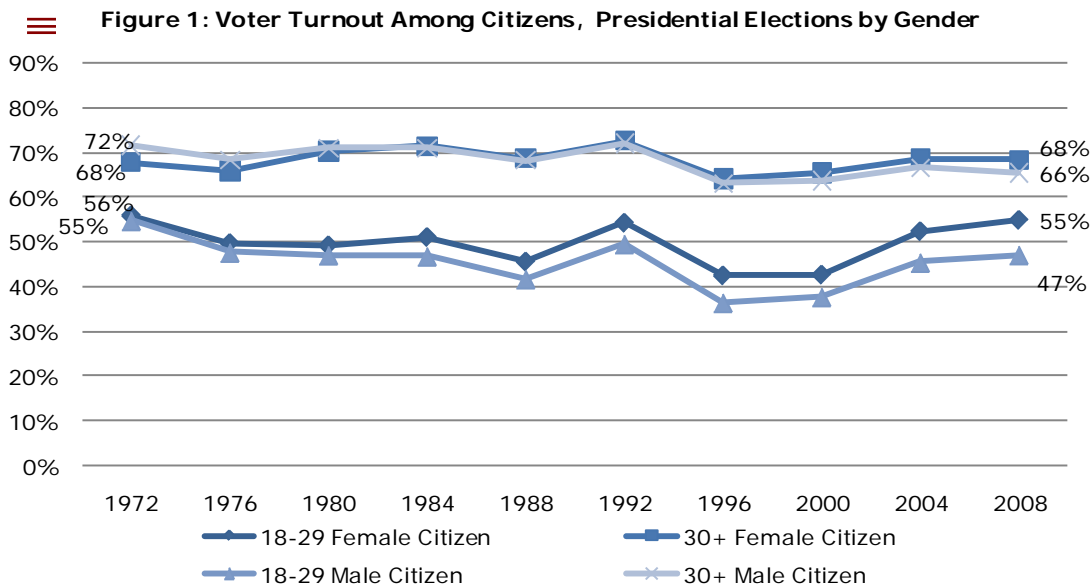


## Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men in the 2008 Presidential Election

By: **Surbhi Godsay and Emily Kirby<sup>1</sup>**  
 October 2010

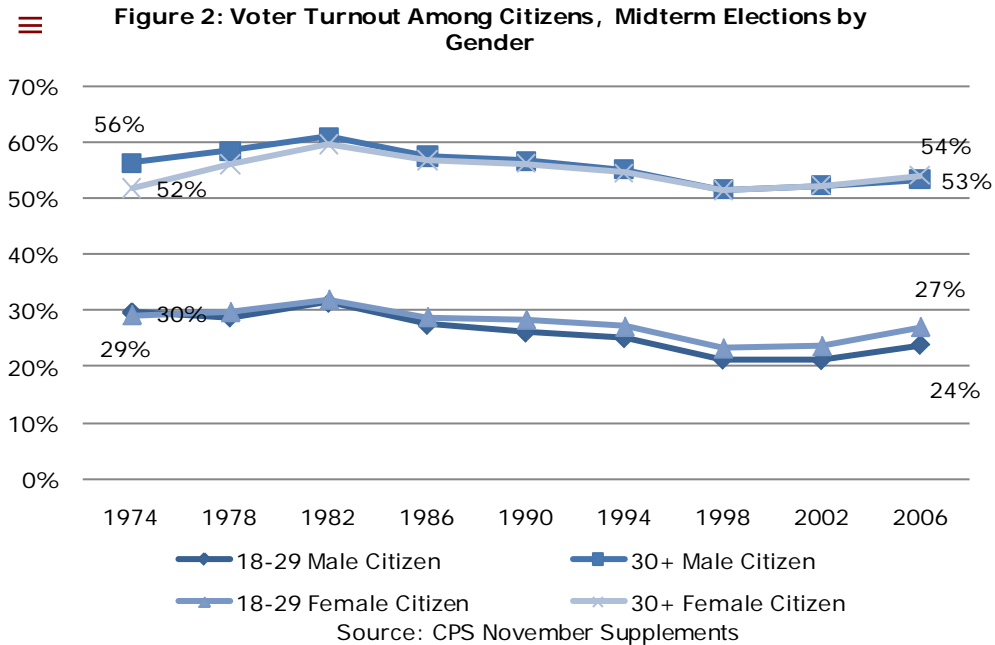
The 2008 Presidential election marked a significant turning point in American politics; for the first time both an African-American and female candidate were strong contenders. Moreover, young voters, especially African-American females, significantly increased their turnout rates. Although overall youth turnout increased, a significant gender gap in turnout exists, with young women voting at higher rates than young men. This fact sheet presents information on voter turnout (which is just one measure of civic engagement) for women and men, with detailed information about racial and ethnic groups, differences by educational background, and married and unmarried individuals. (See table 1A, 1B, and 1C in the appendix for full voter turnout figures.)



Source: CPS Nov. Supplements 1972-2008

In 2008, there were approximately 41 million 18-29 year-old citizens who were eligible voters in the United States. In total, approximately 51.1% of the 18-29 year-old population voted in the 2008 Presidential election. Since 1972, when 18- and 19-year-olds won the right to vote, young women have been more likely than young men to vote. In 2004, the gap was nearly six percentage points – in 2008, this gap increased to approximately eight percentage points (see Figure 1).

