



CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on
Civic Learning & Engagement

Youth Voter Turnout in the States during the 2004 Presidential and 2002 Midterm Elections

By Carrie Donovan, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Jared Sagoff¹
July 2005

Youth voter turnout among citizens varies substantially across states, in both the 2004 presidential election and the 2002 midterm election, though the vast majority of states experienced a dramatic decline in turnout between 1972 and 2002 followed by one of the largest turnout increases in recorded history in last November's election. However, youth turnout still remains substantially below turnout for adults 25 and older.² For youth between the ages of 18 and 24, turnout rates have generally declined by 6 percentage points in midterm election years between 1978 and 2002. In presidential election years between 1972 and 2000, the turnout rate had declined by 16 percentage points among young citizens before rebounding by 11 percentage points in the 2004 election. It remains to be seen if the increase in youth turnout in 2004 is part of a new trend or is instead a spike in youth electoral participation like the 1992 election.

State by State Voter Turnout for 2004

Youth voter turnout was highest in 2004 in Minnesota (69%), Wisconsin (63%), Iowa (62%), Maine (59%), and New Hampshire (58%). Youth voter turnout in 2004 was lowest in Arkansas (36%), Tennessee (38%), and Texas (39%). Young people voted at a much higher rate in contested, "battleground" states.³ In the ten most contested states, youth turnout was on average 53%, up 17 percentage points from 2000. In the non-battleground states, youth turnout was on average 45%, up eight percentage points from 2000. One explanation for the higher rates of participation in the battleground state 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.⁴

Across all states, voter turnout rates among adults 25 and older ranged from a low of 58 percent in Georgia and Tennessee to a high of 81 percent in Minnesota. Nationally, youth voter turnout in 2004 was 47 percent, and voter turnout among adults over age 25 was 66 percent.

Across all states, youth voter turnout was almost 20 percentage points lower than voter turnout among adults ages 25 and older. For 2004, Kentucky exhibited the smallest turnout gap between young and older voters (10 percentage points), while Kansas and Oregon showed the greatest difference (28 percentage points).

Most states saw significant increases in youth voter turnout in the past election, some of more than twenty percentage points. These states include: New Hampshire (23 points), Kentucky (22 points), Minnesota (22 points), and Missouri (22 points). However, not all states saw their youth

voter turnout rates rise. Three states experienced a turnout decrease from 2000: Connecticut (-2 points), Virginia (-2 points), and Arkansas (-1 point).

State by State Voter Turnout for 2002

In 2002, youth voter turnout rates among citizens were highest in Minnesota (46%), Alabama (27%), Oregon (25%) and South Carolina (25%), but were very low in New Jersey (14%), West Virginia (13%), and North Carolina (12%). Youth voter turnout was lowest in Arizona, with a youth turnout rate among young citizens of 11 percent. Across all states, voter turnout rates among adults 25 and older ranged from a low of 40 percent in Virginia to a high of 71 percent in Minnesota. Nationally, youth voter turnout in 2002 was 19 percent, and voter turnout among adults over age 25 was 50 percent, both up slightly from 1998.

Nationally, youth voter turnout was on average 31 percentage points lower than the adult voter turnout rate. The smallest voter turnout gap, at 24 percentage points, was in Georgia, and the largest gap, at 42 percentage points, was in Maine.

Between 1978 and 2002, youth voter turnout rates had declined from a national youth voter turnout rate among citizens in 1978 of 25 percent to a youth voter turnout rate among citizens in 2002 of 19 percent. Between 1978 and 2002, only nine states saw a rise in their youth voter turnout rates, with the greatest gain in Georgia at 10 percentage points. Across all other states, some substantial declines in youth voter turnout among citizens between 1978 and 2002 were observed. In particular, Tennessee (-16 point), Michigan (-15 point), Maine (-15 point), and Massachusetts (-14 point) saw the greatest declines in youth voter turnout among citizens over the 24-year period during midterm elections.

