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Youth Voting in the 2004 Battleground States

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August 2004

As November 2nd quickly approaches, much attention is being paid to young voters, especially in the closely contested “battleground” states.² The national population of 18-29s has grown substantially to 40.7 million eligible voters in the United States—an increase of 1.9 million since 1992. Surveys conducted in recent years find that they are fairly evenly divided among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. In 2000, in several large battleground states, young voters chose a different candidate from older voters. Thus they represent an important voting bloc. This fact sheet provides information about the size of the youth electorate in battleground states and past patterns of youth voting in those states.

As the fact sheet demonstrates, voter turnout among 18 to 29 year olds varies substantially from state to state and from election to election. For example, in the last presidential election, 59 percent of young people in Maine turned out to vote, compared to only 32 percent in Arizona.³

Youth Population by Battleground State

The size of the youth population varies greatly among the battleground states. Table 1 contains estimates of the sizes of the youth population during the past three presidential elections as well as in the upcoming election. In 2004, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan have the largest number of eligible young voters while Wyoming, Maine, New Hampshire, and West Virginia have the smallest eligible youth populations.

Since 1992, Southern and Western battleground states have seen the greatest growth in the number of new young voters, with Arizona, North Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, and New Mexico each gaining over 100,000 young eligible voters. Eight of the twenty battleground states witnessed a decline in their youth populations. These states, in order of decline, are Pennsylvania, Ohio, Missouri, West Virginia, Maine, Iowa, New Hampshire and Minnesota.

Table 1 – Youth Citizen Population in the Battleground States 1992-2004, Ages 18-29 (in thousands)

	1992	1996	2000	2004
Arizona	455	678	755	779
Arkansas	377	394	415	430
Colorado	547	618	676	646
Florida	1,901	1,872	1,834	2,052
Iowa	484	489	393	459
Louisiana	668	775	750	811
Maine	213	172	194	180
Michigan	1,441	1,639	1,390	1,506
Minnesota	796	737	766	782
Missouri	968	930	748	909
Nevada	193	178	226	286
New Hampshire	186	189	154	172
New Mexico	204	265	252	306
North Carolina	1,051	1,151	1,073	1,205
Ohio	1,724	1,767	1,653	1,625
Oregon	448	485	418	495
Pennsylvania	1,988	1,848	1,594	1,722
Washington	790	825	852	943
West Virginia	294	254	307	252
Wisconsin	787	720	721	855
National Total	38,739	39,524	39,332	40,667

Source: November 2000, 1996, and 1992 Supplement of the Current Population Survey; March 2004 Annual Demographic File of the Current Population Survey.

In the 2004 presidential election, 18 to 29 year olds will account for 21 percent of the eligible voters in the United States— a substantial voting bloc. To put this in perspective, Latinos make up 12 percent of eligible voters while African Americans make up 8 percent of eligible voters. Moreover, in some key battleground states young people represent an even greater proportion of their respective state's population. For example, in Louisiana, young voters represent 25 percent of all eligible voters. Across all battleground states, young people represent at least 18 percent of eligible voters. Table 2 provides an estimate of the proportion of eligible voters who are between the ages of 18 and 29 by battleground state.

Table 2 – 2004 Proportion of Eligible Voters who are Youth, by Battleground State (in thousands)

	2004 18-29 citizens	2004 18+ citizens	Percent of total state voting eligible population that is 18- 29 years old
Arizona	779	3,470	22%
Arkansas	430	1,976	22%
Colorado	646	3,091	21%
Florida	2,052	11,514	18%
Iowa	459	2,134	22%
Louisiana	811	3,203	25%
Maine	180	990	18%
Michigan	1,506	7,209	21%
Minnesota	782	3,626	22%
Missouri	909	4,101	22%
Nevada	286	1,468	19%
New Hampshire	172	941	18%
New Mexico	306	1,308	23%
North Carolina	1,205	5,660	21%
Ohio	1,625	8,261	20%
Oregon	495	2,503	20%
Pennsylvania	1,722	9,064	19%
Washington	943	4,207	22%
West Virginia	252	1,387	18%
Wisconsin	855	3,923	22%
National Total	40,667	195,828	21 %

Source: 2004 Current Population Survey's March Annual Demographic file.

