



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men

By Mark Hugo Lopez and Emily Kirby<sup>1</sup>  
January 2003, Updated May 2003

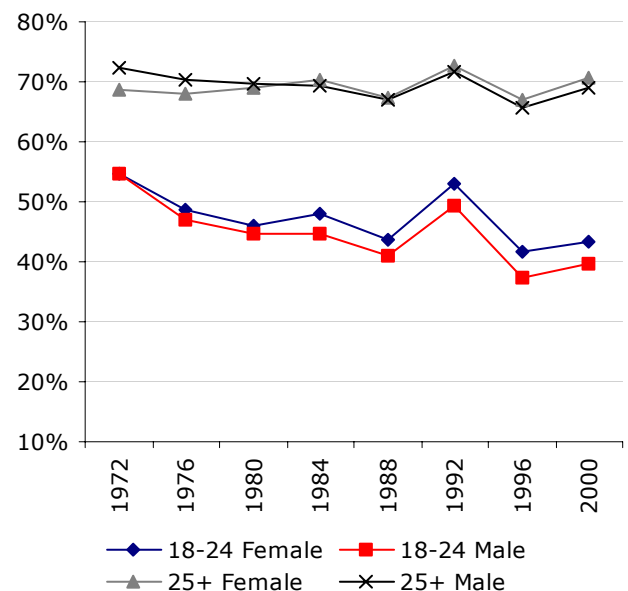
Civic engagement among young men and young women, while similar, is not equal. In recent years, young women, particularly college educated young women, have voted and volunteered more and been more civically engaged than their young male counterparts. This fact sheet presents information on one measure of civic engagement, voter turnout, across women and men. It also highlights some of the similarities and differences between young women and young men in their attitudes towards voting.

In 2000, there were approximately 12.1 million young female citizens between the ages of 18 and 24 and approximately 11.8 million young male citizens between the ages of 18 and 24.<sup>2</sup>

### Voter Turnout<sup>3</sup>

Voter turnout among young people, as reported in CIRCLE's fact sheet entitled "Youth Voter Turnout Has Declined by Any Measure," has declined steadily since 1972, with the exception of a spike in turnout in 1992. However, there is a slight difference in the decline in youth voter turnout when examined by gender. Specifically, young women and young men are voting at lower rates today than their counterparts did in 1972. However, the voter turnout rate among young female citizens declined at a slower rate than that for young citizen males through 2000. This has produced a small, but growing, gap in voter turnout between

Graph 1: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among Citizens, by Gender

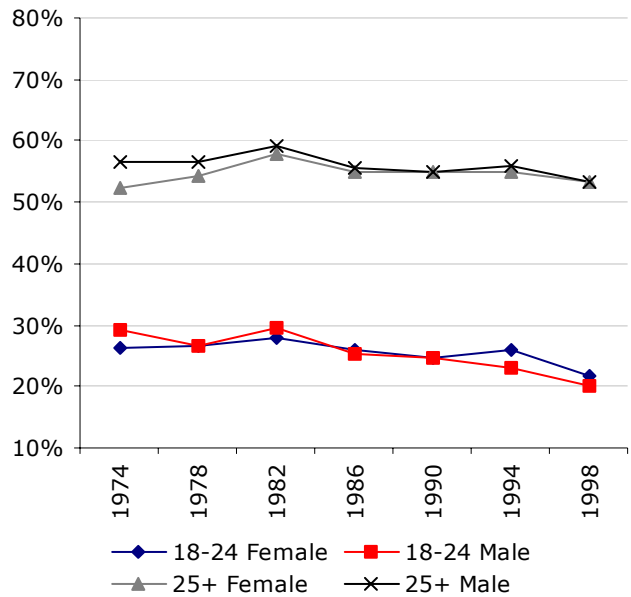


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

young women and young men. By 2000, young women turned out at a statistically higher rate of 43 percent while young men turned out at a rate of 40 percent.<sup>4</sup> This is shown in Graph 1.

For midterm elections, shown in Graph 2, differences between young women and young men are smaller. However in all years, young people are turning out at lower rates than their older counterparts.

**Graph 2: Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among Citizens, by Gender**

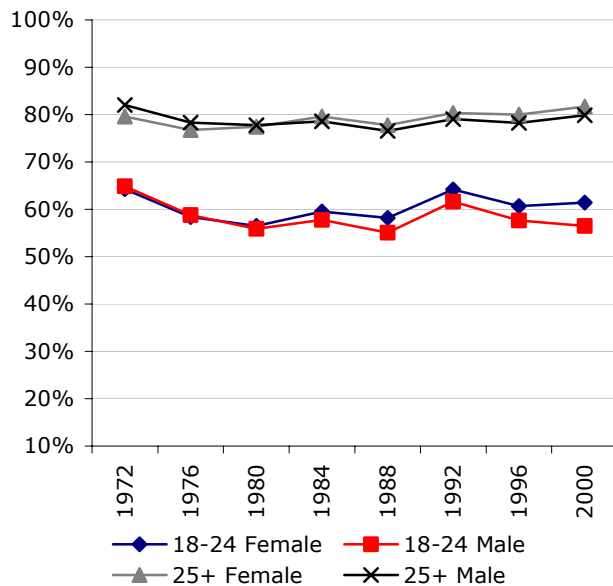


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Voter Registration Rates<sup>5</sup>**