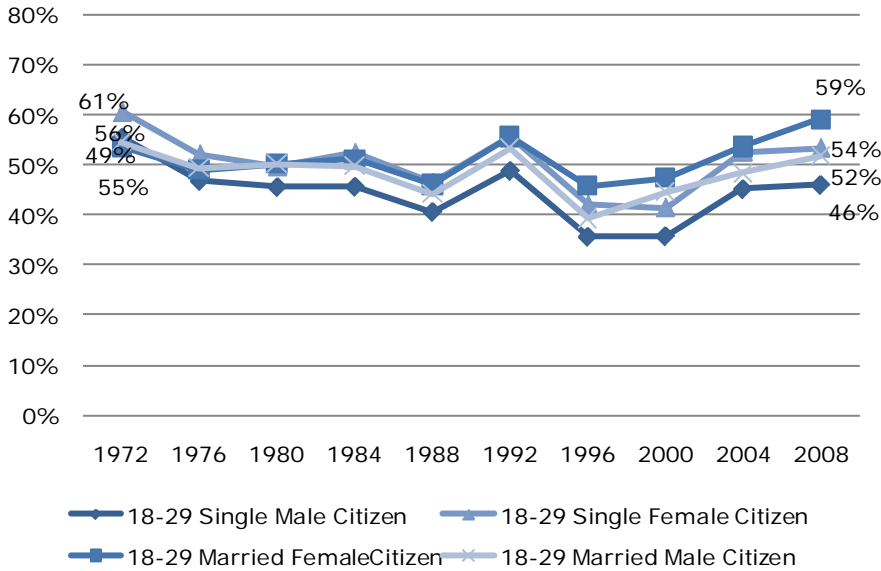
Young women and men also turned out in increased numbers for the 2006 midterm elections – both groups saw an increase of approximately three percentage points. This is the third midterm election in a row in which voter turnout among young women has increased (see Figure 2). The gap in turnout rates between both male and female voters age 18-29 and those thirty and older is much larger in midterm elections than presidential elections.



### *Voter Turnout by Gender and Marital Status*

Single young men have consistently voted at lower rates compared to their female or married counterparts (see Figure 3). For example, in 2008 the turnout rate among single young men was 46.4% compared to a 54.4% turnout rate among young single females. In 2008, nearly 59% of young married females voted compared to 52.3% of married men. In 2004, the turnout rate between young single and young married females was virtually the same; in 2008, the turnout difference between the two groups grew by more than five percentage points.

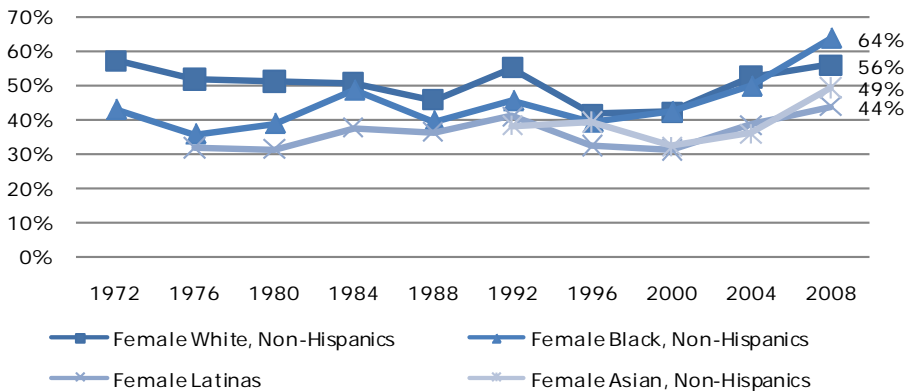
**Figure 3: Voter Turnout Among 18-29 Year-Old Citizens, by Gender and Marital Status, Presidential Elections**



*Voter Turnout among Young Women, by Race/Ethnicity*

Between 2000 and 2004, there was no significant difference in the turnout rate between young African-American women and young white women (see Figure 4). 2008 marked the first time since the voting age was lowered to 18 when young African-American women showed greater turnout than white women. Voter turnout among young African-American women increased by 14 percentage points between 2004 and 2008. Although young white females saw a minimal three percentage point increase in their voter turnout, both Latina females and Asian females saw an increase in turnout since 2004 (five points and 13 points respectively), and 2008 marked the highest turnout for Asian and Latina female youth since data were first collected.

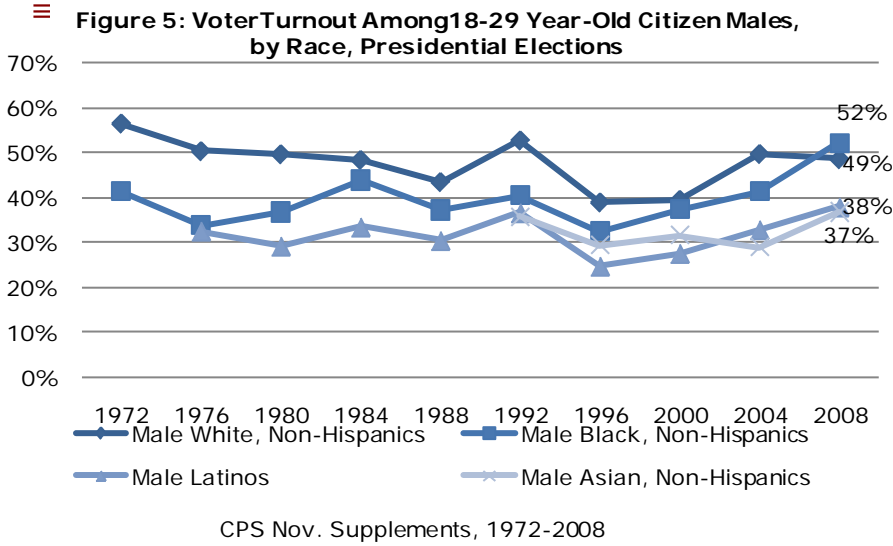
**Figure 4: Voter Turnout Among 18-29 Year-Old Citizen Females by Race, Presidential Elections**



