

## YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT DOWN IN NEW JERSEY, ABOUT THE SAME IN VIRGINIA, COMPARED TO PAST GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

Young voters played a major role in the 2008 presidential election, but less so in 2009. In the New Jersey governor's race, turnout decreased by seven points to 19% between 1997 and 2009. In Virginia, turnout decreased by just one point to 17% between 1997 and 2009. Less than one in five eligible young people voted in both states. A majority of young people preferred the Democratic candidate in New Jersey and the Republican candidate in Virginia.

To produce state-level youth voting estimates immediately following an election, CIRCLE relies on preliminary exit polls, which are subject to revision. We must use 1997 for comparison because no turnout data are available for more recent off-year elections in these two states. Thus we do not know the change since 2005, the most recent gubernatorial election year in Virginia and New Jersey. Comparisons to the presidential election year of 2008 are misleading because turnout is always much lower in odd-numbered years.

**Table 1: Turnout in Gubernatorial Elections, ages 18-29**

| STATE      | 1997 | 2009 |
|------------|------|------|
| New Jersey | 26%  | 19%  |
| Virginia   | 18%  | 17%  |

As a proportion of all the people who voted, in 2009, under-30s represented 9% in New Jersey and 10% in Virginia. ("Turnout" is the proportion of all young citizens who voted, shown above.)

In Virginia, where Republican Robert F. McDonnell won the election by a large margin, young voters preferred McDonnell to Democrat R. Creigh Deeds by 54% to 44%. In New Jersey, young voters preferred Jon S. Corzine over Christopher J. Christie by 57% to 36%. In New York City, young voters preferred Michael R. Bloomberg to William C. Thompson Jr. by 49% to 48%. These results are based on exit polls conducted by Edison Research.

Data from the 2000, 2004, and 2008 presidential elections show that youth turnout in Virginia, New Jersey, and nationally had been increasing in presidential years:

**Table 2: Turnout in National Elections, ages 18-29**

| STATE      | 2000 | 2004 | 2008 |
|------------|------|------|------|
| New Jersey | 41%  | 51%  | 53%  |
| Virginia   | 47%  | 43%  | 59%  |
| National   | 40%  | 49%  | 51%  |

"Although 17 and 19 percent are low turnout numbers and far from satisfactory, they should be put in context," said CIRCLE Lead Researcher Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg. "Turnout is always much lower in off-year gubernatorial elections than in presidential years." Also, it is a statistical mistake to generalize or make predictions based on a very small sample, such as two governors' races. We do know, however, that gubernatorial campaigns and independent, nonpartisan groups put more resources into mobilizing youth in 2005 than they did in 2009. Other research shows that campaigning to young voters is effective at raising their turnout.

**"TURNOUT IS ALWAYS MUCH LOWER IN OFF-YEAR GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS THAN IN PRESIDENTIAL YEARS."**

As another way of estimating turnout trends, CIRCLE analyzed the number of votes cast in 13 precincts in VA and five precincts in NJ that have relatively high concentrations of college students. These precincts were the focus of non-partisan get-out-the-vote efforts of the Student PIRGs' New Voters Project in 2005. We compared the turnout rate of registered voters from the 2001 and 2005 Gubernatorial Election with turnout of registered voters in 2009 and found that the number of voters decreased by an average of seven percentage points (compared to 2001) in the precincts studied in VA and increased by three percentage points (compared to 2001) in NJ.

Again, it is important to note that the campaign and nonpartisan resources devoted to youth outreach were smaller in 2009 than in 2005. For instance, in New Jersey the PIRGs made 16,000 get-out-the-vote contacts in 2005 and 9,000 in 2009. The PIRGs did not have a get-out-the-vote effort in VA in 2009. ★

\* The estimated number of young people who voted in the 1997 VA and NJ Governor's races were calculated using: (1) the number of ballots cast in each race according to the media, (2) the youth share of those who voted, as reported by CNN/ Time Exit Poll, and (3) the estimated number of 18-29 year old citizens taken from the 1997 Census Current Population Survey, March Demographic File.

