

## Electoral Engagement among Young African Americans

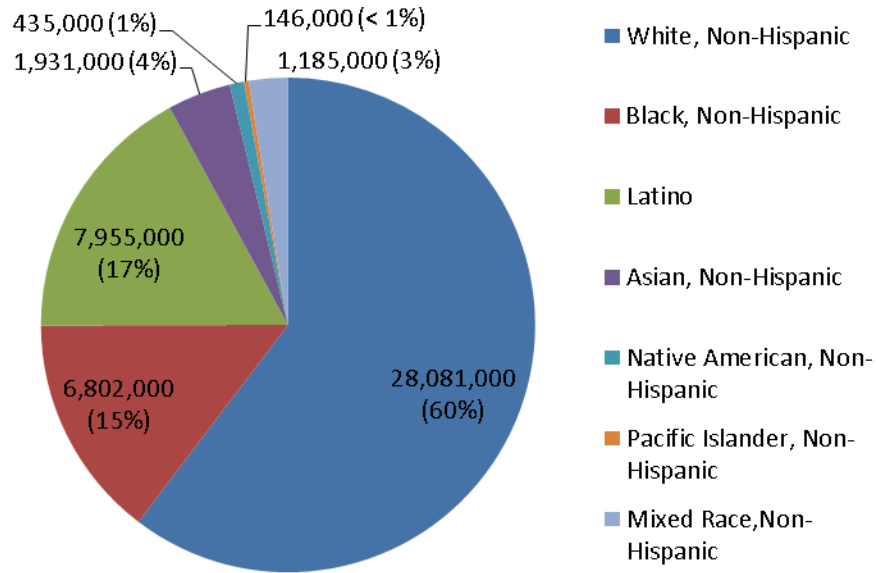
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With racial and ethnic diversity among youth (ages 18-29) growing every year, it is increasingly important to understand how young people of different backgrounds participate in the nation's political and public life. Furthermore, young voters are an increasingly powerful part of the electorate, making up an essential portion of President Obama's 2012 reelection coalition.

This fact sheet, one of three in a series on youth engagement by race and ethnicity (see related fact sheets for [Asian youth](#) and [Latino youth](#)), examines historical data on the civic and political engagement of African Americans of non-Hispanic descent. Drawing on this data, we make several recommendations on how to engage African American youth in the upcoming 2014 midterm election and more broadly going forward.

In the past three election cycles (2008, 2010, 2012), young African Americans turned out to vote at a higher rate than youth of any other racial or ethnic group. Young African Americans experienced a huge increase in registration rates between the 2006 and 2010 midterm elections, likely a result of the "Obama effect" from the 2008 presidential election. For Black youth who first voted in 2008 and their slightly older peers, this "Obama effect" helped prevent registration rates from decreasing as much as other groups between the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, but instead raising them almost 10 percentage points.

**Figure 1: Youth, Ages 18-29, by Race & Ethnicity**



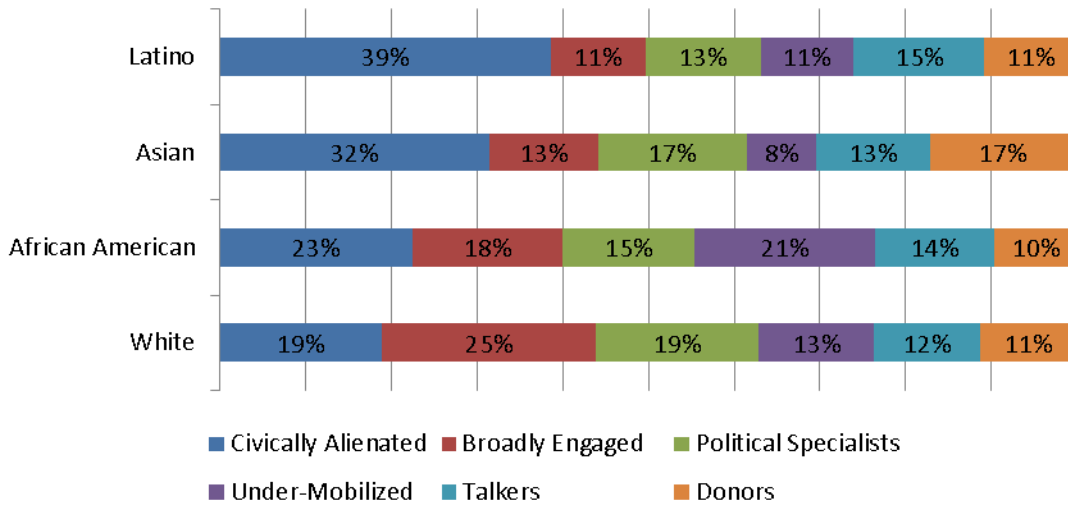
Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) March Basic Supplement, 2014

