

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH:

political parties & THE MOBILIZATION *of* YOUNG AMERICANS

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most alarming trends in American politics is the growing disinterest in the electoral process. Shrinking turnout grabs the headlines, but a host of other indicators—such as talking about politics, wearing a button, attending political events, watching candidate debates, and even the number who contribute funds to candidates—all suggest a turned-off citizenry. For the younger generation, citizens 18 to 25 years old, the problem is quickly approaching a crisis stage. For example, in 1972, when 18-year-olds were granted the right to vote, about 50 percent did so. In recent presidential elections that number has shrunk to about 35 percent. Recent survey data suggest that while young Americans seem quite willing to volunteer their time and energies to community projects, relatively few are willing to participate in elections or other forms of political activity.

This trend is most disturbing in a democracy, with a government “of, by, and for the people.” Democracy works best when all citizens are actively involved. Optimistically, we might think of voter withdrawal as simply an indicator of contentment; people don’t vote because they are pleased with the way things are going. Conversely, when things get bad, voters will return to the polls. But given the gravity of the issues that confront our system of government—not the least of which is the threat of terrorism and the changing structure of the economy—the “contentment” theory seems misplaced. Indeed, on close inspection we often find that non-voters, such as many of the young, have the most at stake when it comes to election outcomes and their long-term policy implications. Yes, we should care, and care very deeply, about declining interest in politics. To once again quote Thomas Jefferson, “[Without becoming] familiarized with the habits and practice of self-government ... the political vessel is all sail and no ballast.”

There are many causes behind this decline in political participation among youth. Much work has been done to identify the culprits and propose solutions. But it is also time to take action.

Our project springs from this perspective—a belief that concrete steps can be taken to bring young Americans into the political process.

We believe political parties can be an important part of the solution. E. E. Schattschneider, an eminent political scientist, once remarked that democracy is “unthinkable save in terms of political parties.” We could not agree more. And one of the many functions that parties provide our system is voter mobilization. Simply put, communities with vibrant, active party committees bring more voters to the polls on Election Day, including young voters. Reinvigorated parties can do an even better job.

Yet it is only fair to say that many state and local party committees are finding mobilization difficult in the 21st century, and connecting with young voters has proven even harder. Not for want of trying, many party organizations are simply at a loss as to what activities might make a difference with young voters. Is there anything that might be done?

With financial assistance from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), we have begun to explore how local parties might better connect with young voters. In the fall of 2003, we conducted a first-of-its-kind telephone survey of 803 county party chairs from across the nation. This study produced a wealth of information on what party committees are doing right and where improvements are needed.

This booklet represents the *second* step of the project, detailing the most successful efforts to mobilize the youth vote. Using the survey data as our starting place, during the summer of 2004 we conducted interviews with a few dozen party leaders who seemed to be doing innovative work to attract young voters. We compiled some of these interviews into “case studies,” found in the pages that follow. Our goal is to applaud these organizations for their efforts and, more importantly, to make their stories available to other party leaders across the country.

Two important disclaimers are in order: First, the organizations highlighted below do not represent the only ones doing good work. Nor do they represent the “best” youth-centered committees. Doubtless there are many, many other

committees rolling up their sleeves, doing innovative work. Second, our findings lead us to conclude that neither party is “out in front” of the other. Indeed, there are success stories among both Democrats and Republicans.

We open with a brief introduction on the role of parties in mobilizing voters throughout American history. We underscore changes in the last few decades that made the task of mobilizing voters, and especially young voters, problematic. We then offer some of the basic findings from our survey of local party chairs. These findings are best characterized as mixed: while most party leaders recognize the importance of the youth vote, only a minority are actively focused on getting young voters to the polls. Next, we move to a quick look at national party activities and those of a few state committees. The bulk of this booklet focuses on the efforts of ten county committees. Along with the narrative information, we provide a few nuts-and-bolts statistics that the reader may find helpful.

We would like to acknowledge the help of Sara Anderson (Allegheny College) and Anne Cizmer (University of Akron) for their hard work and diligence in compiling much of the information to follow. Rebecca Harris of Allegheny College did a good bit of editing, and the Public Affairs Office was kind enough to help with the layout. Of course this project would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance of CIRCLE, and we are most thankful. Finally, our most sincere gratitude is extended to the many state and local party leaders who took time out of their busy schedules to share their thoughts, their ideas, and their enthusiasm for making a difference.

In closing, we feel compelled to paraphrase an immortal line in party politics: Here’s to wishing that voters in your community—and in all communities across the country—will vote early and vote (more) often!

Daniel M. Shea, Director

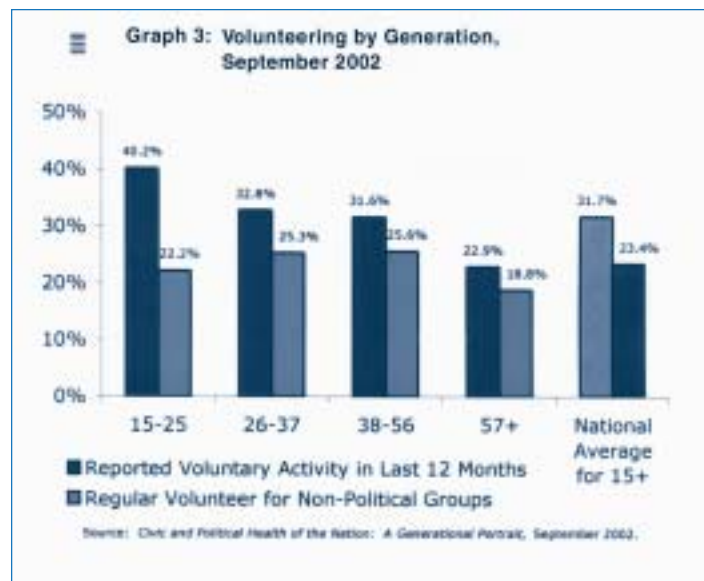
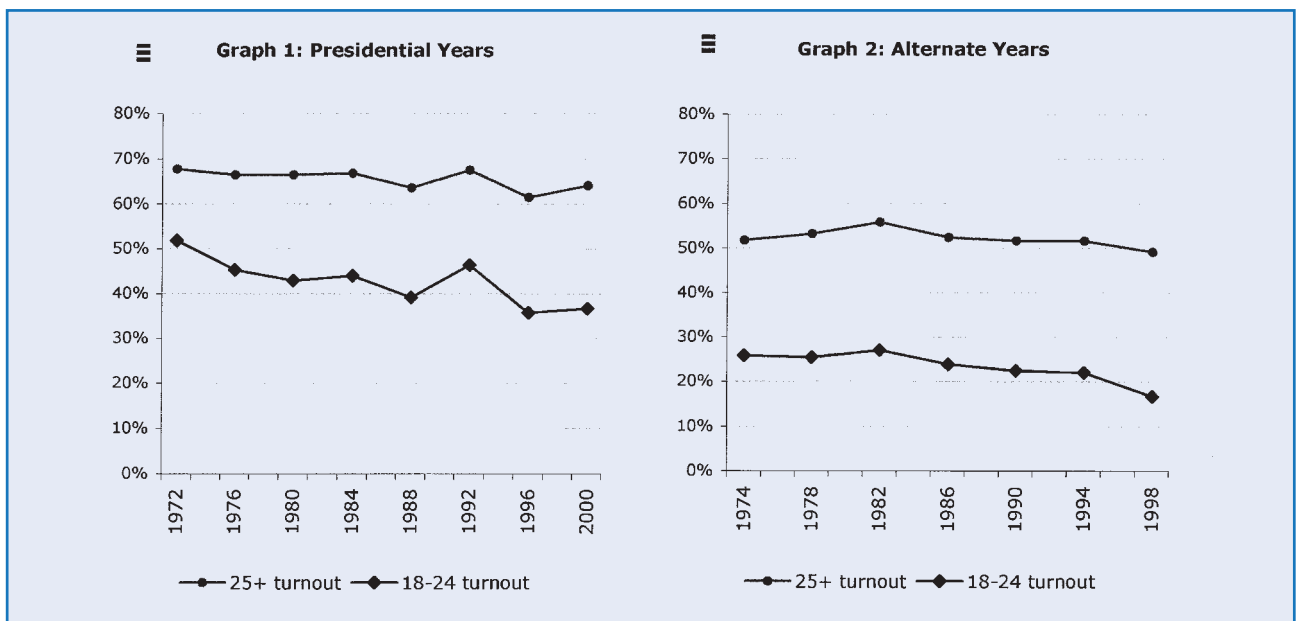
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THE YOUTH VOTE & POLITICAL PARTIES

As noted in Graphs 1 and 2 below, turnout among young voters is relatively low and on the decline. Many observers, therefore, assume that young Americans are apathetic, self-absorbed, and indifferent to civic affairs. “Generation X” and its successors are labeled a “turned-off generation.” While plausible, such a generalization is simply not true. Indeed, a host of data reveals that young Americans give generously of their energy, time and money to their schools, community, and nation. A recent report by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), for example, suggests that young Americans volunteer at significantly higher rates than do older Americans, as noted in Graph 3. Moreover, the frequency of pitching-in has also increased in recent years: In 1990 some 65 percent of college freshmen reported volunteering in high school, and by 2003 that figure had risen to 83 percent. Rates of volunteer work for those under 25 are now twice as high as for those over 55. From this perspective, this generation is the activist generation.



But why doesn't this extensive engagement among young people extend to voting? Indeed, the problem runs much deeper than nonvoting. The same report cited above finds the rate of participation for younger Americans at similar or higher levels than that for the overall population for every type of volunteer organization except political organizations. Here the rate of participation is just one-third the overall rate. And young people are much less interested in campaigns and elections. According to the American National Election Study, published by the University of Michigan every two years, the number of young Americans (younger than 25) "very much" interested in campaigns stood at roughly 30 percent from the 1950s to the 1980s. Since then, the decline has been steady, and by 2000 this figure had dropped to just 6 percent. In 2002, 67 percent of all Americans cared "very much" or "pretty much" about the outcome of congressional elections in their area. Just 47 percent of those younger than 25 felt the same way. The withdrawal of young people from politics has been rapid, deep, and broad.

Of course, some pundits argue that the political withdrawal of our youth is an expression of contentment and thus nothing to worry about. Arguments refuting this contention stretch from the theoretical to the pragmatic. From a theoretical perspective, former Harvard University president Derek Bok was surely correct when he noted, "Democracy is a collective venture that falters or flourishes depending on the efforts citizens invest in its behalf." And from a pragmatic perspective, the departure of a generation of Americans from the electoral sphere may have a profound influence on the outcome of elections and even more importantly on subsequently enacted public policies. Many would agree with University of Maryland scholar William Galston that the "withdrawal of a cohort of citizens from public affairs disturbs the balance of public deliberation—to the detriment of those who withdraw, and to the rest of us as well." A generation removed from politics is something to fret about.

FINDING CULPRITS & PROPOSING SOLUTIONS

Much effort has been spent searching for the root of young people's withdrawal from politics and proposing solutions. Most have assumed that the decline is due to changes in the attitudes of the young. Apathy, cynicism, and alienation are often dubbed the culprits. Another line of thinking focuses on civic education. A report by a prominent organization, for example, found that one-third of high school seniors lacked a basic understanding of how government works. The solution, then, is to retool and reinvigorate the young citizen. Many high school and college programs have been developed to promote knowledge, interest, and involvement in politics. MTV's "Rock the Vote" is based on the logic that changing attitudes and providing information can spur involvement.

Other areas of investigation have centered on the election process and the behavior of elites. Perhaps the problem lies with the mushrooming cost of elections, the emergence of new-style campaign consultants, or negative/attack advertising. The impact of fund-raising shenanigans, in particular, has received much attention. And of course the media have received their share of the blame: a focus on scandal and "the politics of personal destruction" may well have turned off young people.

CLUES FROM HISTORY

These are important areas of inquiry, but they provide only a partial view of the story of the decline of youth participation in politics. A concomitant way of approaching the problem is to look closely at American political history: When was political participation highest and what brought average people, particularly young people, into the political process?



Most would agree that the heyday of electoral participation was from 1840 to the end of the 19th century. Although the voting age was 21 instead of today's 18, turnout was still remarkably high. In only three elections during this period did the presidential election turnout dip to less than 70 percent, and on three occasions it breached the 80 percent mark. By way of contrast, since 1972, turnout in presidential elections has averaged 55 percent, and it has never risen above the 60 percent mark.

Politics during the heyday period was integral to the everyday lives of most Americans. When Charles Dickens traveled around the United States in the early 1840s, he was overwhelmed by our passion for politics:



Quiet people avoid the question of the Presidency, for there will be a new election in three years and a half, and party feelings run very high: the great constitutional feature of this institution being, that (as soon as) the acrimony of the last election is over, the acrimony of the next begins; which is an unspeakable comfort to all strong politicians and true lovers of their country; that is to say, to ninety-nine men and boys out of every ninety-nine and a quarter.¹

It is little wonder that candidate forums, such as the Lincoln/Douglas debate in 1858, would extend for hours and even days. One account suggests that there were “monster rallies” during the 1840s and that political events were pressed to “new levels of intensity.”