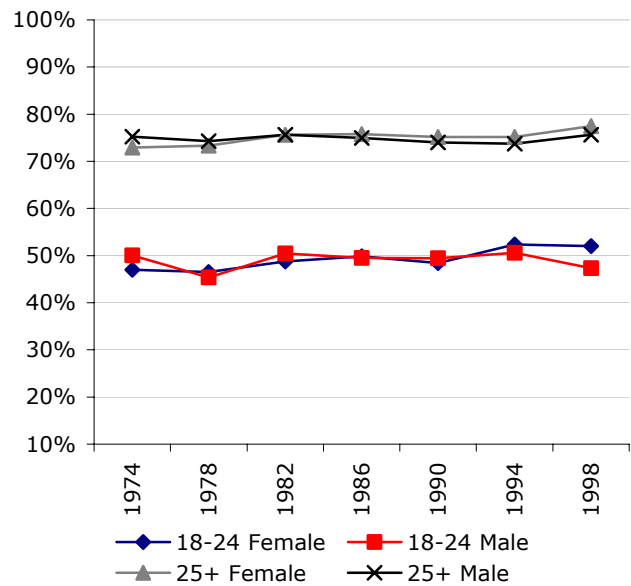
Voter registration rates among young women and young men are similar in Presidential and Midterm Election years, though there is a small growing gap between young men and young women, as with voter turnout rates.

**Graph 3: Voter Registration Presidential Years Among Citizens, by Gender**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 4: Voter Registration Midterm Years Among Citizens, by Gender**



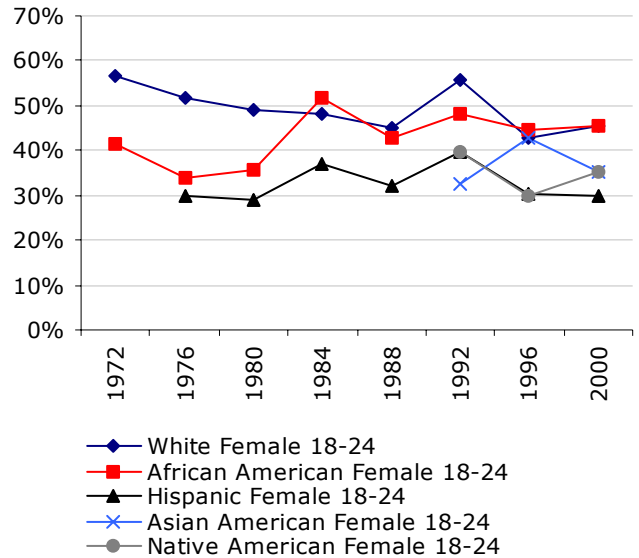
Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

### ***Voter Turnout among Young Women, by Race/Ethnicity<sup>6</sup>***

In Presidential election years, as shown in Graph 5, the pattern of participation among young women by race/ethnicity is similar to the pattern observed for all minority youth. Voter turnout rates for young white women have generally fallen since 1972, with a spike in 1992. In contrast, voter turnout rates among young African American women have improved since 1972, with a large spike in voter turnout in 1984. By 2000, there is statistically no difference in the voter turnout rate of young African American women and young white women.

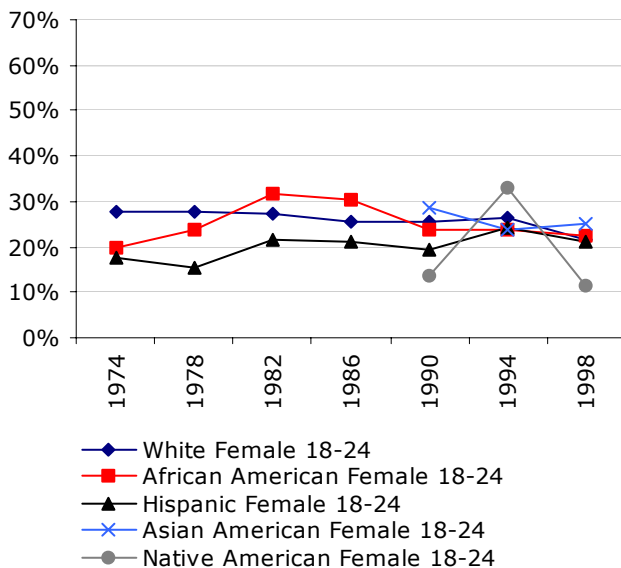
For young Hispanic women, voter participation rates between 1972 and 2000 are relatively unchanged. While 1984 and 1992 witnessed a modest improvement in the 30 percent voter turnout rate of young Hispanic women in 1980 and 1988, by 2000, young Hispanic women turned out to vote at a rate similar to that of 1972.

