

The Youth Vote in 2010: Final Estimates Based on Census Data

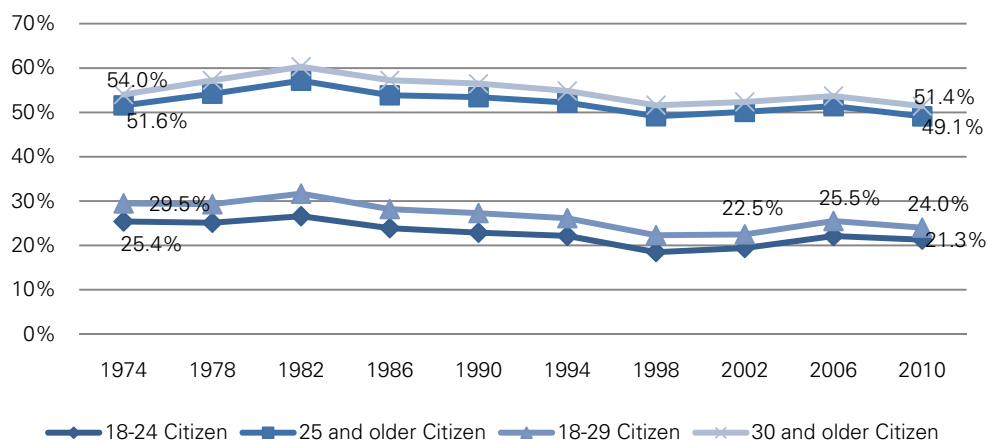
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Voter turnout among young American citizens age 18 to 29 in the 2010 Midterm Election was 24.0%¹, according to CIRCLE’s estimates from the recently released 2010 U.S. Census Current Population Survey (CPS), November Supplement. While youth turnout declined slightly (down one and a half points)² between 2006 and 2010, it remained similar to past midterm elections and tracks a similar decline in adult turnout.

In general, turnout rates in midterm elections are relatively stable. Historically, turnout estimates among 18-to 29-year-olds range between 20 and 30 percent and turnout among those 30 and older ranges between 50 and 60 percent of the eligible population (see Graph 1 below). Turnout in presidential elections is generally twice as high as in midterm elections, among all ages.

Figure 1: Voter Turnout by Age, 1974-2010



Source: Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplements, 1974-2010

According to the National Election Pool (NEP) 2010 National Exit Poll, younger voters chose Democratic House candidates over Republican House candidates by a margin of 55%-42%. In contrast, all voters favored the Republicans in House races by 52%-45%. Since 2004, young voters have chosen Democratic candidates in each national election by significant margins.

The exit polls also found that the 2010 youth electorate was largely a subset of the 2008 electorate: 13% went to the polls for the first time, meaning that 87% of youth were repeat voters. This suggests that the 2010 election did not bring out new young voters, nor did it sustain the entire young electorate of the 2008 presidential election.³

The 2010 midterm election revealed some important differences in turnout rates among young people. Young African Americans, as in 2008, came out at higher levels than the national electorate as a whole. Some young African American voters might have been first engaged during the 2008 presidential election.

This fact sheet presents trends in youth voting from 1974-2010 using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's CPS, November Voting and Registration Supplements. Additionally, it provides information on differences in youth voting trends by various demographics, such as gender, race, and educational attainment.

2010 Youth Voter Turnout Rate

When we discuss the role of young voters in the outcomes of an election, we can describe their impact in several ways. The first, and perhaps most useful, measure of young voters' influence is their turnout. We present turnout estimates in Table 1 below. The youth voter turnout was approximately 24.0%, a decrease of one and a half percentage points from 2006. Compared to 2002, the *increase* in youth turnout is one and a half percentage points.