What would explain such intense participation in electoral politics? Perhaps the pace of change in the 19th century is part of the answer. Industrialization and urbanization of the Northeast progressed with “startling rapidity,” notes one scholar. King Cotton was celebrated in the South, and the advancement of the western frontier proceeded at a dizzying pace. The rate of technological innovation during this period was equally quick. New uses of materials (chiefly iron and steel) were discovered, as were new energy sources. Innovative machines, methods of organizing work, modes of transportation, and the general application of science to business changed society and the economic base of the nation. Of course, the present era is one of equal—if not greater—technological advance and the advent of globalization has quickened the pace of change.

The 19th century was also characterized by major policy debates. A growing tension had emerged between the increasingly industrial and urban North and the agrarian, plantation-centered South. The clash over slavery took on more immediacy by the midpoint of the century as new territories were added to the union. The conflict escalated into the greatest challenge in our nation’s history, and Reconstruction was a turbulent period as well. During these years waves of immigrants also washed onto American shores. Between 1846 and 1856, for instance, some 3.1 million immigrants arrived, representing one-eighth of the existing U.S. population. While the present era is fortunate not to face a question as serious as slavery, there is no shortage of pressing policy issues, from global warming and the war on terrorism to the challenges of poverty and human rights.

Another explanation for the high level of 19th-century participation could be higher levels of education, a factor strongly associated with voting. Widespread public education took hold during the midpoint of the 19th century. Newspapers and magazines sprang up, many shifting their focus from commercial and legal news to broader topics such as political and cultural happenings. Lyceums, or lecture halls, spread throughout the nation, and soon each community boasted a distinguished lecture series. Institutions of higher learning were formed, including many on the western frontier. But the present era is also characterized by a high level of education. Indeed, the greatest expansion of education in history occurred in the late 20th century, and by the beginning of the 21st, the upcoming generation was the best educated ever.

POLITICAL PARTIES & VOTER MOBILIZATION

Besides rapid change, momentous policy issues, and expanding education, the 19th century was characterized by something else: strong local political parties. Indeed, one cannot look very deep into the nature of politics in the 19th century without noticing the omnipotent role of political parties. Modern political parties were invented in the United States in the late 1790s. They burst on the scene in the national legislature and spread outward. Between 1800 and 1824 they dissipated somewhat, given that Jeffersonian Republicans dominated government—the Era of Good Feelings.

Then something happened to reinvigorate the party spirit—and with it usher in the golden age of political participation. In 1824, Andrew Jackson felt he had unfairly lost the presidency. Although he had won the popular vote, he obtained less than a majority of the Electoral College and the election was settled in the U.S. House of



Representatives in favor of John Quincy Adams. In response, Jackson and U.S. Senator Martin Van Buren implemented a new strategy to win the presidency in 1828: the establishment of vibrant local Democratic Party committees in every community across the nation. This organizational innovation was successful enough to put Jackson in the White House in 1828 and again in 1832, and to allow Van Buren to succeed him in 1836. But then this strategy was imitated by Jackson's opponents, the Whigs, who won in 1840. Local political parties became a staple of national politics for the rest of the 19th century—long after the passions of the disputed 1824 election had faded away.

Although designed primarily to elect presidents and other office-holders, this system of local political parties had the invaluable side effect of dramatically increasing the level of voter participation, pulling citizens out of their private lives into the public realm. Writing of the heyday period, historian Joel Silby draws a clear link between party activities and voter mobilization: “After 1838, parties were, and were accepted as, the key integrating mechanisms of all aspects of American politics...[As a result] the American electorate now contained few apathetic, poorly informed, or marginally involved voters.” In a very real sense, local parties manufactured mass electoral mobilization in America; when turnout has been high, parties have been active. Indeed, as political scientist E. E. Schattschneider argued, “Parties have extended the area of popular participation in public affairs enormously” and “Once party organizations become active in the electorate, a vast field of extension and intensification of effort is opened, the extension of the franchise to new social classes, for example.”

However, the 20th century was unkind to this system of local parties. A series of reforms designed to reduce corruption, such as the secret ballot, the direct primary, and the replacement of patronage with civil service, eventually undermined the vitality of many local parties. Innovations in communications technology, such as television, gave national organizations and individual candidates a greater role in campaigns to the detriment of local organizations. Thus, by the end of the 20th century local parties found it increasingly difficult to perform their historic function of mobilizing the vote. It is not entirely coincidence that these difficulties occurred during the period when voter turnout declined, especially among the youth. This connection has not gone unnoticed by scholars or party leaders: by the early 21st century efforts were under way to revitalize local parties as a means of increasing voter turnout. Youth have been a special focus of these concerns. Local political parties can once again perform their critical function in mobilizing the vote.

THROWING A BETTER PARTY: A NATIONAL STUDY



Given this renewed interest in local parties, it is worth asking how well local parties are reaching out to young voters. With financial assistance from CIRCLE, we set out to explore the connection between party activities and youth mobilization. We undertook a first-of-its-kind telephone survey of local party leaders, interviewing 805 party officials (mostly county chairs) from communities of all sizes and types across the nation.

Some of our findings are quite positive. Looking specifically at young voters, party leaders were asked if they agree with the statement “The lack of political engagement by young people is a serious problem.” Some 52 percent “strongly agreed” with the statement, and 36 percent “agreed.” Only 60 party leaders (7.5 percent) disagreed with the statement. The chairs were quite optimistic that local parties can make a difference: 39 percent of respondents “strongly agreed” and 54 percent “agreed” (93 percent overall) with the statement that “local parties can make a big difference getting young people involved in politics.”

But are local parties working to attract young voters? Here the results were less positive. We attempted to measure the extent to which young voters are on the minds of local party leaders—are they on their “radar,” so to speak? Near the beginning of the survey we asked an open-ended question: “Are there demographic groups of voters that are currently important to the long-term success of your local party?” “Young voters” (defined as 18 to 25 years of age) were mentioned by just 8 percent of party leaders. Senior citizens were mentioned nearly three times as often, even though the question addresses the “long-term success of the party.” Next, respondents were asked to think of another group. Here “young voters” were mentioned by only 12 percent of the respondents. Finally, respondents were asked a third time to name an important demographic group for the long-term success of the party, at which time 18 percent

pointed to younger voters. In all, local party leaders were given three opportunities to say that younger voters are important to the long-term success of their party, but barely one-third did so.

The survey asked respondents if they have developed specific get-out-the-vote programs for young voters; 41 percent of party leaders said yes. A follow-up question asked them to describe the program, and, on closer inspection, we find that a vast majority of these programs are rather modest. For example, a common response was “Some people in our party have spoken at area schools” or “Our people set up booths at fairs and malls.” Only a handful of party chairs mentioned significant activities—programs that require a good bit of time and resources. Many of the respondents who mentioned that they had programs were unable to provide much specificity.

Groups Important for the Long-Term Success of the Local Party: Priority of Young Voters Versus Senior Voters*

PRIORITIES

Youth Most Important Group	8%	Seniors Most Important Group	21%
Youth Second Important Group	12%	Seniors Second Important Group	19%
Youth Mentioned as Important	18%	Seniors Mentioned as Important	10%
Total Priority to Youth	38%	Total Priority to Seniors	50%

*This was an open-ended question. Respondents were asked to note the most important demographic group for the “long-term success of their party.” They were then asked a second time, and finally they were asked to list any other groups they considered important.

PARTIES AS RATIONAL ACTORS?

Why would so many party chairs suggest youth engagement is a serious problem and that their efforts have the potential to make a difference, but at the same time be unable to outline significant, specific programs for young voters? Why have young voters not been invited to the party? Clearly, a local party might consider numerous groups to be of critical importance to their efforts. Minority voters, union members, and women, for example, were frequently mentioned by Democratic leaders, and blue-collar workers and middle-class citizens were often noted by Republican leaders—just to mention a few. Given that census estimates are that younger voters make up only 14 percent of the electorate, we might expect political operatives to pay a limited amount of attention to this group. Indeed, perhaps they are giving this group enough attention.



On the other hand, the question speaks to the long-term success of the local party. Given the importance of political socialization—that is, early-in-life connections to a party and the election process—the lack of attention to young voters is puzzling. One of the criticisms leveled against contemporary parties is that they are increasingly short-sighted; winning the election at hand has become more important than developing a long-term broad-based following. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Don Peck says, “In recent decades parties have moved away from grassroots mobilization efforts, which reach out to nonvoters, to focus on ‘switching’ independents who have a strong history of voting.”

Our survey asked which of the following should be given priority by local political parties: “helping candidates win elections or helping voters develop attachments to the parties.” A sizable majority—some 63 percent—suggested helping candidates is more important than building loyal supporters. Moreover, we asked the chairs how much effort they put into non-electoral activities—that is, programs that occur during off-election periods. A full 70 percent of respondents report that their county committees spend less than 10 percent of their time on such activities.

Another reason why young voters might not spring to mind as an important group for local parties may be the difficulty of reaching out to them. Local party chairs were asked, “In your experience, how difficult has it been to mobilize young voters, 18 to 25 years of age?” Some 46 percent noted that it has been “very difficult,” and 45 percent said it was “difficult.” There is some variation by party: 56 percent of the Democrats and 37 percent of the Republicans said youth mobilization was “very difficult.” Conversely, only 5 percent of Democrats and 13 percent of GOP chairs said it was “not at all difficult.”

It would seem, however, that the perceptions of the difficulty of connecting with young voters might be at variance with the reality. Of those chairs who noted that their committees have viable youth get-out-the-vote programs, 37 percent said that those programs have been a “very difficult” endeavor. This compares to 58 percent for those who do not have youth mobilization programs. The number of chairs who suggested getting young voters to participate was “not at all difficult” was twice as high for those who actually had programs than for those without them.



Clearly, there is room for innovative programs so that local parties can do a better job of mobilizing young citizens to vote. And if history is any guide, local parties can be enormously successful in this regard. The next section of this report highlights the efforts of the national party organizations as well as several state and local parties in devising new approaches to attracting voters—particularly young voters. As the pages that follow suggest, there is much to be optimistic about.



1. Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (London and Hall, 1842), 149, as cited in Howard Reiter, *Parties and Elections in Corporate America*, 2nd Edition, 1993, 6.

NATIONAL PARTY COMMITTEES & THE YOUTH VOTE

It has often been noted that innovation in party politics heads in both directions, upward and downward. That is, in many instances the national committees seem “first off the mark,” and their innovation spreads downward to state and local party operations. A good example is the use of direct mail to raise funds and to persuade voters. The RNC, in particular, began using aggressive direct mail operations in the early 1980s. It proved successful and the DNC headed down this same path, and that particular innovation spread downward through the structure of both parties in the following years. At other times it seems that innovation has moved upward—from the local party committees to the state and national level. There are many reports, for example, of national committee operatives organizing “meet-and-greets,” “coffee socials,” and neighborhood gatherings for their presidential candidates in 2004. Of course local party committees have used these sorts of activities for centuries.

With regard to youth outreach activities, much the same seems to be occurring: a number of innovative programs and activities are emerging at different levels of the party structure. The bulk of our analysis explores local party committees—where we believe voter mobilization is most important and where we think young voters will have the greatest opportunity to become involved. This section looks briefly at national party endeavors.

THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Our interviews with DNC staff clearly suggest that youth participation is a key part of the party’s long-term strategy. Yet DNC staffers were frank about the difficulties of bringing young voters into the party rubric in recent years. According to Stephanie H. Sanchez, executive director of the College Democrats of America



and advisor to the DNC Chairman on Youth Outreach, “Young people are involved in their communities, but not in politics. Yet young folks, especially students, are very important to the DNC because we believe the Democratic Party is on track with the issues that are important to this age group. We have to worry about Republicans and what they’re doing, but we also have to worry about apathy. We’re fighting apathy as much as we are fighting Republicans.” Ryan Friedrichs, head of the Young Voter Alliance, a branch organization dedicated to mobilizing Democratic young voters in five target states, echoed these sentiments with a mix of both pragmatic and ideological concerns: “It’s the broken wheel of democracy right now. Young voters can make or break an election. They’re the ones who have friends in Iraq and experienced 9/11, and they never had challenges to their generation like that—so they’re going to step up now. They are the core of Democratic beliefs, and they are key to the progressive heart of this country.”

As for youth-centered pieces of the DNC, it seems that the College Democrats of America (CDA), the official student outreach arm of the Democratic Party, is front and center. Its goal is to mobilize campuses across the country for Democratic candidates, train new generations of progressive activists, and shape the Democratic Party with voices from America’s youth. As for specific voter

registration programs, several have been conducted by the CDA, the DNC, and other branch units in the past few years, including “Every Vote Counts,” “Youth to the Booth,” “New Citizens Voter Registration Project,” “2002 Get Out the Vote Initiative,” “Give a Damn 2002 Pledge Card Drive,” and “Get on Board,” a

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—Ryan Friedrichs

voter registration program through which 13 states registered more than 700 voters.

DNC operatives see “Campaign Invasion” as a bold, aggressive step. Here college students go door to door to talk to potential voters in swing states and swing districts. In South Dakota, for example, they knocked on over 14,000 doors. By giving students something concrete to do, and by suggesting that their involvement is critical to the prospects of victory, the DNC believes it can pull young people into the party for the long term. The DNC also helped sponsor a College Democrats of America National Convention in Boston during the same week the DNC was nominating John Kerry.

