



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

### Civic Engagement Among Minority Youth

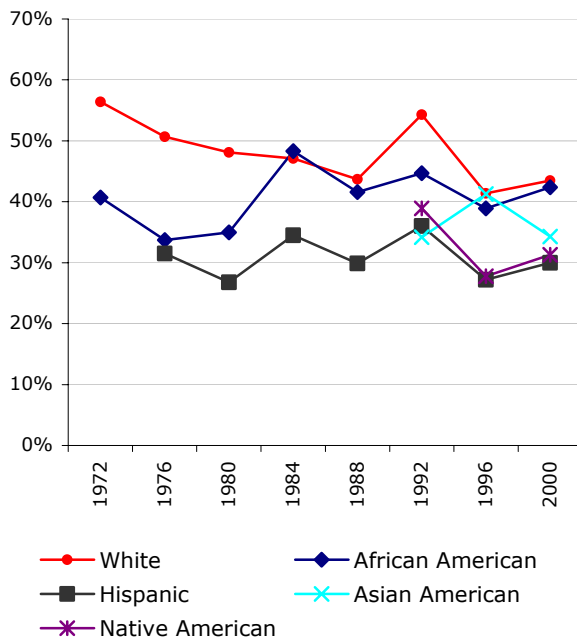
By Mark Hugo Lopez, Research Director<sup>1</sup>  
September 2002

There are many ways to measure civic engagement. In this fact sheet, information on three main measures, voter turnout, voter registration, and volunteering is presented. In 2000, there were an estimated 6.15 million young non-Hispanic African Americans<sup>2</sup> between the ages of 15 and 25, 52.9 percent of who were female. This compares to an estimated 27.4 million young non-Hispanic whites and 6.4 million young Hispanics.<sup>3</sup>

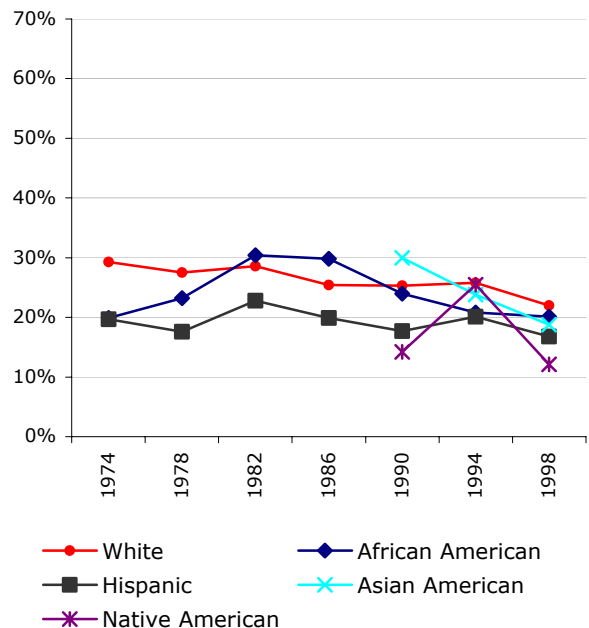
#### Voter Turnout

As reported in our fact sheet "Youth Voter Turnout has Declined by Any Measure," voter turnout, using the CIRCLE method,<sup>4</sup> for young people ages 18-24 has declined steadily

**Graph 1: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter Turnout, Presidential Years**

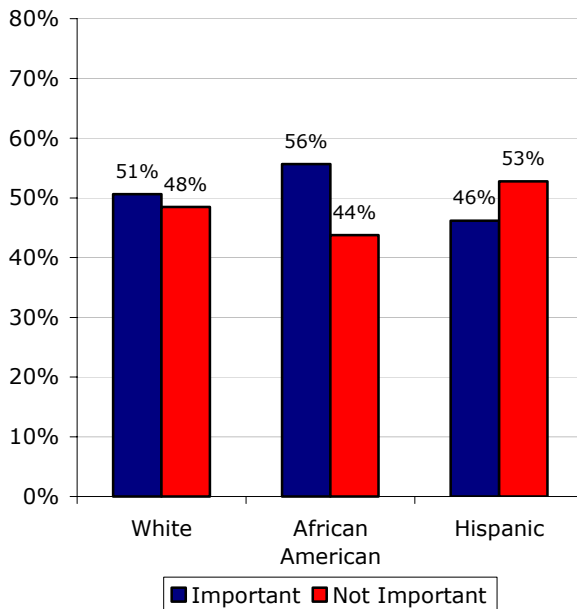


**Graph 2: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter Turnout, Midterm Election Years**



since 1972. Among young African Americans, the decline in voter turnout since the mid-1980s comes after several years of increased turnout, most noticeably in the presidential election year of 1984. By 2000, voter turnout among young African Americans had returned to 1972's level.