	2002	2006	2010	Percentage Point Difference between 2006 and 2010
18-29	22.5%	25.5%	24.0%	-1.5 points
30-44	42.2%	43.0%	40.3%	-2.7 points
45-64	55.0%	56.0%	54.4%	-1.6 points
65+%	62.4%	63.1%	60.7%	-2.4 points
<i>All Ages</i>	<i>46.1%</i>	<i>47.8%</i>	<i>45.5%</i>	<i>-2.3 points</i>

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS Nov. Voting and Registration Supplements, 2002-2010

Number of Votes Cast

Another way to describe the role of young voters in elections is by directly examining how many votes are cast by members of that age group. Although American democracy relies on ballot anonymity, polls and surveys can give us a good estimate of how many votes are cast by

certain groups. In 2010, approximately 10.8 million American youth (ages 18 to 29) voted, which represents a slight increase in the number of voters from 2006 and is almost two million more voters than in 2002. In the total electorate, the number of votes cast declined slightly between 2006 and 2010. The increase in the number of youth votes cast is due to the increasing size of the 18-to 29-year-old population.

	<i>All Votes Cast</i>	<i>Votes Cast by 18-24 Year Olds</i>	<i>Votes Cast by Voters 25 and Older</i>	<i>Votes Cast by 18-29 Year Olds</i>	<i>Votes Cast by Voters 30 and Older</i>
1974	63,164	6,130	57,034	11,526	51,637
1978	69,587	6,516	63,071	12,417	57,170
1982	80,310	7,140	73,171	14,472	65,837
1986	79,954	5,782	74,172	12,360	67,593
1990	81,991	5,072	76,918	11,077	70,914
1994	85,702	5,049	80,653	10,461	75,242
1998	83,098	4,251	78,846	8,815	74,283
2002	87,762	4,787	82,975	8,910	78,852
2006	96,119	5,524	90,595	10,768	85,351
2010	95,987	5,681	90,306	10,830	85,157

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1974-2010

Youth Share of the Electorate

A third method of examining young voters' effect on elections is to calculate their share of the electorate. In 2010, young voters' share of the electorate was very similar to their share in 2006: it was 11.2 in 2006 and 11.3 percent in 2010 (for ages 18-29).

	<i>Youth Share of Citizens</i>		<i>Youth Share of Votes Cast</i>		<i>Difference Between Share of Cit. Pop. and Share of Votes Cast</i>	
	18-24	18-29	18-24	18-29	18-24	18-29
1974	17.9%	29.0%	9.7%	18.2%	8.2%	10.8%
1978	18.2%	29.8%	9.4%	17.8%	8.8%	12.0%
1982	17.3%	29.5%	8.9%	18.0%	8.4%	11.5%
1986	14.9%	27.1%	7.2%	15.5%	7.7%	11.6%
1990	13.3%	24.4%	6.2%	13.5%	7.1%	10.9%
1994	12.9%	22.6%	5.9%	12.2%	7.0%	10.4%
1998	12.5%	21.5%	5.1%	10.6%	7.4%	10.9%
2002	13.0%	20.8%	5.5%	10.2%	7.5%	10.6%
2006	12.4%	21.0%	5.7%	11.2%	6.7%	9.8%
2010	12.9%	21.7%	5.9%	11.3%	7.0%	10.4%

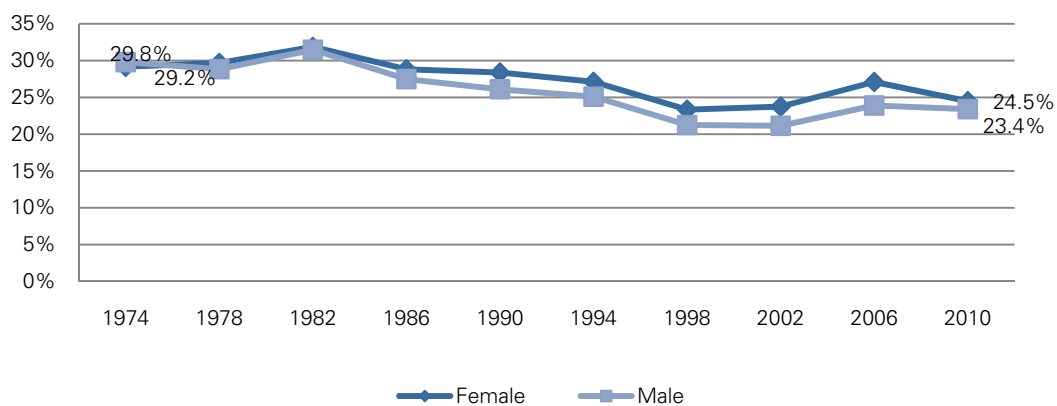
Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1974-2010.

