



**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Youth Voter Turnout in the States during the 2000 Presidential and 2002 Midterm Elections

By Carrie Donovan and Mark Hugo Lopez<sup>i</sup>  
June 2004

Youth voter turnout among citizens varies substantially across states, in both the 2002 Midterm election, and the 2000 Presidential election, and is consistently lower than voter turnout rates of adults 25 and older.<sup>ii</sup> Voter turnout rates have generally declined in midterm election years between 1978 and 2002 by 6 percentage points among young citizens between the ages of 18 and 24. In Presidential election years between 1972 and 2000, the national youth voter turnout rate has declined by 13 percentage points among young citizens.

### *State by State Voter Turnout for 2000*

Youth voter turnout was highest in 2000 in Alaska (63%), North Dakota (62%), Maine (60%), the District of Columbia (57%), and Wisconsin (56%). Youth voter turnout in 2000 was low in Arizona (28%), New Mexico (28%), Tennessee (28%), and South Dakota (27%). Youth Voter turnout was lowest in Hawaii at 22 percent. Across all states, voter turnout rates among adults 25 and older ranged from a low of 55 percent in Hawaii to a high of 84 percent in Alaska. Nationally, youth voter turnout in 2000 was 42 percent, and voter turnout among adults over age 25 was 70 percent.

Across all states, youth voter turnout was on average 28 percentage points lower than voter turnout among adults ages 25 and older. For 2000, the smallest voter turnout gap, at 14 percentage points, was in North Dakota, and the largest voter turnout gap, at 43 percentage points, was in South Dakota.

Between 1972 and 2000, youth voter turnout declined by 13 percentage points nationally from a 1972 youth voter turnout rate among citizens of 55 percent to a youth voter turnout rate among citizens of 42 percent. In Presidential Years, youth voter turnout has declined in the majority of states. Specifically, Colorado (27 percentage points), Idaho (27 percentage points), Utah (32 percentage points), Hawaii (41 percentage points), and South Dakota (47 percentage points) saw the greatest declines in youth voter turnout between 1972 and 2000. However, not all states saw their youth voter turnout rates fall. Eleven states saw no change or an increase in the voter turnout among young citizens between 1972 and 2000. Specifically, Virginia (6 percentage points), Louisiana (6 percentage points), Nevada (7 percentage points), the District of Columbia (18 percentage points), and Maine (19 percentage points) all saw the greatest gains in youth voter turnout among citizens in presidential years between 1972 and 2000.

### ***State by State Voter Turnout for 2002***

In 2002, youth voter turnout rates among citizens were highest in Minnesota (52%), South Dakota (37%), Alaska (33%), Alabama (31%), and North Dakota (31%), but were very low in Delaware (15%), West Virginia (15%), and North Carolina (14%). Youth voter turnout was lowest in Arizona and Vermont, with a youth turnout rate among young citizens of 13 percent. Across all states, voter turnout rates among adults 25 and older ranged from a low of 37 percent in Virginia to a high of 75 percent in Minnesota. Nationally, youth voter turnout in 2002 was 23 percent, and voter turnout among adults over age 25 was 56 percent, both up slightly from 1998.

In all cases, youth voter turnout was on average 33 percentage points lower than the adult voter turnout rate. The smallest voter turnout gap, at 24 percentage points, was in Minnesota, and the largest gap, at 51 percentage points, was in Vermont.

Between 1978 and 2002, youth voter turnout rates had declined from a national youth voter turnout rate among citizens in 1978 of 27 percent to a youth voter turnout rate among citizens in 2002 of 23 percent. Between 1978 and 2002, only 15 states saw a rise in their youth voter turnout rates, with the greatest gain in Georgia at 13 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 percentage point decline), North Dakota (15 percentage point decline), Montana (14 percentage point decline), and Maine (13 percentage point decline) 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 2000, 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>Voter Turnout All Citizens, Ages 18 and older</i>	<i>Difference in Voter Turnout between citizens 18-24 and 25+</i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens in 1972</i>	<i>Decline in Youth Voter Turnout between 1972 and 2000.</i>
Alabama	44%	70%	66%	26% points	43%	1% point
Alaska	63%	84%	82%	21% points	58%	5% points
Arizona	28%	62%	57%	34% points	48%	-20% points
Arkansas	40%	61%	58%	21% points	42%	-2% points
California	44%	70%	67%	26% points	64%	-20% points
Colorado	36%	68%	64%	32% points	63%	-27% points
Connecticut	49%	70%	68%	21% points	57%	-8% points
Delaware	50%	75%	73%	25% points	56%	-6% points
D.C.	57%	81%	78%	24% points	39%	18% points
Florida	41%	69%	66%	28% points	50%	-9% points
Georgia	41%	65%	62%	24% points	41%	No change
Hawaii	22%	55%	51%	33% points	63%	-41% points
Idaho	41%	69%	65%	28% points	68%	-27% points
Illinois	47%	73%	70%	26% points	62%	-15% points
Indiana	35%	68%	64%	33% points	57%	-22% points
Iowa	50%	74%	71%	24% points	68%	-18% points
Kansas	41%	72%	67%	31% points	62%	-21% points
Kentucky	39%	67%	64%	28% points	46%	-7% points
Louisiana	49%	77%	73%	28% points	43%	6% points
Maine	60%	78%	76%	18% points	41%	19% points
Maryland	42%	70%	67%	28% points	54%	-12% points
Massachusetts	47%	74%	71%	27% points	63%	-16% points
Michigan	44%	75%	71%	31% points	54%	-10% points
Minnesota	54%	80%	77%	26% points	68%	-14% points
Mississippi	48%	71%	67%	23% points	43%	5% points
Missouri	36%	78%	73%	42% points	57%	-21% points
Montana	46%	72%	69%	26% points	52%	-6% points
Nebraska	37%	70%	65%	33% points	53%	-16% points
Nevada	35%	61%	58%	26% points	28%	7% points
New Hampshire	37%	74%	71%	37% points	47%	-10% points
New Jersey	42%	74%	70%	32% points	59%	-17% points
New Mexico	28%	63%	59%	35% points	49%	-21% points
New York	42%	71%	68%	29% points	61%	-19% points
North Carolina	34%	66%	62%	32% points	36%	-2% points
North Dakota	62%	76%	74%	14% points	70%	-8% points
Ohio	42%	68%	65%	26% points	55%	-13% points
Oklahoma	41%	69%	65%	28% points	53%	-12% points
Oregon	47%	78%	75%	31% points	47%	No change
Pennsylvania	36%	66%	63%	30% points	47%	-11% points
Rhode Island	46%	71%	69%	25% points	70%	-24% points
South Carolina	43%	68%	65%	25% points	38%	5% points
South Dakota	27%	70%	64%	43% points	74%	-47% points
Tennessee	28%	65%	60%	37% points	48%	-20% points
Texas	37%	65%	60%	28% points	48%	-11% points
Utah	42%	68%	63%	26% points	74%	-32% points
Vermont	36%	75%	71%	39% points	41%	-5% points
Virginia	49%	70%	68%	21% points	43%	6% points
Washington	45%	73%	69%	28% points	56%	-11% points
West Virginia	36%	59%	56%	23% points	51%	-15% points
Wisconsin	56%	78%	75%	22% points	57%	-1% point
Wyoming	48%	72%	69%	24% points	63%	-15% points
<b>National</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>28% points</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>-13% points</b>