Youth Turnout Since 1992

Table 3 shows how the youth vote has fluctuated since 1992 in the battleground states. While the turnout rates of young voters in Arkansas and West Virginia grew in 2000, in the rest of the battleground states the turnout rates of young people either remained the same or declined.

Table 3 – Voter Turnout Among 18 – 29 Year Old Citizens in Battleground States, 1992-2000

	1992	1996	2000	Percentage Point Change between 1992 and 2000
Arizona	53%	37%	32%	-20.8%
Arkansas	42%	37%	44%	2.9%
Colorado	59%	43%	43%	-15.7%
Florida	47%	35%	45%	-1.4%
Iowa	62%	46%	54%	-8.2%
Louisiana	60%	55%	55%	-4.5%
Maine	73%	53%	59%	-13.6%
Michigan	59%	48%	48%	-11.1%
Minnesota	72%	53%	58%	-14.4%
Missouri	56%	46%	44%	-11.9%
Nevada	45%	30%	37%	-8.7%
New Hampshire	49%	37%	49%	0.1%
New Mexico	52%	36%	37%	-15.2%
North Carolina	49%	44%	43%	-5.5%
Ohio	56%	45%	45%	-10.9%
Oregon	63%	43%	53%	-10.1%
Pennsylvania	46%	38%	39%	-7.9%
Washington	59%	46%	47%	-12.0%
West Virginia	38%	31%	41%	3.0%
Wisconsin	67%	53%	56%	-11.3%
National Total	54 %	44 %	46 %	-8.3 %

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements 2000, 1996, and 1992.

Political Preferences of Young Voters

Surveys conducted in recent years generally show that young voters are drawn to the major parties in roughly equal numbers, and many are independents. For example, a survey conducted by CIRCLE and the Council for Excellence in Government in January 2004 found that 15-25s were evenly divided among Democrats (32 percent), Republicans (28 percent), and independents (25 percent). Additionally, 15 percent of young people were undecided.

Unfortunately, current polling data does not report on how partisanship varies between the battleground states. Given this limitation, the next best option is to look at how young people have voted in the past. Generally, in the 1992 and

1996 elections young people voted similarly to the overall population. Table 5 shows which candidate won the most votes among 18 to 29 year olds in the 1992, 1996, and 2000 elections.

Table 5- Candidate Favored by the Majority of Young Voters and General Voters, 1992 to 2000

	1992			1996			2000		
	18-29 voters	All Voters	Difference	18-29 voters	All Voters	Difference	18-29 voters	All Voters	Difference
Arizona	Perot	Bush	✓	Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Bush	
Arkansas	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Bush	
Colorado	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Dole	✓	Gore	Bush	✓
Florida	Bush	Clinton/Bush	✓	Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Bush/Gore*	✓
Iowa	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Gore/Bush*	✓
Louisiana	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Bush	
Maine	Perot	Clinton	✓	Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Gore	✓
Michigan	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Gore	
Minnesota	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Gore	✓
Missouri	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Gore/Bush*	Bush	✓
Nevada	Bush	Clinton	✓	Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Bush	
New Hampshire	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Bush	✓
New Mexico	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Gore	
North Carolina	Bush	Bush		Dole/Clinton	Dole	✓	Bush	Bush	
Ohio	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Bush	
Oregon	Clinton	Clinton		**	**		**	**	
Pennsylvania	Bush	Clinton	✓	Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Gore	
Washington	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Gore	
West Virginia	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Bush	Bush	
Wisconsin	Clinton	Clinton		Clinton	Clinton		Gore	Gore/Bush*	✓

Source: Exit polls in 1996 & 2000 were conducted by Voter News Service (VNS). Exit polls in 1992 were conducted by Voter Research & Surveys (VRS).

*The first candidate listed polled ahead by less than one percentage point.

**No exit poll data were available from VNS for Oregon in the years 1996 & 2000.

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² Based on the National Journal's July definition of the 2004 battleground states.

³ Measuring youth voter turnout raises difficult issues, and there is not a single clearly correct turnout figure 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. 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 2002 and 2000 U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) November Supplements respectively. 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.