The next section of this fact sheet examines youth voter turnout rates for women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and young people with different educational experiences. Also presented are turnout rates among youth and adults by state.

Voter Turnout Among Young Females Declines Slightly

In 2010, young female voters voted at a similar rate as their male counterparts (24.5% vs. 23.4%). Moreover, turnout among young women declined between 2006 and 2010 by three points, shrinking the “gender gap” in voting that previously favored women. In 2008, for example, an eight point voter turnout gap existed between young men and women (55% of young females voted compared to 47% of young men). In 2010, the gap shrunk to just slightly over one percentage point.

Figure 2: Voter Turnout among 18-to-29 year-olds, by Gender, 1974-2010



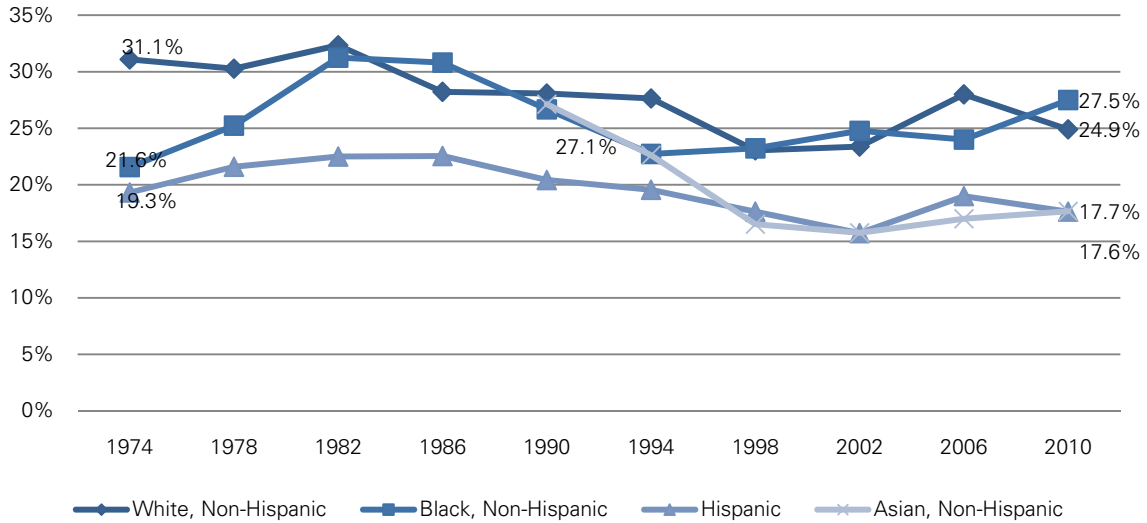
Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1974-2010

Participation of Young African Americans Still Strong in 2010

In 2010, young African Americans voted at a rate of 27.5%. This was an increase from the 2006 Midterm elections, when 24.0% of young African Americans had voted. The relatively strong showing continues a trend from 2008, when young African Americans showed the highest turnout rate among any youth racial/ethnic group since 1972. Despite lower levels of turnout all around, young African American voters are still relatively engaged politically. Turnout among Asian American youth also increased between 2006 and 2010, but by a smaller amount (one point).

White youth experienced the largest decline in voter turnout, dropping from 28.0% in 2006 to 24.9% in 2010. Turnout among Hispanic youth also declined, but by only one point.