### **African American Youth: Political and Civic Engagement Patterns and Clusters**

Civic engagement comprises more than just voting, and previous research shows that youth engage politically and civically in diverse ways. In 2010, youth overall broke into six different clusters of engagement—or lack thereof—with just over a fifth of youth (21%) “broadly engaged” in many different leadership roles, and slightly more (23%) “civically alienated” from public life. Additional clusters emerged that showed some young people were “political specialists” focused solely on electoral activism (18%); “donors” who gave money to charitable causes and organizations (11%); the “under-mobilized” who were registered but did not vote in 2010 (14%), and “talkers” who reported discussing political issues both on and offline, but who did not take action (13%).

These patterns of engagement varied for youth of different racial and ethnic groups (*Figure 2*). While African American youth were more “civically alienated” and less “broadly engaged” than their White counterparts, they were more involved than youth of Asian or Hispanic descent. Many young African Americans were also “under-mobilized,” which suggests that campaigns and “get out the vote” efforts did not adequately reach this important youth demographic group.

**Figure 2: Patterns of Youth Engagement, by Race & Ethnicity, 2010**

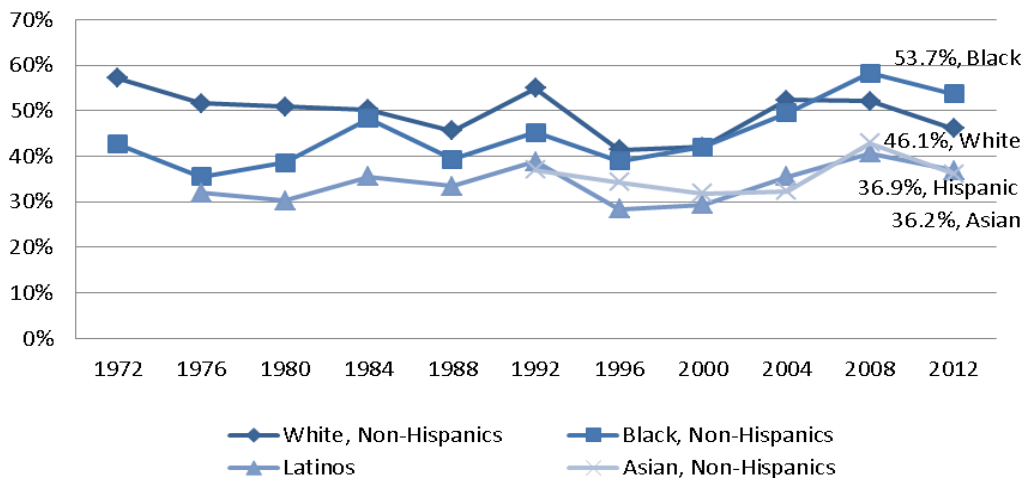


Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) November Civic Engagement Supplement, 2010

**Voter Turnout among African American Youth**

In the last two presidential elections, [Black youth had the highest voter turnout rates of any racial group](#): 58.2% and 53.7% in 2008 and 2012, respectively. In 2012, young Black and Latina women were the strongest supporters of President Obama. Similarly, in the 2010 midterm, Black youth had the highest turnout among all racial and ethnic groups: 27.5%.