**Graph 5: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among 18-24 Year Old Women Citizens, by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 6: Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among 18-24 Year Old Women Citizens, by Race/Ethnicity**

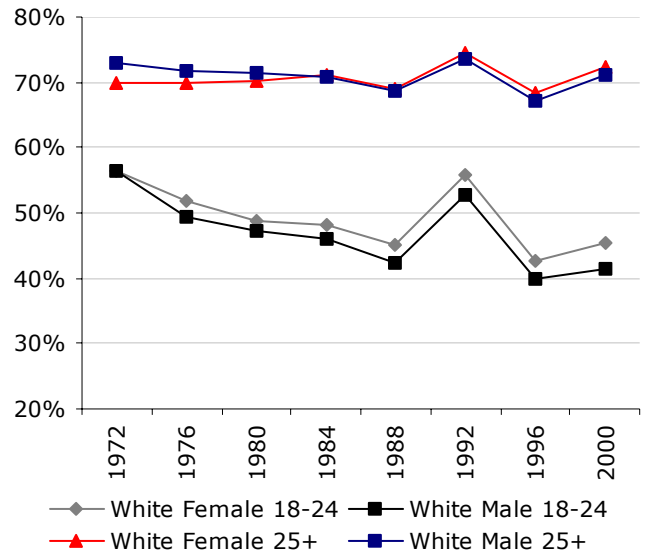


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

In Midterm election years, shown in Graph 6, voter turnout rates across race and ethnicity are surprisingly similar in 1998, but overall low.

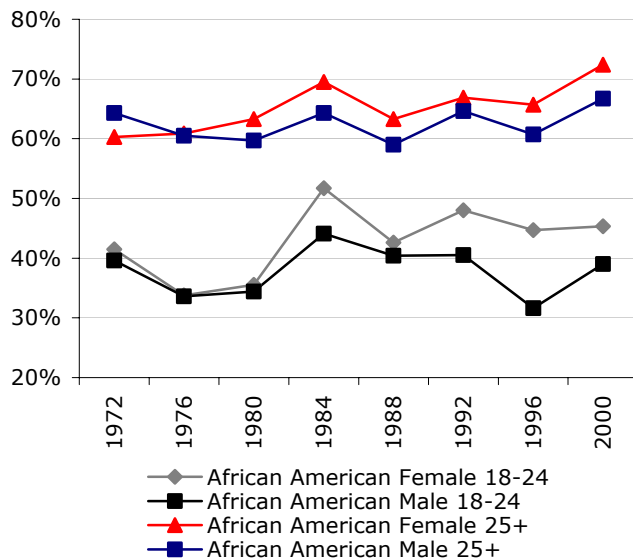
Graph 7 shows voter turnout rates among whites in Presidential election years. Similar to trends reported elsewhere, with the exception of 1992, the voter turnout rate of young whites has declined steadily since 1972. However, the gap between young white women and young white men has grown since 1972. In 2000, the turnout rate among young white women was 45.5 percent. The turnout rate for young white men in 2000 was a statistically significantly lower 41.4 percent. A similar pattern is not evident among older whites.

**Graph 7: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among Whites, by Age and Gender**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000

**Graph 8: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among African Americans, by Age and Gender**

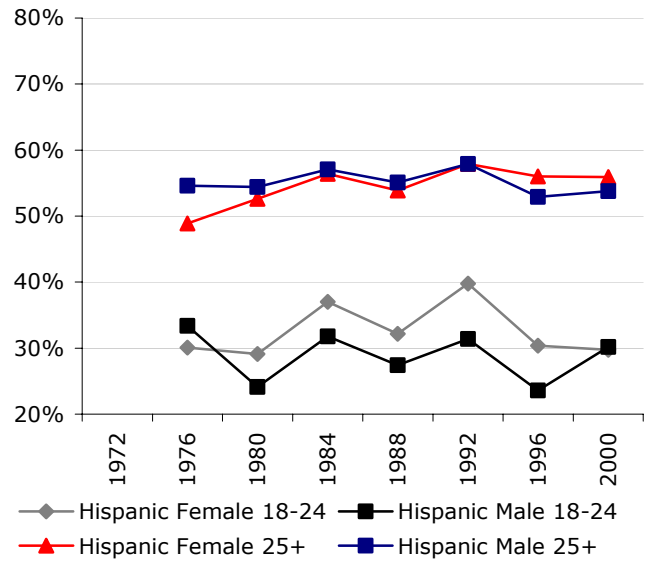


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000

Among young African Americans, a different pattern is evident. Graph 8 shows patterns of voter turnout in Presidential election years among 18-24 and 25+ male and female African American citizens. Since 1972, there has been a general increase in the voter turnout rates of African American citizens. However, African American young male citizens voted in 2000 at a rate similar to that in 1972. Young African American males also did not see a spike in voter turnout in 1992 like their female counterparts did. Furthermore, while voter turnout spiked among young African Americans in 1984, young African American women turned out at greater rates in 1984 and in subsequent Presidential election years than their male counterparts.

Voter turnout rates among Hispanic citizens, in contrast, have remained flat since 1972 and are consistently below those of whites and African Americans. Graph 9 shows voter turnout rates for Hispanics 18-24 years old and 25 years old and older. Historically, young Hispanic male citizens have turned out to vote at lower rates than their female counterparts, but by 2000, there was statistically no difference in the voter turnout rate between young Hispanic male and female citizens.

