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The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement

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California Youth Voter Turnout 19%
950,000 Citizens Under the Age of Thirty Participate in California Primary
California Youth Support Democratic Candidates Clinton and Obama and Republican
Candidate McCain

Youth Voter Experts Available for Interviews
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Washington, DC - 19 percent of eligible California citizens under the age of 30 participated in the state's primary, according to estimates by CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement). More than 250,000 young people participated in the Republican primary and 700,000 in the Democratic primary. (See Table 2.)



Table 1 –Presidential Primary Participation in 2008 and 2000
18-to-29-Year-Old Citizens

California Primary	Youth Turnout Rate	Turnout Rate of Age 30 and Over	Overall Turnout Rate	Number of Youth Who Voted	Youth as Share of All Voters
2008	19 %	35 %	32 %	951,484	14 %
2000	13%	32%	28%	574,807	10%

Source: The share of primary voters is obtained from the 2008 California Republican and Democratic exit polls conducted by Edison/Mitofsky. The numbers of votes cast are obtained from the CNN.com (3/14 /2008; 100% of precincts reporting.) Estimated voter turnout is obtained by taking the estimated number of votes cast and dividing it by the estimated population of 18-to 29-year-old citizens and citizens over the age of 30 from the Current Population Survey (2007).

See p.3 for definitions.

The results from California punctuate the findings of national focus groups that CIRCLE conducted last fall. The research showed that college students are deeply concerned about issues, involved personally as volunteers, and ready to consider voting. But they want political leaders to be positive, to address real problems, and to call on all Americans to be constructively involved.

"Young Americans have been turning out to vote at remarkable rates in these primaries. This reflects their deep concern about the critical issues at stake and the impact of this election on our country's future," said CIRCLE Director, Peter Levine. "Since 2000, young people have been volunteering at high rates and are becoming more interested in news and public affairs. Now they are ready to consider voting as a way of addressing major problems. The Millennials are beginning to make their distinctive and lasting mark on American politics."

Comparisons to other caucuses and primaries must be made with caution, because turnout is affected by the date of the primaries and by the nature of the Democratic and Republican presidential campaigns, which are different in every state. "Closed" primaries and caucuses tend to depress turnout since Independents cannot participate.

Because there is no actual count of the number of votes cast by young people in the California primaries, we can only estimate their level of participation. Table 2 provides estimates of youth participation in the California primary by party.

The table below shows youth participation in past California primaries. Comparisons to past primaries should be made with caution since in 2004, California did not hold a Republican primary.



Table 2 – 2008, 2004, and 2000 Presidential Primary Participation by Party, Ages 18-29

	Democratic		Republican	
	Number of Primary Participants	Share of Primary Participants	Number of Primary Participants	Share of Primary Participants
2008	700,079	16 %	251,405	10 %
2004	341,837	11%	N/A	N/A
2000	318,494	12%	256,313	9%

Youth turnout increased in the Iowa caucuses where the youth turnout tripled compared to 2004, rising from four percent of eligible citizens in 2004 to 13 percent in 2008. In New Hampshire, the youth vote soared to 43 percent, up from 28 percent in 2000. In the Democratic contest, with the exception of Florida, Obama has won the largest share of the youth vote (ages 18-29). In the Republican contest, youth support has varied by state. (See Table 4.)



Table 3– Youth Vote Choice by Party

		Democratic Candidates			Republican Candidates			
		Clinton	Edwards	Obama	Huckabee	McCain	Paul	Romney
California	Ages 18-29	49%	0%	49%	20%	35%	7%	33%
Florida	Ages 18-29	44%	11%	43%	18%	30%	5%	23%
South Carolina	Ages 18-29	23%	10%	67%	35%	28%	7%	12%
Nevada	Ages 18-29	33%	7%	59%	7%	13%	19%	50%
New Hampshire	Ages 18-29	28%	13%	51%	13%	31%	18%	23%
Iowa	Ages 17-24	10%	14%	57%	37%	8%	20%	21%
	Ages 25-29	15%	12%	57%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: www.cnn.com

This increase in youth turnout in the early primary season continues a trend observed in other elections since 2000. In the 2006 congressional elections, the voter turnout rate among 18-to 29-year-olds increased by three percentage points compared to the previous congressional election of 2002. And in the 2004 presidential election, the national youth voter turnout rate rose 9 percentage points compared to 2000, reaching 49 percent. In 2004, under-30-year-olds were registered to vote at the highest rate in 30 years.

Definitions

Youth: For the purpose of the California primary, we define “youth” as citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 on February 5, 2008.

Number of youth who voted: An estimate of how many youth participated.

Youth share primary participants: An estimate of the number of young people who participated in the primaries as a percentage of the number of *all people* who participated in the primaries.

Youth turnout rate: An estimate of the number of young people who participated in the primaries as a percentage of the total number of young people who were eligible to participate in either primary.

The youth turnout rate is the best indicator of how young Americans are engaging in the political process. The other statistics—the sheer number of youth participants and the youth share of the electorate—can change because of factors unrelated to youth engagement.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Since 2001, CIRCLE has conducted, collected, and funded research on the civic and political participation of young Americans. CIRCLE is based in the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and several other foundations.