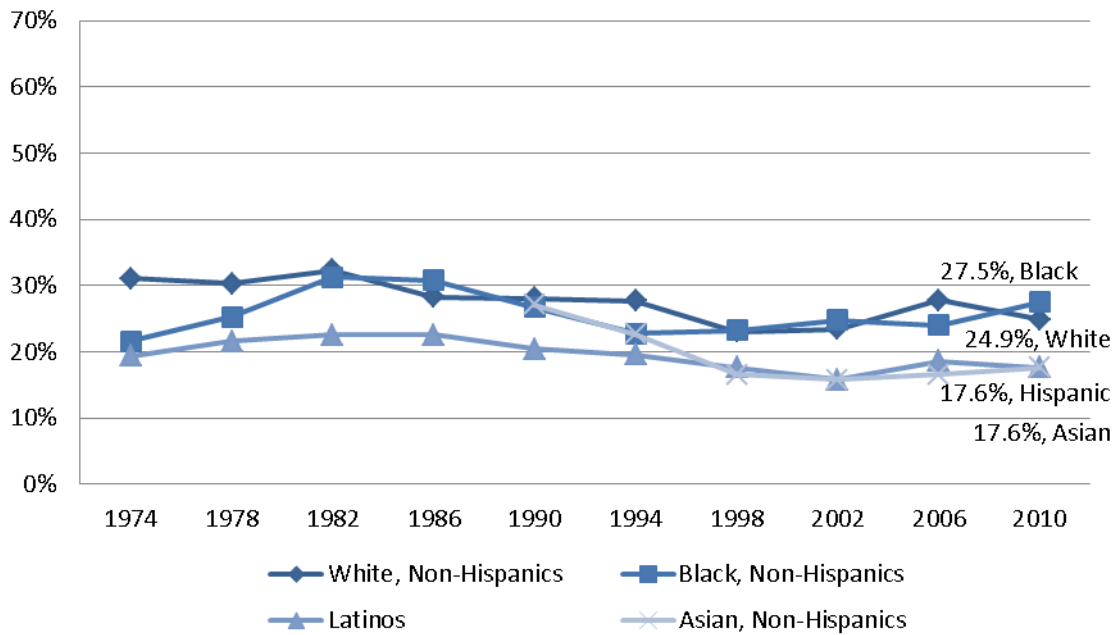
**Figure 3: 18 to 29-Year-Old Citizen Turnout in Presidential Elections, by Race, 1972-2012**



Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey November Voting & Registration Supplement, 1972-2012<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following racial and ethnic groups: Native-American, Non-Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic, and More Than One Race are not included in the graph. Sample sizes for these youth sub-populations are not large enough to report turnout or registration estimates.

**Figure 4: 18 to 29-Year-Old Citizen Turnout in Midterm Elections, by Race, 1974-2010**



Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey November Voting & Registration Supplement, 1974-2010

### Reasons for Not Voting among African American Youth

In 2012, when asked why they didn't vote, 22.9% of registered young people across all ethnic groups responded that they were too busy or had conflicting work schedules—in 2010, 33.5% said the same. Additionally, 17.4% reported feeling that their vote did not make a difference, and 12.1% said they were out of town. Black youth most of noted busy or conflicting work schedules as the reason they did not vote.

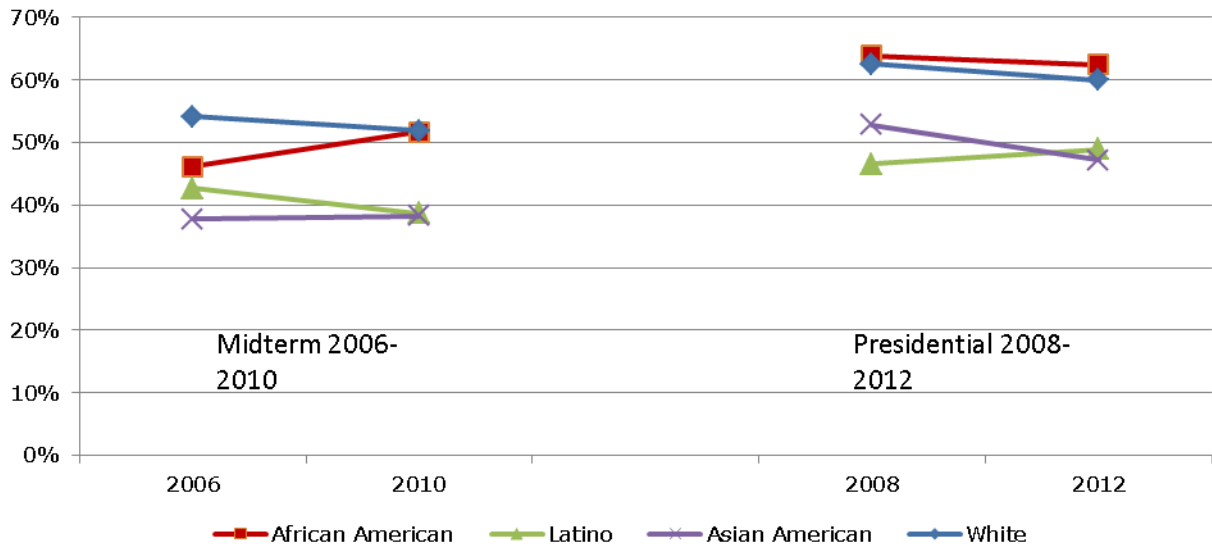
[Previous research documents that youth without college experience are less likely to vote](#) than youth with college experience. In comparison to the general youth population, African American youth are overrepresented among youth without college experience (21.2%); this may be one of the reasons they are “under-mobilized.” Previous research has shown that youth without college experience are interested in participating, [but can face a systemic lack of political and civic opportunities](#), which can consequently have negative effects on self-efficacy and motivation.

