



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

### The Youth Vote 2004

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Estimates from all sources suggest that voter turnout among young people in 2004 has surged to its highest level in a decade.<sup>2</sup> This is a sharp break from recent years, and suggests that the confluence of extensive voter outreach efforts, a close election, and high levels of interest in the 2004 campaign<sup>3</sup> all worked to drive voter turnout among young people to levels not seen since 1992. However, it remains to be seen if this increase in voter turnout in 2004 is part of a new trend, or is instead a spike like that in the 1992 election.

This fact sheet presents trends in youth voting from 1972-2004 using data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) November Voting and Registration Supplements. Additionally, it provides information on differences in youth voting trends among women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and people of different educational and marital backgrounds.

#### *Youth Voter Turnout Up Sharply in 2004*

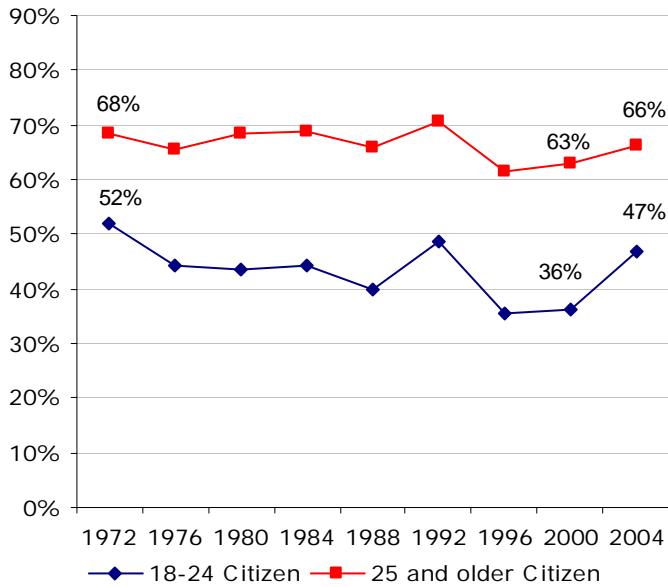
When we discuss the role of young voters in the outcomes of an election, we can describe their impact in a number of different ways. The first, and perhaps most useful, measure of young voters' influence is their turnout. The youth voter turnout rate rose significantly in 2004, and young people comprised the age group that exhibited the greatest increase in voter turnout between 2000 and 2004. Table 1 shows that participation among young people ages 18-24 jumped 11 percentage points between 2000 and 2004.

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>Percentage Point Difference</b>
18-24	36%	47%	+11 % points
25-34	51%	56%	+5 % points
35-44	60%	64%	+4 % points
45-54	66%	69%	+3 % points
55-64	70%	73%	+3 % points
65-74	72%	73%	+1 % points
75+	67%	69%	+2 % points
<b>All Ages</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>+4 % points</b>

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS Nov. Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004

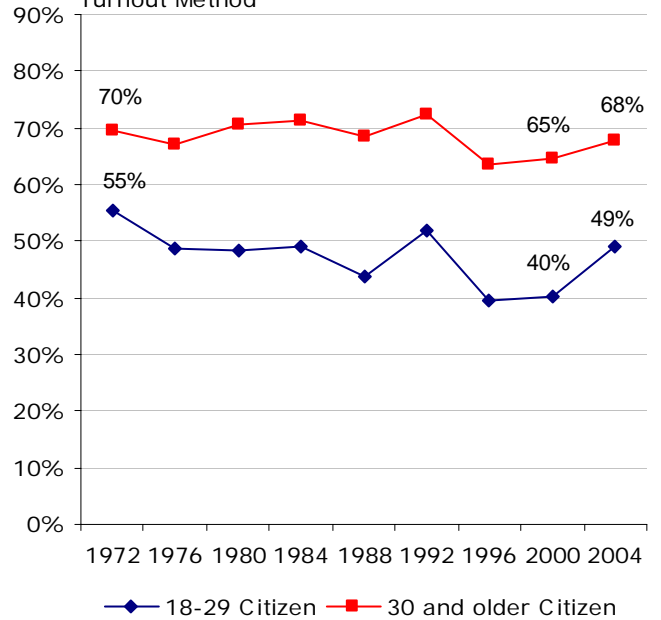
Graphs 1 and 2 show the voter turnout rate for young people versus older voters. In each case, the increase in voter turnout among young people outpaced the growth in voter turnout among adults in the last election cycle.

