%, as white 18-29 year olds favored President Bush, according to estimates from exit poll data released today by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE.)

Analyzing state exit polls, CIRCLE reported that the overall turnout rate among 18 to 29 year olds grew by approximately 10 percentage points between 2000 and 2004. But the increases varied dramatically between different segments of the population. The 2004 turnout rates of under-30 voters by race/ethnicity were:

♦ 53% of African-Americans voted in 2004, up 15 points from a 38% turnout rate in 2000.
♦ 53% of Latinos voted, up 21 points from a 32% turnout rate in 2000.
♦ 52% of white, non-Latinos voted in 2004, an 8-point increase over 2000’s 44% turnout rate.

The new analysis also showed a dramatic change in the diversity of youth voters. Since 1992, the share of young voters who are white dropped from 84% to 68% in 2004, while the share of young African-American voters grew by 50%, to 15%, and the share of young Latino voters more than quadrupled, growing from 3% in 1992 to 13% last fall.

These figures are estimates based on exit polls. Another set of data will become available later in 2005 when the Census Bureau releases results from its November 2004 voting survey. There is no official or precise count of turnout by race or ethnicity, but CIRCLE’s analysis represents the most accurate estimate possible at this time.

“We were all heartened to see young people going to the polls in record numbers last fall,” said CIRCLE Director William A. Galston. “By taking a closer look, we see an even more remarkable story. It appears that the turnout rates among minority youth may have even exceeded that of whites. In particular, there was unprecedented interest in this election among young Latinos, with 1.3 million more voting in 2004 than in 2000.”

Strong Support for Kerry Among Young Latino, African-American Voters

Voters aged 18-29 were the only age group besides those 75 and older, where a majority supported John Kerry. This support was driven by young Latino and African-American voters.
Young Latino voters supported Kerry over Bush (58-40%), and young African-American voters backed Kerry by 88-11%. Younger Latinos supported Kerry by a wider margin than their over-30 counterparts (who voted 52% for Kerry, 45% for Bush.) Over-30 African-American voters supported Kerry over Bush by the same margin as those under 30.

Young white voters were the only group of young voters to favor Bush over Kerry, 55-44%. White voters age 30 and over supported Bush over Kerry by a 59-40% margin.

Overall, higher percentages of voters 18-24 years old supported Kerry than 25-29 year olds. For example, 48% of white 18-24 year olds voted for Kerry, compared to 44% of whites under the age of 30. The one exception is Latino youth, where 55% of under-25 Latino voters backed Kerry, compared to 58% of those under 30.

“While we know America is becoming more diverse, particularly among young people, this underscores the significant differences between groups and shows the growing influence of minorities,” said Mark Hugo Lopez, CIRCLE’s Research Director. “Not only are minority groups growing as a share of the youth population, but among the youngest generation of voters they are voting at the same rate as whites.”

Until the release of Census Bureau data later in 2005, there two available sources of data about turnout in 2004, the National Exit Poll, and CIRCLE’s aggregation of state exit polls, both based on surveys done by Edison/Mitofsky. Numbers in this release are based on aggregate state exit poll data, because of the larger sample size. Additional information on both methods, and additional figures, are in a fact sheet Voting Patterns of Young People by Race and Ethnicity, 1988 to 2004, which is available at CIRCLE’s Web site, www.civicyouth.org.

# # #

Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie Corporation of New York, and housed at the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy, CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) is a premier source of impartial, nonpartisan, and comprehensive data, research, and analysis on the civic engagement of young people.