### Voter Registration among African American Youth

Registration is a precondition of voting, and [getting young people to register](#) can be a bigger hurdle than getting them to vote. In 2012, Black youth had a voter registration rate of 62.4%, the highest of any racial or ethnic group of young people. Bucking the general trend, the registration rate among Black youth was higher during the 2010 midterm than in the 2006 election. In 2006, the registration rate of Black youth was lower than that of White youth. However, since 2008, Black youth have sustained high registration rates, exceeding

that of White youth by 2.4 percentage points in 2012. In midterm elections, Black youth increased their registration rate by almost six percentage points between 2006 and 2010, going from 46.2% to 51.9%.

**Figure 5: Voter Registration among 18 to 29-Year-Olds, by Race & Ethnicity**



Source: CIRCLE Analysis of Census Current Population Survey November Voting & Registration Supplement, 2006-2012

### Reasons for Not Registering among African American Youth

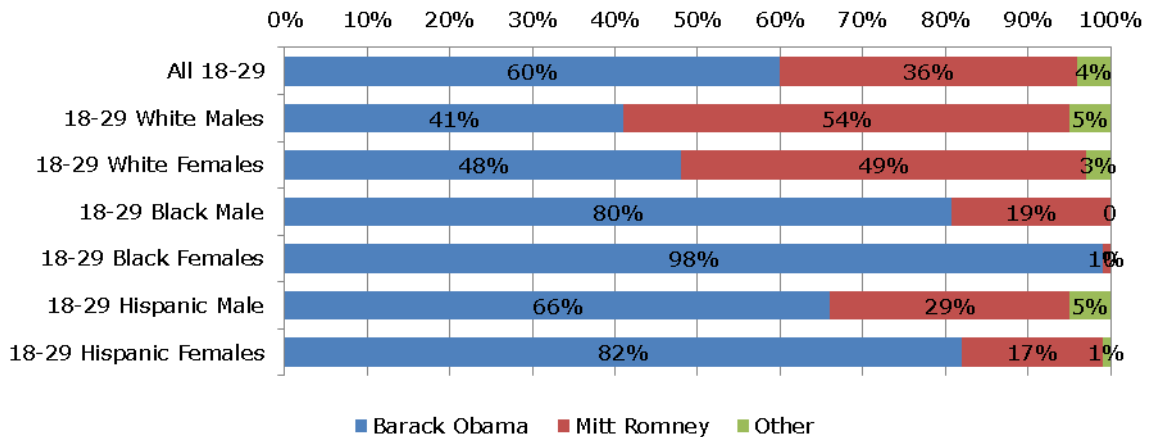
Young people offered various reasons for not registering to vote in 2012. While a lack of interest in the election was the most common reason (41.1%), one fifth of youth (20.4%) reported that they did not meet the registration deadline, and 6.7% said they did not know how or where to register. The data was [similar in 2010](#), when 16.7% did not meet the registration deadline and 7.2% said they did not know where or how to do so.

There were no large differences in the reasons for not registering given by youth of different racial and ethnic groups. However, Hispanic and Black youth were most likely to report they did not meet registration deadlines or they did not know how or where to register, compared to their peers of other racial and ethnic groups.