**Graph 1: Ages 18-24 and 25+, Voter Turnout in Presidential Years Census Citizen Turnout Method**



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

**Graph 2: Ages 18-29 and 30+, Voter Turnout in Presidential Years Census Citizen Turnout Method**



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

### Number of Votes Cast in Presidential Elections

Another way we can describe the role of young voters in elections is by directly examining how many votes are cast by members of that age group. Although American democracy relies on ballot anonymity, polls and surveys can give us a good estimate of how many votes are cast by certain groups. In 2004, approximately 11.6 million American youth voted in the presidential election, which represents an increase of more than 3 million from 2000 and the greatest number of votes cast by 18- to 24-year-olds since 1972. Approximately 15 million more total votes were cast in 2004 than in the 2000 election among voters of all ages.

<b>Table 2: Number of Votes Cast, Presidential Election Years 1972-2004 in thousands</b>					
	<i>All Votes Cast</i>	<i>Votes Cast by 18-24 Year Olds</i>	<i>Votes Cast by Voters 25 and Older</i>	<i>Votes Cast by 18-29 Year Olds</i>	<i>Votes Cast by Voters 30 and Older</i>
1972	85,766	12,215	73,551	20,745	65,021
1976	86,698	11,367	75,331	20,473	66,225
1980	93,066	11,225	81,840	20,718	72,348
1984	101,878	11,407	90,471	22,091	79,787
1988	102,224	9,254	92,969	18,513	83,711
1992	113,866	10,442	103,424	20,157	93,709
1996	105,018	7,996	97,021	15,649	89,369
2000	110,826	8,635	102,191	15,864	94,962
2004	125,736	11,639	114,097	20,125	105,611

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004

### Youth Share of the Electorate

A third method of examining young voters' effect on elections is to calculate their share of the electorate. Like their turnout and volume of votes cast, young voters' electoral share grew significantly in 2004—from 7.8 to 9.3 percent—representing their largest share of the electorate since 1984, when they represented 11.2 percent of the total votes cast.

<b>Table 3: Youth Share of the Electorate and Citizen Populations Presidential Years 1972-2004</b>						
	<i>Youth Share of Citizens</i>		<i>Youth Share of Votes Cast</i>		<i>Difference Between Share of Cit. Pop. and Share of Votes Cast</i>	
	<b>18-24</b>	<b>18-29</b>	<b>18-24</b>	<b>18-29</b>	<b>18-24</b>	<b>18-29</b>
1972	17.9%	28.6%	14.2%	24.2%	3.7%	4.4%
1976	18.2%	29.8%	13.1%	23.6%	5.1%	6.2%
1980	17.8%	29.5%	12.1%	22.3%	5.7%	7.3%
1984	16.4%	28.7%	11.2%	21.7%	5.2%	7.0%
1988	14.1%	25.7%	9.1%	18.1%	5.1%	7.6%
1992	12.8%	23.0%	9.2%	17.7%	3.6%	5.3%
1996	12.5%	22.0%	7.6%	14.9%	4.9%	7.1%
2000	12.8%	21.1%	7.8%	14.3%	5.0%	6.8%
2004	12.6%	20.9%	9.3%	16.0%	3.4%	4.8%

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004.

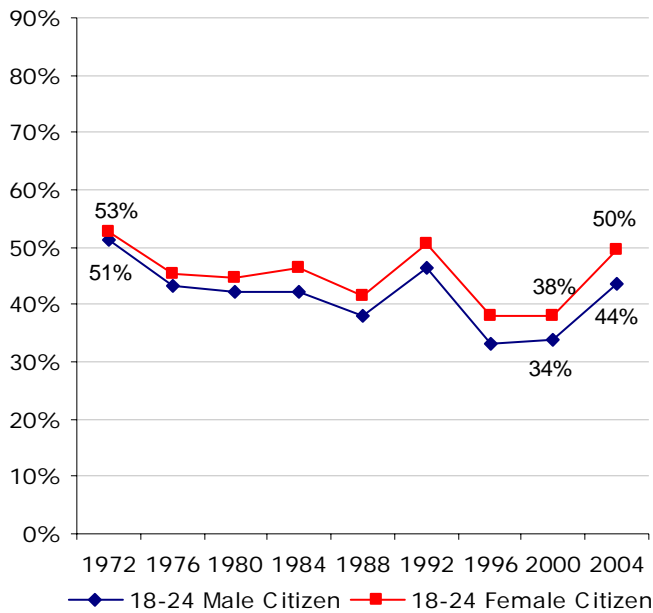
While each of these three methods of describing the impact of America's youngest voters requires a different set of calculations, they all display roughly the same trend—a steady decrease in turnout from 1972 until 2000 with a large spike in 1992, followed by a large increase in turnout in 2004.

The increase in youth voting was driven by changes in voter turnout among several different sub-groups within the youth population. The next section examines youth voter turnout rates for women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and young people of different educational and marital backgrounds.