The DNC’s “Something New” events are designed to create an exciting atmosphere for 18- to 35-year-olds. According to Sanchez, the idea is to “call upon a talented group of forward thinking young professionals, entertainment industry executives, professional athletes and urban promoters to create an educated and registered army of young, new voters.” Events have been held in cities across the country and include voter registration drives, town hall meetings and events at local hot spots. In October of 2003, a Something New event held at a nightclub in Washington, D.C., attracted some 4,500 participants and contributors.

Finally, the DNC has made a number of moves to utilize the power of the Web. For example, “democrat.meetup.com” is a new DNC Web page initiative designed after Howard Dean’s success with Meetup.Org. Young voters can sign up to be “eCaptains” and build an online team of activists. There are several blogs, including “Kicking Ass” and a College Democrats blog. The idea is to bring young voters into Democratic politics by reaching them across the Internet.

For more information on DNC youth-centered activities, see their Web site at: <http://www.democrats.org/youth/index.html>.

THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE

Not surprisingly, the Republican National Committee shares a sense with the Democrats that young voters are critical to their party's long-term efforts. As the 2004 presidential race began to heat up, RNC Chair Ed Gillespie remarked to the media that "Young Americans have an optimistic vision of America's future. They are rejecting the Democrats' political hate speech for President Bush's positive message and positive agenda. Their excitement, energy and organization will be a powerful force for President Bush and Republican candidates around the country on Election Day."



Voter registration is conducted at college campuses across the country, with special attention being paid to battleground states in 2004. The party also works, through national volunteers, to get graduating high school seniors involved in the process. There is an attempt to target students who have just turned 18—or soon will. The idea is that if people begin to vote at a younger age, voting may become habitual for them and they will become lifelong voters. The party engages in an absentee ballot program for all voters, which helps to ensure that college students can vote even though they are away at college.

In the summer of 2004 the RNC did not plan to host a lot of events for younger people specifically, but the party is taking advantage of opportunities that arise. Indeed, they regularly send people to as many events as possible. At concerts, for example, the party will send a group and set up a table. Recently the party sent a group to a "Third Day" concert. The party chairman went to MTV's Rock the Vote to speak to younger voters to help get them involved. The party also is involved in "Stand Up and Holla!," a contest in which 18- to 24-year-olds submit an essay to win a trip to the national convention. MTV launched the program to get younger people motivated and participating in the political process.

Young Americans have an optimistic vision of America's future ... Their excitement, energy and organization will be a powerful force for President Bush and Republican candidates around the country on Election Day.

- Ed Gillespie

The RNC also sends "Reggie" the Voter Registration Rig to events around the nation. Reggie is a 56-foot semi-truck that serves as a mobile voter registration table. Through Reggie, the party has registered 3 million new voters. Reggie is outfitted with televisions, Xbox game systems, DirectTV satellite dishes, and other equipment. It appears at sporting events, including NASCAR races and minor league baseball games, college campuses, state fairs, parades, and other public events. Reggie's stops can be followed online at the GOP Web site and through the "Track Reggie" link or through the "Reggiecam," which broadcasts footage of the truck during voter registration events.

Although not formally affiliated with the national party because of campaign finance restrictions, the College Republicans are helping to activate students as well. They are currently doing outreach at universities that do not have a College Republicans chapter, at historically black colleges, and in battleground states. The College Republicans are reaching out through an active field program right now. They are sending 60 field representatives and 4 field directors, who serve as managers, to campuses across the country. They are starting new College Republicans chapters, conducting voter registration drives, and helping with the presidential election and local area elections. They also have a College Republicans Convention that draws many students.

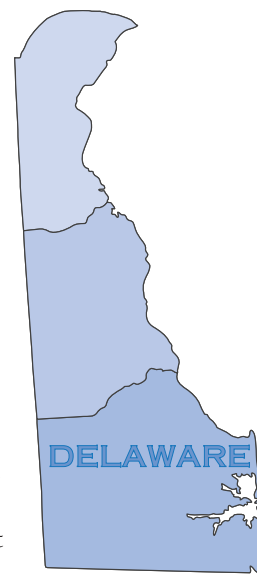
As with the Democrats, the Internet has also been a way for the GOP to reach younger people. On the party Web site are campaign videos, games, political cartoons, updated news, etc. The party is trying to get younger people to use the Internet as a means for political participation.

To learn more about GOP young voter outreach, visit their Web site at: <http://www.gop.com/OutReach/Read.aspx?ID=10>.

STATE PARTY ACTIVITIES & THE YOUTH VOTE

THE DELAWARE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Over the past two and a half years, the Democratic Party in Delaware has been quite successful in increasing the number of their youth outreach programs. Such success stems from two principal factors. First, Delaware is a very small state with only three counties, each of which has a liaison that focuses specifically on youth outreach. The state executive committee consists of twenty-three members who are spread throughout the state helping youth groups. Second, the state party is actually run by young voters. Executive Director Nicole Majeski is 25, and her other staff director is 24. Majeski believes that this is beneficial because young people feel that they are on the same level with their state party leaders and are more receptive to their efforts because of this.



DELAWARE

Population: 817,491

White: 74.6%

African American: 19.2%

Hispanic or Latino: 4.8%

Other: 6.1%

Persons 16-24: 10.2%

Land Area: 1,954 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$47,381

Largest Sector of Industry:
Retail Trade

State Capital: Dover

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 31.4%;
some college or Associate's degree:
36.1%; Bachelor's: 15.6%; Master's,
professional, or doctorate: 9.4%

State Party Chair:
Richard H. Bayard

State Party Web site:
www.deldems.org

E-mail Address:
delaware@deldems.org

Young voters are vital to the Delaware Democratic Party. Majeski notes that they are "of huge importance." "They come to our meetings and we help them in any way that we can. The youth vote can shift an election here so it's very important to us." Recognition of that importance has led to great changes over the past few years in Delaware. Previously, events were held for young voters, but there was nothing to keep them interested. Erik Schramm, president of the Delaware Young Democrats, notes that people were not attending meetings or events and it was necessary to find ways to keep people interested and involved. Majeski notes that having isolated registration drives or events does not result in successful youth outreach.

Everything is tied together. The first step is to register young voters and then you have to keep them excited through events and organizations, which ideally ends in getting out the vote. It's all a process to keep them engaged.

- Nicole Majeski

Schramm, who became president of the Delaware Young Democrats three years ago, says, "It became obvious that youth outreach had to begin at the county level." The organization is directly connected with the state party committee, and Schramm is an actual voting member of the state executive board. In order to facilitate youth outreach beginning at the county level, liaisons were placed in each of the three counties. The liaisons rotate among counties and are responsible for attending county meetings and finding new and exciting activities within the county. All liaisons then report back to Schramm. Over the past three years, the

Delaware Young Democrats have grown from five members to 135. Majeski also notes that the state committee works with local committees on youth outreach projects by providing funding and advertising via word of mouth, and by making sure that events are posted on the state committee's Web site and in their newsletter.

When it comes to specific outreach programs, the Delaware Democrats have voter registration drives but focus heavily on getting young people involved in the party and the democratic process as a whole. Both Schramm and Majeski note that, over the past few years, the party has added an educational component to projects. For example, training is held to teach young voters how to affect the way campaigns are run. Schramm also notes that they try to take advantage of other organizations by having joint events. For example, the Delaware state convention is usually held on the same day as the Delaware Stonewall convention.

The Delaware Young Democrats will often participate in service projects not only to get young voters involved but also to give back to the community. Schramm states, "People are more likely to check out a community service event than go to a meeting when they're just starting out and not sure about everything." One of their recent service projects was with AIDS Delaware. The Delaware Young Democrats assisted with a personal products drive and then on a Saturday morning assisted AIDS Delaware in cleaning and sorting their food pantry, creating over 500 personal hygiene packs to hand out to their clients. The Delaware Young Democrats also try to hold fun events at which young people can meet their members and elected officials in a more relaxed atmosphere. "You get to sit and mingle rather than drilling them with the ideals of the Democratic Party," says Schramm. An example of such an event took place over the summer, when the Young Democrats purchased tickets to a Wilmington Blue Rocks game for any young people who might be interested in their organization and a fun afternoon out. Schramm notes that it was "an opportunity to come hang out and see what Delaware Young Democrats is all about in a setting that was extremely informal. We have found that meetings are not always the most conducive environment to check out for your first time."

When it comes to future youth outreach projects in Delaware, plans include reaching out to more and more young people. Majeski notes that there are a lot of programs for college-age and young Democrats, but the state party would like to work with colleges more on voter registration. Majeski also hopes to increase outreach in high schools as students are turning eighteen because there are not as many programs at this level. The state party also hopes to increase the number of liaisons at the county level. Majeski notes they hope to organize at the county level. That way the party can have people in different areas in the county to assist the state committee and more effectively mobilize voters.



THE INDIANA REPUBLICAN PARTY

The Indiana Republican Party has a strong focus on mobilizing young voters. One party official interviewed suggests, “The party stresses the importance of voting to youth in a nonpartisan way, agreeing that voter participation for youth voters is the most important goal.”

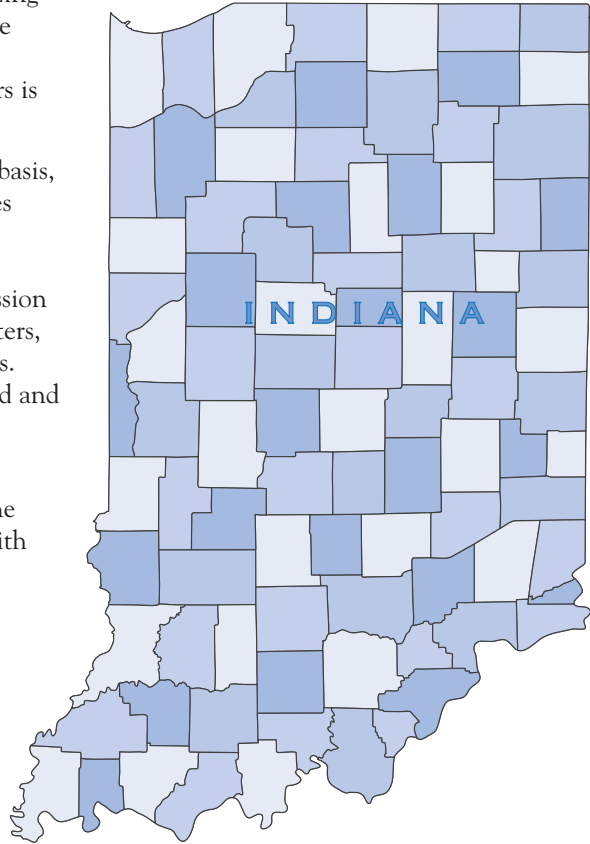
Voter registration efforts take place largely on a county-by-county basis, so state assistance to local committees is crucial. The county parties register voters at the county fairs. The party has an absentee ballot program in which they work to “maintain contact with the voter throughout the entire process, from requesting the ballot to submission of the ballot.” The party also works with College Republican chapters, groups, county parties and high schools to register new 18-year-olds. The party sends people into high schools whenever they are invited and otherwise seek opportunities to speak to younger people.

The state party also makes an effort to involve young people in fundraising activities. The party sponsors dinners with special guest speakers, depending on who is available to speak. Attendance is usually between 800 and 1,000.

A party official noted, “How many younger people attend the fundraisers generally depends on the cost of the tickets.” It is difficult for students to attend more expensive events. The state party works to include College Republicans by giving them tickets at reduced rates, especially if they assist with set-up or tear-down at the events. Sponsors (people or groups) also buy tables for the dinner, and younger people are often included in the groups at these tables.

The 2004 gubernatorial candidate increased youth interest by speaking to them about issues that are important to them, especially the economic issues that concern youth. “Speaking to the younger people on issues that are important to them gets them fired up,” offered an official of the party. The job losses of the last seven years and the negative export of college graduates (brain drain) have been key issues that have gotten the attention of many younger people.

The state party also has an internship program that helps bring young people into the process. At any given time, four or five college interns are working for the party. Some students are receiving college credit, while others intern for the valuable work experience. Interns have multiple responsibilities. “They do a little bit of everything. They perform administrative and clerical tasks, as well as staffing phone banks. Interns also canvass door-to-door, place signs, and participate in literature drops.” The College Republicans and other young volunteers perform valuable work in campaigns throughout the election season. On average, there are 150 to 200 volunteers throughout an election cycle.



INDIANA

Population: 6,195,643

White: 87.5%

African American: 8.4%

Hispanic or Latino: 3.5%

Other: 4.1%

Persons 16-24: 14.5%

Land Area: 35,867 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$41,567

Largest Sector of Industry:
Manufacturing

State Capital: Indianapolis

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 37.2%;
some college or Associate's
degree: 25.5%; Bachelor's:
12.2%; Master's, professional
or doctorate: 7.2%

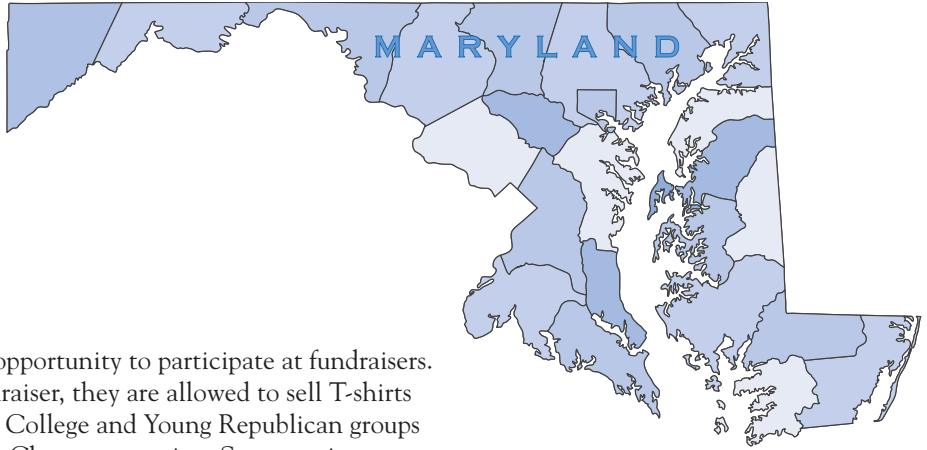
State Party Chair: Jim Kittle, Jr.