**Graph 3: African American Youth Ages 15-25 are Most Likely to View Voting as Important**



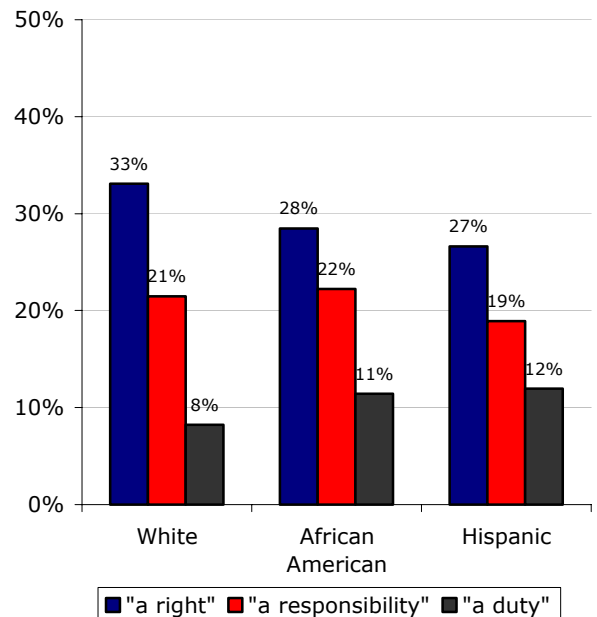
Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002

Among young people, approximately 30 percent view voting as "a right," with a similar view of voting evident across young whites, young African Americans, and young Hispanics.

### Views on Voting

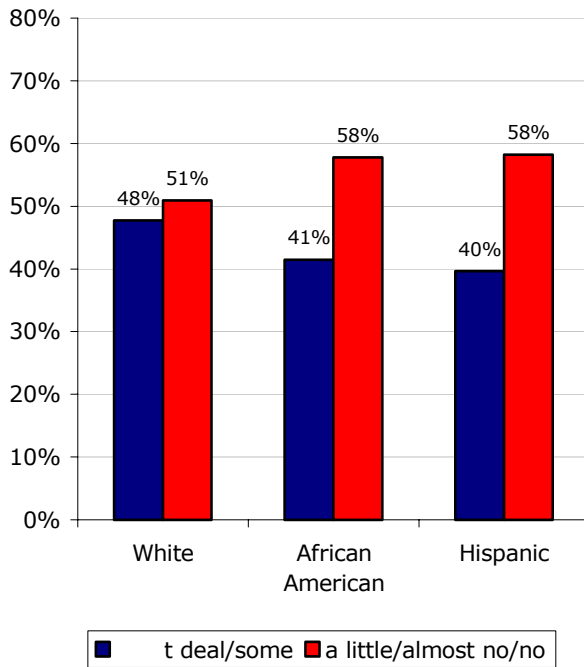
In a recent survey of 1,500 young people commissioned by CIRCLE in collaboration with the Council for Excellence in Government's Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and the Partnership for Trust in Government in January of 2002, among 15-25 year olds, young African Americans are equally likely as young whites to view voting as important.

**Graph 4: 30% of Young People Ages 15-25 Describe Voting as "a Right"**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

**Graph 5: A Majority of Youth Ages 15-25 Feel they can make Little Difference in Solving the Problems of Their Communities**

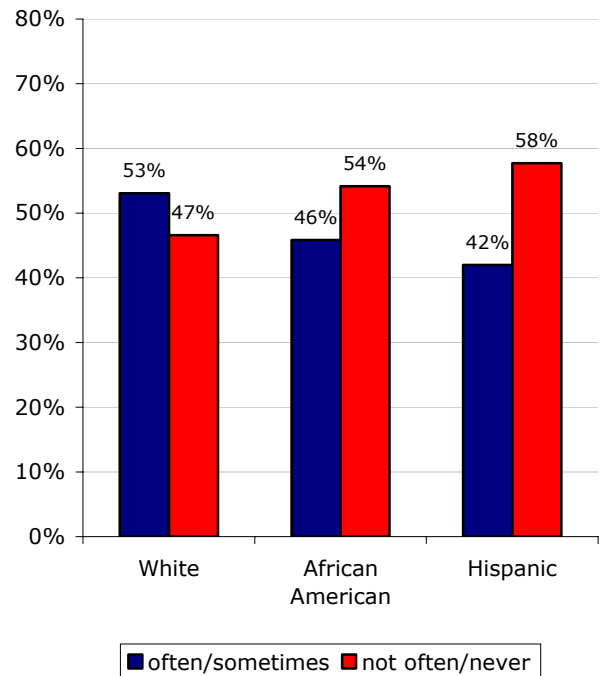


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

Hispanic young people are least likely to have discussed politics with their parents.