***Young Women Have Become More Likely to Vote than Young Men***

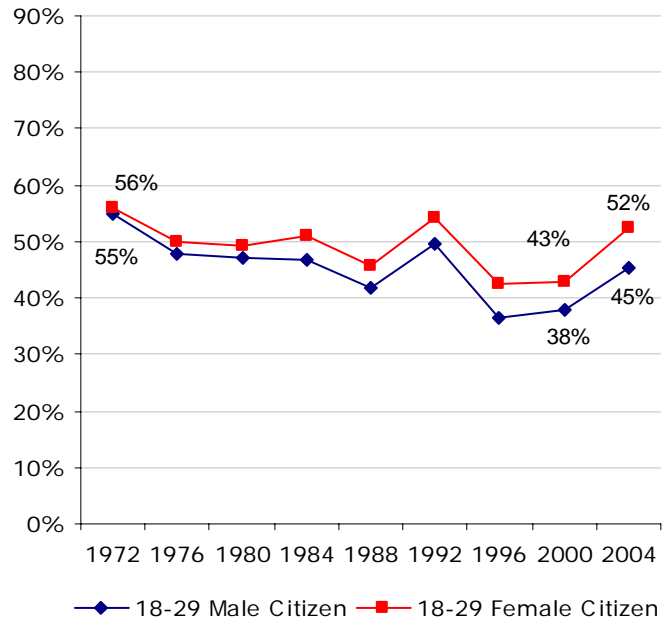
Although in the 1972 general election men and women were equally likely to go to the polls, over the past thirty years the gap between male and female turnout in presidential elections has widened considerably. By 1992, 51 percent of women ages 18-24 voted while only 46 percent of men did so. In 2004, this difference continued to widen to nearly six percentage points, although both genders posted significant gains in turnout over the 2000 election.

**Graph 3: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Gender, Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

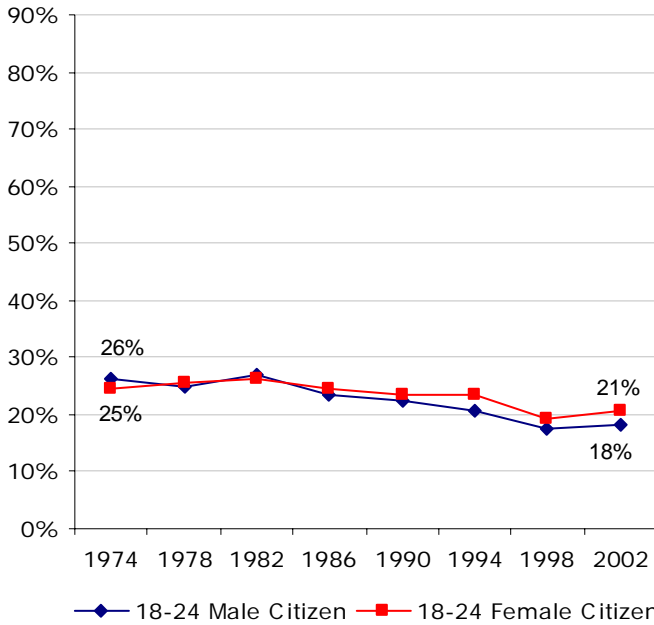
**Graph 4: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Gender, Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

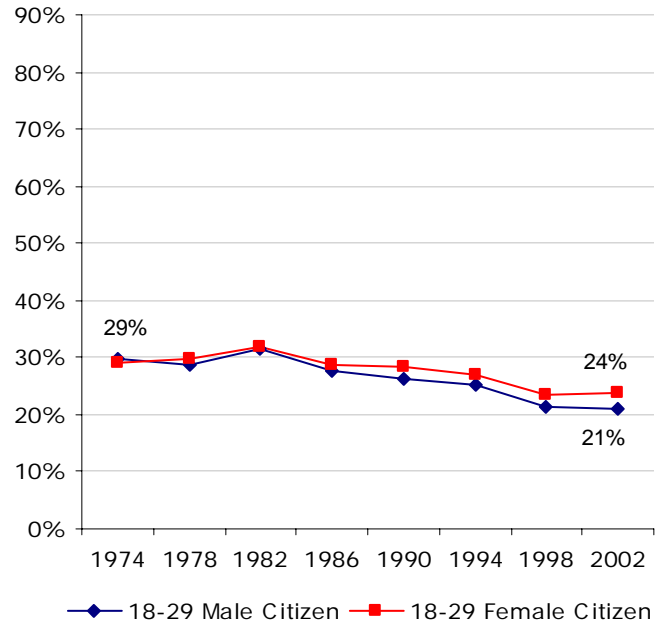
Turnout in midterm elections display the same gender gap, although neither young men nor young women made significant improvements in turnout in the most recent midterm election. Midterm turnout among both men and women has decreased slowly but steadily since 1982.<sup>4</sup>

