



**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Electoral Engagement Among Non-College Attending Youth

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In 2004, there were an estimated 12.1 million 18-24 year old American citizens who had no college experience. This constituted roughly 48 percent of the estimated total of 24.9 million 18-24 year old citizens in America. Those without a college education are diverse, but more likely to be male and disproportionately African-American and Latino than the general youth population. Specifically, from 2004 data, we estimate that among citizens 55 percent of non-college attending 18-24 year olds are male, while only 50 percent of all 18-24 year old citizens are male. Similarly, we find that among young non-college citizens 63 percent are non-Hispanic white, 15 percent are Latino, and 17 percent are African-American. Among all youth, 68 percent are non-Hispanic white, 12 percent are Latino, and 15 percent are African-American. This population of young people is less likely to vote than their college attending counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1 – Educational Attainment Among 18-24 Year Old Citizens**

	All 18-24s	Age Group				All Adults 25 and older
		18-19	20-21	22-23	24	
<b>1972</b>						
Less Than HS	19%	35%	16.2%	16%	16%	40%
HS Diploma	35%	34%	33.9%	37%	37%	34%
Some College	38%	41%	48.1%	29%	27%	13%
BA or greater	8%	0.04%	1.8%	17%	20%	13%
<b>2004</b>						
Less Than HS	16%	30%	11%	12%	9%	13%
HS Diploma	32%	38%	30%	30%	29%	32%
Some College	42%	32%	57%	42%	35%	27%
BA or greater	9%	0.2%	1%	17%	27%	28%

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972 and 2004.

Educational attainment in the U.S. has been rising over the past 30 years among young people. Specifically, more young people have some college experience today than in 1972, though college attendance is not evenly distributed across all racial/ethnic groups<sup>3</sup>. Table 1 above shows educational attainment in 1972 and in 2004 for various components of the youth citizen population ages 18-24. Concentrating on 24 year olds, in 1972 16 percent of 24 year olds had less than a high school diploma, and 37 percent had completed high school, but had never attended college. By 2004, 9 percent of 24 year olds had less than a high school diploma, and 29 percent had completed a high school diploma, but had never attended college. Furthermore, by 2004, 27 percent of 24

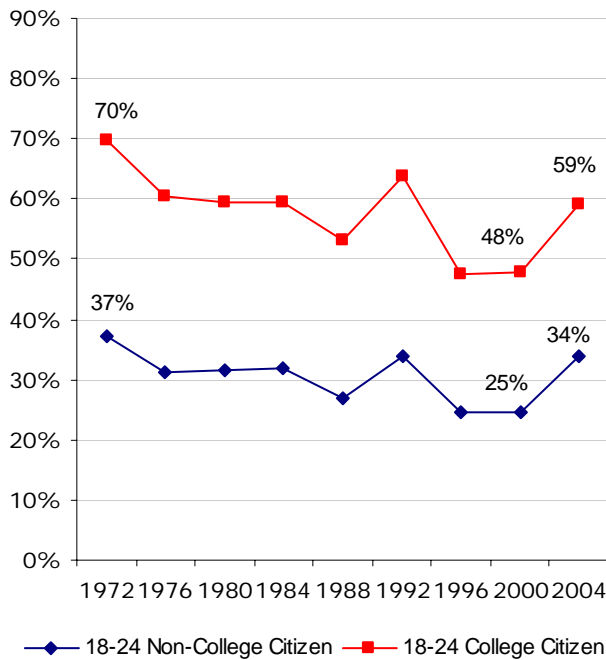
year olds had a bachelor's degree, an increase of 7 percentage points over 1972. However, even with a rising level of educational attainment, a sizeable number of young people do not attend college.