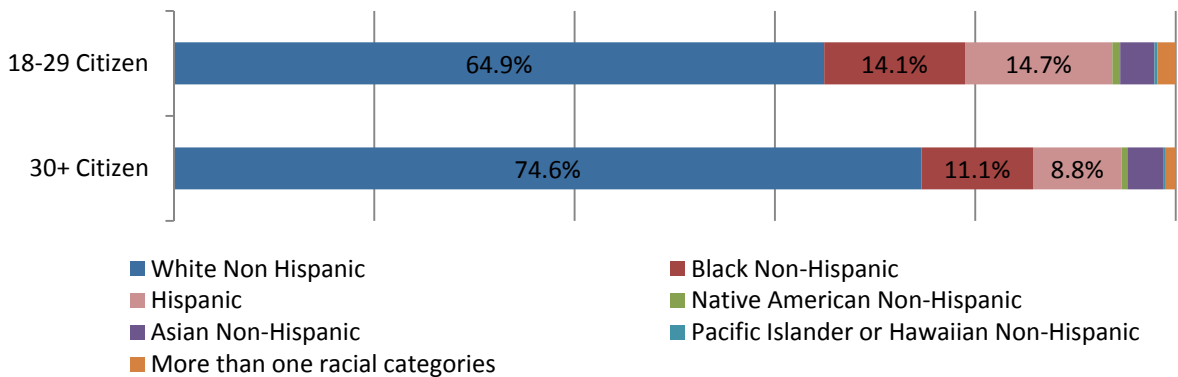
Figure 3: 18-to-29 Year-Old Citizen Turnout, by Race 1974-2010



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1974-2010
 Note: Turnout estimates for Asian Americans are available only from 1990.

Because of the rising proportion of people of color in the US population as a whole, young citizens are much more racially and ethnically diverse than older Americans (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Race and Ethnicity Break-Down of Citizens, by Age



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplement, 2010

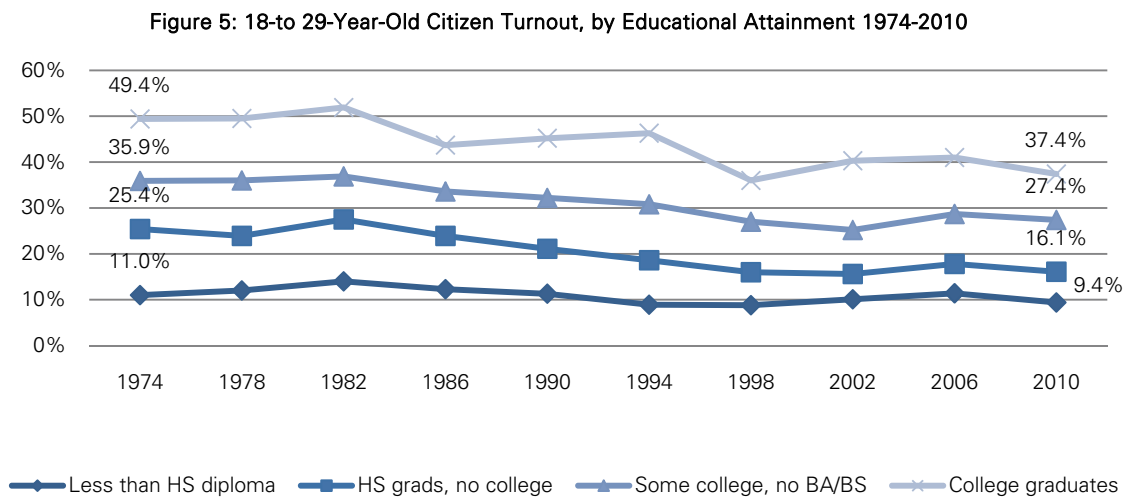
Young People with More Education are More Likely to Vote

In the 2010 election, young people with college experience were almost twice as likely to vote as those without college experience (14.2% vs. 30.8%).⁴ One's educational level has long been understood to be a strong predictive factor of one's likelihood of voting. More-educated individuals—those who have had at least some college education—have consistently been almost twice as likely to vote as those who have received no more than a high school diploma. Despite the fact that college attendance has grown since 1972, the turnout gap between these two groups has remained relatively constant (see Table 4).