Source: Current Population Survey, November 2000 and 1972 Supplements.

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>Voter Turnout All Citizens, Ages 18 and older</i>	<i>Difference in Voter Turnout between 18-24 year olds and 25+ citizens<sup>iii</sup></i>	<i>Voter Turnout Among 18-24 year old Citizens in 1978</i>	<i>Decline in Youth Voter Turnout between 1978 and 2002<sup>iv</sup>.</i>
Alabama	31%	57%	54%	26% points	30%	1% points
Alaska	33%	67%	63%	34% points	31%	2% points
Arizona	13%	53%	47%	40% points	19%	-6% points
Arkansas	16%	54%	50%	38% points	18%	-2% points
California	23%	53%	49%	30% points	32%	-9% points
Colorado	26%	60%	56%	34% points	25%	1% points
Connecticut	25%	57%	53%	31% points	28%	-3% points
Delaware	15%	56%	51%	41% points	18%	-3% points
D.C.	30%	64%	59%	33% points	21%	9% points
Florida	25%	57%	54%	33% points	26%	-1% points
Georgia	25%	51%	48%	26% points	12%	13% points
Hawaii	20%	56%	52%	35% points	31%	-11% points
Idaho	19%	53%	48%	34% points	22%	-3% points
Illinois	26%	59%	55%	33% points	25%	1% points
Indiana	18%	49%	46%	31% points	22%	-4% points
Iowa	25%	58%	53%	33% points	23%	2% points
Kansas	24%	57%	52%	32% points	27%	-3% points
Kentucky	24%	54%	50%	29% points	16%	8% points
Louisiana	28%	60%	56%	32% points	24%	4% points
Maine	25%	66%	61%	41% points	38%	-13% points
Maryland	25%	62%	58%	36% points	25%	0% points
Massachusetts	23%	62%	58%	39% points	34%	-11% points
Michigan	27%	61%	57%	34% points	38%	-11% points
Minnesota	52%	75%	72%	24% points	48%	4% points
Mississippi	19%	53%	48%	34% points	27%	-8% points
Missouri	28%	63%	59%	35% points	28%	0% points
Montana	23%	62%	58%	39% points	37%	-14% points
Nebraska	22%	54%	49%	32% points	22%	0% points
Nevada	22%	51%	47%	29% points	18%	4% points
New Hampshire	24%	58%	54%	34% points	17%	7% points
New Jersey	16%	52%	48%	36% points	25%	-9% points
New Mexico	18%	54%	49%	37% points	24%	-6% points
New York	21%	54%	50%	33% points	28%	-7% points
North Carolina	14%	54%	49%	40% points	14%	0% points
North Dakota	31%	65%	60%	34% points	46%	-15% points
Ohio	22%	52%	48%	30% points	25%	-3% points
Oklahoma	27%	56%	52%	29% points	25%	2% points
Oregon	30%	65%	61%	35% points	36%	-6% points
Pennsylvania	19%	52%	48%	33% points	28%	-9% points
Rhode Island	22%	60%	56%	38% points	28%	-6% points
South Carolina	27%	53%	50%	27% points	18%	9% points
South Dakota	37%	75%	69%	39% points	35%	2% points
Tennessee	16%	58%	52%	42% points	32%	-16% points
Texas	18%	51%	47%	33% points	20%	-2% points
Utah	20%	54%	47%	34% points	30%	-10% points
Vermont	13%	64%	57%	51% points	19%	-6% points
Virginia	18%	45%	42%	28% points	21%	-3% points
Washington	19%	62%	56%	43% points	20%	-1% points
West Virginia	15%	43%	40%	28% points	18%	-3% points
Wisconsin	26%	58%	55%	32% points	36%	-10% points
Wyoming	30%	61%	57%	31% points	36%	-6% points
<b>National</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>33% points</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>-4% points</b>

Source: Current Population Survey, November 2002 and 1978 Supplements.

---

## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Youth Director and Research Director respectively. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>ii</sup> 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.

<sup>iii</sup> This is calculated by taking the 25+ voter turnout rate and subtracting the 18-24 voter turnout rate.

<sup>iv</sup> 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.