**Graph 5: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Gender, Midterm Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

**Graph 6: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Gender, Midterm Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

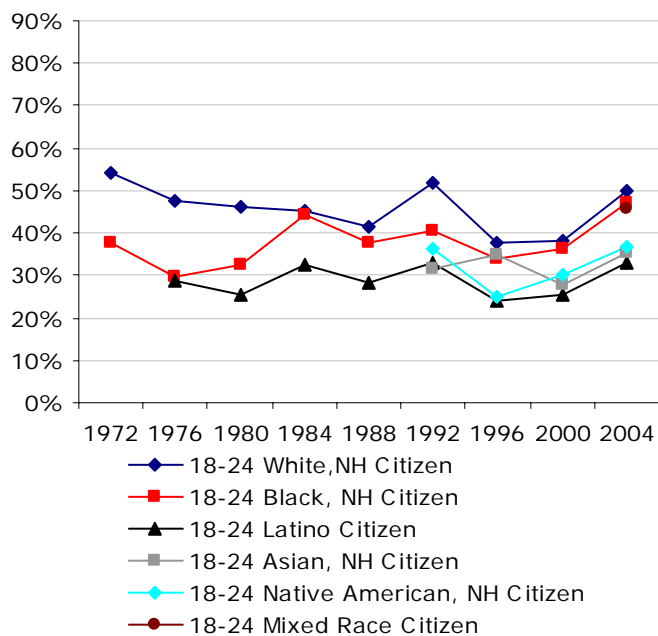
### ***Participation of Young African Americans Especially Strong in 2004***

Turnout among young African-Americans surged during the 1980s, as African-American turnout was nearly as high as turnout among whites in 1984. However, African-American turnout fell off in the 1988 election and remained relatively stable until the 2004 election, in which African-Americans experienced a jump in turnout of more than 11 percentage points—the greatest increase in turnout of any racial or ethnic minority group during the recent election cycle. Forty-seven percent of African-Americans voted on November 2, their highest level in three decades, just 2.5 percentage points fewer than whites.

While African Americans experienced noteworthy increases in turnout over the past decade, other racial and ethnic groups also made significant strides. Turnout among whites increased by nearly 12 percentage points while Asians, Latinos, and Native Americans ages 18 to 24 all experienced gains of five to ten percentage points since the 2000 election.<sup>5</sup>

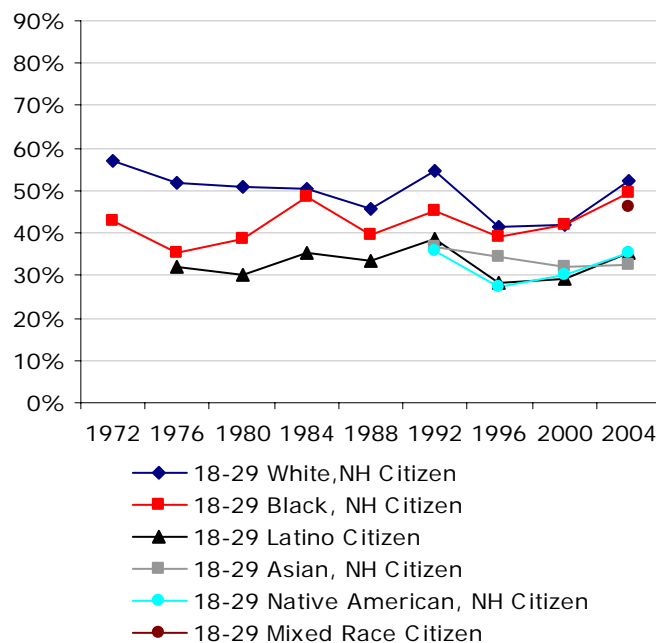
Asians age 18-29 comprised the only group that experienced significant declines since 2000, and now have the lowest turnout percentage in that age category. Also, the turnout among the youngest Asian cohort – those aged 18-24 – increased to only 1996 levels in 2004. While Asians had the second greatest percentage turnout of any ethnic group in 1996, they sank to the second-lowest, just ahead of Latinos and behind Native Americans, in 2004.

