

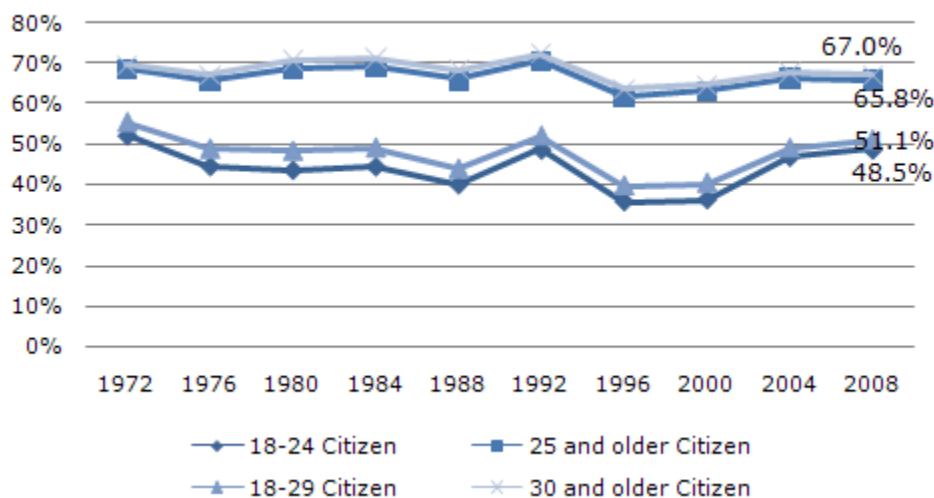
The Youth Vote in 2008

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Estimates from the Census Current Population Survey November Supplement suggest that the voter turnout rate among young people in 2008 was one of highest recorded.² The increase suggests that the confluence of extensive voter outreach efforts, a close election, and high levels of interest in the 2008 campaign³ all worked to drive voter turnout among young people to levels not seen since 1992. The increase is a continuation of the trend observed in the 2004 and 2006 elections.⁴ While young people increased their turnout significantly, older adults voted at lower rates than in 2004 and only slightly above their 2000 level.

While overall youth turnout was high in the 2008 presidential election, there were important differences in turnout rates. Young African Americans posted the highest turnout rate ever observed for any racial or ethnic group of young Americans since 1972. The gap in turnout by educational attainment remained large; voter turnout of young people without college experience was 36%, compared to a 62% rate among young people with college experience. (About half of the young adult population has some college experience.) There was also a significant gender gap in turnout: young women voted at a rate eight points above young men.

Graph 1: Voter Turnout by Age, 1972-2008



Source: Census CPS Nov. 1972-2008

This fact sheet presents trends in youth voting from 1972-2008 using data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) November Voting and Registration Supplements. Additionally, it provides information on differences in youth voting trends among women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and people of different educational levels.

2008 Youth Voter Turnout Rate

An estimated 22 million young Americans under the age of 30 voted in the 2008 presidential election, two million more voters than in the 2004. The youth voter turnout rose to 51 percent, an increase of two percentage points from 2004. Compared to 2000, the increase in youth turnout is 11 percentage points. The 2008 election marked the third highest turnout rate among young people since the voting age was lowered to 18. Graph 1 shows the voter turnout rate for young people (ages 18-25 and 18-29) versus older voters (ages 25 plus and 30 plus). Those under age 26 and under age 30 increased their turnout, while older groups voted at lower rates than in 2004.

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. The youth voter turnout rate rose significantly in 2004 and continued to rise in 2008, and young people comprised the age group that exhibited the greatest increase in voter turnout between 2000 and 2008. Table 1 shows that participation among young people ages 18-24 jumped 11 percentage points between 2000 and 2004. The youth turnout rate increased another two percentage points in 2008.

Table 1: Voter Turnout Among Citizens November 2000, 2004, and 2008				
	2000	2004	2008	Percentage Point Difference between 2004 and 2008
18-29	40%	49%	51%	+2
30-44	59%	62%	62%	0
45-64	68%	70%	69%	-1
65+	70%	71%	70%	-1
All Ages	60%	64%	64%	0

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS Nov. Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2008

Number of Votes Cast in Presidential Elections

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 2008, approximately 22.4 million American youth (ages 18 to 29) voted in the presidential election, which represents an increase of more than two million from 2004 and more than 6.5 million from 2000. Approximately 5 million more total votes were cast in 2008 than in the 2004 election among voters of all ages.