State Party Web site:
www.indgop.org

E-mail Address:
newsroom@indgop.org

THE MARYLAND REPUBLICAN PARTY

For 2004 the Republican Party in Maryland set a goal to register 25,000 new voters. The College Republicans are conducting voter registration drives on college campuses. The chair of the party also occasionally goes to colleges to speak. This is the only time party speakers directly target young audiences.



The College Republicans have the opportunity to participate at fundraisers. In exchange for working at the fundraiser, they are allowed to sell T-shirts to make money for their group. The College and Young Republican groups also provide volunteers for the Bush-Cheney campaign. State parties are limited in what they can do for the Bush campaign because of campaign finance laws. This makes youth participation more valuable, and the party coordinates with the Young Republican groups to obtain information such as lists of potential volunteers.

The state party does its part to increase the membership of the Young Republicans. When people under thirty-five register to receive e-mails from the state party, their information is forwarded to the Young Republicans, who use these referrals to recruit members through additional mailings or other contact. When people call or e-mail the state party to ask about volunteer opportunities, the state party forwards this information to the Young Republicans as well.

MARYLAND

Population: 5,508,909

White: 64.0%

African American: 27.9%

Hispanic or Latino: 4.3%

Other: 8.1%

Persons 16-24: 12.7 %

Land Area: 9,774 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$52,868

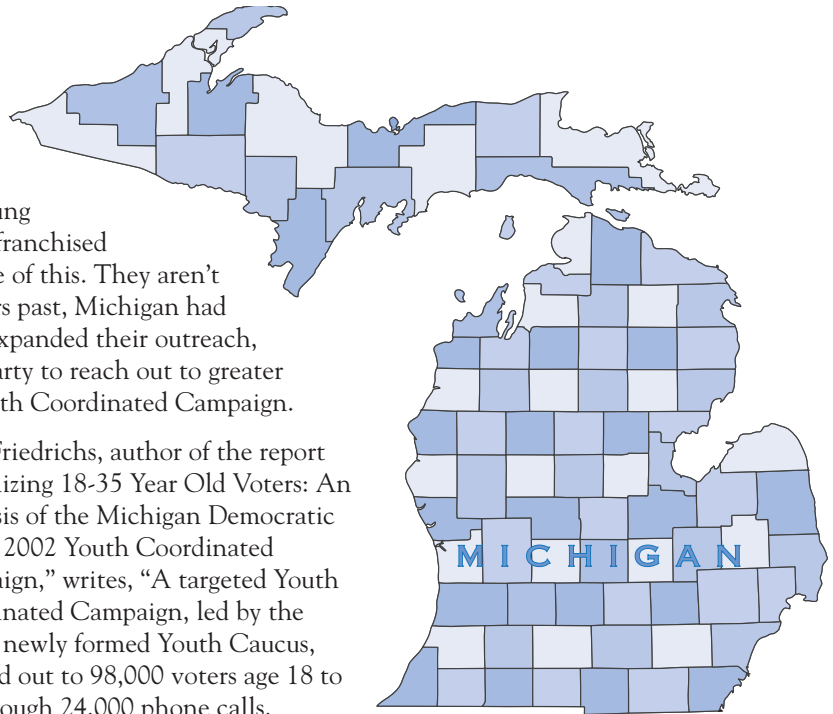
Largest Sector of Industry:
Retail Trade

State Capital: Annapolis

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 26.7%;
some college or Associate's
degree: 25.7%; Bachelor's:
18.0%; Master's, professional,
or doctorate: 13.4%

THE MICHIGAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mark Brewer, executive chair of the Michigan Democratic Party, notes, "We really believe that there is a lot of potential among young people. When you're in the business of politics, you go where the greatest potential for voters are." Furthermore, Chris Cornwell, president of the Michigan Young Democrats, states, "I believe, number one, that young voters have to be a priority because they feel disenfranchised with the system. They are leaving the state because of this. They aren't participating in anything across the board." In years past, Michigan had programs to reach out to youth, but in 2002 they expanded their outreach, utilizing a program that allowed the Democratic Party to reach out to greater numbers of youth. The program was called the Youth Coordinated Campaign.



MICHIGAN

Population: 10,079,985

White: 80.2%

African American: 14.2%

Hispanic or Latino: 3.3%

Other: 5.6%

Persons 16-24: 13.5%

Land Area: 58,804 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$44,667

Largest Sector of Industry:
Manufacturing

State Capital: Lansing

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 31.3%;
some college or Associate's degree:
30.3%; Bachelor's: 13.7%;
Master's, professional, or
doctorate: 8.1%

State Party Chair:
Mark Brewer

State Party Web site:
www.mi-democrats.com

E-mail Address:
midemparty@mi-democrats.com

Ryan Friedrichs, author of the report "Mobilizing 18-35 Year Old Voters: An Analysis of the Michigan Democratic Party's 2002 Youth Coordinated Campaign," writes, "A targeted Youth Coordinated Campaign, led by the Party's newly formed Youth Caucus, reached out to 98,000 voters age 18 to 35, through 24,000 phone calls, 14,000 door knocks and 60,000 door hangers. The Youth Coordinated Campaign mobilized young voters in fourteen target sites from October 5 to November 5. The campaign utilized thirteen paid staff, 174 paid volunteers, 266 unpaid volunteers, and had a total cost of \$53,317. Target sites were in fourteen of Michigan's fifteen congressional districts as well as fourteen State House and State Senate districts; selected based on an area's number of 18-35 year old voters and its number of competitive 2002 races." In his study, Friedrichs found that door-to-door conversation was the most effective means of mobilizing youth.

Brewer notes that this year's Coordinated Campaign will be similar to the 2002 effort. As of June 2004 he noted that the program was still in its planning stages. However, Brewer expects the effort will be on an equal scale, if not larger than in 2002, and the majority of the footwork will again be carried out by volunteers to keep costs down. The report written by Friedrichs noted not only that personal contact was the most effective method of mobilization, but that it was made even more effective if the contact was started at least four weeks before the election. Brewer comments that the state party is trying to do things earlier and more often this year. For example, a state-wide canvassing program was started last year so people would get multiple contacts before election day. When discussing personal contact, Brewer states, "We do rallies, but door to door is most effective. The study confirms this so we really stress this. We won't do an event in place of door-to-door if we can do door-to-door."

Chris Cornwell notes that the Michigan Young Democrats work very closely with the Michigan Coordinated Campaign. "We have a rep that

sits in on the Coordinated Campaign meeting and vice versa. We're kept aware of what both coordinated campaigns are doing." He also says that many of the volunteers working on the coordinated campaign are young and even high school students are included. And what do the volunteers' knocking on doors and personal contact entail? Cornwell states, "We don't necessarily hand them a bunch of stuff. We do more identifying and letting people know who we are. We try to reach out to 'identified' Democratic voters." Volunteers then ask if people would like any literature from the Kerry campaign and if they would like to get involved. Cornwell also mentions that volunteers may hand out targeted literature in a targeted race and that all areas are targeted for a different reason. When volunteers come across voters who are registered as Independents, Cornwell says, "We offer our Democratic view. We may ask questions like: Are you satisfied with the way your community and country is going? Did you vote in the last election? Why/Why not? What can we do for you? What do you need? Are you a student? Do you have student loans?, etc." Cornwell notes that personal contact and peer-to-peer outreach are incredibly effective.

We're steaming ahead full speed. Every day that we do youth outreach we pick up new volunteers. They then reach out to other young people. That's how we build our army of young foot soldiers.

- Chris Cornwell



THE MISSISSIPPI REPUBLICAN PARTY

Mississippi has Republican groups at all colleges and junior colleges and at most high schools. These groups pull from a ready-made base in other organizations. Party official Ward Baker says, "Approximately 60% of the students are involved in the youth Right to Life groups or the youth National Rifle Association. So they are already active in political causes through these groups." Because these organizations are popular in high schools it is easy to recruit for the Young Republicans.

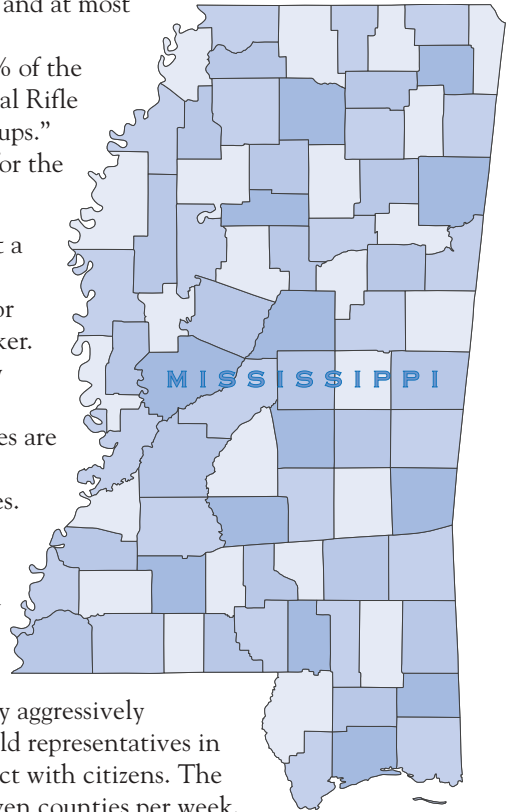
Frequent, informal meetings work best for students. The state party makes it a priority to attend football games and other core student activities. The Republicans also hold rallies and pizza parties and often host movie events or television sports events. "These events are a lot of fun for the kids," says Baker. The Republicans also offer classes on effective campaigning. The state party sponsors workshops on conducting phone banks, canvassing door-to-door, purchasing media advertisements, and writing a campaign plan. These classes are taught by people from the state party, as well as people in the field, such as

someone who works in radio sales. These classes not only enable students to be involved in politics now but also teach them valuable skills that they will be able to use into the future.

The Mississippi Republican Party aggressively monitors local party activity. Field representatives in the state are constantly in contact with citizens. The field representatives must hit seven counties per week, so 42 counties are covered every week in the state. This means that the whole state is covered every two weeks.

The party also participates in an extensive internship program. There are roughly 17 interns right now. One current intern is only 14 years old. According to Baker, "She wanted to work on a political cause and she felt the Republican Party is the place to be. She says it is good to know that you're helping a cause that you support while having fun." Interns and youth volunteers have multiple responsibilities. They update voter files for target mailings. They also enjoy what many characterize as exciting experiences: attending press conferences, meeting party chairs. The party engages youth of all ages. Working parents in the party often leave their children at party headquarters, where the kids participate in data entry or other appropriate projects.

These young workers feel they are having a good time while working on something meaningful. "It's not just getting it started, but keeping it going that is important," comments Baker. "This can be difficult to do, but it is worth the effort." Working as part of a team on a meaningful project is a motivational draw for many young people. It pays off for the party as well. Young volunteers will work hard long after their initial involvement. Youth involvement is also a strategic part of growing the party organization. Baker sees these activities as critical for the long-term success of the party: "Young people often encourage friends to participate, and their youth means they will be part of the organization for many years.



MISSISSIPPI

Population: 2,881,281

White: 61.4%

African American: 36.3%

Hispanic or Latino: 1.4%

Other: 2.3%

Persons 16-24: 14.5%

Land Area: 46,907 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$31,330

Largest Sector of Industry:
Manufacturing

State Capital: Jackson

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 29.4%;
some college or Associate's
degree: 26.6%; Bachelor's:
11.1%; Master's, professional,
or doctorate: 5.8%

State Party Chair: Jim Herring

State Party Web site:
www.msgop.org

E-mail Address:
chairman@msgop.org

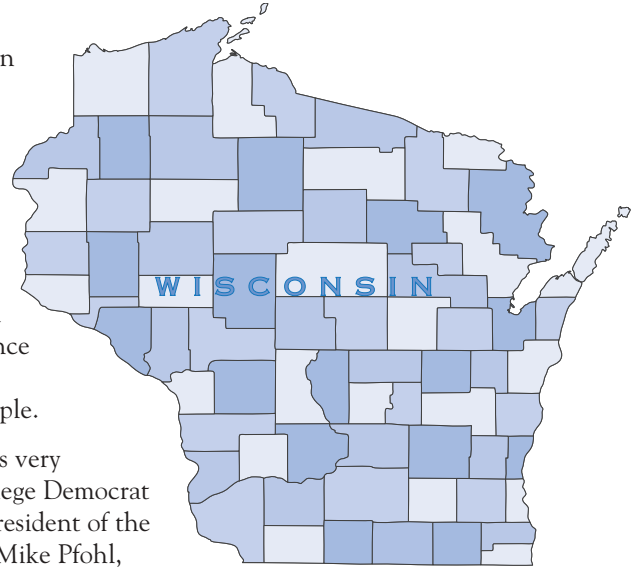
They will be involved and voting for a long time, and will be around to keep the party strong.” Party leaders feel that young participants are very important. They work hard, and they are significantly involved by the time they go to college. This provides a strong leadership core for vital college organizations that influence campuses as well as having more organizational responsibilities.