**Graph 9: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among Hispanic Citizens, by Age and Gender**

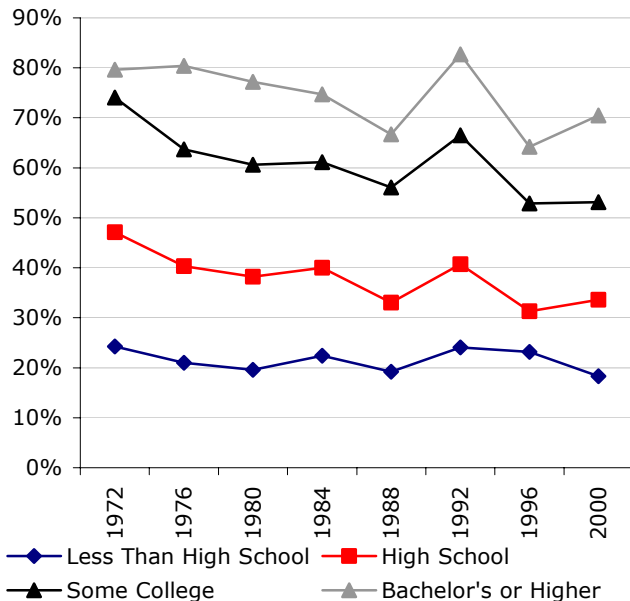


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000

**Voter Turnout Among Young Women by Educational Attainment**

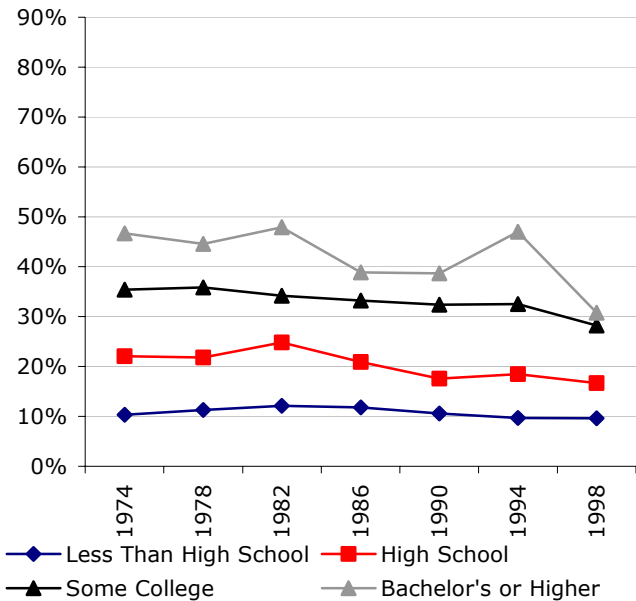
Similar to patterns observed for all young people, young women with greater levels of educational attainment are also more likely to vote. Graphs 10 and 11 show voter turnout among young female citizens in Presidential and Midterm election years respectively by level of educational attainment.

**Graph 10: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among 18-24 Year Old Female Citizens, by Educational Attainment**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

**Graph 11: Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among 18-24 Year Old Female Citizens, by Educational Attainment**

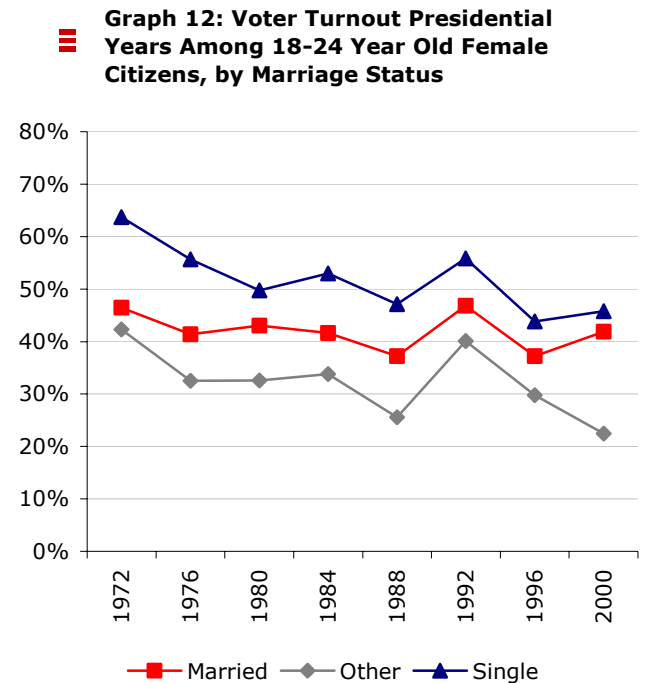


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

In 1992, the spike in youth voter turnout was primarily driven by college-educated youth. Among those with a bachelor's degree or more, the downward trend in youth voter turnout has been reversed, though the decline in youth turnout continues for all other educational attainment groups.<sup>7</sup>