**Table 2: Number of Votes Cast,
Presidential Election Years 1972-2008
in thousands**

	<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>
1972	85,766	12,215	73,551	20,745	65,021
1976	86,698	11,367	75,331	20,473	66,225
1980	93,066	11,225	81,840	20,718	72,348
1984	101,878	11,407	90,471	22,091	79,787
1988	102,224	9,254	92,969	18,513	83,711
1992	113,866	10,442	103,424	20,157	93,709
1996	105,018	7,996	97,021	15,649	89,369
2000	110,826	8,635	102,191	15,864	94,962
2004	125,736	11,639	114,097	20,125	105,611
2008	131,094	12,501	118,593	22,367	108,727

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2008

Youth Share of the Electorate

A third method of examining young voters' effect on elections is to calculate their share of the electorate. Like their turnout and volume of votes cast, young voters' age 18-24 electoral share grew significantly in 2004—from 7.8 to 9.3 percent—representing their largest share of the electorate since 1984, when they represented 11.2 percent of the total votes cast.

**Table 3: Youth Share
of the Electorate and Citizen Populations
Presidential Years 1972-2004**

	<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
1972	17.9%	28.6%	14.2%	24.2%	3.7%	4.4%
1976	18.2%	29.8%	13.1%	23.6%	5.1%	6.2%
1980	17.8%	29.5%	12.1%	22.3%	5.7%	7.3%
1984	16.4%	28.7%	11.2%	21.7%	5.2%	7.0%
1988	14.1%	25.7%	9.1%	18.1%	5.1%	7.6%
1992	12.8%	23.0%	9.2%	17.7%	3.6%	5.3%
1996	12.5%	22.0%	7.6%	14.9%	4.9%	7.1%
2000	12.8%	21.1%	7.8%	14.3%	5.0%	6.8%
2004	12.6%	20.9%	9.3%	16.0%	3.4%	4.8%
2008	12.6%	21.4%	9.5%	17.1%	3.1%	4.3%

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004.

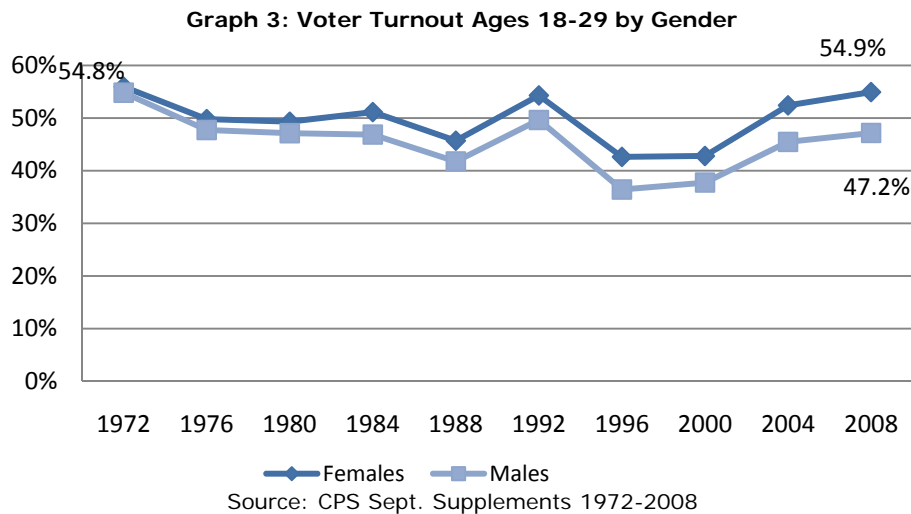
While each of these three methods of describing the impact of America's youngest voters requires a different set of calculations, they all display roughly the same trend—a steady

decrease in turnout from 1972 until 2000 with a large spike in 1992, followed by a large increase in turnout in starting 2004 and continuing in 2008.

The increase in youth voting was driven by changes in voter turnout among several different sub-groups within the youth population. The next section examines youth voter turnout rates for women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and young people of different educational levels.

Young Women Have Become More Likely to Vote than Young Men

Although in the 1972 general election men and women were equally likely to go to the polls, over the past thirty years the gap between male and female turnout in presidential elections has widened considerably. By 1992, 54 percent of women ages 18-29 voted while only 50 percent of men did so. In 2008, this difference continued to widen to nearly eight percentage points, although both genders posted significant gains in turnout over the 2000 election. Young women also have substantially higher levels of educational attainment today.