Young people often encourage friends to participate, and their youth means they will be part of the organization for many years. They will be involved and voting for a long time, and will be around to keep the party strong. - Ward Baker



THE WISCONSIN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Although the Wisconsin Democratic Party works hard to register young voters and stresses the importance of their votes, there seems to be a stronger concentration on getting young people to participate in the activities of the Democratic Party and to train them for future work in politics. Lynda Honold, chair of the State Party, notes, “Young voters are the future of the state. I, as state chair, got involved in the Democratic party in college. For our party to grow in the future, it’s important to engage young people. Many young people want to see a better world and that’s the vision of the Democratic Party, so we want to attract young people so they can help us carry out that vision.” Because youth are of such importance in Wisconsin, the entire staff and board from the state party are involved with youth outreach projects, a total of about thirty people.



WISCONSIN

Population: 5,472,299

White: 88.9%

African American: 5.7%

Hispanic or Latino: 3.6%

Other: 5.4%

Persons 16-24: 14.1%

Land Area: 54,310 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$43,791

Largest Sector of Industry:
Manufacturing

State Capital: Madison

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 34.6%;
some college or Associate's
degree: 28.1%; Bachelor's:
15.3%; Master's, professional,
or doctorate: 7.2%

State Party Chair:
Lynda Honold

State Party Web site:
www.wisdems.org

E-mail Address:
party@wisdems.org

The state party works very closely with the College Democrat Organization. The president of the College Democrats, Mike Pfohl, works directly out of the state party office and is very active with all of the chapters throughout the state. Pfohl notes that the College Democrats are very fortunate to receive such extensive support from the state party. He stresses that his organization is “hooked in” with a lot of the state party activities. For example, College Democrats are recruited to go to the state convention and party officials are invited to do campaign training at the College Democrats convention to get more students to understand the different processes of elections. Using the College Dems to reach out to other young voters is extremely beneficial because they understand what methods work best. Pfohl states, “How you package the message is helpful. College students don’t just want to come to meetings. Recruit to an event or rally instead of a meeting and more people are likely to come.” Pfohl points out that organizations can often have “meetings in disguise” by simply bringing young people together to make signs and talk about new issues on campus.

Honold says that the College Dems are incredibly useful when it comes to voter registration and voter turnout. She points out that because college students change residences quite frequently, the state tries to coordinate a massive get-out-the-vote drive right around election time on college campuses. Also, Wisconsin is a unique state when it comes to registration because people are able to register at the polls. Thus, Honold notes, there is a “Knock and Drag” program through which the College Dems literally knock on their friends’ doors and take them to the polls to register and vote. She also feels it is important to have young people helping with the party so they are prepared to be leaders in the future. There are generally about 20 interns per semester that do work for the state party. Many of them subsequently get hired to work on campaigns.

What often happens is an individual mentor will take a young person under their wing and the young person is the one who gets things up and running. There's not necessarily a program, but it's more centered around individuals. - Lynda Honold

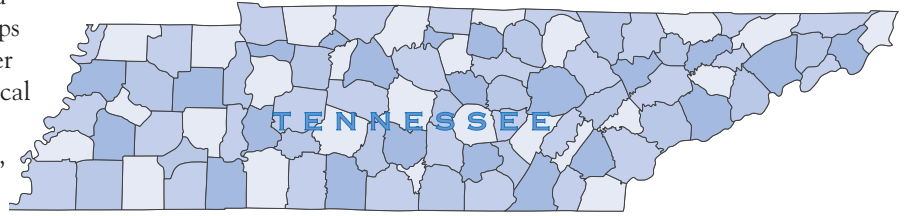
One of the most innovative and effective programs in Wisconsin, however, is the Democratic Leadership Institute (DLI), which has become one of the state party's longest-running programs to engage youth. Andy Engel, political director of the state party, notes that DLI "brings in about 150 young people from across the state to learn about Democrats, politics, and campaigns." Lynda Honold says that the program was started ten years ago because there was a vacuum and "there weren't many young people getting involved in the party." DLI started with about 75 young people who would go for a weekend and learn some basics for campaigns and spend one day learning about issues. Over the years the program has grown; last year 140 people attended DLI.

Many graduates of the program have become county chairs, members of legislatures, and campaign workers. The purpose of the program is to train young people and not only get them engaged but also keep them active. On average, DLI costs about \$15,000 a year and the committee that runs the program raises all of the money to pay for the costs. The DLI board is made up of 15 to 20 people and there is also a recruitment committee. The state party is also able to reach into the county level through DLI because there is a county party activist program in which members of county organizations are trained in youth outreach and are able to attend workshops such as "How to Attract Young People to Your County Party." Andy Engel states, "DLI keeps us tapped in all the time ... There is a buzz about it that it is a fun event that a lot of major politicians come to. It's the place to start if you ever want to continue in politics."



THE TENNESSEE REPUBLICAN PARTY

The Tennessee Republican Party has had success using College Republican groups to register younger voters. They register voters at the numerous universities and technical colleges in the state. The College Republicans have their own state organization, with elected leadership. The Board of the College Republicans initiates chapters at



universities lacking a Republican organization, sometimes targeting a specific university or college. Many groups are initiated by internal interest as well. Usually there are a few interested people who approach the state organization to inquire about starting a group. A party official interviewed for this project suggests, "There are self-starters who come to the state party and ask for help and information about how to get started. Once they come to us, we help them." At that point, the organization assists in the establishment of the group, providing information and leadership. College Republicans plan several events at the beginning of each school year for the campus and state levels.

TENNESSEE

Population: 5,841,748

White: 80.2%

African American: 16.4%

Hispanic or Latino: 2.2%

Other: 3.4%

Persons 16-24: 13.7%

Land Area: 41,218 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$36,360

Largest Sector of Industry:
Manufacturing

State Capital: Nashville

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate: 31.6%;
some college or Associate's degree:
24.8%; Bachelor's: 12.8%;
Master's, professional, or
doctorate: 6.8%

State Party Chair:
Beth Harwell

State Party Web site:
www.tngop.org

E-mail Address:
feedback@tngop.org

The Republican National Committee has also helped to register young voters in Tennessee using Reggie the Registration Rig, which allows the party to have mobile voter registration setups at concerts and other places. In Tennessee, Reggie was used at "Dancing in the District" and "Memphis in May," among other events. Reggie has enabled the RNC to "register a couple thousand voters through all of the events."

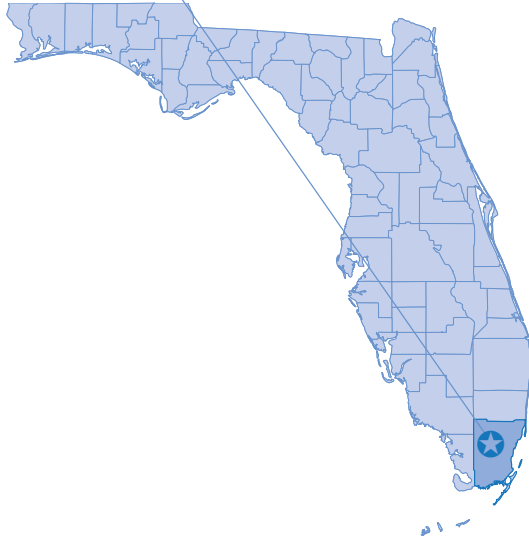
Younger people also participate in the state party through an internship program. Most of them are college students, and approximately half of the interns obtain college credit for their internship. The state party usually has about 6 to 12 interns throughout the year. They complete a variety of tasks, including research, writing for campaigns and the state party, working with volunteers, and clerical tasks. The interns "do many of the same jobs as the staff members and are given a range of responsibilities. This helps to keep them interested in their internship experience because they are always doing something different."

Occasionally, special opportunities arise for young voters from the state party. In a presidential election year, there are many special ways for younger people to get involved. This year the state sent three interns to the convention—one student from each region of the state. There was an application process to select which students would be sent. It was an open process and anyone could submit an application. A party leader notes, "At the convention, the party has set up special activities for interns and younger people." The Bush-Cheney campaign also has opportunities available. On the Web site is a special area for students giving them information and volunteer opportunities. Many students begin their volunteer work through the Bush-Cheney campaign.

The party is currently contemplating some other opportunities for younger people, such as a scholarship program to provide money for dedicated young Republican volunteers to assist them with college. Right now they are also "getting geared up to start and are planning events for the new school year and the election," noted a party leader.

COUNTY PARTY COMMITTEES & YOUTH OUTREACH

★ MIAMI-DADE COUNTY DEMOCRATS, FLORIDA THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH NETWORKS



In Miami-Dade County, Florida, the Democratic Party seems to be completely in sync with the local youth. Ray Zeller, chair of the county party, states, "They are the future of the party and they have to step up to the plate now. My focus has been on youth to ensure that the party is there in the future. If you don't prepare for the future, you're dead." Zeller feels that it will be the young voters who are instrumental in the 2004 presidential election. He has discovered that young

voters not only can affect the outcome of an election, but that they are also capable of reaching out to other young people to increase participation. Zeller comments that young people are very innovative and he uses the young people he has working or volunteering for the county Democratic Party to reach out to other young voters.

You have to use youth to reach youth. They can take the point you want to use and they can put it into today's language. - Ray Zeller

Political youth organizations in the Miami-Dade area have gone through a metamorphosis, for which Zeller and the local Democratic Party are partly responsible. Zeller mentions that he started with a group of about twelve students who came together with him and had what he calls a "brain trust." Zeller called the initial group the "Democratic Futures," and they met for several months to talk and put forth both their ideas and their criticisms. Zeller states, "We didn't focus on money, but on involvement and on them. Many of them were in college so they knew what they were talking about. I wanted their approach to politics and to the Democratic Party." The "Democratic Futures" voted on ideas for projects. To increase awareness of current events and politics in general, they decided to send out emails about articles they had read online or in the newspaper. Eventually, the "Democratic Futures" started their own organization and became the Young Democrats. Zeller points out that the young voters were very effective when they moved into campaigns and

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

Population: 2,253,362

White: 69.7%

African American: 20.3%

Hispanic or Latino: 57.3%

Other: 10.0%

Persons 16-24: 13.3%

Land Area: 1,946 sq. miles

Median Household income:
\$35,966

Largest Sector of Industry:
Retail Trade

County Seat: Miami

Interesting fact: By population, Miami-Dade is the eighth largest county in the nation. It has the second largest Hispanic population of any county.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 22.3%;
Some college or Associate's
degree 23.9%; Bachelor's degree
12.3%; Master's, Professional or
Doctorate 9.3%

County Party Chair:
Raymond H. Zeller

County Party Web site:
www.miamidadedemocrats.com

E-mail Address:
dadedec@bellsouth.net

spread the word about political activism because they had grown up working with their local party. Now, Zeller works on youth outreach almost exclusively through the Young Democrats and the College Democrats in the county. Zeller states that even though the initial group of students went their own ways into different organizations, they maintain contact with one another. He continues to work with any youth organization that is interested in getting involved. He notes, "We are one hundred percent behind our Young Democrats and we are targeting youth through them. They are dedicated to promoting the party and we stay in constant contact with them. They are integral to what I do. It's like one mind, and that's the secret of any county—have a strong YD group. They are college students and young professionals."

The methods of outreach used in Miami-Dade County greatly vary. Registration drives are held weekly at the University of Miami, which is near the Democratic Party's office. Non-college students are targeted through precinct walks and door-to-door work. Zeller also notes that the county party depends heavily on the Internet and e-mails to reach young voters, whether they are students or not. He points out that young people are integral in helping with the technological aspects of youth outreach. "They are the ones who are prepared to deal with technology. A lot of people are not able to cope with technological changes. If you have a group of young people and someone is qualified in one area, whether it may be computer technology or graphics, or any other area, you utilize that person. Then they move from there into campaigns and become more of a participant physically in the party."

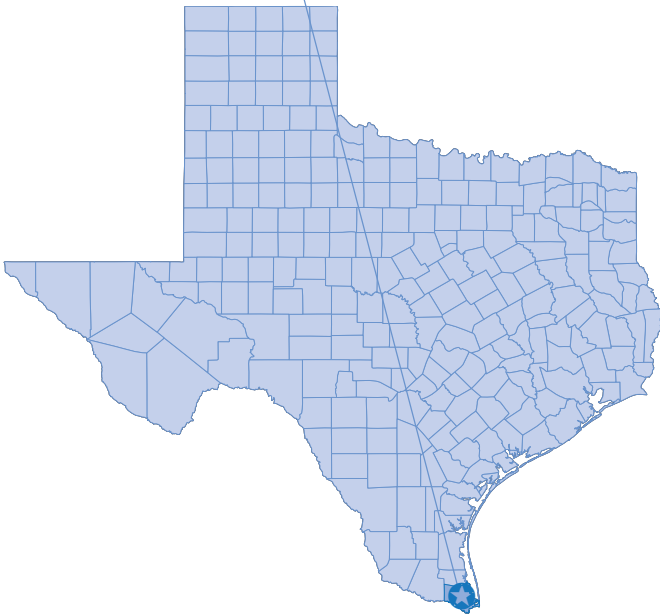
Some of the recent college graduates who work in the county office help take on various projects. One wrote what Zeller calls "a wonderful youth program that was geared toward high schools," which will be implemented in September. The idea is to have youth serving youth. Young voters will be going into classrooms to speak with about forty students at a time and promote democratic values. This project is based on the hope that high school students will be more interested if they realize that people who are not much older than they are actively participating in the political process.