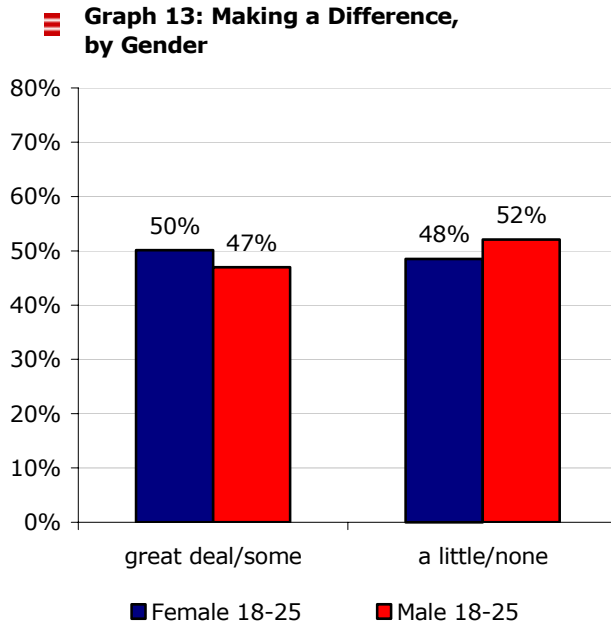
### ***Voter Turnout Among Young Women by Marital Status***

Graph 12 shows voter turnout rates for young women by marital status. Consistent with other work, these graphs show that voter turnout among young people has dropped, no matter their marital status. However, the drop has been most pronounced among young women who have been divorced, separated or widowed, with an approximately 20-percentage point drop in voter turnout since 1972. Similarly, the turnout rate for single young women has dropped by 18 percentage points since 1972.



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000.

## Attitudes Towards Voting

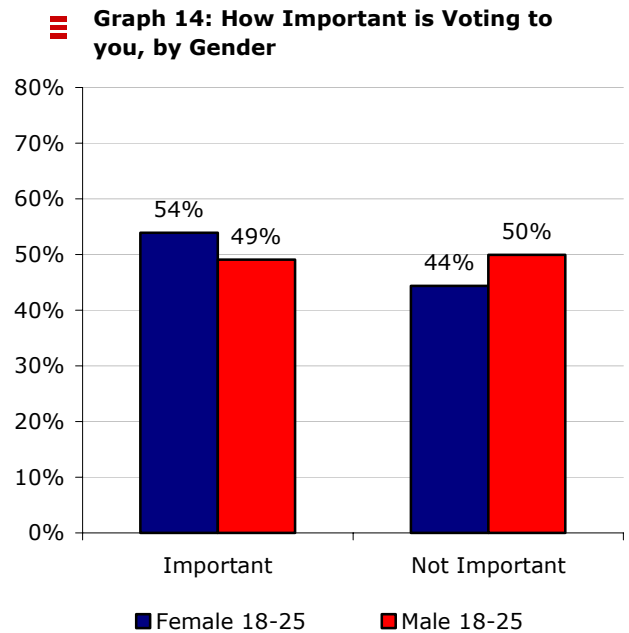


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government  
National Youth Survey, Jan 2002

In January of 2002, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, in conjunction with the Council for Excellence in Government, sponsored a National Youth Survey of 1500 young people ages 15 to 25. This youth survey asked several questions about youth attitudes towards voting, and other forms of civic engagement.

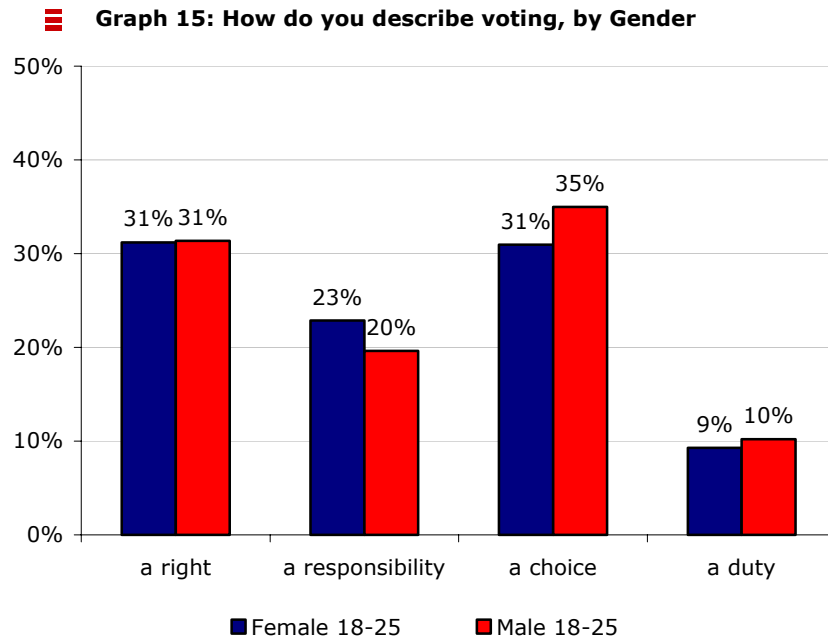
Employing data from this survey for 18-25 year olds, several measures of young people's attitudes towards voting can be compared. First, as shown in Graph 13, young women are more likely than their young male counterparts to feel they could make a difference in their communities.

Furthermore, as shown in Graph 14, young women were more likely to report that voting is an important thing to do.