**Graph 7: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Race, Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

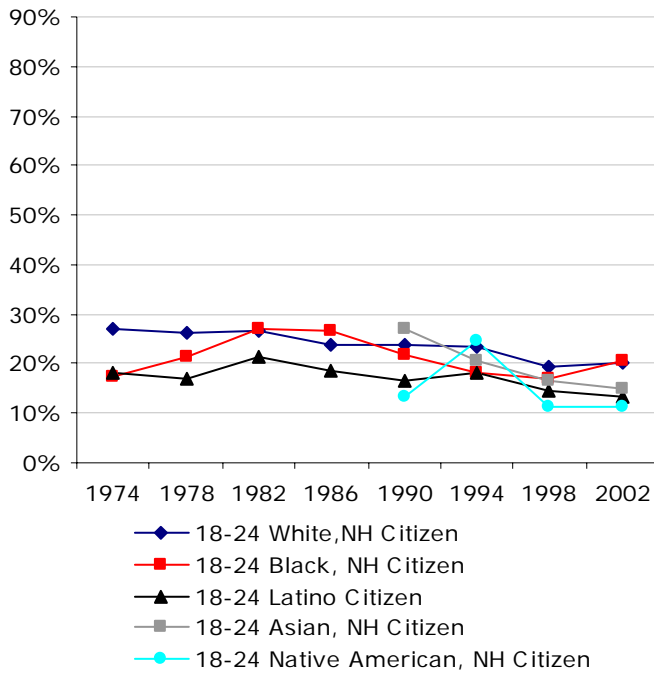
**Graph 8: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Race, Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

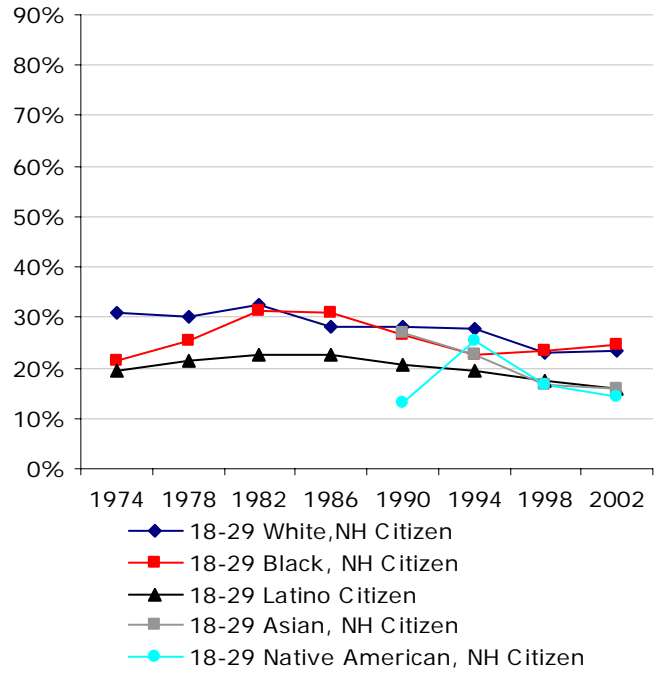
In midterm elections, the trend has been just the opposite. Native Americans were only about half as likely to vote in the 2002 Congressional elections as in 1994. Latinos, Asians, and whites have also experienced significant falloffs in turnout over the past two cycles. The only group to experience any gains in midterm elections was African-Americans. Black youth were more likely to vote in 2002 than any other race.<sup>6</sup>

**Graph 9: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Race, Midterm Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