### Ideology, Issue Priorities, and Candidate Support among African American Youth

In 2012, the youth electorate as a whole was divided in their candidate support and partisanship by race and gender. For instance, non-White young women were generally enthusiastic about President Obama, while non-White men were satisfied, but not enthusiastic. Young White men were dissatisfied with President Obama and voted for his opponent. In comparison, young Black women were by far the most enthusiastic supporters of the President, with 98% casting their ballots for him. Young Black men were also supportive of the President (80%), but less so than young Latinas.

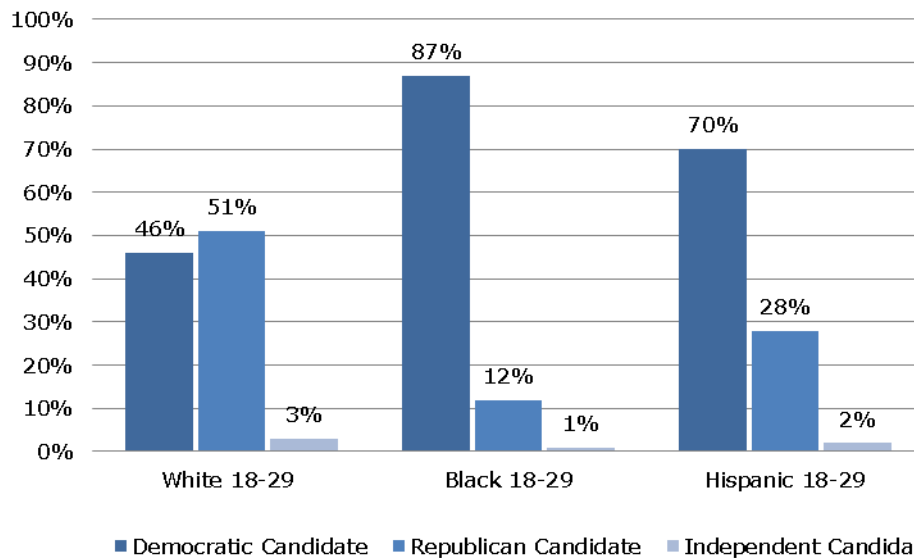
**Figure 6: Youth Vote Choice for 2012 Presidential Election by Race and Gender**



Source: CIRCLE analysis of the National Election Day Exit Poll data (2012) collected by Edison Research

Similarly, in 2010, Black youth were significantly more likely to support Democratic House candidates compared to White youth, the majority of whom supported Republican House candidates.

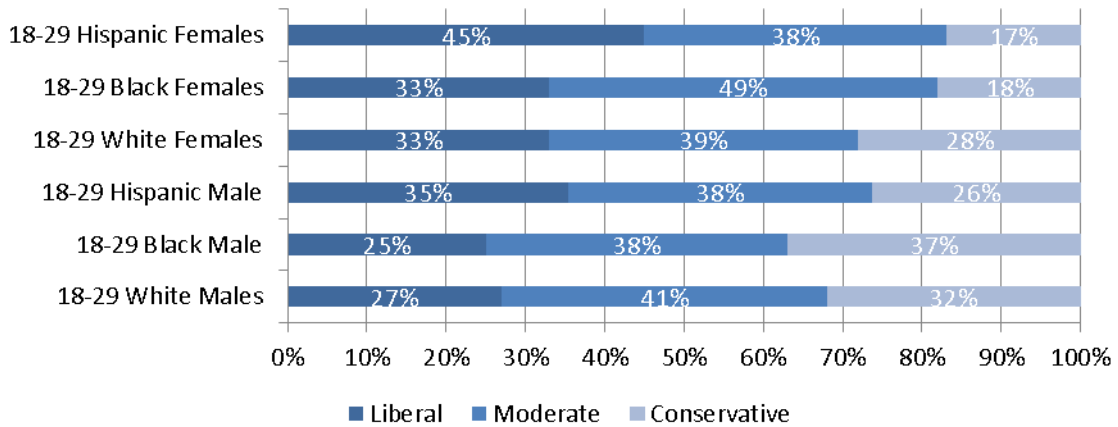
**Figure 7: House Candidate Support in 2010 Midterm Election, by Race**



Source: CIRCLE analysis of the National Election Day Exit Poll data (2012) collected by Edison Research