Young people feel they can make little difference in solving the problems of their community, with young African Americans and Young Hispanics feeling less efficacious than their young white counterparts.

**Graph 6: Talked About Politics with Parents, Young People Ages 15-25**

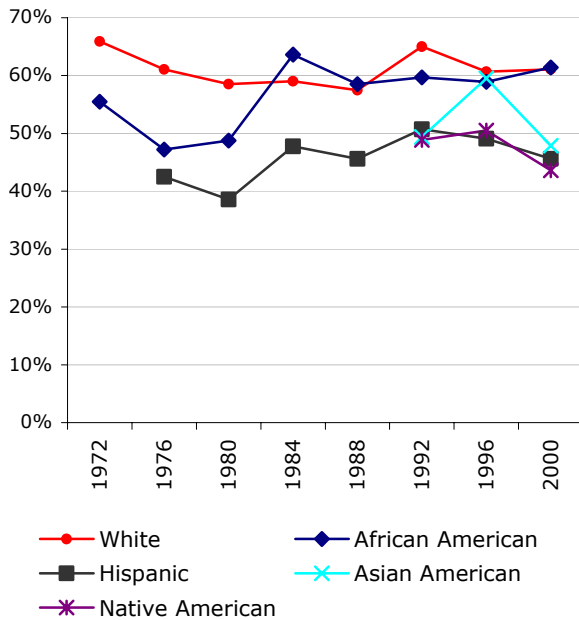


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

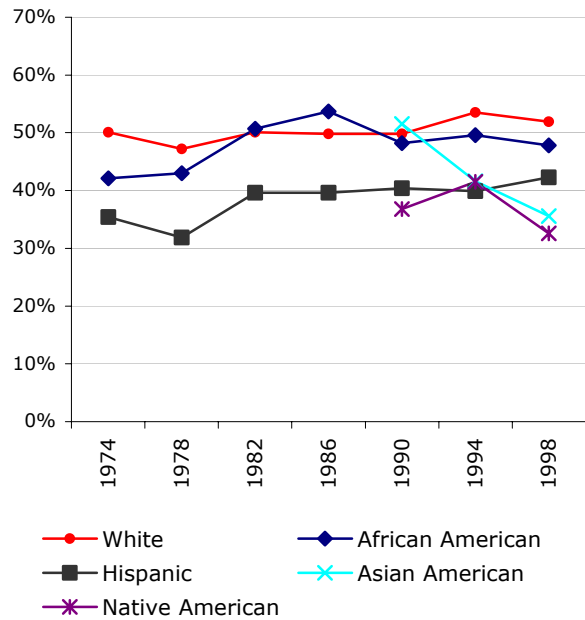
## Registering to Vote

Voter Registration rates among young people have remained relatively flat over the past 30 years, though since 1984 voter registration rates among young African Americans are statistically indistinguishable from that of whites. Young Hispanics continue to lag behind their young African American and white counterparts in voter registration rates.<sup>5</sup>

**Graph 7: Registration Rates Among 18-24 Year Old Citizens, Presidential Years**



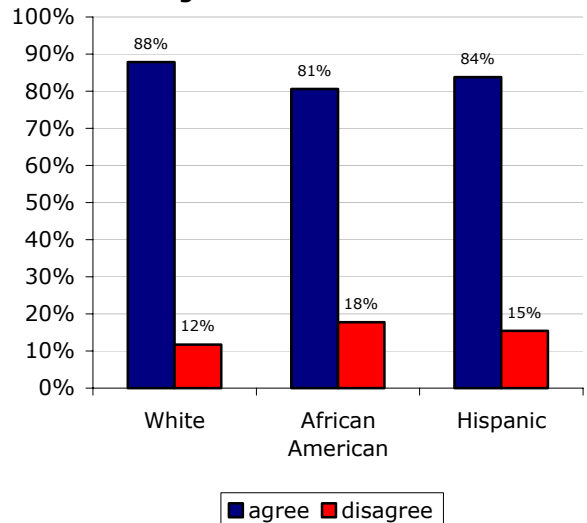
**Graph 8: Registration Rates Among 18-24 Year Old Citizens, Midterm Years**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplement Data, 1972-2000. Voter turnout is calculated using the CIRCLE method.