**Graph 10: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Race, Midterm Years

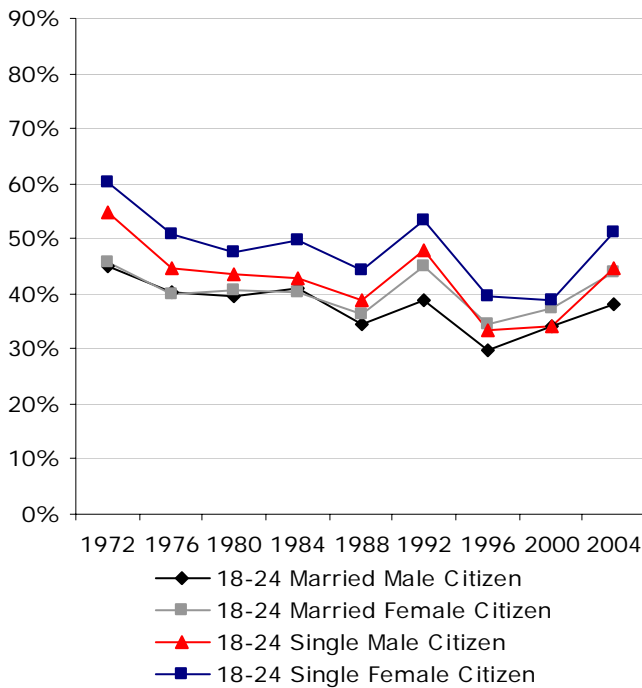


Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

### Single Young People Are More Likely to Vote than Married Young People<sup>7</sup>

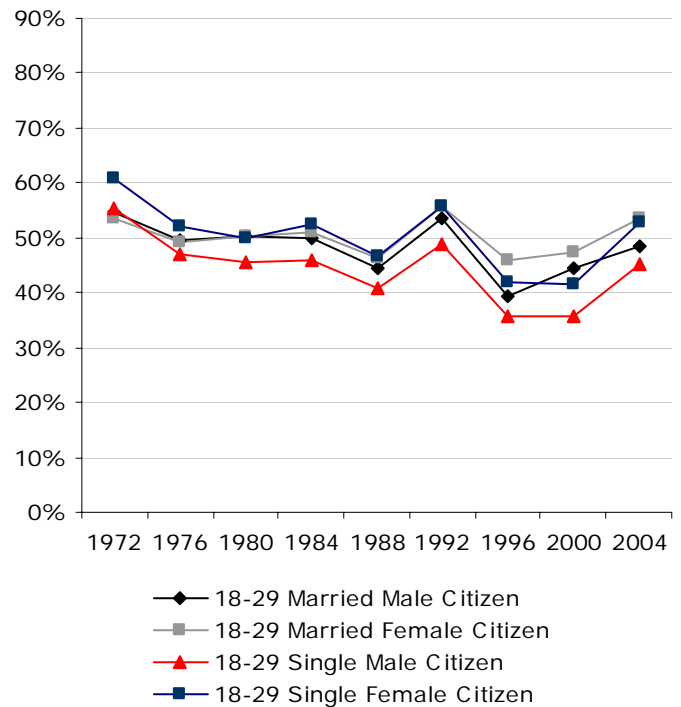
While single young people have consistently been more likely to vote than their married counterparts since 1972, the difference in turnout between the two groups has widened considerably since 1996. The 2004 election saw greater increases in voting among single young people than among married ones, as turnout for single females age 18-24 increased 12 percentage points, or about a third, since 2000. Single young men also experienced a turnout gain of nearly 10 points, while both married men and women saw increases of closer to five points. Single men 18-24 also turned out more often than married women of the same age group for the first time since 1992. However, surprisingly, in the larger 18-29 age bracket, single men were the group least likely to go to the polls, followed by married men<sup>8</sup>.

**Graph 11: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter  
Turnout by Gender and Marital Status,  
Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

**Graph 12: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter  
Turnout by Gender and Marital Status,  
Presidential Years

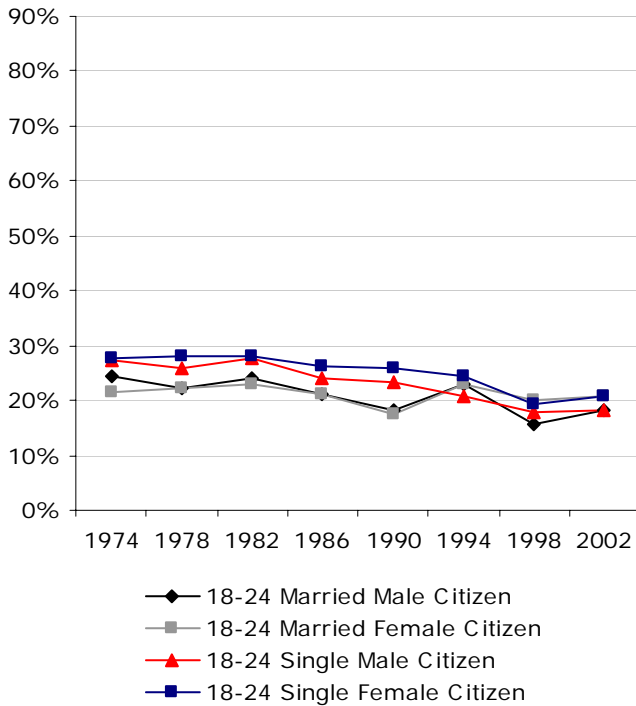


Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.



