Civic Engagement Among Minority Youth

By Mark Hugo Lopez, Research Director
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There are many ways to measure civic engagement. In this fact sheet, information on three main measures, voter turnout, voter registration, and volunteering is presented. In 2000, there were an estimated 6.15 million young non-Hispanic African Americans between the ages of 15 and 25, 52.9 percent of who were female. This compares to an estimated 27.4 million young non-Hispanic whites and 6.4 million young Hispanics.

**Voter Turnout**

As reported in our fact sheet “Youth Voter Turnout has Declined by Any Measure,” voter turnout, using the CIRCLE method, for young people ages 18-24 has declined steadily.
since 1972. Among young African Americans, the decline in voter turnout since the mid-1980s comes after several years of increased turnout, most noticeably in the presidential election year of 1984. By 2000, voter turnout among young African Americans had returned to 1972’s level.

**Views on Voting**

In a recent survey of 1,500 young people commissioned by CIRCLE in collaboration with the Council for Excellence in Government’s Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and the Partnership for Trust in Government in January of 2002, among 15-25 year olds, young African Americans are equally likely as young whites to view voting as important.

Among young people, approximately 30 percent view voting as “a right,” with a similar view of voting evident across young whites, young African Americans, and young Hispanics.
Young people feel they can make little difference in solving the problems of their community, with young African Americans and Young Hispanics feeling less efficacious than their young white counterparts.

Hispanic young people are least likely to have discussed politics with their parents.

Registering to Vote

Voter Registration rates among young people have remained relatively flat over the past 30 years, though since 1984 voter registration rates among young African Americans are statistically indistinguishable from that of whites. Young Hispanics continue to lag behind their young African American and white counterparts in voter registration rates.\(^5\)

Graph 7: Registration Rates Among 18-24 Year Old Citizens, Presidential Years

Graph 8: Registration Rates Among 18-24 Year Old Citizens, Midterm Years

Graph 9: My Vote Counts, Youth Ages 18-25


Strong majorities of young people feel their vote will count, though young African Americans are least likely to feel their vote makes a difference.

Young women are more likely than young men to feel their vote will count, irrespective of race or ethnicity.

**Graph 10: My Vote Counts, by Gender, Youth Ages 18-25**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Male</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Female</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Male</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Female</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Male</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Female</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Voter Turnout Among the Registered**

Youth voter turnout has declined, even among those registered to vote.

Trust in Government

African American and Hispanic youth have less trust in government than their white counterparts.

Trust in government is highest among young women.

Volunteering among white and African American youth over the past 10 years is up. Graph 15 shows that fewer young people are reporting they have never volunteered.

Across ethnic groups, from CIRCLE’s 2002 survey, Hispanic young people are most likely to say they have never volunteered, though this masks differences in gender. By gender, young white males and young Hispanic males are least likely to have volunteered their time.


Graph 17: Percent Who Never Volunteer, By Gender, Youth Ages 15-25


Graph 18: Percent of Young People, Ages 15-25, Who Have Donated to a Church or Community Organization

Similarly, young Hispanics are least likely to have donated to a community or church organization.

Support for Civic Courses

Young African Americans are the biggest supporters of requiring High School Civics/Government classes for graduation.

Graph 19: Support for High School Civics/Government Classes, Youth Ages 15-25

Political Party Identification

Young African Americans are most likely to identify themselves as democrats. This is particularly true for young female African Americans.

Notes

1 I thank Michael Olander for excellent research assistance. I also thank Bill Galston, Deborah Both, and Peter Levine for helpful comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

2 All results are for non-Hispanic African Americans, non-Hispanic whites, and Hispanics.

3 These figures are estimates of the number of non-institutionalized young people in the U.S. Estimates are based on the 2000 November supplement of the Current Population Survey.

4 Data for Voter Turnout rates and Registration rates are taken from the 1972 to 2000 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. Calculation of the voter turnout rate by the CIRCLE method excludes survey participants who did not answer the voting question or the registration question. Inclusion of “no answers” would result in a lower turnout rate than that reported here. For this fact sheet, voter turnout and voter registration rates are calculated for U.S. citizens only. For example, Voter Turnout among citizens is given as:

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

5 Similar to the measure for voter turnout, the measure of voter registration has been adjusted to reflect registration rates among U.S. citizens only, and non-responses to the question of voter registration.