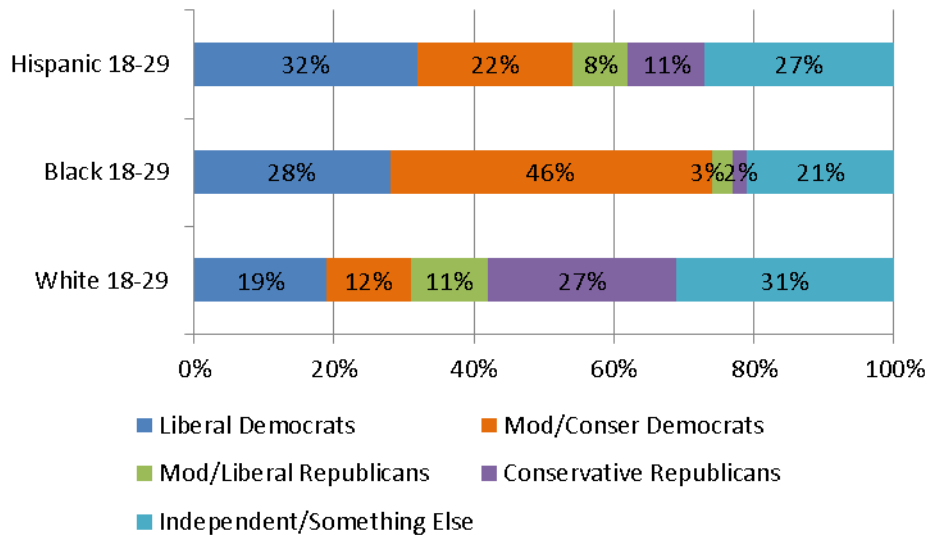
In an early July 2012 poll commissioned by the Youth Engagement Fund and analyzed by CIRCLE, young people across ethnic backgrounds were [concerned primarily about economic issues](#) such as college loan debt, the federal deficit, and a lack of jobs [during that presidential election](#). Black and Latino youth were generally less critical of government than White youth. [Black youth were also most likely to feel that young people have the power to change things](#) in their country, compared to White or Latino youth.

**Figure 8: Youth Political Ideology, by Race and Gender, 2012**



Source: CIRCLE analysis of the National Election Day Exit Poll data (2012) collected by Edison Research

**Figure 9: Youth Political Ideology, by Race, 2010**



Source: CIRCLE analysis of the National Election Day Exit Poll data (2010) collected by Edison Research

The data also show that one should not make assumptions about political ideology based on race alone. In 2012 exit polls, young African American men were far more likely to identify themselves as Conservative than any other gendered racial or ethnic group. In exit polls from 2010, a large percentage of young Blacks who voted (46%) identified themselves as either Moderates or Conservative Democrats, in the middle of the political spectrum.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Engaging young people in politics [requires collaboration among multiple sectors](#). Youth need the tools to navigate a complex political environment; in the short term, getting youth registered, investing in personalized outreach, and providing necessary information (such as where to vote, when to vote, and how to use the voting machine) are keys to increasing turnout. These efforts are even more critical in order to engage young African Americans. In the long-term, educating youth through strengthened civic education initiatives is a promising mechanism to engage youth in politics.

Young African Americans have seen increased engagement in the electoral process, likely due to the campaign efforts of Barack Obama and his presidency. It will be crucial to find ways to continue this trend of increased political participation as Obama's presidency comes to a close.

Some vital points:

- Despite increased voting and registration by African American youth, the 2010 elections suggest they were still under-mobilized. Campaigns and mobilization efforts for the 2014 midterm cycle should critically assess whether their strategies work for this demographic group.
- African American youth are more likely to have no college experience; therefore mobilization strategies focused on college campuses may have less of an impact on this demographic group.
- Given that many African American youth indicate that busy or conflicting work schedules prevented them from voting, early voting, mail-in voting, and absentee voting should be promoted in areas where these options are available—and they should be advocated where they are not.
- It is important to understand the gender differences between young Black men and women when it comes to past voting preferences, in order to tailor messages to each group.
- No one should assume that young African American voters are necessarily liberal or progressive. Campaigns and other outreach efforts should understand the issues of importance to them and address those issues in a personalized manner that appeals to Black youth.