Once young people show an interest in politics, Zeller notes that he tries to encourage participation in an internship or a volunteer position to learn more. This is also accomplished as part of an incentive system developed by the Young Democrats in the county to keep their members involved. Each member has a card with six slots on it, which they have to fill in by participating in projects such as voter registration drives or by knocking on a certain number of doors. Zeller states that, once they complete the six projects, "they become members of the chairman's circle, which is an organization that has high end donors and the students are put in contact with more people and are able to have one on one contact with certain candidates."

Zeller also tries to support events that the College or Young Democrats organize to reach out to other young voters. He states, "They may want to open a club or plan a fun event, and if they come to us, we'll sponsor them." One recent exciting event was planned for July 29 at a local club on Miami Beach called "State." The owner of the club is a friend of Zeller's, and they have done various events together. Kerry's acceptance speech was televised at the event, a gathering with music geared toward young people. Zeller notes that, depending on the music and activities, as many as four hundred people can attend events such as these. The local Democratic Party has been quite successful in reaching out to the younger generation, and Zeller plans to continue such outreach by working with and supporting the local youth organizations.

★ CAMERON COUNTY REPUBLICANS, TEXAS

BUILDING AN ORGANIZATION ESPECIALLY FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS



Cameron County gets young people involved in politics through meaningful, hands-on experience, according to Chair Frank Morris. Recently, the county party worked to establish a new College Republicans chapter, through which students learn how to build a grassroots political organization of their own. The vitality of College Republicans chapters tends to depend on the students who are involved. There have been College Republicans “clubs” at two schools in the past; however, they depended on good local leadership to thrive. Last year the county party tried to get the College Republicans groups connected with the state organization in

order to charter the group and provide it with permanent standing.

Chairman Morris notes that once a chapter has a faculty advisor and a few interested students, “depending on the school’s rules, an additional 5 to 15 students are generally needed” for official school recognition. At that point the group is allowed to post literature and signs around campus, as well as advertise for new members in the school newspaper. This process can be difficult, especially if the school is highly Democratic. It is important to find a few people who can and are willing to help the group. Morris has noticed that the key is to get “people in good strategic positions to help get the organization started.” Once a core group of dedicated members is established, the chapter can build membership. For example, a dedicated professor and a graduate student were instrumental in establishing a recent chapter on one campus.

Building College Republicans membership is a party priority early in August, before election season begins in earnest. “The volunteers already need to be trained before the campaign season really gets going, because it is impossible to build the organization and to train people at the same time. Establishing the group of students as early as possible is important.” The party finds many new volunteers by organizing the students. Information is best spread by word of mouth so that interested students know whom they need to contact to become involved.

Prior to the election, the party has a 90-day push to volunteer, especially for younger voters.

CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS

Population: 335,227

White: 80.3%

African American: 0.5%

Hispanic or Latino: 84.3%

Other: 19.2%

Persons 16-24: 10.6%

Land Area: 906 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$26,155

Largest Sector of Industry:
Health Care and Social Assistance

County Seat: Brownsville

Interesting fact: “Cameron County is full of geckos, free-tailed bats, twice-fried-food franchises, and audacious contradictions.” -*New Yorker Magazine* (March 29, 2004)

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 20.1%;
Some college or Associate’s degree 21.8%; Bachelor’s degree 8.4%; Master’s, Professional or Doctorate 4.9%

County Party Chair:
Frank Morris

County Party Web site:
www.cameroncountyrepublicans.com

E-mail Address:
pacokell@swbell.net

For many younger people, working on campaigns is exciting. They get to work hands on putting up signs, selling tickets to fundraisers, and helping with weekend or evening neighborhood walk teams.

- Frank Morris

Working directly on campaigns and experiencing first-hand the fruits of their contribution to the party and the candidates makes party activity exciting and rewarding. "You have to work with their interests, and that helps to get the students involved," Morris says. The presidential election offers an opportunity to take advantage of already heightened interest and introduce students to other candidates and the party organization. However, it is important to make sure activities fit the students' schedules.

The county party has an awards banquet every two years with the election cycle. At the banquet, those volunteers who consistently worked hard for the previous 24 months are rewarded. Two people are also recognized for their long-time achievement. Sometimes young people may be among those receiving recognition for their hard work. Most recently a student was recognized for his work with the College Republicans group.

The key to getting younger people motivated and interested is giving them functions and duties right from the start. It is important to plan what they will be doing and how they can best be used as volunteers. "You can't organize while they're waiting there to hear what you have to say; you have to lay it out ahead of time," Morris says. "They need to feel their time is being used and that they are working on something worthwhile." It does no good to have student volunteers excited to work but with nothing to do.



★ VENTURA COUNTY DEMOCRATS, CALIFORNIA

TAPPING INTO THE IDEAS OF YOUTH



Their ideas are much more innovative. You have to be able to know what the kids are doing, and they have so many more innovative ideas than we do. - County Party Chair Sharon Hillbrant

In Ventura County, California, the local Democratic Party places a high value on the opinions and impact of young voters. The party always tries to have younger influences on their committee, and usually one or two members are from one of the local colleges that serve as a bridge to students. The Young Democrats in Ventura County are chartered for the organization, and they participate equally with the other chartered clubs. There are also Young Democrat groups in the county at specific colleges and in major cities. Young people throughout the county have an opportunity to participate in clubs. County Party Chair Sharon Hillbrant notes, "When school starts again we are going to have a young man going to different college campuses and starting a drive to recruit young democrats to see if they

want to have a county wide organization if they don't have enough people at their own school."

According to Hillbrant, the county's Democratic Party is constantly doing voter registration drives and college campuses in the county are heavily targeted for such drives. She states, "We've already started in voter registration and precinct work. We started right after the primary in March because this year is so important that each of our eight chartered clubs is fully active in registration and precinct work. It's an ongoing effort and we're out there every weekend." One particularly innovative registration drive was a countywide effort in which registration booths were set up at movie theaters during showings of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. The effort was very successful in that young people had a lot to do with setting it up and running the booths.

The county party also tries to bring in speakers who will talk about topics of particular interest to students and younger citizens. Recently, a young man who had returned home from serving in Iraq called the Democratic Party in Ventura County and told them that he wanted to get involved. She will be speaking at college campuses once school begins in the fall and has already spoken to different clubs about what it was like in Iraq. The chair notes that this speaker has piqued the interest of the younger generation because they have concerns about young people going to war, the draft, and other related issues. The county committee announces such events through e-mail and posts on Yahoo groups. Hillbrant says that "these posts serve a major purpose and all of our young groups at the colleges use them."

VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Population: 753,197

White: 69.9%

African American: 1.9%

Hispanic or Latino: 33.4%

Other: 28.0%

Persons 16-24: 13.5%

Land Area: 1,845 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$47,493

Largest Sector of Industry:
Manufacturing

County Seat: Ventura

Interesting fact: The Los Padres National Forest, spanning 860 square miles, makes up nearly half of the county's land mass.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 19.7%;
Some college or Associate's degree 33.5%; Bachelor's degree 17.4%; Master's, Professional or Doctorate 9.5%

County Party Chair:
Sharon Hillbrant

County Party Web site:
www.venturacountydemocrats.com

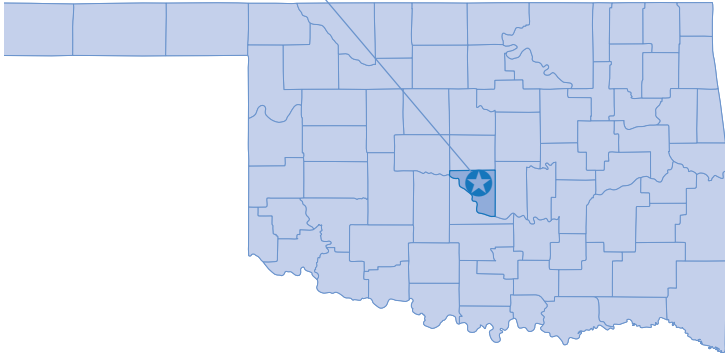
Technology is used in a variety of ways in Ventura County. The main purpose, of course, is communication. "E-mail and cell phones are about the only way we handle business now," says Hillbrant. A recent Kerry fundraiser was held in the county, and one of the younger club members got bands to come together for the event. A lot of young people attended because it appealed to their taste. "We take their names and e-mail addresses so we can follow up with them," Hillbrant says. She also understands the importance of having an interesting Web site. The county party recently found a young volunteer who is going to work on "jazzing up" their Web site. Hillbrant notes, "The state web site is so colorful and alive, I said that we had to get ours to be like that. That's one of the things we have found that you really have to have. You can drum up business with an exciting Web site, and a lot of young people now are really into that. They are much more computer knowledgeable. We are going to have the Web site be updated more frequently and more exciting to look at."

Technology is also used in Ventura County to assist with precinct operations, or door-to-door work. The precinct county group purchased all of the county data and maps, using them to produce computerized data for each of the areas. The county clubs then use that data to go door-to-door, and it is generally the younger members who do this work. From Hillbrant's perspective, "This is a very visual age that we live in, it's made communication a whole different topic nowadays. We're trying to rethink having headquarters because technology is so much better now. You can get statistics while you're out in the field, and you don't have to go back to headquarters." Use of technology in this way seems to open the doors for younger people who want to get involved, and greater opportunities are also created for reaching out to voters who may still need to be brought into the process.



★ CLEVELAND COUNTY REPUBLICANS, OKLAHOMA

TARGETING YOUNG PEOPLE WHERE THEY LIKE TO BE—OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM



Cleveland County has built a large, active membership of young Republicans. Local party chair Kathy McBlair reports, “Cleveland County has had success through fun, exciting activities and by using young people to help recruit others their age.” Indeed, their peer-to-peer outreach effort is one of the group’s great successes.

The county GOP goes to local high schools and colleges two or three times a year. The College Republicans usually work in conjunction with the county party when they go to high schools. This gives the college students a feeling of doing something important while suggesting to youngsters that it’s “cool” to be partisan.

They also run the tables and hand out T-shirts at “Howdy Week,” when they start back to school, as well as setting up a tent where they offer food and beverages.

The local party also reaches out to younger voters by going to football and basketball games and other youth activities to register students and to bolster their interest in voting and politics. The party targets a number of youth-centered social activities, rather than visiting government classes.

We like to suggest that politics can be fun and to use college-aged students to attract even younger students. - Kathy McBlair

The party hosts a “Straw Poll—Pizza and Politics” event with voter-registration opportunities and also makes an effort to reach out through a 4th of July booth, where candidates come to meet and speak with citizens. “We make a special effort to get young people to work at the table and shake hands with people at the fair,” says McBlair. The party also enters multiple community parades, including the Red Ribbon Week parade. McBlair notes, “The party likes to get involved in all of the local parades that it can. We like to be as visible as possible.” Here too the local party makes good use of its youth volunteers, as they are called upon to staff floats and pass out literature.

CLEVELAND COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

Population: 208,016

White: 83.6%

African American: 3.6%

Hispanic or Latino: 4.0%

Other: 12.8%

Persons 16-24: 19.2%

Land Area: 536 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$41,846

Largest Sector of Industry:
Retail Trade

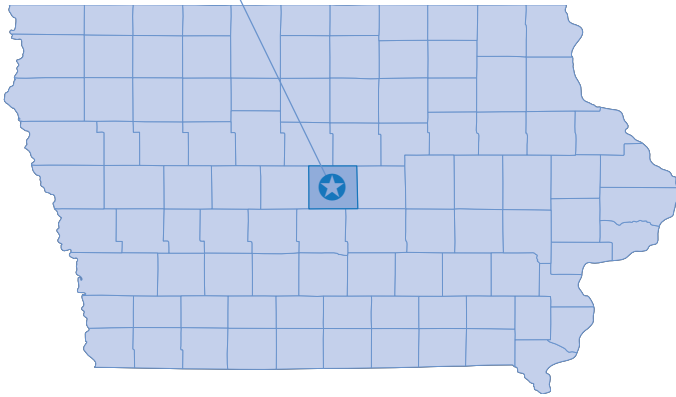
County Seat: Norman

Interesting fact:
The University of Oklahoma is in Cleveland County.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 26.7%;
Some college or Associate’s degree 33.4%; Bachelor’s degree 17.6%; Master’s, Professional or Doctorate 10.4%

★ STORY COUNTY DEMOCRATS, IOWA

USING ORGANIZATIONAL BACKING AND SPECIAL EVENTS TO INVOLVE STUDENTS



As the home of Iowa State University, Story County is heavily populated by students. Jan Bauer, chair of the Democratic Party in Story County, states that young voters are extremely important because “they provide the enthusiasm and the energy, and it is the young people that are carrying out the day-to-day operations.” In Iowa canvass teams from the Iowa Democratic Party go door to door, hitting every door throughout the state. Bauer notes that this is where young people are needed. “In each county office, there is a paid staffer on the coordinated campaign and they are typically college students or just out of college,” she says.