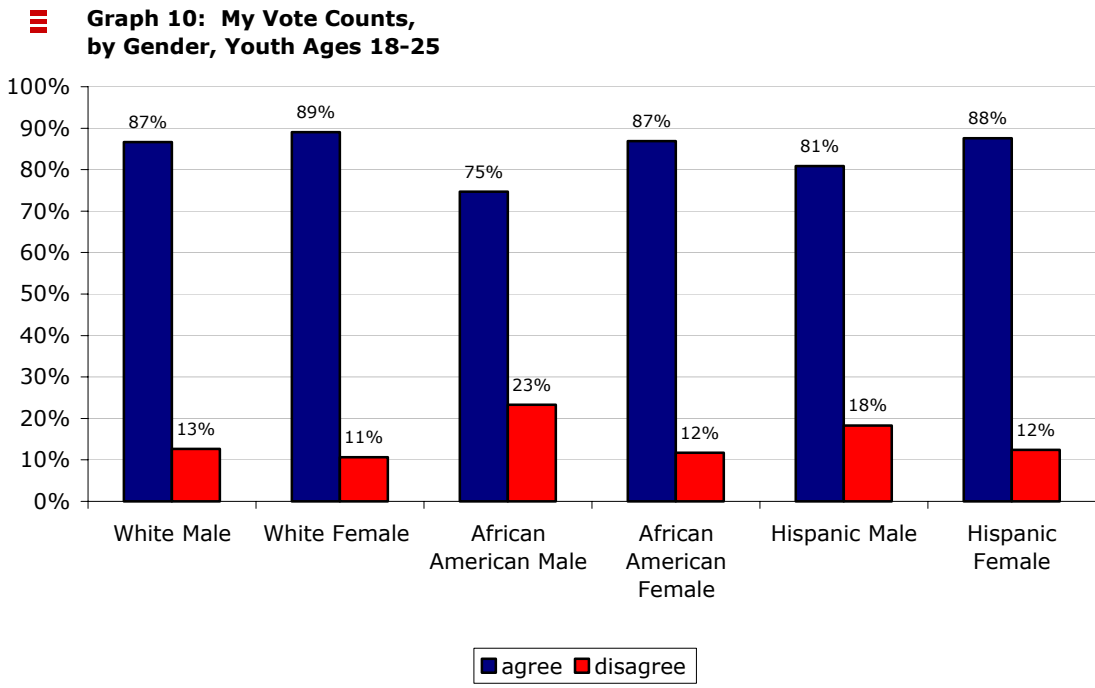
Strong majorities of young people feel their vote will count, though young African Americans are least likely to feel their vote makes a difference.

**Graph 9: My Vote Counts, Youth Ages 18-25**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

Young women are more likely than young men to feel their vote will count, irrespective of race or ethnicity.

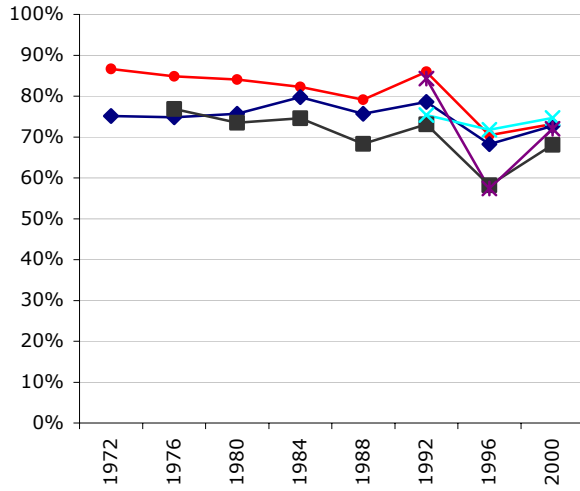


Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

## Voter Turnout Among the Registered

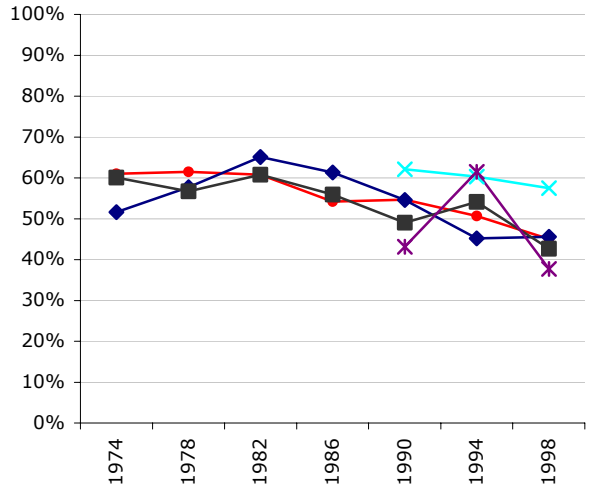
Youth voter turnout has declined, even among those registered to vote.