Table 1 – Voter Turnout Among Citizens in 2004, by State

<i>State</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens in 2004</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 25 year old and older Citizens in 2004</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens in 1972</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens in 2000</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout between 2000 and 2004⁵</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout Between 1972 and 2004⁶</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout between 1972 and 2000⁷</i>
Alabama	44%	66%	42%	40%	+4% points	+2% points	-2% points
Alaska	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Arizona	42%	67%	44%	26%	+17% points	-2% points	-19% points
Arkansas	36%	62%	40%	36%	-1% points	-4% points	-3% points
California	45%	64%	63%	37%	+8% points	-18% points	-25% points
Colorado	48%	70%	59%	30%	+18% points	-11% points	-29% points
Connecticut	41%	66%	57%	43%	-2% points	-16% points	-14% points
Delaware	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
D.C.	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Florida	46%	67%	47%	35%	+10% points	-1% points	-12% points
Georgia	45%	58%	39%	33%	+13% points	+6% points	-7% points
Hawaii	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Idaho	48%	64%	65%	36%	+12% points	-17% points	-29% points
Illinois	42%	69%	59%	40%	+2% points	-17% points	-19% points
Indiana	41%	61%	55%	33%	+8% points	-14% points	-22% points
Iowa	62%	73%	65%	47%	+15% points	-3% points	-18% points
Kansas	40%	68%	59%	36%	+4% points	-19% points	-23% points
Kentucky	56%	66%	44%	34%	+22% points	+12% points	-10% points
Louisiana	48%	67%	40%	44%	+4% points	+8% points	+4% points
Maine	59%	73%	39%	51%	+8% points	+20% points	12% points
Maryland	51%	67%	52%	39%	+12% points	-1% points	-13% points
Massachusetts	46%	72%	60%	40%	+6% points	-14% points	-20% points
Michigan	54%	69%	52%	37%	+17% points	+3% points	-14% points
Minnesota	69%	81%	64%	46%	+22% points	+5% points	-18% points
Mississippi	52%	63%	41%	43%	+8% points	+11% points	+3% points
Missouri	53%	71%	55%	31%	+22% points	-2% points	-24% points
Montana	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Nebraska	42%	69%	61%	32%	+9% points	-19% points	-28% points
Nevada	44%	61%	28%	31%	+13% points	+16% points	+3% points
New Hampshire	58%	73%	45%	35%	+23% points	+13% points	-10% points
New Jersey	50%	68%	54%	36%	+15% points	-4% points	-18% points
New Mexico	42%	67%	49%	24%	+17% points	-7% points	-25% points
New York	45%	62%	58%	34%	+12% points	-12% points	-24% points
North Carolina	43%	64%	34%	31%	+12% points	+8% points	-4% points
North Dakota	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Ohio	56%	68%	53%	38%	+18% points	+3% points	-15% points
Oklahoma	44%	66%	51%	36%	+7% points	-7% points	-15% points
Oregon	49%	77%	45%	41%	+8% points	+4% points	-4% points
Pennsylvania	43%	67%	45%	32%	+12% points	-1% points	-13% points
Rhode Island	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
South Carolina	43%	66%	37%	38%	+5% points	+6% points	+1% points
South Dakota	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Tennessee	38%	58%	46%	24%	+14% points	-8% points	-22% points
Texas	39%	60%	46%	32%	+7% points	-7% points	-14% points
Utah	51%	71%	70%	40%	+11% points	-19% points	-30% points
Vermont	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
Virginia	41%	66%	41%	43%	-2% points	-1% points	+1% points
Washington	52%	70%	54%	40%	+12% points	-2% points	-14% points
West Virginia	46%	59%	49%	33%	+13% points	-4% points	-17% points
Wisconsin	63%	78%	54%	51%	+12% points	+9% points	-4% points
Wyoming	***	***	***	***	***	***	***
National	47%	66%	52%	36%	+11% points	-5% points	-19% points

Source: Authors' tabulations from the CPS November 1972- 2004 Supplements. *** Sample sizes are too small to estimate voter turnout rates.

