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Youth Turnout Up Sharply in 2004

4.6 Million More Young People Cast Votes Than in 2000 Youth Turnout Up by 9.3 Points

At least 20.9 million Americans under the age of 30 voted in 2004, an increase of 4.6 million over 2000,¹ and the turnout rate among these voters rose from about 42.3% to 51.6%, a sharp rise of 9.3 percentage points, according to final national exit polls and an early tally of votes cast. Youth voter turnout was especially high in the contested battleground states.

“This is phenomenal,” said CIRCLE Director William A. Galston. “It represents the highest youth turnout in more than a decade, 4 percentage points higher than the previous peak year of 1992.”

Because young people participated in considerably larger numbers than they had in the past, they kept pace with the higher turnout of Americans of all ages. Voters under the age of 30 constituted the same proportion of all voters as they did in 2000 (about 18%).

Young people voted at a much higher rate in contested, “battleground” states.² In the ten most contested states, youth turnout was 64%, up 13 percentage points from 2000. In the battleground states, the youth share of the electorate was 19%. In the remaining 40 states and the District of Columbia, youth turnout was 47% and the youth share of the electorate was 18%. One explanation for the higher rates of participation in the battleground states is that there was greater voter outreach and political advertising in these states. Current research shows that youth participate when they are asked to do so.

Young people chose the Kerry-Edwards ticket over Bush-Cheney by 54-44, according to national exit polls. They were the *only* age group to prefer the Democrats.

Table 1 – Election 2004 Youth Voter Turnout

Presidential Election Year	Percentage of all voters who are age 18-29 ³	Estimated Number of Votes Cast by Voters Age 18-29 ⁴	Percentage of citizens age 18-29 who voted (turnout)
2004	18.4%	20,996,000	51.6%
2000	16.8%	16,260,000	42.3%
1996	17.1%	14,452,000	34.9%
1992	20.7%	19,073,000	47.9%

Source: The percentages of voters age 18-29 are obtained from state exit polls. The numbers of votes cast are obtained from the Associated Press as of 6am the day following the election. Estimated voter turnout is obtained by taking the estimated number of votes cast and dividing it by the estimated population of 18-29 year old citizens from the Current Population Survey.

Table 2 – Youth Voter Turnout in Battleground and Non-Battle Ground States

	Battleground States	Non-Battleground States
2004		
% of voters Age 18-29	19.4%	18.1%
Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year olds	64.4%	47.6%
2000		
% of voters Age 18-29	17%	16%
Voter Turnout Among 18-29 year olds	51%	38%

Source: Battleground states include Florida, Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Nevada, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The percentages of voters age 18-29 is obtained from state exit polls. Estimated voter turnout is obtained by taking the estimated number of votes cast and dividing it by the estimated population of 18-29 year old citizens from the Current Population Survey.

Table 3 – Support for Presidential Candidates Among Voters Age 18-29

	National Results
2004	
George Bush	44%
John Kerry	54%
Ralph Nader	1%
2000	
George Bush	46.2%
Al Gore	47.6%
Ralph Nader	4.7%
1996	
Bill Clinton	52.8%
Robert Dole	34.4%
Ross Perot	10.4%
1992	
Bill Clinton	43.5%
George Bush Sr.	34.3%
Ross Perot	22.2%

Source: National Exit Polls from 1992 to 2004.

¹ Results for 2004 are calculated using the National Election Pool exit polls (conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International) and a preliminary tally of votes cast, as reported by the Associated Press at 6 am on November 3. CIRCLE's national turnout estimates and estimates of the youth share of the electorate are calculated by aggregating the 51 exit polls and vote tallies for the states and the District of Columbia. The same methodology is used to calculate figures for 2000. One caution in interpreting these estimates is that exit polls do not always adequately represent the proportion of voters by age. As a result, youth turnout and the numbers of votes cast by young people are estimates for all election years.

² In 2004, we define the “battleground” as those in which the margin of victory was 5 percentage points or less, according to exit polls. These states are Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

³ For consistency, all figures in this column are derived from national exit polls. Other CIRCLE documents use Census Current Population Survey data instead of exit polls. However, the Census Bureau’s election data for 2004 will not be released until 2005, so this fact sheet uses exit polls as a provisional source that allows comparisons to past years.

⁴ This number will likely increase over the next days and weeks. In 2000, the vote tally on the day after the Election rose by 8 million over the subsequent weeks. As the vote tally rises, youth turnout may rise somewhat.