Source: CPS Nov. Supplements, 1972-2008

### *Voter Turnout among Young Men, by Race/Ethnicity*

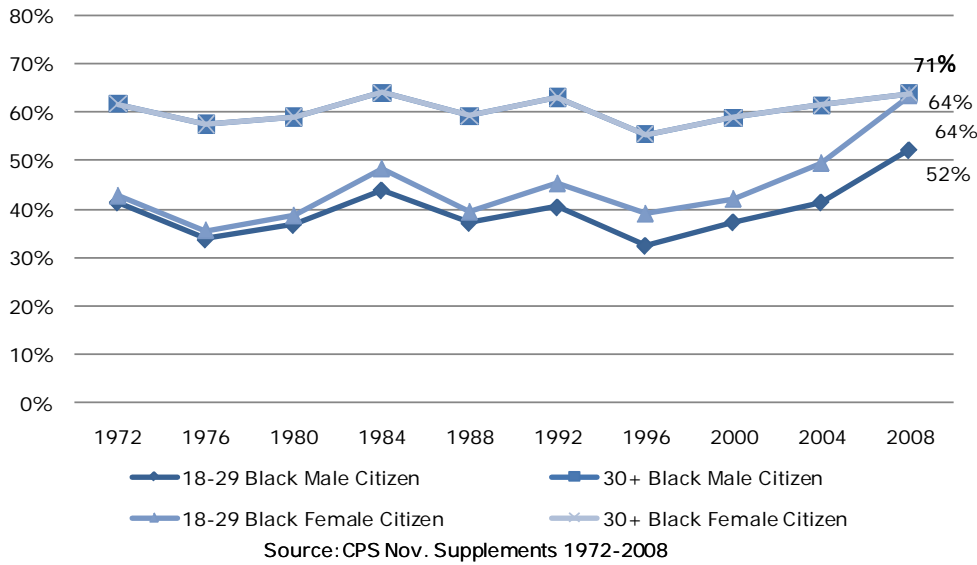
Trends show that young women have consistently voted at a higher rate than men – this is specifically true of the difference between young white females and young white males. As discussed earlier, young white females increased their voter turnout by a small margin since the 2004 election. Young white males, on the other hand, showed a small decrease in voter turnout (see Figure 5).



### *African American Females Start to Close the Age Gap*

Though both African-American young men and women increased their voter turnout since 2004, the percentage point gap between the two groups increased from eight points to 11 points. As seen in Figure 6, the spike in the young African-American female vote started to close the turnout gap between African-Americans 30 and over, and young African-Americans females 18-to-29 years-old. In 2004, there was a 14 percentage point difference between turnout among African-American females 30 and over and young African-American females. In 2008, however, this gap was decreased to seven percentage points. Moreover, in 2008, young African American females voted at essentially the same rate as adult African American males (63.5% vs. 63.9%). Young people have traditionally voted at lower levels than adults, but this election shows that youth participation can grow to reach participation levels as high as adults.

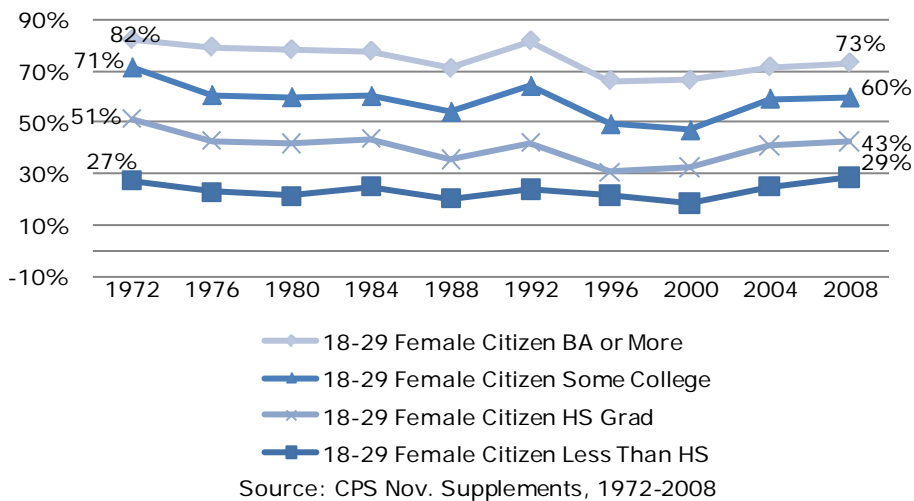
**Figure 6: Turnout Among African American Citizens by Age, Presidential Elections**



**Voter Turnout Among Young Women by Educational Attainment<sup>2</sup>**

Consistent with trends observed for all young people, young women with greater levels of education are more likely to vote. As shown in Figure 7, there was a one to two percentage point increase in voter turnout for each educational group of young females from 2004 to 2008. Though the voter turnout gap between youth with college experience and youth without college experience still exists, young females with less than a high school education have shown a rising trend in voter turnout since 2000. In fact, the 2008 Presidential election marked the highest voter turnout for females without a high school degree since 1972.