Throughout this fact sheet, two groups of young people are compared: "college attending" and "non-college attending" young people. Non-college attending young people have completed a high school education or less than a high school education, but have not enrolled in any college courses, including technical/vocational programs, associates degree programs, or four year college programs. The college attending sample of young people is composed of students who have some exposure to college, and may also be currently enrolled. One should be cautious in interpreting the results presented here, as it is likely that some non-college attending 18-24 year olds may be contemplating attending college, and may enter college after the age of 24. People often acquire education somewhat later in life, as shown by the following fact: in 2004, within the population of 18-19 year olds, 30 percent reported no high school diploma, but among 24 year olds, only 9 percent reported no high school diploma.

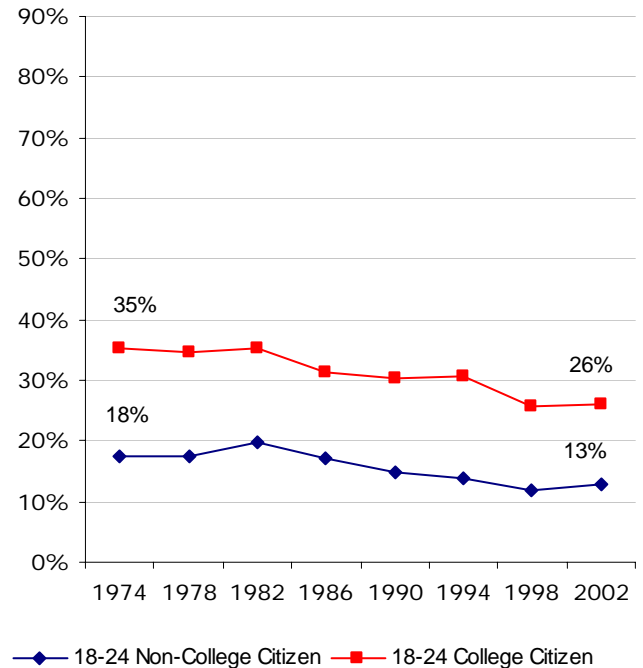
### Voter Turnout

As reported in our fact sheet "The Youth Vote 2004," voter turnout<sup>4</sup> for young people ages 18-24 rose sharply in 2004. Non-college attending young Americans have consistently voted at levels below college attending youth in both presidential and midterm election years. Between the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, turnout increased by 11 percentage points among college-educated young people and by 9 percentage points among non-college youth. In the 2002 mid-term elections turnout among college youth was 13 percentage points higher than non-college youth. (See Table 1A and 1B in the appendix for actual voter turnout figures.)

**Graph 1: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter Turnout by Education Level, Presidential Years**



**Graph 2: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter Turnout by Education Level, Midterm Years**



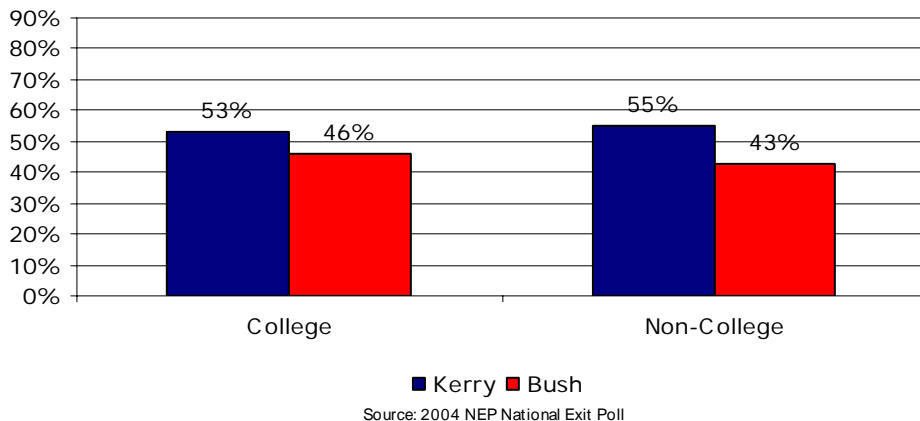
Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

### Support for Presidential Candidates in 2004

Along with voters age 75 or older, young voters were the only other age group to support John Kerry in last fall's presidential election.<sup>5</sup> Both college and non-college youth choose the Kerry/Edwards ticket over the Bush/Cheney ticket.