	College	Non-college	Difference
1974	40.0%	20.9%	-19.1 points
1978	39.9%	20.2%	-19.7 points
1982	41.4%	23.6%	-17.8 points
1986	36.6%	20.7%	-15.9 points
1990	36.0%	18.2%	-17.8 points
1994	35.7%	15.8%	-19.9 points
1998	29.9%	13.8%	-16.1 points
2002	29.8%	13.9%	-15.9 points
2006	30.4%	13.1%	-17.3 points
2010	30.8%	14.2%	-16.6 points

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1974-2010.

Young people with a college degree saw the greatest decline in voting rates compared to their counterparts with less education: turnout dropped four points from 41.0% in 2006 to 37.4% in 2010. However, college graduates voted at a rate three times as high as those with less than a high school degree.

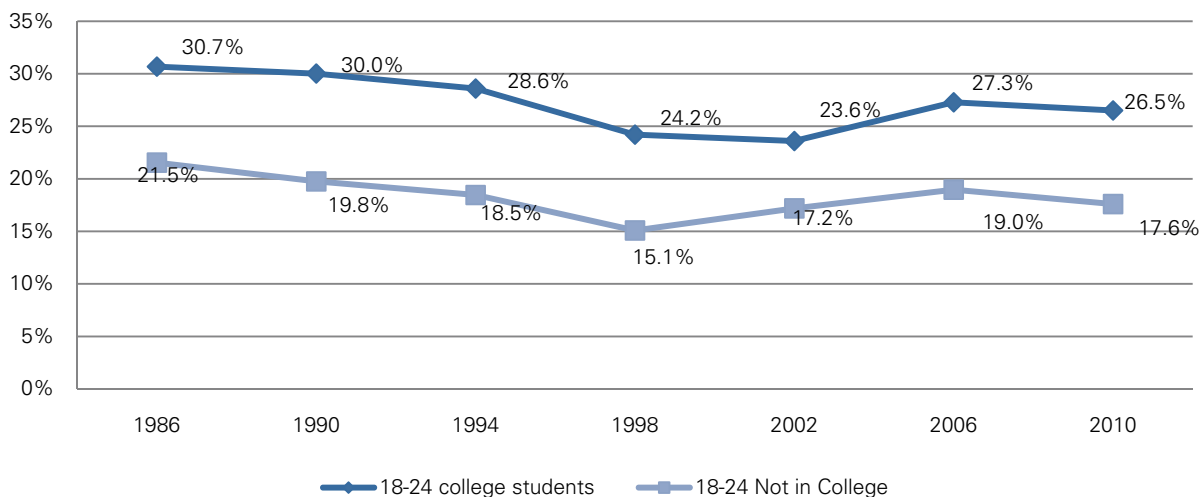


Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1974-2010

Turnout Among College Students

In the 2010 election, young people age 18 to 24⁵ who were currently in college were more likely to vote than their peers who were not currently attending college by a margin of nine percentage points. Turnout gap between college-enrolled and non-enrolled youth have been relatively stable over time, with an exception of 2002.

Figure 6: 18-to-24 year-old Citizen Turnout, by Current College Status, 1986-2010



Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1986-2010
 *CPS does not ask about current college student for years 1974-1982

Full-time college students were more likely vote (26.8%) than part time students (24.9%). Moreover, young Black current college students were more likely than their White counterparts to vote in 2010 (29.6% versus 27.4%). Hispanic College students lagged behind their peers, with a turnout of 22.7%.

State-by-State Voter Turnout for 2010⁶

Among the states that had sufficiently large and reliable samples in 2010, youth voter turnout was highest in Oregon (35.7%), North Dakota (35.5%), South Carolina (34.9%) and Minnesota (34.6%). Voter turnout in 2010 was lowest in Nebraska (13.6%), Indiana (13.8%), Texas (16.1%), and Tennessee (16.4%). Turnout gaps between young people and adults varied between 20 and 35 points depending on the state. South Carolina, Hawaii, West Virginia, Arizona, Nevada, Mississippi, Georgia and Virginia had some of the smallest gaps between youth and adult turnout (See Table 5).