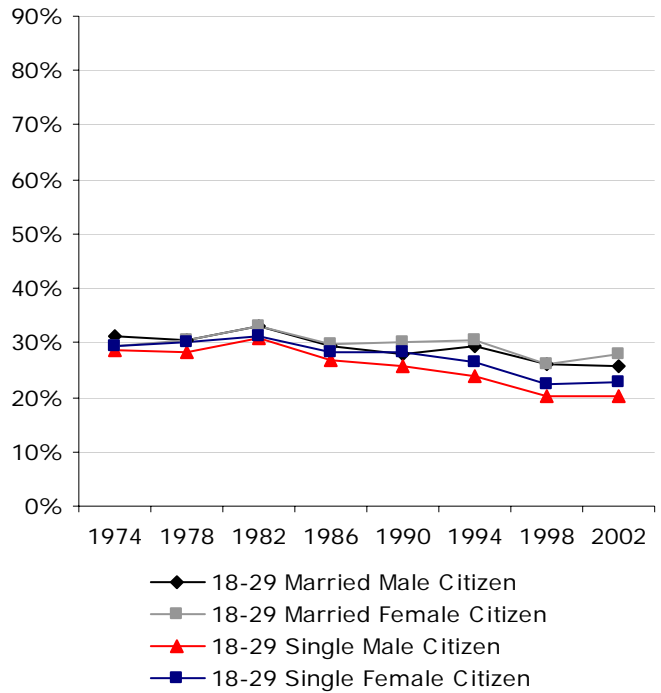
In midterm elections, all four groups have experienced turnout decreases since 1994. The gap that separates each group is small, especially among young people age 18-24, in which the range is only three percentage points from married women (the most likely to vote) to single men (the least likely). Among those 18-29, single men were also the least likely to vote in 2002. The 2002 data exhibit one interesting phenomenon: while the gap between those of different marital status age 18-24 seems to have closed in 2002, the gap among within the 18-29 age group has widened. This may be due in large part to significantly lower turnout among single men age 25-29 than among married women of the same age.

**Graph 13: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter**  
Turnout by Gender and Marital Status, Midterm Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

**Graph 14: 18-29 Year Old Citizen Voter**  
Turnout by Gender and Marital Status, Midterm Years

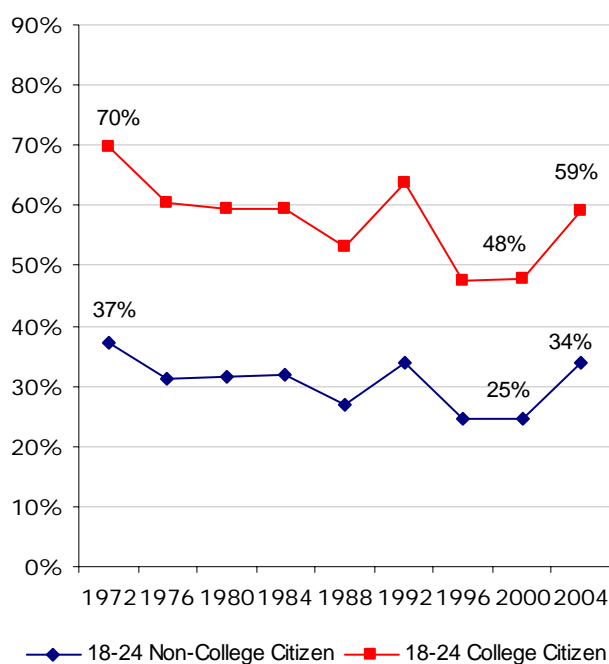


Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

### Young People with More Education are More Likely to Vote

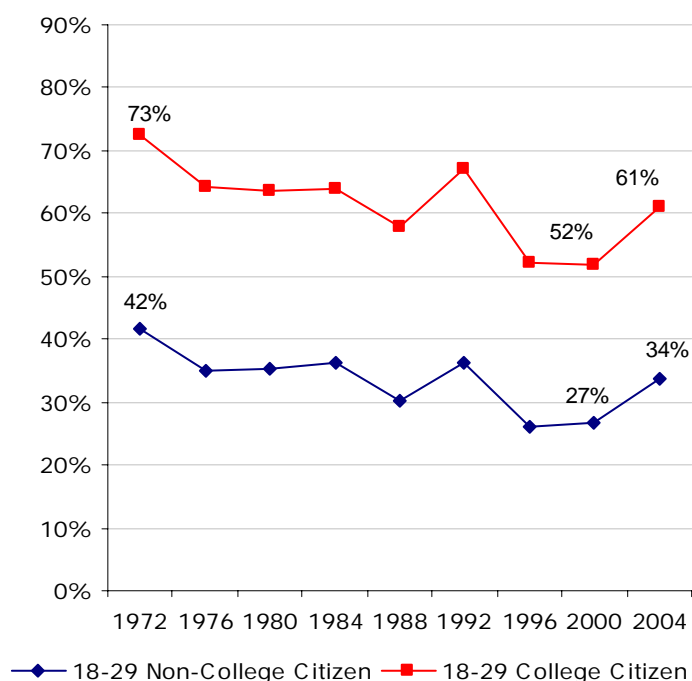
Educational level has long been understood to be a strong predictive factor of one's likelihood of voting. Higher-educated individuals—those who have had at least some college education—have consistently been almost twice as likely to vote as those who have received no more than a high school diploma. Like the gender gap, the education gap has also widened over the past decade. Between the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, turnout among college-educated young people increased two percentage points more than it did among lesser-educated youth.

