

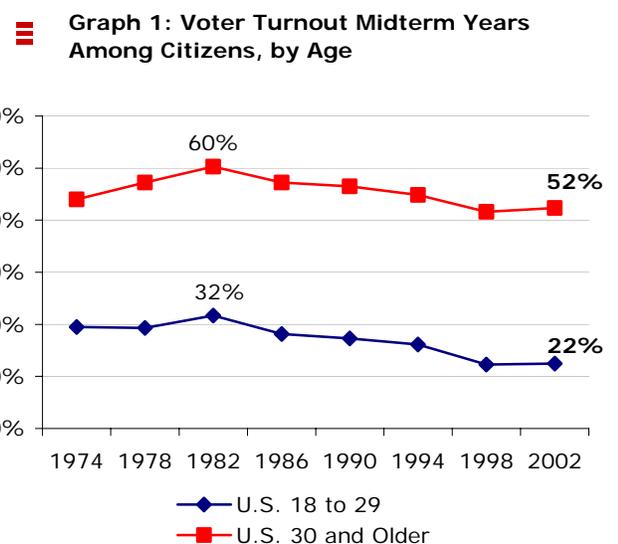
CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on
Civic Learning & Engagement

Quick Facts about Young Voters: 2006

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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 voter turnout rate among 18 to 29 year olds of 47 percent, up 9 percentage points over 2000. Whether the national voter mobilization momentum of 2004 continues into 2006 remains unpredictable. However, 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).



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1974-2002.

This fact sheet reports the characteristics of young voters nationally, including estimates of the number of young voters, voter turnout in 2002 and 1994 for various sub-groups of young people, and estimates of young voter partisanship in 2002 and 2006.

Overall, the general trend in the voter turnout rate nationally among young people during midterm elections was down between 1982 and 2002, as shown in Graph 1.² This general decline in youth voter participation in midterm election years, however, masks variation in youth voter turnout rates across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In 2002, the three states with the highest level of youth voter turnout were Minnesota (45 percent), South Dakota (36 percent), and Alaska (34 percent). In contrast, the three states with the lowest voter turnout rates among young people in 2002 were Delaware (15 percent), West Virginia (15 percent) and Arizona (14 percent). It is likely that differences in electoral participation among young people across states was driven by high profile gubernatorial and Senate races and state wide initiatives in midterm years. In 2006, these factors again may help drive young people to the polls.

Estimates of Eligible Young Voters, 2006

In 2006, a midterm election year, there are an estimated 41.9 million young people between the ages of 18 and 29 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).³ Note that the number of votes cast by young people in 1994 exceeded the number of votes cast by young people in 2002 by 1.5 million. In 1994, young people represented a greater share of voters than in 2002, and had a higher voter turnout rate than young people in 2002.

Voter Turnout Rates in 2002 and 1994 Among Young Citizens

Table 2 displays voter turnout rates for various groups of young people in 2002 and 1994. In many cases, voter turnout rates were higher in 1994 than in 2002, with the largest declines in voter turnout occurring for Asian non-Hispanic youth, Native American non-Hispanic youth, youth in the West, and youth with at least some college experience. For each of these groups, voter turnout rates declined by at least six percentage points between 1994 and 2002.

Table 1 – U.S. Voter Turnout Statistics, 2006, 2002, and 1994

	Young People 18 to 29	Adults 30 and Older
2006		
Number of Citizens Eligible to Vote in 2006	41.9 million	158.2 million
2002		
Number of Votes Cast	8.9 million	78.9 million
Citizen Voter Turnout Rate	22 percent	52 percent
Share of all Voters	10 percent	90 percent
1994		
Number of Votes Cast	10.4 million	75.2 million
Citizen Voter Turnout Rate	26 percent	55 percent
Share of all Voters	12 percent	88 percent

Source: Author's Tabulations, Current Population Survey, March Supplement 2006 and November Supplements 2002 and 1994.

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

Voter Turnout Rate Among:	2002	1994
Race/Ethnicity⁴		
White non-Hispanics	23 percent	28 percent
Black non-Hispanics	25 percent	23 percent
Latinos	16 percent	20 percent
Asian non-Hispanics	16 percent	23 percent
Native American non-Hispanics	14 percent	25 percent
Gender		
Women	24 percent	27 percent
Men	21 percent	25 percent
Educational Attainment		
Less than High School	10 percent	9 percent
High School	16 percent	19 percent
Some College	25 percent	31 percent
BA or more	40 percent	46 percent
Marital Status		
Single Men	20 percent	24 percent
Single Women	23 percent	26 percent
Married Men	26 percent	29 percent
Married Women	28 percent	30 percent
Region		
Northeast	21 percent	27 percent
Midwest	25 percent	26 percent
South	22 percent	22 percent
West	22 percent	32 percent
Registered Voters	47 percent	53 percent
All Youth	22 percent	26 percent

Source: Author's Tabulations from the 2002 and 1994 November Supplements of the Current Population Survey.

Partisanship Among Young People

In a new CIRCLE survey conducted in the early summer of 2006, young people were more likely to identify as an Independent and less likely to identify as a Republican than their adult counterparts. While young people today are more likely to identify as Democrats and Independents, there was little change in self-reported partisanship among young people between 2002 and 2006. (See Table 3.)

**Table 3 – Partisanship
in 2006 and 2002**

	2006		2002	
	18 to 29 Year Olds	Adults 30 and Older	18 to 29 Year Olds	Adults 30 and Older
Democrat	29 percent	33 percent	26 percent	36 percent
Independent who leans Democrat	16 percent	13 percent	20 percent	12 percent
Independent (no leaning)	26 percent	18 percent	24 percent	15 percent
Independent who leans Republican	8 percent	9 percent	9 percent	10 percent
Republican	20 percent	26 percent	21 percent	28 percent

Source: Author's Tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey. Margin of error for 2006 is ± 3.5 percentage points. The margin of error for 2002 is ± 2.0 percentage points.

Notes

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² For more information on the voter turnout rates of young people in presidential years, see "CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Voter 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 1972-2004."

³ 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.

⁴ We have defined racial/ethnic groups in the Current Population Survey November Supplements by defining anyone with Hispanic background as Latino; individuals who cite a single race or ethnicity and who are non-Hispanic as white, African American, Asian American or Native American. All programs used to generate race and ethnicity variables are available from the authors upon request.