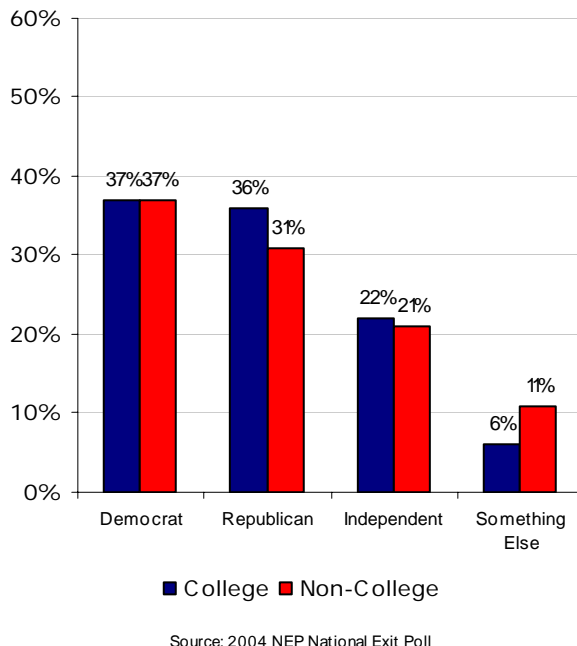
**Graph 3: 2004 Presidential Vote According to Exit Polls, Ages 18-29**



### Political Party Identification

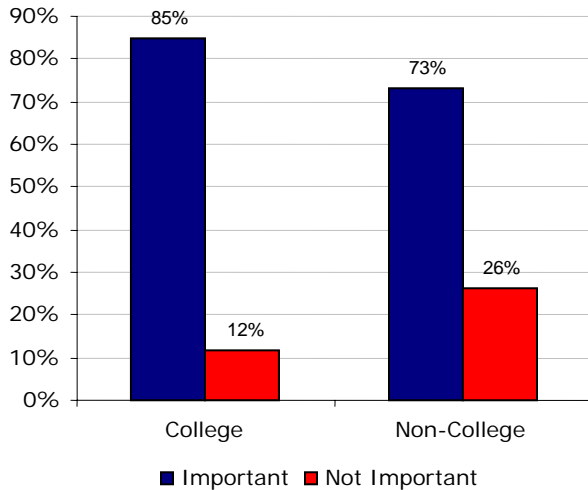
In 2004, 18-29 year old voters with college experience were slightly more likely to identify as Republican than their non-college counterparts. However, more than a third of both college and non-college voters identified with the Democratic party.

**Graph 4: Political Party Identification, Young Voters Age 18-29**



## Views on Voting

**Graph 5: College Non-Attending 18-25 Year Olds are Less Likely to View Voting as Important.**



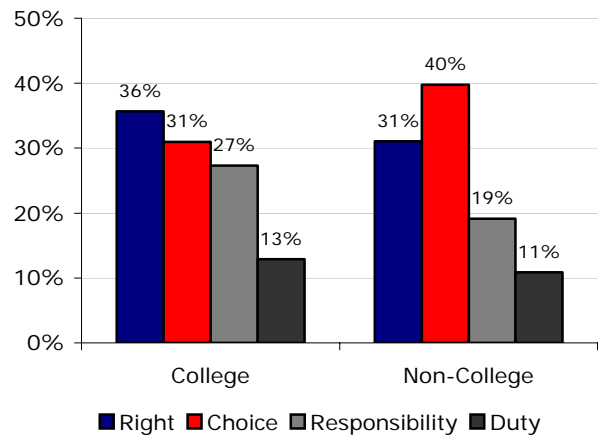
Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, Jan. 2004.

Seventy-one percent of non-college attending youth are likely to view voting as either a right or a choice while only 30 percent are likely to view voting as a responsibility or a duty. Among college attending youth, in contrast, 40 percent are likely to view voting as a responsibility or a duty.<sup>6</sup>

In 2002 and 2004 CIRCLE in collaboration with the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Council for Excellence in Government commissioned a survey of over 1,000 15-25 year olds called the *National Youth Survey*. The next section of the fact sheet presents findings from these two surveys.