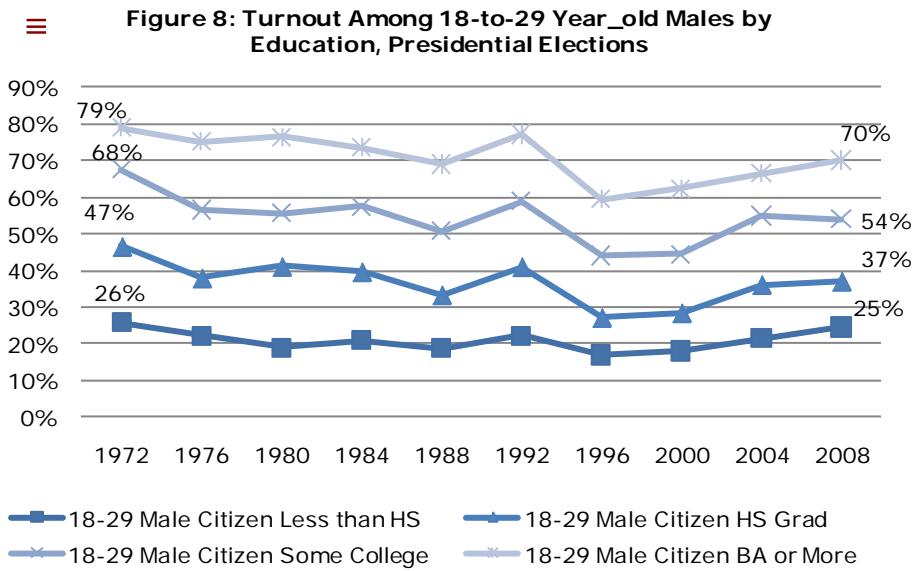
**Figure 7: Turnout Among Females by Education, Presidential Elections**



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

Like their female counterparts, young men with more formal education voted at higher levels in 2008. However, turnout remained relatively unchanged between 2004 and 2008 among young men whose highest

levels of education were either “high school degree” or “some college.” Turnout among young men with less than a high school diploma increased by three percentage points from 21.5% to 24.5%.

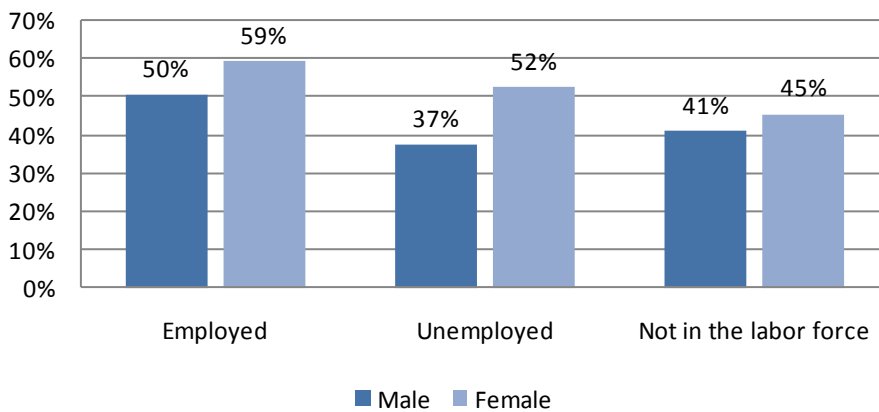


Source: CPS Nov. Supplements, 1972-2008

**Voter turnout Among Men and Women by Employment, College Enrollment Status, and Region**

In 2008, young women – regardless of employment status – voted at higher rates than young men. The voting rate of young employed men is approximately 13 percentage points greater than unemployed males age 18-29. Young unemployed males were the least likely to vote, voting at a rate of 37.3%. Comparatively, young employed women were the most likely to vote at a rate of 59.2%, approximately seven percentage points higher than young unemployed females. The largest gap in voter turnout is between unemployed males and females.

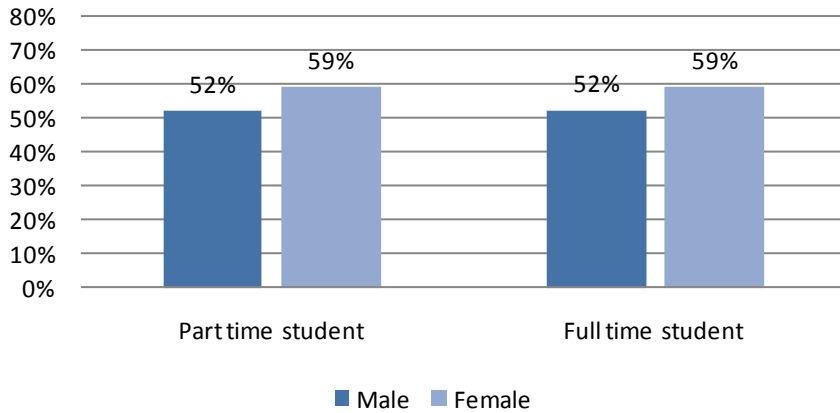
**Figure 9: 2008 Presidential Vote by Employment Status and Gender, Age 18-29**