STORY COUNTY, IOWA

Population: 71,981

White: 91.1%

African American: 1.8%

Hispanic or Latino: 1.5%

Other: 7.0%

Persons 16-24: 14.7%

Land Area: 573 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$40,442

Largest Sector of Industry:
Retail Trade

County Seat: Nevada

Interesting fact: Story County was named for Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate 21.3%;
Some college or Associate's degree 27.7%; Bachelor's degree 29.9%; Master's, Professional or Doctorate 19.6%

County Party Chair: Jan Bauer

County Party Web site:
www.storydems.org

E-mail Address:
storydems@yahoo.com

There is also a great deal of youth outreach that is not directly connected to the canvassing teams of the state party. Similar to other chairs who have universities in their county, Bauer tries to work closely with local college organizations. Once the students return to school in the fall, the county party coordinates with the ISU Democrats to do registration. “Students aren’t always able to man the booths so we do our best to coordinate the effort,” states Bauer. Her organization will often send people to help with the effort. The county party also has a presence at university gatherings such as Welcome Fest, an event held primarily for freshmen, and Club Fest, which is geared more toward getting people to join the ISU Democrats. Bauer notes, “The ISU Democrats will have events with bands and such, and, although they drive their own events, we provide support for them.” Students are also able to get internships with the local Democratic Party, whether they are in high school or college. The students can get credit at their schools for working in the office, answering phones, doing mailings, helping with canvassing and phone banks, and other such activities.

The county party has also tried to increase students’ ability to actually cast their votes in Story County. Since Iowa allows early voting through the use of absentee ballots, Bauer notes that they petitioned for satellite voting on campuses. If enough signatures are received, a location has to be made available. Bauer states, “We requested satellite voting in all of the dorms that allows them to vote early.” Ideally, Bauer would like to have the system organized so that people could register and vote on the same day; however, no one can vote before the close of registration. “So now we have to first get them registered and then get them to the satellite location.” Publicizing exactly when and where the students can vote does this.

The Democratic Party in Story County has also found success in events that they have held such as fundraisers with costume themes. A year ago, at an event with a big band swing theme, people could come in costume, register, and get involved. Young people especially enjoyed attending and participating in the event.

We had youth helping with registration at the event and it was something that the kids loved because they were in costume and were a visible part of the event. A lot of people showed up to attend and also to help.

- Jan Bauer

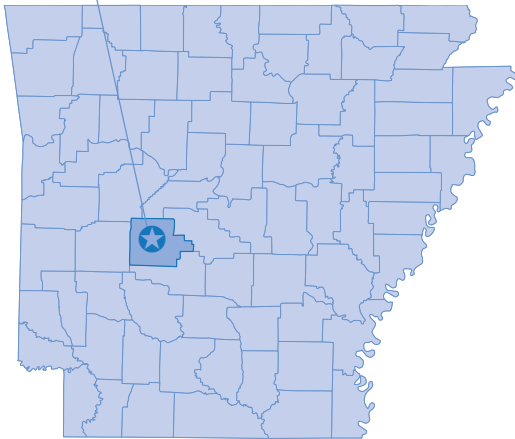
The Democratic Party had similar results when they invited young people to attend and assist with a Mardi Gras soup supper. Plans are being made for something similar this year, says Bauer. "We're planning to hold a large fundraising event with a 40s theme."

Another event that Bauer is hoping to bring to the county is house parties. "The Kerry campaign has been working hard on house parties, and we'd like to do some youth-driven ones," she says. Bauer describes a house party as an event at which "someone would open up their home, invite their friends, watch a video, listen to a staff member talk about the campaign, encourage them to get involved, and talk about different opportunities to participate." It seems that this atmosphere would be especially beneficial for young participants because it would be more relaxed and less intimidating if someone is joining the meeting or the group for the first time. The Democratic Party of Story County, Iowa seems to have found a way to reach out to young citizens of various backgrounds, to get them involved, keep them interested, and give them various ways to cast their vote.



★ GARLAND COUNTY REPUBLICANS, ARKANSAS

IMPRESSIVE YOUTH MEMBERSHIP



GARLAND COUNTY, ARKANSAS

Population: 88,068

White: 88.9%

African American: 7.8%

Hispanic or Latino: 2.6%

Other: 3.3%

Persons 16-24: 11.1%

Land Area: 667 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$31,724

Largest Sector of Industry:
Health Care and Social Assistance

County Seat: Hot Springs

Interesting fact: Garland County was named for Augustus H. Garland, Governor, U.S. Senator, and Attorney General.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduate 32.8%;
Some college or Associate's degree 27.6%; Bachelor's degree 11.7%; Master's, Professional or Doctorate 6.3%

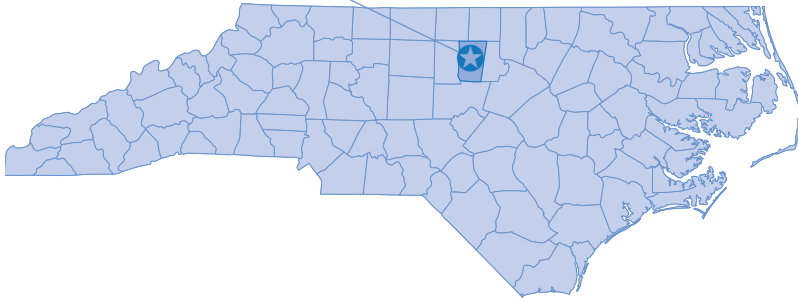
In Garland County, young volunteers are central to local party activities. To attract young folks to their booth at the Garland County Fair, “we often have prize drawings, and give away some nice prizes—such as a television,” reports Chairman Larry Bailey. “The larger ticket items get a lot of people to stop by the booth.” Young Republicans and the Women’s Republican group staff the booth, providing voter registration, information about candidates, and literature on Republican activities. To meet voters, candidates will often work in the booth as well. Volunteers and candidates also conduct voter registration efforts at local churches.

The committee has been able to create groups in three area high schools. “The goal is to build the Young Republicans and to get them involved in the central committee so that they are part of the organization,” suggests Bailey. Building a student organization requires a core group who are dedicated and willing to roll up their sleeves and make a difference. Finding these people and helping them succeed has been at the center of the county committee’s outreach efforts. Currently, three of seven of the high schools have a Young Republican group, with approximately 50 to 60 members in each. The county coordinates directly with the students a couple of times in non-election years. The students are more active in the campaigns, but efforts are made to keep them involved in off-election periods. Experience shows that if students remain active during off-years they are more likely to get involved when the action heats up.

Students are also visible at party events via a “sponsorship program.” The party has a fish fry at which candidates and party members come together. Students are “sponsored” so that they can come and meet the candidates and get involved. The idea is that students, who often do not have a lot of extra money, can still get involved in party activities through the donations of older members. The party has one major fundraiser—the Lincoln Day Dinner, which usually raises between \$12,000 and \$13,000. About 300 people attend. Along with the “sponsored students,” others serve as pages for the corporate table, or help set up the event. In exchange they are invited to attend the dinner. The party understands the importance of bringing young people into a range of activities, even including black-tie dinners.

★ ORANGE COUNTY DEMOCRATS, NORTH CAROLINA

MAKING USE OF TECHNOLOGY & THE INTERNET



Barry Katz, chair of the Democratic Party in Orange County, North Carolina, feels that young voters are immensely important not only because they can affect the outcome of an election but also because “they participate in precinct leadership and they also do a very good job of organizing young voters.” Katz has discovered the benefits of working with youth and tries to meet the needs of different youth organizations as often as possible. He notes, “We

completely fund everything the Young Democrats do. They’ve never made a request for us that we have rejected.” There are two Young Democrat organizations in the county. One is associated with the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and the other is a countywide organization. Katz feels that it is important to have both in order to capture young voters that are not associated with the university.

Projects such as voter registration drives are organized almost completely by such organizations. Katz notes that there is a massive registration drive at the university in the fall at which hundreds of voters are registered. He says, “52 weeks a year there is someone out doing some sort of registration.” North Carolina has a “motor voter rule.” This rule often leads to a high number of registered voters, but not necessarily a comparatively high number of people who actually vote. A motor voter rule means that people are registered to vote when they go to the DMV to get a driver’s license. Their voting address is then the same as that on their driver’s license. What is more interesting about the rule is that, if someone changes their address on their driver’s license, their voting address changes. However, the person’s voting address can be changed without changing their permanent address. For this reason, efforts are made during registration drives to change students’ voting addresses so they can vote near the university. This is done because many people feel that students are more likely to vote near their school than they are to send in an absentee ballot.

In Orange County other unique methods are being used to reach out to young voters. The Democratic Party in the county is trying to get current contact information for all registered voters, and in the process they try to register more young voters. Katz notes, “We’ve got teams in each of the precincts that will be phoning all the households and one of the questions that we have is if any youth in the house will turn 18 before November 2. We’re polling all of the households in the county to find out if we can register them that way. When we identify someone who is young and not registered, we contact the family and give them a voter registration form. We check the rolls at the board of elections regularly to find out if they have registered. If they haven’t, we call them back and we are persistent. We make an effort to identify unregistered youth and then to follow it up.” He states that, in order to run an effective get-out-the-vote drive, someone has to be working on the contact list to improve it well in advance of the actual drive.

ORANGE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

Population: 118,227

White: 78.0%

African American: 13.8%

Hispanic or Latino: 4.5%

Other: 8.2%

Persons 16-24: 13.9%

Land Area: Not Available

Median household income:
\$39,184

Largest Sector of Industry:
Health Care and Social
Assistance

County Seat: Hillsborough

Interesting fact: Orange County
was named for the infant
William V of Orange.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 15.9%;
Some college or Associate’s
degree 20.3%; Bachelor’s degree
24.4%; Master’s, Professional or
Doctorate 27.1%

We identify where the youth are while at the same time getting corrected contact information, which leads to a more effective get-out-the-vote drive in the fall and requires dedicated volunteers.

- Barry Katz

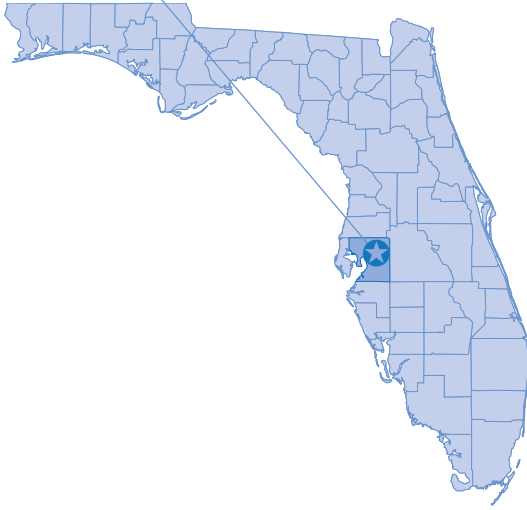
Katz has also discovered that such efforts require the knowledge and use of technology. He notes that there is a strong supply of expertise with software development in the county. "We have an incredible data base that allows us to do fabulous things with our data." The importance of e-mail and a strong Web site is also taken into consideration in Orange County. E-mail is used to reach young voters, but not in a way that will turn them off. E-mail addresses are taken on a confidential basis by the party and are not shared with any other party organization or candidate. Katz also notes that the party limits the number of contacts that are made via e-mail. Katz is also hoping to improve the county party organization's Web site because "young people tend to look at the Web site more frequently than other groups of voters." Eventually, there will be various essays on the Web site by different people throughout the county expressing their political ideas.

Katz has also found that many young people do not know what precinct they live in and where they have to vote. He states, "We have a precinct finder that will eventually be online. You type in the name of your street and it will tell you what precinct you are in and give you directions on how to get to the polls where you have to vote. People can call for now, but eventually it will be on the website so they can do it themselves." The county party also tries to make it easier for young people to get to the polls on voting day by having vans that go to the polls all day long. Katz notes, "We rent the vans, the largest we can find, and for days we put up signs that tell where the vans will pick people up either near a gym or the dorms." Furthermore, not all students on campus vote at the same location, so the party makes sure that a laptop with the precinct finder program is available so that students will be taken to the correct polling stations.



★ HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY REPUBLICANS, FLORIDA

COUNTY-LEVEL INTERNSHIPS PROVIDE VALUABLE ELECTION EXPERIENCE



Voter registration, absentee follow-up, and candidate rallies are all used by the Hillsborough County GOP to reach out to young voters. Chairwoman Margie Kincaid notes that they have had some success with high school registration, but the party also reaches out through government offices, banks, and other high-traffic places. The party also has an aggressive absentee ballot program in which volunteers contact people who requested absentee ballots to make sure that they followed through by sending them in.

Hillsborough County has a College Republican and Young Republican Club that help organize both students and the larger community. This year, the

Young Republican Club organized precinct walks once per month, not only to reach out to voters across the county but also to give club members something concrete to do. As noted in other county organizations, strong leadership is crucial to the success of these groups.

Younger citizens are introduced to the party through a number of exciting party-sponsored day trips. An internship program provides a direct opportunity for youth involvement. Indeed, area high schools send 10 to 15 students to intern during each election cycle. According to local party leadership, these interns are some of the best workers in the organization. A good bit of effort is also spent on connecting with local college professors and lining up student volunteers and interns.