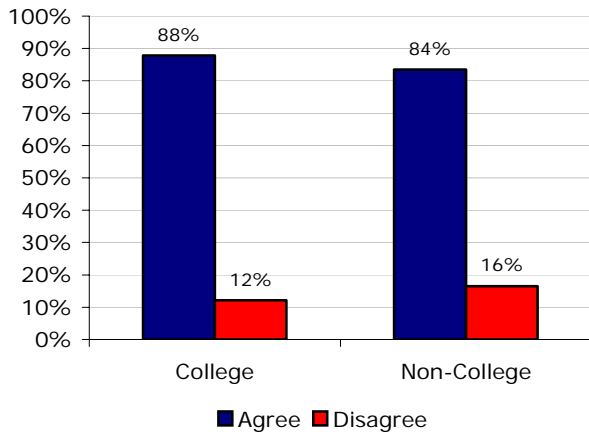
College attending youth are more likely to view voting as important than those youth with no college experience. However, nearly three fourths of youth without college experience still view voting as important.

**Graph 6: College Non-Attending 18-25 Year Olds are Less Likely to View Voting as a Responsibility or Duty**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, Jan. 2002.

**Graph 7: "My Vote Counts" Among College Attending and Non-Attending 18-25 Year Olds**

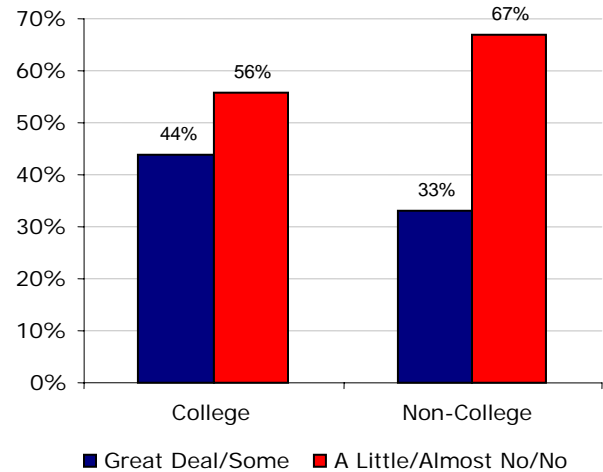


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

Young people overwhelmingly agree that "my vote counts as much as anyone else's" irrespective of educational attainment.

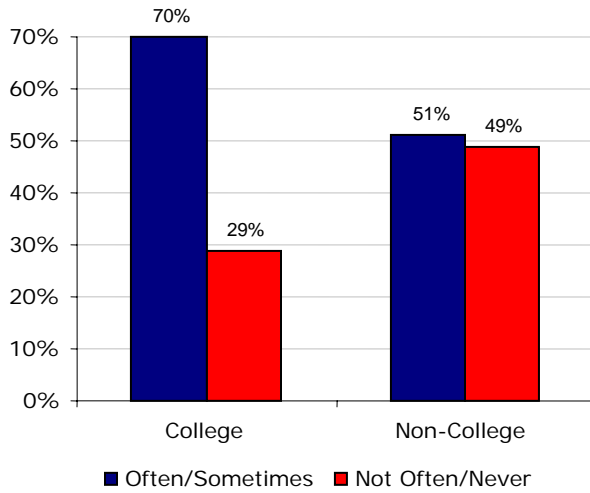
Research has shown that young people who feel that they can make a difference, or feel efficacious, are more likely to vote. However, 18-25 year olds with no college experience are significantly less likely to feel they can make a difference in their communities than their college-attending counterparts.

**Graph 8: College Attending and Non-Attending 18-25 Year Olds Who Feel They Can Make A Difference in Their Communities.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, Jan 2004.

**Graph 9: College Attending and Non-Attending 18-25 Year Olds Who Talk to Their Parents About Politics.**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government Youth Survey, Jan. 2004.