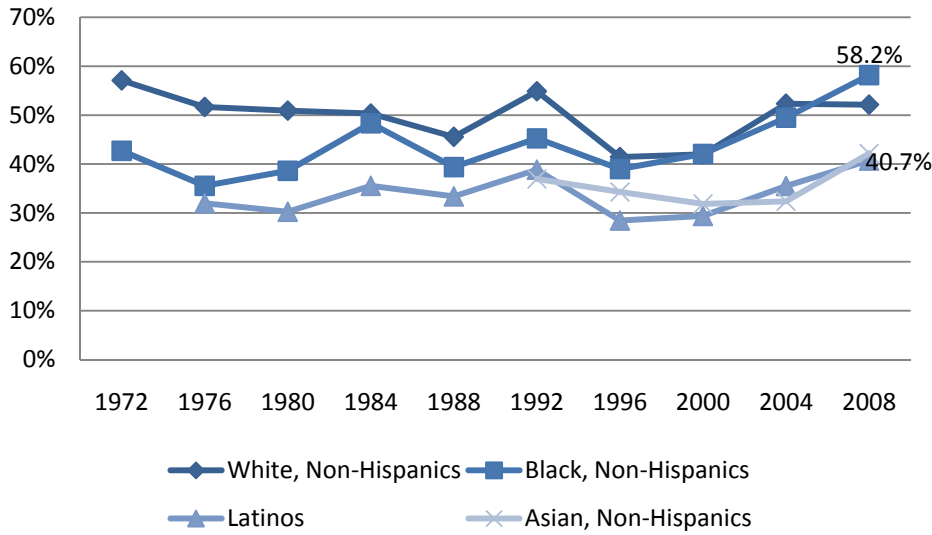


Participation of Young African Americans Especially Strong in 2008

Fifty-eight percent of African-American youth voted on November 4th, the highest turnout rate of any youth racial/ethnic group since 1972. Moreover, among young people, African-American youth had the highest turnout: nearly six in ten young African Americans voted in the 2008 election. Turnout among this group rapidly increased between the 2000 and 2008 elections, rising by nearly 20 percentage points. This increase represents the greatest increase in turnout of any racial or ethnic minority group since 1972.

While African Americans experienced noteworthy increases in turnout over the past decade, other racial and ethnic groups also made significant strides. In 2003, Census introduced a new racial category, mixed race. In 2008, this group had the second highest turnout rate at 55%. Turnout among white youth was 52% and unlike most other racial/ethnic groups showed no gain between the 2004 and 2008 elections. Asian-American youth increased their turnout by ten percentage points and turnout among Latino youth increased five percentage points.⁵

Graph 4: 18-to-29 Year-Old Citizen Turnout, by Race 1972-2008

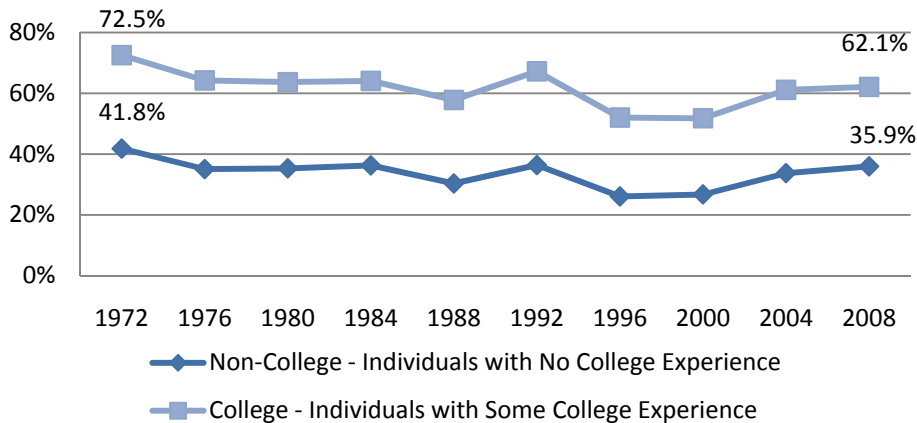


Source: CPS November Supplements, 1972-2008

Young People with More Education are More Likely to Vote

In the 2008 election, young people with college experience were almost twice as likely to vote as those without college experience (62% vs. 36%).⁶ 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. Between the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections, turnout among college-educated young people increased one point more than it did among lesser-educated youth.

Graph 5: 18-to-29 Year-Old Citizen Turnout by Educational Level, Presidential Years



Source: CPS Nov. Supplements 1972-2008

Despite the fact that college attendance has grown since 1972, the turnout gap between these two groups has remained relatively constant.

	College	Non-college	Difference
1972	72.5%	41.8%	30.7%
1976	64.2%	35.0%	29.2%
1980	63.7%	35.3%	28.4%
1984	64.1%	36.3%	27.8%
1988	57.8%	30.3%	27.5%
1992	67.2%	36.4%	30.9%
1996	52.0%	26.0%	26.0%
2000	51.8%	26.7%	25.1%
2004	61.1%	33.7%	27.4%
2008	62.1%	35.9%	26.2%

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2008.