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

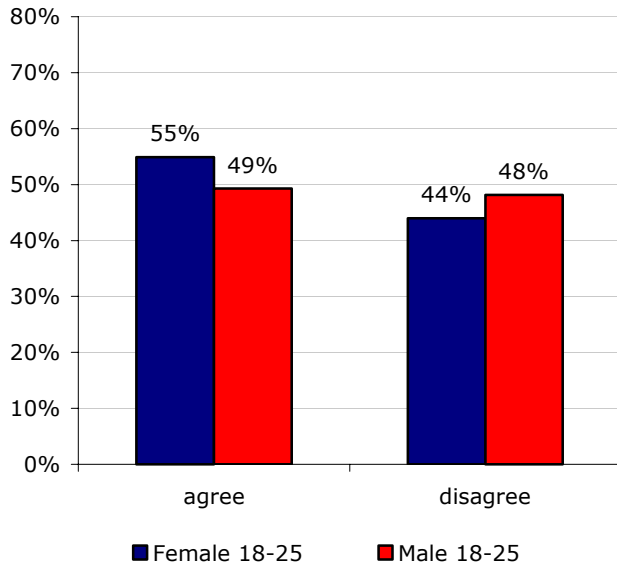
Young men and young women had slightly different views of voting. Specifically, young women were more likely to view voting as a responsibility than their young male counterparts. However, as shown in Graph 15, young men were more likely to call voting a choice than their young female counterparts.



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

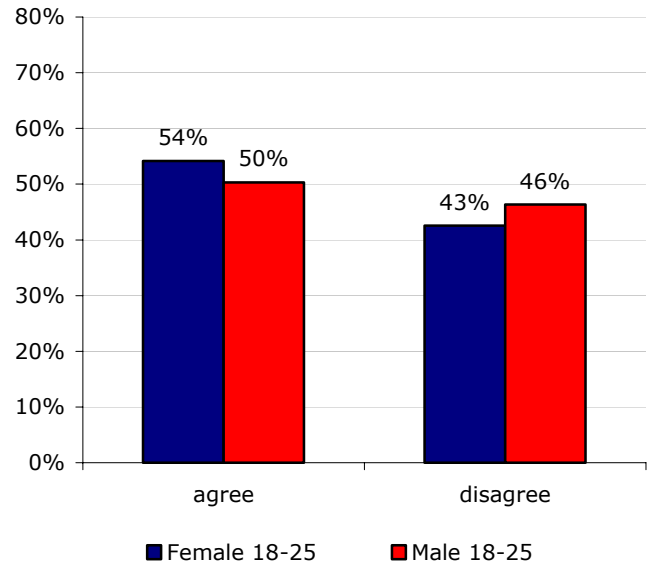
Graphs 16 and 17 show whether young people believe that government addresses the needs of young people, or that elections and politics address the needs of young people. In both cases, young women are more likely to view government and politics and elections as addressing the needs of young people than their young male counterparts.

**Graph 16: Government Addresses the Needs of Young People, by Gender**



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

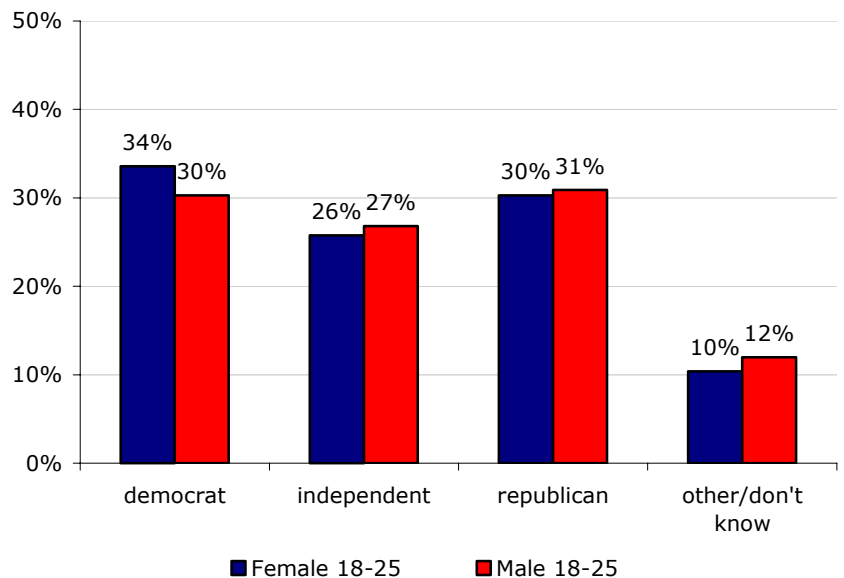
**Graph 17: Politics and Elections Address the Needs of Young People, by Gender**



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

Young women are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than their young male counterparts, though the distribution of party identification is fairly equal for both young men and young women. Graph 18 displays the distribution of reported political party identification showing that over a quarter of all young people ages 18 to 25 identify themselves as independents.