Among the 18-to-24<sup>3</sup> year-old, college student population, young women were significantly more likely to vote in 2008 (62.7%) compared to young men (56.1%). There was little to no difference between the voter turnout

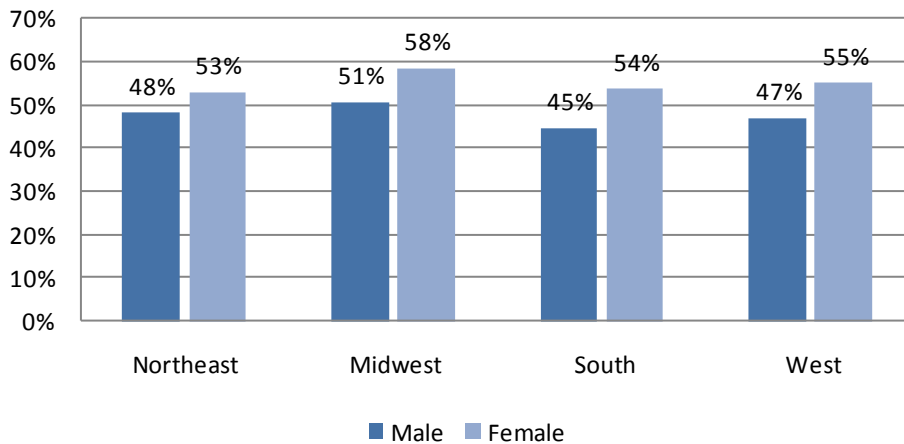
among young male part-time students and young male full-time students and similarly, there was no difference in turnout among female part-time students and full-time students.

**Figure 10: 2008 Presidential Vote by Student Type and Gender**



In all geographic regions, young women were more likely to turn out compared to their male counterparts. Young women from the Midwest were the most likely to vote (58.5%), whereas young men from the south were the least likely to vote (44.8%). The smallest gap in voter turnout between genders was in the northeast, with a gap of approximately five percentage points.

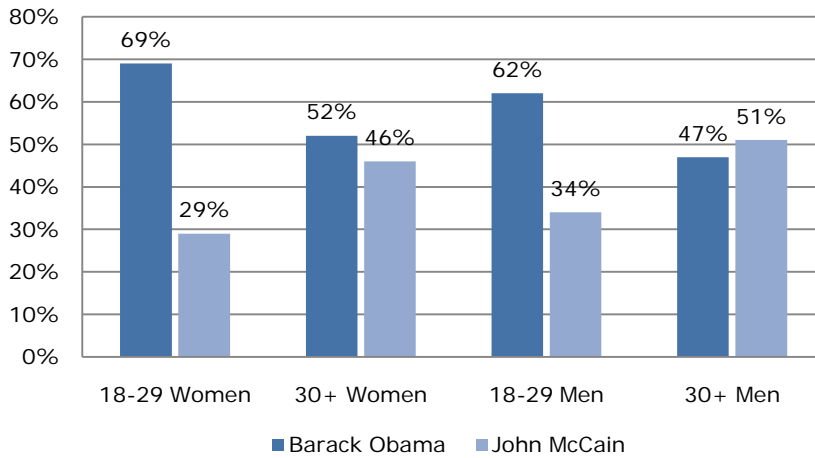
**Figure 11: 2008 Presidential Vote by Region and Gender**



### *Support for Presidential Candidates in 2008*

Young women were slightly more likely to vote for Barack Obama than their male counterparts, although for ages 18-29, both genders were strong supporters of Obama. As a whole, voters age 30 and above differed in their support; they split almost evenly between the two candidates (Obama 49.8% vs McCain 48.5%). But, older women (age 30+) were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to vote for Barack Obama (52% versus 47%).

**Figure 12: 2008 Presidential Vote Choice by Age and Gender**

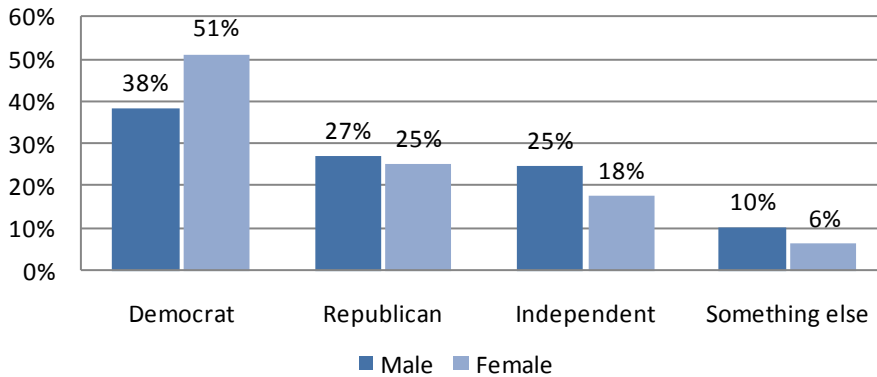


Source: 2008 National Election Poll (NEP), National Exit Poll

### *Political Party Identification*

Young women voters, 18-29, were more likely to self-identify as a “Democrat” compared to their male counterparts (51% versus 38%; see Figure 10). In contrast, young male voters were more likely identify as “Independent” voters (25% versus 18%) and slightly more likely to self-identify themselves as “Republican” (27% versus 25%) compared to their young female counterparts (Figure 13). This pattern persisted for voters age 30 and above – older women were more likely to self-identify as a “Democrat” (41%) compared to older men (34%). However, older male voters were slightly more likely to self-identify as “Republican” and “Independent” (see Figure 14).