These interns and other young volunteers are integrated into the party's activities, undertaking a range of activities that include fundraisers, rallies, literature drops, telephone banks, and much else. The key to a successful internship program, local leaders note, is that it keeps students busy and calls upon them to undertake significant tasks. Conversely, giving interns grunt work often frustrates them and reduces their usefulness to the organization. Their efforts must be meaningful—at least occasionally.

In 2004 the county committee's activity is focused primarily on the Bush-Cheney reelection campaign. Here young activists have been involved in the full range of campaign work, including conference calls, e-mail alerts, and phone banks to contact likely voters.

There is no substitute for hands-on experience, but the work has to be significant. Like everyone else, young people want to do things that matter.

- Margie Kincaid

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY, FLORIDA

Population: 998,948

White: 75.2%

African American: 15.0%

Hispanic or Latino: 18.0%

Other: 9.8%

Persons 16-24: 13.4%

Land Area: 1,051 sq. miles

Median household income:
\$40,663

Largest Sector of Industry:
Administration, Support,
Waste Management, and
Remediation Services

County Seat: Tampa

Interesting fact: Of the nation's counties, Hillsborough ranks No. 10 in production of oranges and No. 5 in production of strawberries.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 26.7%;
Some college or Associate's
degree 29.0%; Bachelor's degree
16.7%; Master's, Professional or
Doctorate 8.4%

County Party Chair:
Al Higginbotham

County Party Web site:
www.hcrp.org

E-mail Address:
Higginbotham.Al@hcrp.org

★ OTERO COUNTY REPUBLICANS, NEW MEXICO

WEEKLY SCHOLARSHIP CONTEST PROVIDES PARTY EXPOSURE TO AREA YOUTH

Otero County is a good example of motivating young people to become politically involved because every party activity offers an opportunity for youth participation. As Chair Manuel Gonzales reports, “Here young people participate in the usual county party activities as well as the programs/activities that are specifically designed to target youth.”

OTERO COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

Population: 62,298

White: 73.7%

African American: 3.9%

Hispanic or Latino: 32.2%

Other: 22.4%

Persons 16-24: 14.4%

Land Area: 6,626 sq. miles

Median household income:
30,861

Largest Sector of Industry:
Retail trade

County Seat: Alamogordo

Interesting fact: Otero County is home to the White Sands National Monument, the New Mexico Museum of Space History, the International Space Hall of Fame, and the Mescalero Indian Reservation.

Educational Attainment:
High School graduates 29.2%;
Some College or Associate's degree 36.4%; Bachelor's degree 9.2%; Master's, Professional, or Doctorate 6.3%

County Party Chair:
Manuel Gonzales

County Party Web site:
www.oterorepublicans.com

E-mail Address:
headquarters@oterorepublicans.com

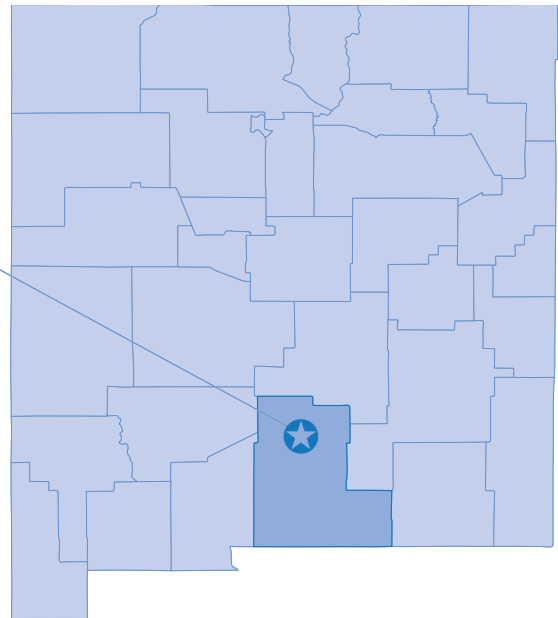
Voter registration efforts occur in locations frequented by young people. The county party maintains a table at the county fair offering candidate and party information as well as registering voters. “Around 18,000 people attend the county fair, and we were able to register

approximately 800 people,” says Gonzales. The party is also a visible participant in the Fourth of July parade and the fair parade, and students are encouraged to participate in the literature drops and sign crews for local campaigns. The party also conducts voter registration drives at local high schools, as well as at the branch of New Mexico State in Otero County. Other voter registration efforts occur at local shopping centers and malls.

Otero County Republicans provide a unique scholarship opportunity to local high school students. The “Tigers, Knowledge, Activities,” or TKA, scholarship program is cosponsored by the Republicans, a local newspaper, and a youth radio station. Students submit an application to be considered for the scholarship. Each week one student is selected from approximately 25 to 30 students. Weekly recognition is given via a classroom presentation, as well as a congratulatory ad broadcast throughout the day on the radio. The student is awarded a gift certificate for lunch, a T-shirt, and a CD copy of the radio ad. At the end of the year, one student is chosen from among the weekly TKA winners to receive a \$500 scholarship. The student is recognized at the school's annual awards banquet.

Every time that there is a political event, Otero Republicans try to get students involved. For example, when President Bush came to the area, members of the high school ROTC, football and basketball teams, cheerleaders, and marching band were all part of the welcome program.

Otero County is a conservative area in which Republicans hold nearly every elected partisan office. The OCR Web site often gets 2,500 hits a month. The Web site contains information pertaining to upcoming party events and is updated for each month's events, along with the county party's newsletter, candidate information, and a printable donation form. There is an Air Force base within the county, and many of the young



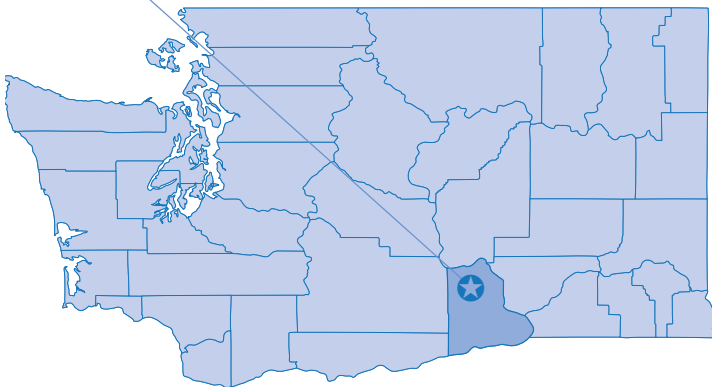
airmen are computer literate and get involved with the party through the Web site. The Web site also has links to the New Mexico government and the Republican National Committee. Otero Republicans also utilize an e-mail alert system, and the party is currently working to build e-mail lists.

For Otero County, the key is to be steady and always involved.

Positive exposure and a commitment to engage young people on their turf encourages participation in local party activities. There is nothing we do in Otero County that doesn't have an element of youth. - Manuel Gonzales

The party features youth whenever possible and keeps them involved in every event at some level. They believe it is important to include youth in all of the party's events.

★ BENTON COUNTY DEMOCRATS, WASHINGTON



When speaking of the importance of young voters, Mimi Latta, chair of the Democratic Party in Benton County, Washington, notes, "You stagnate without younger voters, you don't understand issues from their perspective if you don't have them in your organization. They are the ones who will take over after us and they'll have to reinvent the wheels if they aren't brought in now, so that's up to us to do." With that said, there has been a great deal of youth outreach in Benton County, whether it be to high school students, college students, or nonstudents.

The Democratic Party in Benton County has been particularly successful at reaching out to young citizens of different backgrounds through voter registration drives and registration booths. On the Fourth of July, the party set up a booth in the park to register people. Latta notes that posters advertised the booth "so young people would realize that we are interested in their issues too. We also try to talk with parents and grandparents so that they make young people realize that voting is a priority. We were able to register people who will be turning 18 between now and November. A lot of parents were bringing their children over to register." During the summer, registration booths are set up more generally at fairs, and the booths are staffed by voters young and old. During the school year, the party also sets up registration

BENTON COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Population: 142,475

White: 86.2%

African American: 0.9%

Hispanic or Latino: 12.5%

Other: 12.8%

Population 16-24: 13.9%

Land Area: 1,703 sq. miles

Median Household Income:
\$47,044

Largest Sector of Industry:
Professional and Technical
Services

Interesting Fact: Of nation's
counties, Benton ranks No. 6
in production of potatoes, 6
in production of apples, 10 in
production of cherries.

Educational Attainment:
High School or equivalent:
24.9%; Some college or
Associate's: 34.4%; Bachelor's:
18.4%; Master's, Professional
or Doctorate: 9.3%

County Party Chair:
Mimi Latta

E-mail Address:
bccodems@verizon.net

The Democrats in Benton County also make it a point to reach out to high school students. The organization does not have specific internships with the party, but they will pair students up with candidates to work with. Latta notes that the students usually come to the party and show interest and they are then introduced to different candidates to find a good fit. Latta states, “If people want to increase their participation with youth, they need to keep in touch with and be friendly with local and public schools. They appreciate the fact that we’re checking in. I try to keep it low key, whether it’s going to be Democratic or non-partisan; I let the principals know that. It’s an ongoing relationship.” The Democratic Party also has a variety of strategies to make sure that high school students will register to vote. Some of the party members will go to the schools to speak to classes and hand out registration forms. They will also give registration forms to civics teachers to keep in their classrooms. The most interesting way that registration forms are distributed, however, is by handing them out with the students’ high school diplomas so that they have them in their graduation packets.

The party is now planning their booth for a local fair, and they are planning to have young people helping with that. The party participates in parades throughout the summer in various towns within the county, and Latta notes, “We make sure that we reach out to the youth, especially for that because it’s fun. They walk the route and help with construction of entries.” Latta and the Democratic Party in Benton County try to reach young voters of different ages through various methods because, as Latta stresses, “It’s trying to figure out how to reach out, not just pizza at a meeting, but to get them interested in issues.”



LESSONS LEARNED

Our review of the best practices by political parties with regard to mobilizing young voters reveals a wide variety of approaches and techniques. No two areas are exactly the same, and many different programs have been successful. However, we did learn ten lessons from the most successful party organizations we studied.

- 1. LEADERSHIP IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT.** Many of the new branches of College Republicans and College Democrats were started by a few interested people, and then the club grew from there. A few people in the right place at the right time are needed to get an organization off the ground. Strong leadership is needed to keep the group going so that it does not fade.
- 2. TARGET YOUTH ON THEIR TURF.** Younger people often have a lot of activities in which they are involved. Come to them at these activities with a positive message and show an interest in what they do. This could take the form of going to sporting events or creating college scholarship opportunities or internship programs.
- 3. GET YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY.** It is important to have events or programs that target younger people, but it is also important to ensure that younger people are included in all party events and functions. Many students do not attend fundraisers because they cannot afford them. Get other party members to buy extra tickets to fundraisers so that students can attend, or allow students to attend free for helping with setup.
- 4. GIVE YOUNG VOLUNTEERS MEANINGFUL WORK.** Once young people are involved, give them work they will feel is important so that they will want to come back. Have their tasks planned out in advance. If they are going to put up signs, for example, have the signs and the address lists ready to go when they arrive so that they can get to the hands-on part immediately. This is often the most fun part for them because they can see the results of their efforts and how they are helping the party. Young people are often busy with other activities, and if they feel they are wasting a lot of time “just sitting around,” they are less likely to participate.
- 5. MAKE IT FUN WHENEVER POSSIBLE.** Even if the volunteer work is hard work, find ways to reward the students if possible. This could mean a pizza party at the end of a project, a free ticket to a party event, or a special meeting with a party representative.
- 6. MAKE USE OF DIFFERENT OUTREACH TECHNOLOGIES.** Young Americans reach out to friends and family in many ways, including e-mail, cell phones, and Instant Message technology. Conversely, their dependency upon “snail mail” (that is, through the U.S. Postal Service) is dramatically less than for other generations. Of course innovative Web pages and blogs have proven helpful in reaching out to young voters. Party operatives should be aware of this important difference and consider reaching out to youngsters in unique, high-tech ways.
- 7. PEER-TO-PEER PROGRAMS ARE EFFECTIVE.** Time and again, party leaders have said that some of their best outreach programs are when young people look to connect with other young people. Voter registration and mobilization programs conceived and run by younger people for younger people have had much success. Simply put, youngsters listen to each other.
- 8. REWARD ACHIEVEMENT.** Believe it or not, young Americans look up to older folks. And when their elders recognize their accomplishments, they feel better about their efforts and are even more eager to make a difference. Special mention, awards or certificates at a party banquet, for example, go a long way to reinforcing young people’s political involvement.

- 9. MERGE WITH LIKE-MINDED YOUTH GROUPS.** A number of organizations on both sides of the ideological fence have organized youth operations. Party operatives should look to merge their efforts with the youth groups of these partner organizations.
- 10. LOOK TO COMBINE SERVICE WITH PARTISANSHIP.** One of the surprising findings of this study is how much young people volunteer in their communities. Again, this is the activist generation. Instead of trying to compete with this natural desire to make a difference, astute party leaders might look to combine service activities with partisan events. Indeed, there may be many ways that service work can be merged with volunteer efforts. Why not, for example, plan an event where the youth are called upon to cleaned up a neighborhood park, followed by a party picnic?



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