State-by-State Voter Turnout for 2008

Among the states that had sufficiently large and reliable samples, youth voter turnout was highest in 2008 in Minnesota (68%), Iowa (63%), New Hampshire (62%) and Oregon (59%). Voter turnout in 2008 was lowest in Hawaii (31%), Arkansas (35%), Utah (37%), and Texas (39%).⁷

For the most part, in each state, voter turnout among those age 30 and above was at least 10 percentage points higher than turnout among 18-to-29 year-olds. Iowa, Minnesota, and West Virginia had the smallest gaps between youth and adult turnout rates (under 10 percentage points). See Table 5.

Table 5: 2008 State by State⁸ Turnout Estimates by Age

	Ages 18 to 29	Ages 30 and up	Difference Between Youth and Adult Turnout Rates (in percentage points)
AK	49.3%	70.2%	20.9%
AL*	–	–	–
AR	35.3%	60.0%	24.8%
AZ	47.0%	63.6%	16.7%
CA	53.1%	66.4%	13.3%
CO	52.3%	73.1%	20.8%
CT	51.8%	70.6%	18.9%
DC*	–	–	–
DE*	–	–	–
FL	53.3%	66.3%	13.0%
GA	50.9%	68.1%	17.3%
HI	30.9%	57.3%	26.4%
IA	63.4%	72.0%	8.5%
ID*	–	–	–
IL	50.8%	65.8%	15.0%
IN	47.7%	63.3%	15.6%
KS	44.9%	68.3%	23.4%
KY	49.7%	66.3%	16.5%
LA	55.7%	74.3%	18.6%
MA	47.8%	71.2%	23.4%
MD	55.5%	71.7%	16.2%
ME	57.0%	74.2%	17.3%
MI	55.5%	71.0%	15.4%
MN	68.1%	76.8%	8.6%
MO	54.6%	69.0%	14.4%
MS	56.8%	73.8%	17.0%
MT*	–	–	–
NC	55.1%	70.5%	15.4%
ND	–	–	–
NE	47.6%	73.0%	25.4%
NH	62.0%	73.7%	11.7%
NJ	53.0%	66.8%	13.8%
NM	47.1%	66.9%	19.9%
NV	48.6%	63.2%	14.7%
NY	47.3%	61.9%	14.7%
OH	55.2%	68.1%	12.9%
OK	47.6%	62.0%	14.3%
OR	59.2%	69.5%	10.3%
PA	52.9%	64.8%	11.9%
RI*	–	–	–
SC	52.6%	69.0%	16.4%
SD	–	–	–
TN	45.8%	58.0%	12.3%
TX	38.6%	61.8%	23.2%
UT	36.8%	60.3%	23.5%
VA	58.7%	71.1%	12.4%
VT*	–	–	–
WA	55.3%	69.7%	14.4%
WI	57.5%	74.9%	17.4%
WV	47.5%	54.7%	7.2%
WY*	–	–	–
National	51.1%	67.0%	16.0%

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

NOTES

¹ Senior Researcher and Lead Researcher. We thank Mark Hugo Lopez and Jared Sagoff for their 2004 fact sheet “The 2004 Youth Vote” on which this fact sheet is based. We also thank Peter Levine, Abby Kiesa, and Karlo Barrios Marcelo for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. Finally, we thank Dr. Michael McDonald for sharing his 2008 CPS November Supplement dataset which was used to produce the initial draft of this fact sheet. We would also like to thank Amanda Nover for her assistance in updating this fact sheet.

² The three highest years for youth turnout were 1972 (55.4%), 1992 (52.0%) and 2008 (51.1%). 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.

³ For more information on the level of interest among young people prior to the November 2008 election, see the CIRCLE Fact Sheet “Quick Facts about U.S. Young Voters: The Presidential Election Year 2008”
http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FS_08_quick_facts_national.pdf

⁴ See CIRCLE Fact Sheet “The Youth Vote 2004”, July 2005.
http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_Youth_Voting_72-04.pdf

⁵ We have defined racial/ethnic groups in the 2008 CPS November Supplements by defining anyone with Hispanic background as Latino, single race or ethnicity individuals who are non-Hispanic as white, African American, Asian American or Native American, and those of mixed race/ethnicity as a separate category. Since 2003, the CPS has allowed survey participants to mark more than once racial/ethnic category in describing their backgrounds. This potentially means that data from 2000 and earlier and 2004 and later may not be entirely comparable when identifying race and ethnicity categories of survey respondents. Furthermore, the estimates for Native American youth and mixed-race/Other youth are not reported due to small sample sizes. All programs used to generate race and ethnicity variables are available from the authors upon request.

⁶ 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 59.7%.

⁷ 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.

⁸ See note 7.