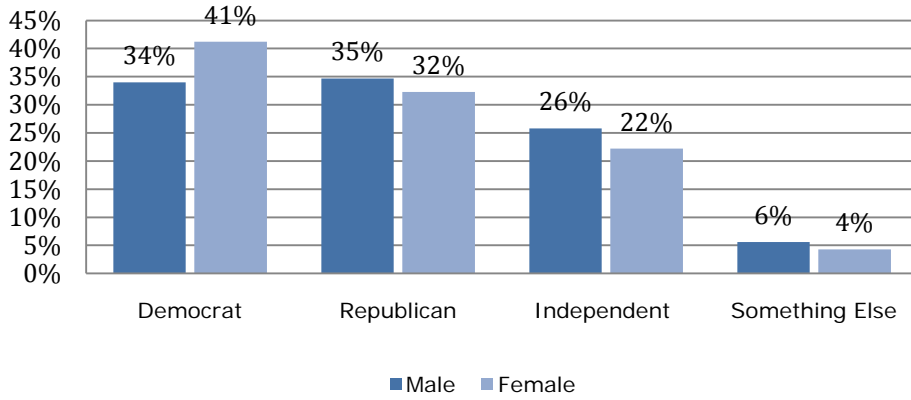
**Figure 13: Political Party Identification Among 18-to-29 Year-Old Voters**



Source: 2008 National Election Poll (NEP), National Exit Poll



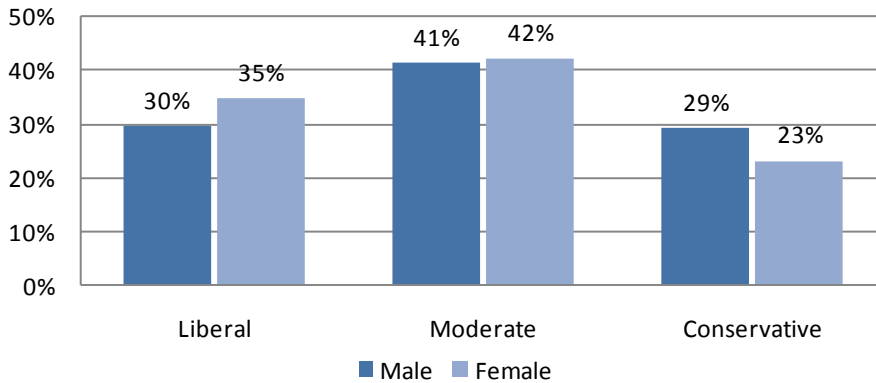
**Figure 14: Political Party Identification Among 30+ Year Old Voters**



Source: 2008 National Election Poll (NEP), National Election Poll

Young female voters were more likely to self-identify as “liberal” compared to young male voters (35% versus 30%), however, both young women and men were most likely to self-identify as “moderate” (see Figure 15). On a whole, older male and female voters were more likely to self-identify as “conservative” than their younger female and male counterparts, although like younger voters they were most likely to self-identify as “moderate” (see Figures 15 & 16).

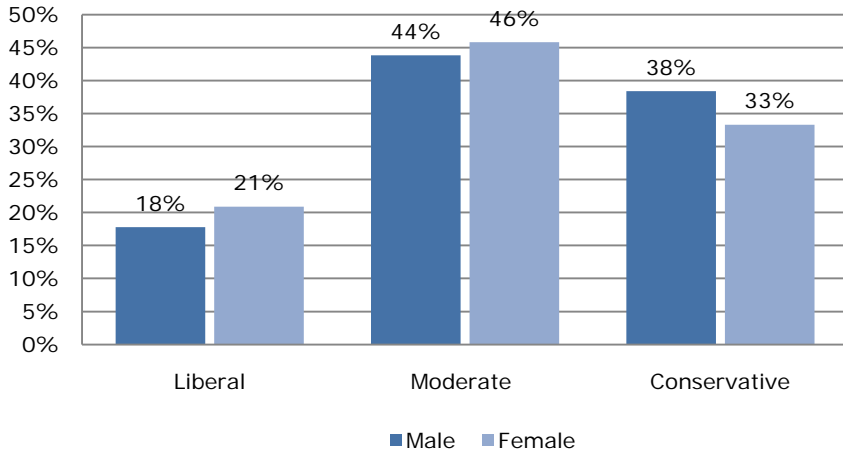
**Figure 15: Political Ideology Among 18-to-29 Year-Old Voters**



Source: 2008 National Election Poll (NEP), National Election Poll



**Figure 16: Political Ideology Among 30+ Year-Old Voters**



Source: 2008 National Election Poll (NEP), National Election Poll

Appendix

Voter Turnout Tables, 1972 – 2008

Table 1a – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2008  
Selected Series