**Graph 11: Voter Turnout Among 18-24 Year Old Registered Citizens, Presidential Years**



● White                      ◆ African American  
■ Hispanic                      ✕ Asian American  
✱ Native American

**Graph 12: Voter Turnout Among 18-24 Year Old Registered Citizens, Midterm Years**

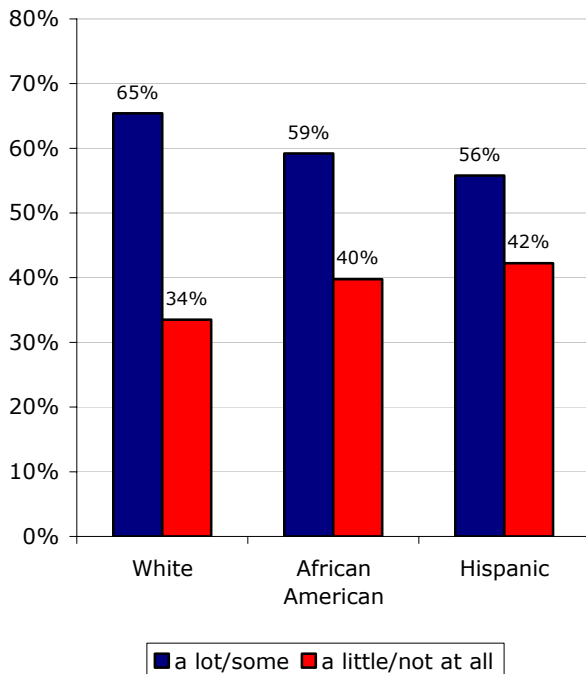


● White                      ◆ African American  
■ Hispanic                      ✕ Asian American  
✱ Native American

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplement Data, 1972-2000. Voter turnout is calculated using the CIRCLE method.

### Trust in Government

**Graph 13: Trust in Government Youth Ages 15-25**

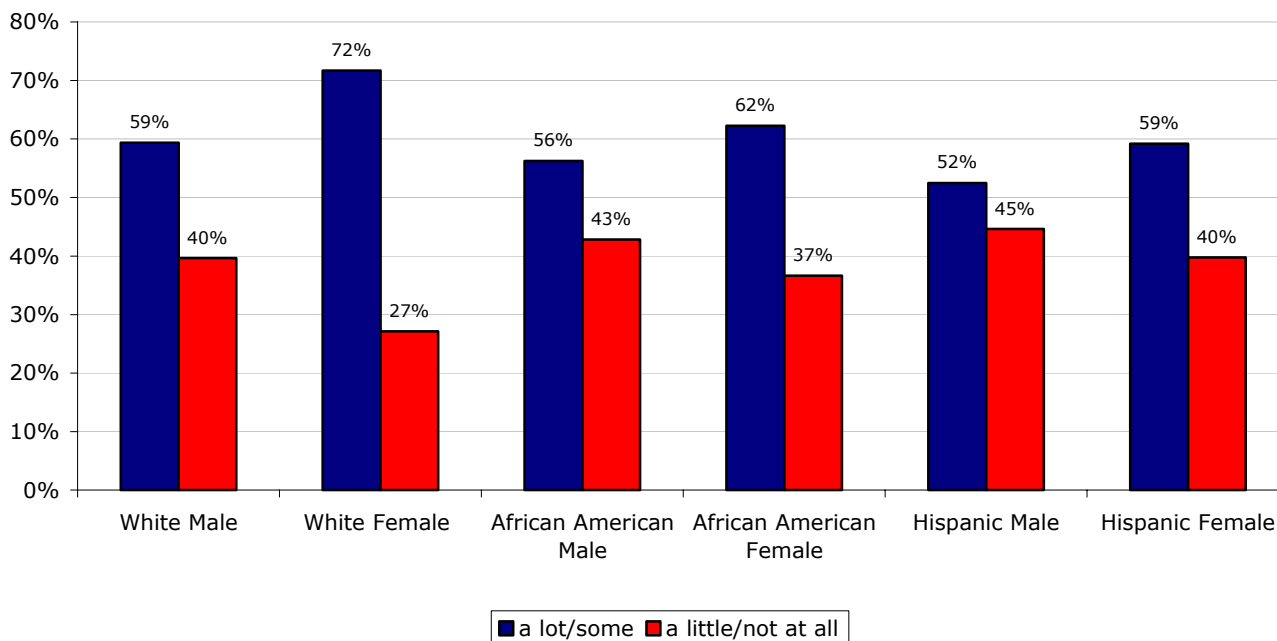


African American and Hispanic youth have less trust in government than their white counterparts.