Table 2 – Voter Turnout Among Citizens in 2002, by State

<i>State</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 25 year old and older Citizens</i>	<i>Difference in Voter Turnout between 18-24 year olds and 25+ citizens^a</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens in 1978</i>	<i>Change in Youth Voter Turnout between 1978 and 2002^b.</i>
Alabama	27%	52%	25% points	29%	-2% points
Alaska	***	***	***	***	***
Arizona	11%	48%	37% points	18%	-7% points
Arkansas	14%	50%	36% points	18%	-3% points
California	19%	47%	28% points	30%	-11% points
Colorado	24%	54%	30% points	24%	-1% points
Connecticut	21%	51%	30% points	26%	-4% points
Delaware	***	***	***	***	***
D.C.	***	***	***	***	***
Florida	21%	52%	31% points	24%	-3% points
Georgia	21%	45%	24% points	11%	10% points
Hawaii	***	***	***	***	***
Idaho	18%	51%	33% points	21%	-3% points
Illinois	20%	51%	31% points	24%	-4% points
Indiana	15%	44%	29% points	21%	-7% points
Iowa	23%	55%	32% points	22%	1% points
Kansas	22%	53%	31% points	26%	-4% points
Kentucky	22%	49%	27% points	15%	7% points
Louisiana	24%	55%	31% points	23%	1% points
Maine	21%	63%	42% points	36%	-15% points
Maryland	22%	54%	32% points	24%	-1% points
Massachusetts	19%	57%	38% points	33%	-14% points
Michigan	21%	55%	34% points	36%	-15% points
Minnesota	46%	71%	25% points	44%	1% points
Mississippi	16%	47%	31% points	25%	-9% points
Missouri	24%	57%	33% points	27%	-3% points
Montana	***	***	***	***	***
Nebraska	19%	51%	32% points	21%	-2% points
Nevada	20%	46%	26% points	17%	3% points
New Hampshire	22%	54%	32% points	16%	6% points
New Jersey	14%	46%	32% points	22%	-9% points
New Mexico	16%	50%	34% points	23%	-8% points
New York	18%	48%	30% points	27%	-9% points
North Carolina	12%	49%	37% points	13%	-1% points
North Dakota	***	***	***	***	***
Ohio	19%	47%	28% points	23%	-5% points
Oklahoma	24%	53%	29% points	22%	1% points
Oregon	25%	60%	35% points	34%	-9% points
Pennsylvania	17%	47%	30% points	26%	-10% points
Rhode Island	***	***	***	***	***
South Carolina	25%	50%	25% points	17%	7% points
South Dakota	***	***	***	***	***
Tennessee	15%	51%	36% points	30%	-16% points
Texas	16%	45%	29% points	19%	-3% points
Utah	19%	50%	31% points	28%	-10% points
Vermont	***	***	***	***	***
Virginia	15%	40%	25% points	20%	-5% points
Washington	17%	56%	39% points	18%	-2% points
West Virginia	13%	40%	27% points	17%	-4% points
Wisconsin	22%	54%	32% points	33%	-12% points
Wyoming	***	***	***	***	***
National	19%	50%	31% points	25%	-6% points

Source: Authors' tabulations from the CPS November 1978- 2002 Supplements. *** Sample sizes are too small to estimate voter turnout rates.

NOTES

¹ Youth Director, Research Director, and Research Assistant respectively. We thank Emily Kirby for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

² For a full discussion of the different ways voter turnout can be calculated please see CIRCLE Working Paper 35: Youth Voter Turnout 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.

³ 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 CPS.

⁴ See Donald Green and Alan Gerber's book, *Getting out the Vote: How to Increase Turnout in 2004*, available through the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C.

⁵ This is obtained by taking the 2000 voter turnout figure and subtracting it from the 2004 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 2000 and 2004. A positive number represents an improvement between 2000 and 2004.

⁶ This is obtained by taking the 1972 voter turnout figure and subtracting it from the 2004 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 1972 and 2004. A positive number represents an improvement between 1972 and 2004.

⁷ This is obtained by taking the 1972 voter turnout figure and subtracting it from the 2000 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 1972 and 2000. A positive number represents an improvement between 1972 and 2000.

⁸ This is calculated by taking the 25+ voter turnout rate and subtracting the 18-24 voter turnout rate.

⁹ This is obtained by taking the 1978 voter turnout figure and subtracting from it the 2002 voter turnout figure. Thus, a negative number represents a decline between 1978 and 2002. A positive number represents an improvement between 1978 and 2002.