<b>Midterm Years</b>																
Year	Young Women 18-24	Young Men 18-24	Young Women 18-29	Young Men 18-29	Women 25+	Men 25+	Women 30+	Men 30+	White Young Women 18-24	White Young Men 18-24	White Young Women 18-29	White Young Men 18-29	White Women 25+	White Men 25+	White Women 30+	White Men 30+
1974	25%	26%	29%	30%	50%	54%	52%	56%	27%	28%	31%	32%	53%	55%	56%	58%
1978	25%	25%	30%	29%	53%	55%	56%	59%	26%	26%	30%	30%	56%	57%	59%	60%
1982	26%	27%	32%	32%	57%	58%	60%	61%	27%	28%	3%	32%	59%	59%	62%	63%
1986	24%	23%	29%	28%	54%	54%	57%	58%	24%	24%	28%	28%	55%	55%	59%	59%
1990	23%	22%	28%	26%	54%	53%	56%	57%	24%	23%	28%	27%	55%	55%	58%	59%
1994	24%	21%	27%	25%	52%	52%	55%	55%	20%	20%	23%	23%	55%	55%	57%	58%
1998	19%	18%	23%	21%	49%	49%	52%	52%	20%	20%	23%	23%	51%	51%	53%	54%
2002	21%	18%	24%	21%	50%	50%	52%	21%	20%	20%	23%	23%	53%	53%	55%	55%
2006	23%	21%	27%	24%	52%	51%	54%	24%	25%	24%	29%	27%	55%	55%	57%	57%

<b>Presidential Years</b>																
Year	Young Women 18-24	Young Men 18-24	Young Women 18-29	Young Men 18-29	Women 25+	Men 25+	Women 30+	Men 30+	White Young Women 18-24	White Young Men 18-24	White Young Women 18-29	White Young Men 18-29	White Women 25+	White Men 25+	White Women 30+	White Men 30+
1972	53%	51%	56%	55%	67%	70%	68%	72%	54%	54%	57%	57%	70%	71%	71%	73%
1976	46%	43%	50%	48%	65%	66%	66%	68%	48%	46%	52%	50%	67%	68%	69%	70%
1980	45%	42%	49%	47%	68%	69%	70%	71%	46%	45%	51%	50%	70%	71%	72%	73%
1984	46%	42%	51%	47%	70%	68%	72%	71%	46%	44%	50%	48%	70%	70%	73%	73%
1988	42%	38%	46%	42%	66%	65%	69%	68%	41%	40%	46%	44%	51%	51%	53%	54%
1992	51%	46%	54%	50%	71%	70%	73%	72%	52%	50%	55%	53%	73%	72%	74%	74%
1996	48%	33%	43%	36%	63%	61%	64%	63%	38%	36%	41%	39%	64%	63%	66%	65%
2000	38%	34%	43%	38%	64%	62%	65%	64%	38%	36%	42%	40%	65%	64%	67%	66%
2004	50%	44%	52%	46%	68%	65%	69%	67%	50%	47%	52%	50%	69%	68%	71%	70%
2008	52%	45%	55%	47%	68%	64%	68%	66%	53%	46%	56%	49%	68%	67%	71%	68%

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

**Table 1b – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2008**  
Selected Series

<b>Midterm Years</b>																
<i>Year</i>	<i>African-American Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>African-American Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>African-American Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>African-American Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>African-American Women 25+</i>	<i>African-American Men 25+</i>	<i>African American Women 30+</i>	<i>African American Men 30+</i>	<i>Latina Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Latino Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Latina Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>Latino Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>Latina Women 25+</i>	<i>Latino Men 25+</i>	<i>Latina Women 30+</i>	<i>Latino Men 30+</i>
1974	18%	17%	22%	2%	40%	41%	42%	43%	17%	20%	17%	21%	35%	39%	39%	42%
1978	22%	21%	25%	25%	45%	44%	47%	46%	15%	19%	19%	24%	40%	44%	43%	47%
1982	27%	25%	31%	29%	51%	49%	54%	53%	21%	22%	23%	23%	43%	44%	47%	49%
1986	27%	25%	31%	30%	50%	49%	53%	51%	20%	17%	24%	21%	43%	43%	46%	48%
1990	22%	21%	27%	25%	47%	45%	49%	48%	19%	14%	23%	18%	41%	40%	44%	43%
1994	18%	15%	23%	21%	43%	43%	45%	44%	22%	14%	23%	16%	37%	38%	40%	42%
1998	14%	23%	21%	47%	44%	49%	19%	47%	11%	21%	14%	37%	37%	39%	40%	40%
2002	21%	18%	25%	21%	47%	43%	49%	45%	16%	10%	18%	13%	36%	35%	38%	37%
2006	23%	17%	27%	20%	48%	42%	50%	44%	17%	16%	20%	18%	37%	34%	39%	37%