Trust in government is highest among young women

Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

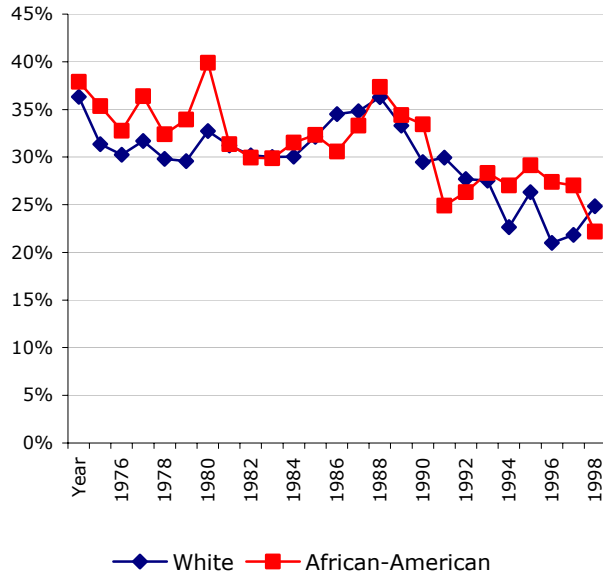
**Graph 14: Trust in Government, by Gender, Youth Ages 15-25**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

## Volunteering

**Graph 15: Whites & African-Americans, percent of High School Seniors who have "Never Volunteered"**

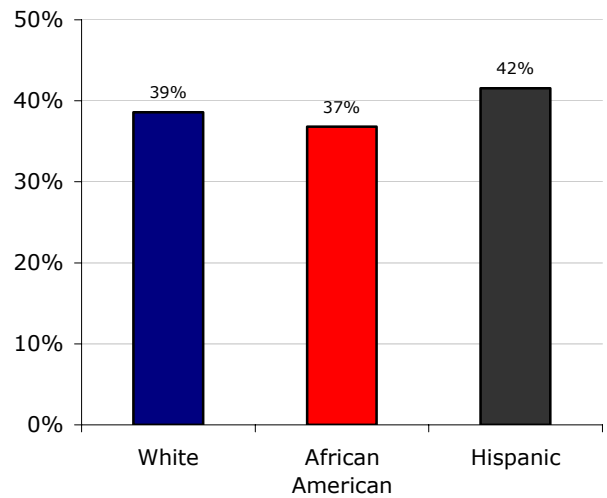


Source: Monitoring the Future, High School Senior Survey, 1976 to 1998.

Across ethnic groups, from CIRCLE's 2002 survey, Hispanic young people are most likely to say they have never volunteered, though this masks differences in gender. By gender, young white males and young Hispanic males are least likely to have volunteered their time.

Volunteering among white and African American youth over the past 10 years is up. Graph 15 shows that fewer young people are reporting they have never volunteered.

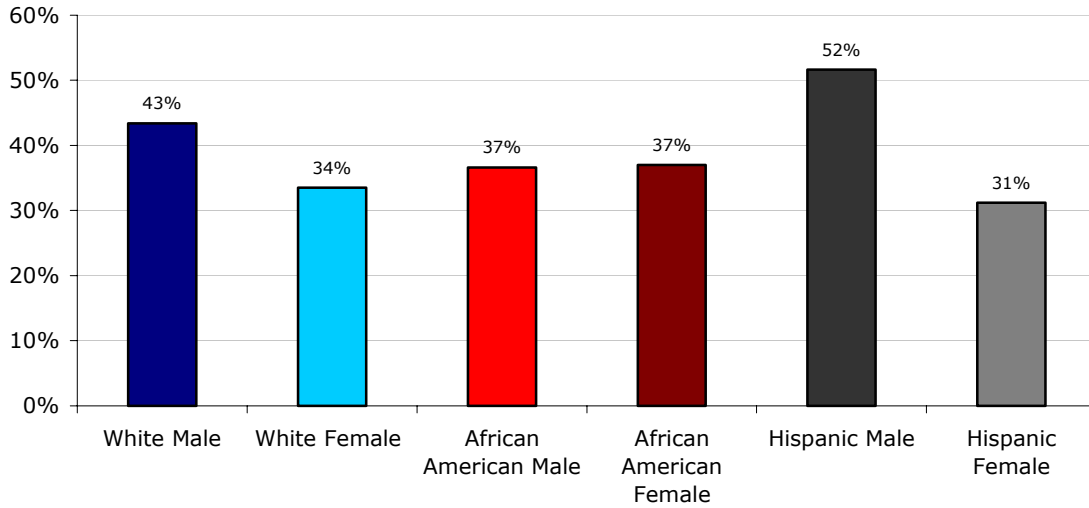
**Graph 16: Percent who Never Volunteer, 15-25 year olds**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

