Quick Facts about Young Voters in Montana: The Midterm Election Year 2006

By Mark Hugo Lopez, Karlo Barrios Marcelo, and Jared Sagoff
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This year’s elections follow a presidential election that witnessed the highest level of national youth voter participation in over a decade, and a youth voter turnout rate of 51 percent in Montana, up 9 percentage points over 2000. Compared to other states in 2004, the turnout rate among 18 to 29 year olds in Montana ranked 21st overall. However, despite high youth voter participation in Montana in 2004, whether this voter mobilization momentum continues into 2006 remains unpredictable. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to compare either state-level or national youth voter turnout in 2006 to 2004 since presidential elections generally draw more voters to the polls, and hence have higher voter turnout rates. Instead, the two appropriate comparisons are 2002, the last time midterm elections occurred, and 1994, the last time midterm elections followed a surge in youth voting in a presidential election (1992).

This fact sheet reports the characteristics of young voters for the state of Montana, including estimates of the number of young voters, voter turnout in 2002 and 1994 for various sub-groups of young people, and a listing of voter registration and election day laws that may affect young voters. Just as the general trend in national voter turnout among young people during midterm elections was down between 1982 and 2002 (see Graph 1), Montana’s youth voter turnout rate in midterm election years has also been steadily declining. In addition, between 1978 and 2002, the youth voter turnout rate in Montana has been higher than the national youth voter turnout rate. In recent midterm election years, however, the substantial advantage in youth voter participation held by Montana has eroded, and was only 4 percentage points in 2002. This year, Montana could see a higher level of voter participation among all voters relative to 2002 because of a high profile Senate race.

Estimates of Eligible Young Voters, 2006

In 2006, a midterm election year, there are an estimated 124,000 young people in Montana who are eligible to vote in U.S. elections. Table 1 shows voting statistics for the years 2002, the last midterm election year, and 1994, the last midterm election year that followed a surge in youth voting in a presidential election year (1992).

Voter Turnout Rates in 2002 and 1994 Among Eligible Young Citizens, Ages 18-29

Table 2 displays voter turnout rates for various groups of young people ages 18 to 29 in 2002 and 1994 in Montana. In 2002, voter turnout among many youth groups in Montana was down from 1994. Also in 1994 and 2002, relative to the nation as a whole, youth in Montana were more engaged electorally.

Table 1 – Montana Voter Turnout Statistics, 2006, 2002, and 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>1994</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Citizens Eligible to Vote in 2006</td>
<td>124 thousand</td>
<td>584 thousand</td>
<td>533 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Votes Cast</td>
<td>30 thousand</td>
<td>333 thousand</td>
<td>311 thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Voter Turnout Rate</td>
<td>26 percent</td>
<td>60 percent</td>
<td>68 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of all Voters</td>
<td>8 percent</td>
<td>92 percent</td>
<td>88 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2 – Montana Voter Turnout Rates Among Young Citizens ages 18 to 29, 2002 and 1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voter Turnout Rate Among:</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>1994</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>23 percent</td>
<td>38 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>28 percent</td>
<td>32 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>***</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>8 percent</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>31 percent</td>
<td>43 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA or more</td>
<td>44 percent</td>
<td>55 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Men</td>
<td>28 percent</td>
<td>31 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Women</td>
<td>17 percent</td>
<td>29 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Men</td>
<td>33 percent</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Women</td>
<td>34 percent</td>
<td>48 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Voter</td>
<td>54 percent</td>
<td>58 percent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ Tabulations from the 2002 and 1994 November Supplements of the Current Population Survey. ‘***’ indicates a sample size is too small to produce a reliable estimate.
Voter Registration and Election Day Laws in Montana

Table 3 displays important Voter Registration and Election Day Laws for the state of Montana. For more information on elections in Montana, contact the Elections and Legislative Bureau of Montana at 406-444-4732 or 888-884-8683 or sos.state.mt.us.

Table 3 – Montana Voter Registration and Election Day Laws, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Registration Day Laws</th>
<th>30 days before an election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Deadline for all Elections</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted Absentee Voting</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Person Early Voting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Day Registration</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows 17 Year Olds to Vote in Primaries</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Day Laws</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polls Open</td>
<td>7am/noon to 8pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off to Vote (Private Sector)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Information on Poll Location</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Sample Ballots</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes

1 Research Director, Research Associate, and Research Assistant, respectively. We thank Peter Levine, Emily Kirby, Abby Kiesa, and Deborah Both for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet.

2 For a full discussion of the different ways voter turnout can be calculated please see “CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Voter 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 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.