<b>Presidential Years</b>																
<i>Year</i>	<i>African-American Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>African-American Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>African-American Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>African-American Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>African-American Women 25+</i>	<i>African-American Men 25+</i>	<i>African American Women 30+</i>	<i>African American Men 30+</i>	<i>Latina Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Latino Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Latina Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>Latino Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>Latina Women 25+</i>	<i>Latino Men 25+</i>	<i>Latina Women 30+</i>	<i>Latino Men 30+</i>
1972	38%	35%	43%	41%	59%	61%	60%	62%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1976	30%	29%	36%	34%	56%	55%	58%	58%	28%	30%	32%	33%	46%	51%	48%	54%
1980	32%	31%	39%	37%	60%	57%	62%	59%	28%	23%	31%	29%	52%	53%	56%	56%
1984	44%	40%	48%	44%	65%	62%	67%	64%	35%	30%	37%	33%	55%	55%	59%	59%
1988	17%	14%	23%	21%	47%	44%	49%	59%	19%	11%	21%	14%	37%	37%	39%	40%
1992	41%	36%	45%	40%	63%	61%	65%	63%	37%	29%	41%	37%	56%	55%	58%	57%
1996	34%	27%	39%	32%	57%	54%	58%	56%	28%	20%	32%	25%	51%	47%	53%	50%
2000	36%	33%	42%	37%	61%	57%	62%	59%	26%	25%	31%	28%	51%	49%	52%	51%
2004	47%	42%	50%	41%	63%	59%	64%	62%	34%	32%	38%	33%	53%	48%	54%	50%
2008	61%	51%	64%	52%	70%	63%	71%	64%	41%	37%	44%	38%	54%	50%	55%	52%

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

**Table 1c – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2008**  
**Selected Series**

<b>Midterm Years</b>																
<i>Year</i>	<i>Single Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Married Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Single Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>Married Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>Single Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Married Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Single Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>Married Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>Single Women 25+</i>	<i>Married Women 25+</i>	<i>Single Women 30+</i>	<i>Married Women 30+</i>	<i>Single Men 25+</i>	<i>Married Men 25+</i>	<i>Single Men 30+</i>	<i>Married Men 30+</i>
1974	28%	22%	30%	29%	27%	24%	29%	31%	48%	53%	51%	56%	41%	56%	44%	59%
1978	28%	22%	30%	30%	26%	22%	28%	31%	48%	57%	54%	60%	44%	58%	48%	61%
1982	28%	23%	31%	33%	28%	24%	31%	33%	50%	60%	55%	64%	45%	61%	48%	64%
1986	26%	21%	28%	30%	24%	21%	27%	29%	45%	57%	52%	61%	40%	58%	44%	61%
1990	26%	18%	28%	30%	23%	18%	26%	28%	48%	58%	50%	61%	39%	58%	45%	61%
1994	25%	23%	27%	30%	21%	23%	24%	30%	43%	58%	48%	60%	37%	58%	41%	60%
1998	19%	20%	23%	26%	18%	16%	20%	26%	40%	54%	44%	56%	35%	55%	39%	56%
2002	21%	21%	23%	28%	18%	18%	20%	26%	40%	55%	45%	57%	34%	56%	38%	58%
2006	24%	23%	26%	31%	21%	23%	23%	29%	41%	57%	45%	59%	47%	57%	41%	58%

<b>Presidential Years</b>																
<i>Year</i>	<i>Single Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Married Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Single Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>Married Young Women 18-29</i>	<i>Single Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Married Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Single Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>Married Young Men 18-29</i>	<i>Single Women 25+</i>	<i>Married Women 25+</i>	<i>Single Women 30+</i>	<i>Married Women 30+</i>	<i>Single Men 25+</i>	<i>Married Men 25+</i>	<i>Single Men 30+</i>	<i>Married Men 30+</i>
1972	60%	46%	61%	54%	55%	45%	56%	55%	66%	70%	66%	72%	60%	72%	60%	77%
1976	51%	40%	52%	49%	45%	40%	47%	49%	61%	68%	62%	70%	56%	69%	55%	71%
1980	48%	41%	50%	50%	44%	39%	46%	50%	64%	72%	67%	74%	56%	72%	58%	74%
1984	50%	40%	53%	51%	43%	41%	46%	50%	65%	72%	67%	75%	57%	72%	60%	74%
1988	44%	36%	47%	46%	39%	35%	41%	44%	60%	70%	65%	72%	51%	70%	55%	72%
1992	53%	45%	56%	56%	48%	39%	49%	53%	65%	76%	67%	78%	56%	75%	59%	76%
1996	40%	35%	42%	46%	34%	30%	36%	39%	55%	67%	58%	69%	46%	66%	49%	68%
2000	39%	38%	42%	48%	34%	34%	36%	45%	55%	69%	58%	71%	47%	68%	49%	69%
2004	51%	44%	53%	54%	45%	38%	45%	48%	61%	72%	63%	73%	51%	71%	53%	72%
2008	52%	51%	54%	59%	45%	41%	46%	52%	62%	72%	64%	73%	52%	70%	54%	70%

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

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Researcher and Senior Researcher respectively. We thank Abby Kiesa, Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, and Peter Levine for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet.

We thank Mark Hugo Lopez, Emily Kirby, and Jared Sagoff for their fact sheet “Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men” published in 2005 upon which this fact sheet is based. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>2</sup> Youth without college experience are defined as those who have no experience attending technical/vocational programs, associate’s degree programs, or four year college programs. This group includes youth who have completed a high school education or GED and those who have not. The college attending group is comprised of young people who have been enrolled in college in the past or are currently enrolled.

<sup>3</sup> College enrollment data are only available for 18-to 24-year-olds.