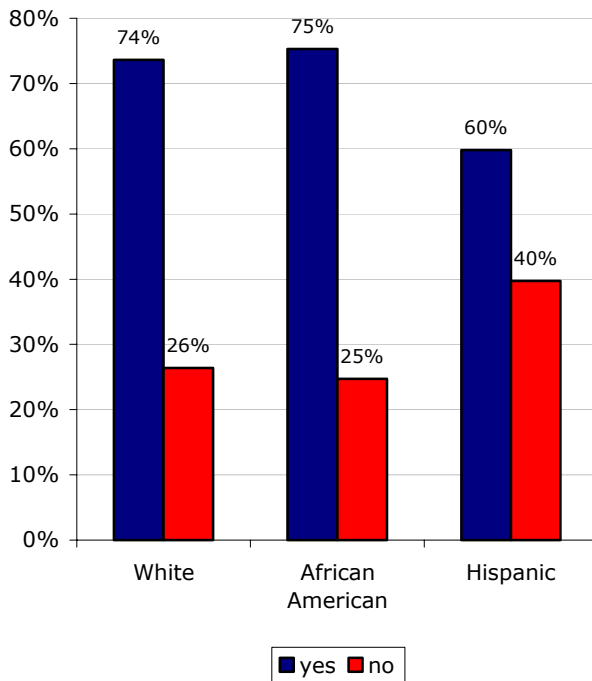


**Graph 17: Percent Who Never Volunteer, By Gender, Youth Ages 15-25**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

**Graph 18: Percent of Young People, Ages 15-25, Who Have Donated to a Church or Community Organization**

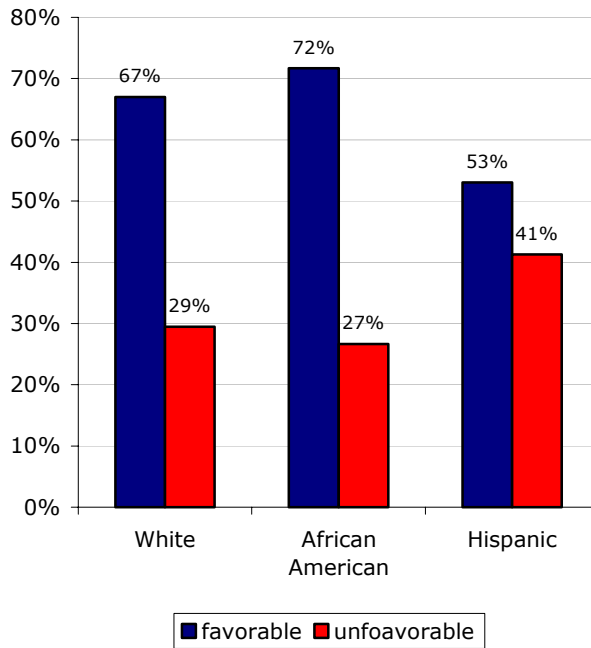


Similarly, young Hispanics are least likely to have donated to a community or church organization.

Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

## Support for Civic Courses

**Graph 19: Support for High School Civics/Government Classes, Youth Ages 15-25**

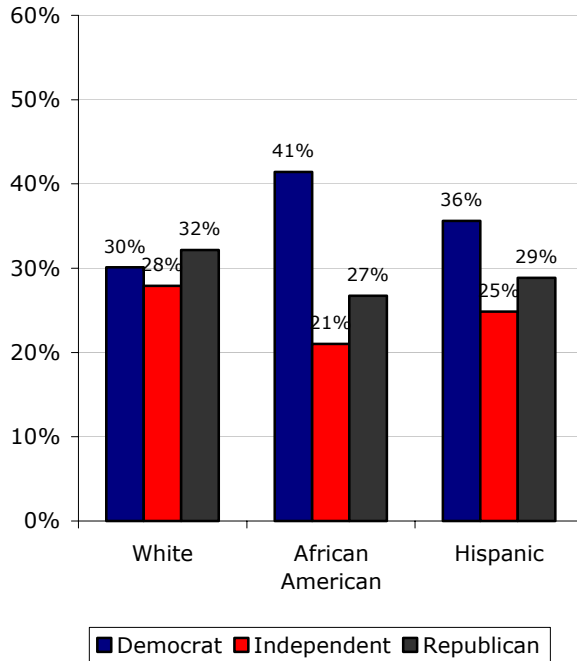


Young African Americans are the biggest supporters of requiring High School Civics/Government classes for graduation.

Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

### Political Party Identification

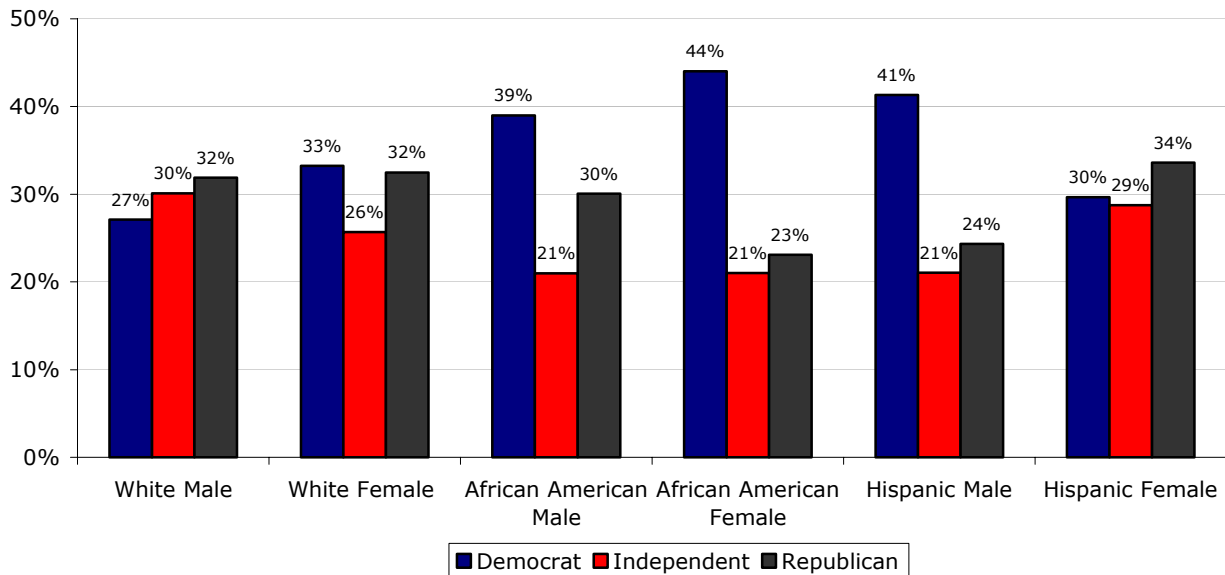
**Graph 20: Political Party Identification, Youth Ages 18-25**



Young African Americans are most likely to identify themselves as democrats. This is particularly true for young female African Americans.

Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

**Graph 21: Political Party Identification, By Gender, Youth Ages 18-25**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I thank Michael Olander for excellent research assistance. I also thank Bill Galston, Deborah Both, and Peter Levine for helpful comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.
- <sup>2</sup> All results are for non-Hispanic African Americans, non-Hispanic whites, and Hispanics.
- <sup>3</sup> These figures are estimates of the number of non-institutionalized young people in the U.S. Estimates are based on the 2000 November supplement of the Current Population Survey.
- <sup>4</sup> Data for Voter Turnout rates and Registration rates are taken from the 1972 to 2000 November Supplements of the Current Population Surveys. Each survey is completed within two weeks of the November elections, and interviews over 50,000 non-institutionalized individuals. Calculation of the voter turnout rate by the CIRCLE method excludes survey participants who did not answer the voting question or the registration question. Inclusion of "no answers" would result in a lower turnout rate than that reported here. For this fact sheet, voter turnout and voter registration rates are calculated for U.S. citizens only. For example, Voter Turnout among citizens is given as:

$$Voter\_Turnout_{citizens\_no\_miss} = \frac{(\# \text{ of } \_self\_reported\_voters)}{(\# \_of\_U.S.Citizens\_over\_age\_18\_who\_answered\_the\_voting\_question)}.$$

- <sup>5</sup> Similar to the measure for voter turnout, the measure of voter registration has been adjusted to reflect registration rates among U.S. citizens only, and non-responses to the question of voter registration.