Discussing politics with parents also is correlated with higher voting rates. 18-25 year olds with no college experience are significantly less likely to have discussed politics with their parents.

## Appendix

<b>Table 1A: Voter Turnout Among College Citizens, 1972-2004</b>				
	<b>18-24 Year Olds</b>	<b>25 and older</b>	<b>18-29 Year Olds</b>	<b>30 and older</b>
<b>Midterm Election Years</b>				
1974	35.3%	64.5%	40.0%	69.3%
1978	34.8%	65.7%	39.9%	70.6%
1982	35.2%	67.9%	41.4%	72.3%
1986	31.3%	63.4%	36.6%	67.5%
1990	30.4%	63.8%	36.0%	67.5%
1994	30.7%	62.5%	35.7%	65.7%
1998	25.7%	58.0%	29.9%	61.2%
2002	26.1%	59.0%	29.8%	61.8%
<b>Presidential Election Years</b>				
1972	69.6%	83.8%	72.5%	85.3%
1976	60.5%	78.6%	64.2%	81.4%
1980	59.3%	81.3%	63.7%	84.3%
1984	59.5%	80.7%	64.1%	83.2%
1988	53.1%	78.0%	57.8%	80.7%
1992	63.6%	82.4%	67.2%	84.2%
1996	47.4%	72.4%	52.0%	74.6%
2000	47.7%	72.8%	51.8%	74.8%
2004	59.0%	76.1%	61.1%	77.5%

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

<b>Table 1B: Voter Turnout Among Non-College Citizens, 1972-2004</b>				
	<b>18-24 Year Olds</b>	<b>25 and older</b>	<b>18-29 Year Olds</b>	<b>30 and older</b>
<b>Midterm Election Years</b>				
1974	17.6%	46.5%	20.9%	48.8%
1978	17.6%	48.5%	20.2%	51.3%
1982	19.9%	51.0%	23.6%	54.0%
1986	17.2%	47.5%	20.7%	50.8%
1990	14.9%	45.5%	18.2%	48.5%
1994	13.9%	42.6%	15.8%	45.1%
1998	11.8%	39.9%	13.8%	42.0%
2002	12.8%	39.9%	13.9%	41.8%
<b>Presidential Election Years</b>				
1972	37.1%	63.1%	41.8%	64.7%
1976	31.3%	59.4%	35.0%	61.4%
1980	31.4%	61.6%	35.3%	64.1%
1984	32.0%	61.6%	36.3%	64.4%
1988	26.8%	57.2%	30.3%	60.3%
1992	33.9%	60.3%	36.4%	62.7%
1996	24.7%	51.0%	26.0%	53.2%
2000	24.7%	52.0%	26.7%	53.7%
2004	33.7%	54.3%	33.7%	56.1%

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

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Research Director, Research Associate and Research Assistants respectively, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, University of Maryland School of Public Policy. We thank Peter Levine, William Galston, Deborah Both, and Carried Donovan for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>2</sup> According to Norman Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry in *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America* (Chicago 1996), the relationship between political participation and educational attainment is "the best documented finding in American political behavior research.

<sup>3</sup> See the CIRCLE fact sheet, "Youth Demographics" by Mark Hugo Lopez, October 2002 for more information on the trend in educational attainment among different ethnic/racial groups.

<sup>4</sup> Data for voter turnout rates are taken from the 1972 to 2004 November supplements of the Current Population Surveys. Each survey is completed within two weeks of the November elections, and interviews over 50,000 non-institutionalized individuals. For this fact sheet, voter turnout rates are calculated for U.S. Citizens only.

For information on how CIRCLE calculates voter turnout rates please see "CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Vote 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns, 1972-2004."

<sup>5</sup> Exit polls are a good data source for estimating youth support for a particular candidate. We have chosen to present data on 18-29 year olds as opposed to 18-24 year olds since the sample sizes are larger and likely give a more accurate estimate.

<sup>6</sup> Percentages add up to more than 100% as respondents could answer they viewed voting as all of the categories.