Table 5: 2010 State by State Turnout Estimates by Age			
	Ages 18 to 29	Ages 30 and up	Difference Between Youth and Adult Turnout Rates (in percentage points)
Alabama	23.1%	48.9%	25.8%
Alaska*		59.8%	
Arizona	30.5%	53.9%	23.3%
Arkansas	18.2%	47.0%	28.8%
California	27.8%	52.9%	25.1%
Colorado	29.6%	58.4%	28.8%
Connecticut	21.6%	55.9%	34.3%
Delaware*		56.6%	
District of Columbia*		51.0%	20.2%
Florida	23.7%	48.7%	25.0%
Georgia	24.3%	48.7%	24.4%
Hawaii	25.6%	48.2%	22.6%
Idaho*		53.8%	
Illinois	24.0%	51.8%	27.9%
Indiana	13.8%	46.1%	32.2%
Iowa	28.8%	59.1%	30.3%
Kansas	20.5%	55.1%	34.6%
Kentucky	22.9%	53.3%	30.4%
Louisiana	26.1%	57.1%	30.9%
Maine	31.2%	65.3%	34.0%
Maryland	24.2%	52.9%	28.7%
Massachusetts	25.5%	59.1%	33.6%
Michigan	23.5%	54.0%	30.5%
Minnesota	34.6%	61.1%	26.5%
Mississippi	28.5%	52.3%	23.7%
Missouri	23.7%	51.6%	27.8%
Montana*		59.6%	
Nebraska	13.6%	48.8%	35.1%
Nevada	23.5%	47.0%	23.6%
New Hampshire	21.6%	53.3%	31.8%
New Jersey	18.9%	46.8%	28.0%
New Mexico	20.5%	49.5%	29.1%
New York	24.2%	49.4%	25.1%
North Carolina	23.5%	51.4%	27.9%
North Dakota	35.5%	62.5%	27.0%
Ohio	20.7%	51.4%	30.7%
Oklahoma	19.3%	45.9%	26.7%
Oregon	35.7%	61.0%	25.3%
Pennsylvania	22.6%	49.4%	26.8%
Rhode Island*		53.3%	
South Carolina	34.9%	55.1%	20.1%
South Dakota*		60.8%	
Tennessee	16.4%	42.6%	26.2%
Texas	16.1%	42.7%	26.6%
Utah	16.8%	45.7%	28.9%
Vermont*		61.2%	
Virginia	21.2%	46.0%	24.8%
Washington	32.9%	64.3%	31.4%
West Virginia	21.9%	45.0%	23.1%
Wisconsin	28.8%	61.5%	32.7%
Wyoming*		54.0%	

*Following the CPS voter turnout reporting practice for 2008, we chose not to report age-specific voter turnout for AK, DE, DC, ID, MT, ND, RI, SD, VT, and WY due to concerns about large margins of error.
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2008.html>

NOTES

¹ CIRCLE calculates turnout among eligible citizens by dividing the number of votes cast by the count of American citizens aged 18 and over.

² Based on the calculations using the Census Bureau's Source and Accuracy Statement (2008), the estimated 95% margin of error for the youth turnout estimate is +/- 0.70%. In other words, we are 95% confident that the true youth turnout would be between 23.3% and 24.7%.

³ For more information on the voting preferences of young people in the 2010 midterm elections, please see the CIRCLE fact sheet "Young Voters in the 2010 Elections" which can be found here <http://www.civicyouth.org/youth-voters-in-the-2010-elections/>

⁴ Individuals with college experience have a high school diploma and have attended, but not necessarily completed, college, technical school, or community college. The turnout rate of those currently enrolled in college was 27%.

⁵ School enrollment status questions are asked only of 18-to-24 year old respondents. Therefore, we cannot estimate the turnout among college students who are 25 or older.

⁶ Several states have not been reported because, due to their small populations and sample sizes, CPS must collapse more than one age group in order to increase the number of publishable estimates. Therefore, we have followed the CPS model and have not reported turnout in states where the youth sample must be combined with other age groups.

⁷ Due to rounding, the percentage point gap between the age groups may appear off by a decimal point or two.