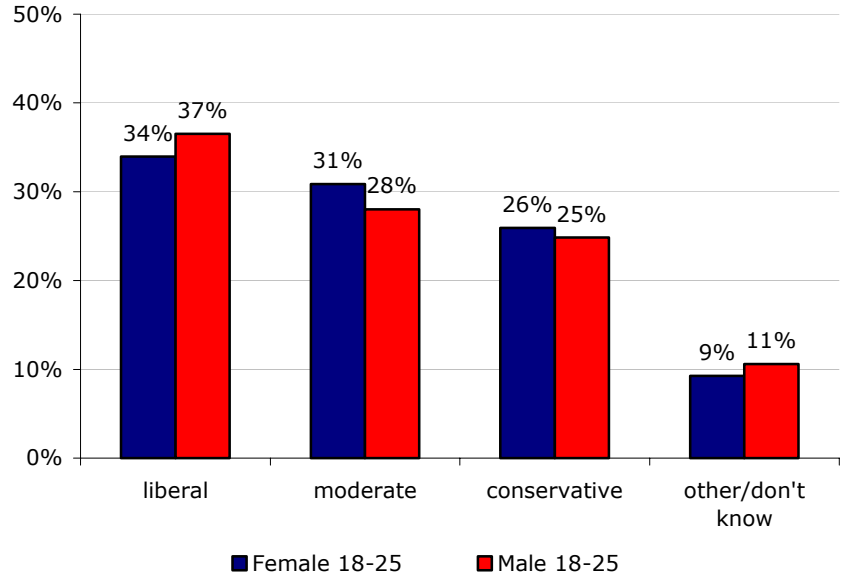
**Graph 18: Political Party Identification, by Gender**



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

In terms of political ideology, young women are more likely to identify themselves as moderates than their young male counterparts, who are more likely to identify themselves as liberal. However, as with political party identification, young people are evenly distributed across ideological categories.

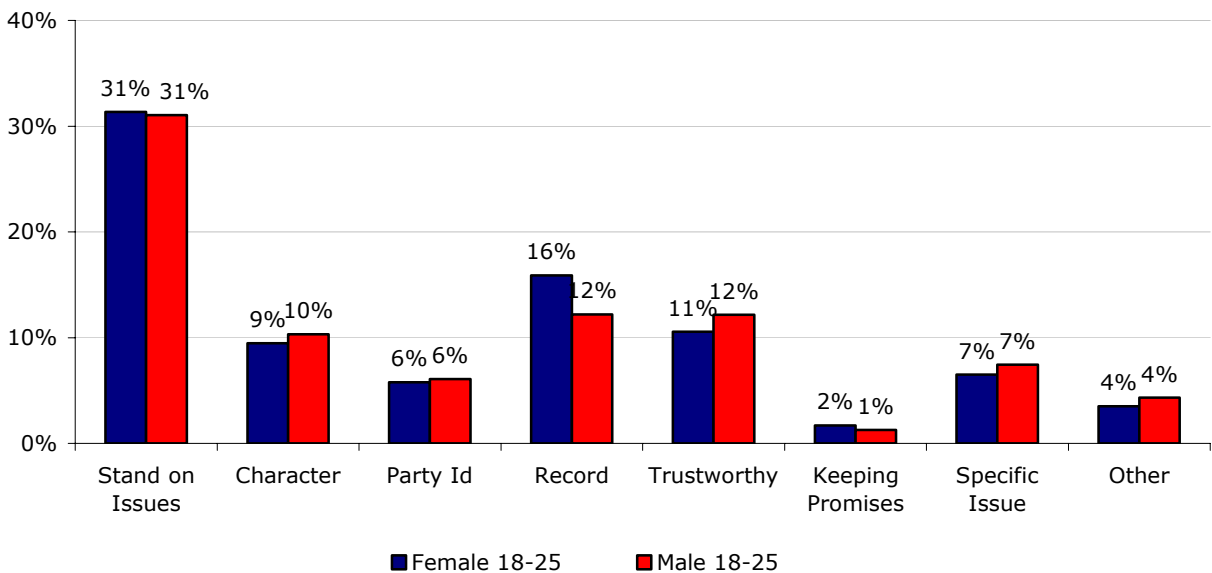
**Graph 19: Ideological Identification, by Gender**



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

Several factors are associated with why a voter makes a decision to vote for a certain candidate. According to young people, the most important consideration when considering which candidate to vote for is the candidate's stand on political issues. Few differences are evident across gender.

**Graph 20: Most Important Consideration when Voting for a Candidate, by Gender**



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

## Appendix

### ***Voter Turnout Tables, 1972 – 2000***

**Table 1a – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2000  
Selected Series**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Women 25+</i>	<i>Men 25+</i>	<i>White Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>White Young Men 18-24</i>
1972	55%	55%	69%	72%	56%	56%
1974	26%	29%	52%	57%	28%	31%
1976	49%	47%	68%	70%	52%	50%
1978	27%	26%	54%	57%	28%	27%
1980	46%	45%	69%	70%	49%	47%
1982	28%	29%	58%	59%	28%	30%
1984	48%	45%	70%	69%	48%	46%
1986	26%	25%	55%	56%	25%	25%
1988	44%	41%	67%	67%	45%	42%
1990	25%	25%	55%	55%	25%	25%
1992	53%	49%	73%	72%	56%	53%
1994	26%	23%	55%	56%	26%	25%
1996	42%	37%	67%	66%	43%	40%
1998	22%	20%	53%	53%	22%	22%
2000	43%	40%	71%	69%	46%	41%

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000. All figures calculated using the CIRCLE method. All results are weighted.

**Table 1b – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2000  
Selected Series**

<i>Year</i>	<i>White Women 25+</i>	<i>White Men 25+</i>	<i>African American Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>African American Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>African American Women 25+</i>	<i>African American Men 25+</i>
1972	70%	73%	41%	40%	60%	64%
1974	54%	58%	20%	20%	42%	45%
1976	70%	72%	34%	34%	61%	61%
1978	56%	58%	24%	23%	47%	47%
1980	70%	71%	36%	34%	63%	60%
1982	59%	60%	32%	29%	53%	53%
1984	71%	71%	52%	44%	70%	64%
1986	56%	57%	30%	29%	53%	52%
1988	69%	69%	43%	40%	63%	59%
1990	56%	57%	24%	24%	50%	49%
1992	74%	74%	48%	41%	67%	65%
1994	57%	58%	24%	18%	47%	48%
1996	68%	67%	45%	32%	66%	61%
1998	55%	55%	23%	17%	54%	50%
2000	73%	71%	45%	39%	72%	67%

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000. All figures calculated using the CIRCLE method. All results are weighted.

**Table 1c – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2000**  
**Selected Series**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Hispanic Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Hispanic Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Hispanic Women 25+</i>	<i>Hispanic Men 25+</i>	<i>Single Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Married Young Women 18-24</i>
1972					64%	46%
1974	18%	22%	38%	43%	31%	22%
1976	30%	33%	49%	55%	56%	41%
1978	16%	20%	41%	45%	31%	23%
1980	29%	24%	53%	54%	50%	43%
1982	21%	24%	44%	46%	31%	24%
1984	37%	32%	56%	57%	53%	42%
1986	21%	19%	45%	45%	28%	23%
1988	32%	27%	54%	55%	47%	37%
1990	20%	15%	42%	41%	28%	20%
1992	40%	31%	58%	58%	56%	47%
1994	24%	16%	40%	41%	27%	24%
1996	30%	24%	56%	53%	44%	37%
1998	21%	13%	41%	41%	23%	21%
2000	30%	30%	56%	54%	46%	42%

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2000. All figures calculated using the CIRCLE method. All results are weighted.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Research Director and Research Associate respectively at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. We thank Carrie Donovan and Peter Levine for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>2</sup> These population estimates are based on weighted counts from the November 2000 supplement of the Current Population Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Measuring youth voter turnout raises difficult issues, and there is not a single clearly correct turnout estimate for youth in any given year. However, no matter how we measure youth and adult voter turnout, there has been a significant decline in voter turnout since 1972.

The simplest and most common measure used by researchers of voter turnout is the number of voters divided by the number of adult residents. In contrast, voter turnout in this fact sheet is calculated for U.S. citizens only, which generates higher voter turnout figures than those reported by the U.S. Census Bureau. Furthermore, we adjust the voter turnout rate for non-responses in the voting question. While the quality of data from the CPS is generally excellent, there are survey participants who do not answer every question presented in the survey. CIRCLE excludes those individuals who did not answer the voting question from our calculations when determining voter turnout; we do not count them as non-voters, because we believe that this would understate voter turnout. Typically, researchers who do count non-answers as “no’s” find a lower turnout rate in each year than we present here. For this report, we calculate turnout for citizens in the following manner:

$$\text{Voter Turnout}_{\text{citizens no missing}} = \frac{(\# \text{ of self-reported voters})}{(\# \text{ of U.S. Citizens over age 18 who answered the voting question})}$$

Our voter turnout figures are based on the 1972 to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplements. The November supplement of the Current Population survey is generally completed within two weeks of the November election, and samples the non-institutionalized population of the U.S. For each survey, approximately 90,000 adults ages 18 or older were interviewed. All data are publicly available, and all programs used to generate these data are available upon request. For more information on issues related to estimating voter turnout, see “Youth Voter Turnout Has Declined by Any Measure” by Peter Levine and Mark Lopez of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), September 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Statistical significance is measured at the 5 percent level of statistical significance.

<sup>5</sup> Similar to the measure for voter turnout, the measure of voter registration has been adjusted to reflect registration rates among U.S. citizens only. Also, non-responses to the question on voter registration have been removed from the analysis.

<sup>6</sup> All results are for non-Hispanics Whites, non-Hispanics African Americans, non-Hispanic Asians, and non-Hispanic Native Americans. All race/ethnicity categories are mutually exclusive.

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<sup>7</sup> One difficulty with the results reported in figures 10 and 11 is that many 18 to 24 year olds are still in school pursuing degrees at the time of the survey. Thus it is difficult to draw conclusions about voter turnout among young people by level of educational attainment since all education has not been attained. As an alternative, consider the voter turnout rates among 25 year olds, most of whom will have completed their education by that age. Among those with a high school degree or less, voter turnout has declined from 57 percent in 1972 for female high school graduates to 39 percent in 2000. Furthermore, the spike generally observed in youth voter turnout in 1992 was muted for high school graduates and those with less than a high school education. Similarly, voter turnout for college-educated 25 year olds has declined since 1972. For female 25 year olds with a bachelor's degree, voter turnout dropped from 89 percent in 1972 to 67 percent in 2000 despite a spike in turnout in 1992. Furthermore, in 2000, there is no statistical difference between the voter turnout of 25-year-old female college graduates and 25-year-old male college graduates.