**Graph 15: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter  
Turnout by Education Level, Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

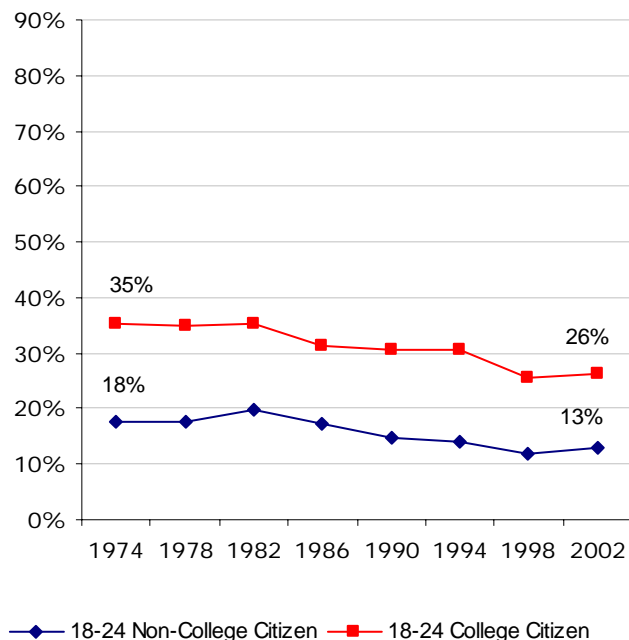
**Graph 16: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter  
Turnout by Education Level, Presidential Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

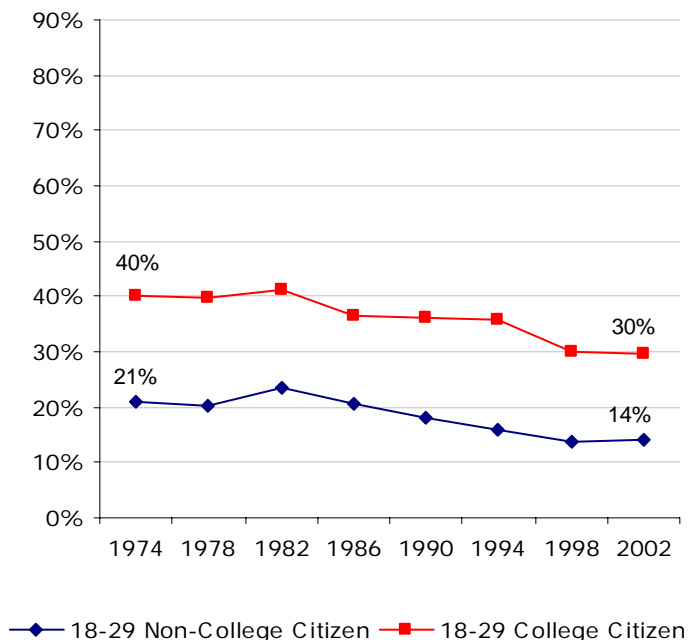
In midterm elections, both educated and less-educated youth have become less likely to vote since 1982. In the past 20 plus years, turnout has fallen off nine percentage points among college-educated citizens and five percentage points among those without a college education (ages 18-24).<sup>9</sup>

**Graph 17: 18-24 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Education Level, Midterm Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

**Graph 18: 18-29 Year Old** Citizen Voter Turnout by Education Level, Midterm Years



Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972 to 2004.

## Appendix

**Table A1: Voter Turnout Among Men and Women by Marital Status**

	18-24 Citizen	25 and older Citizen	18-29 Citizen	30 and older Citizen	18-24					
					Female	Male	Single Female	Single Male	Married Female	Married Male
<i>Presidential Elections</i>										
1972	52.1%	68.4%	55.4%	69.5%	52.8%	51.4%	60.2%	54.6%	45.8%	45.0%
1976	44.4%	65.4%	48.8%	67.0%	45.5%	43.3%	50.8%	44.8%	40.0%	40.3%
1980	43.4%	68.5%	48.2%	70.6%	44.6%	42.3%	47.6%	43.5%	40.8%	39.4%
1984	44.3%	68.9%	49.1%	71.2%	46.3%	42.3%	49.8%	42.8%	40.4%	41.0%
1988	39.9%	65.8%	43.8%	68.5%	41.5%	38.1%	44.4%	38.8%	36.1%	34.6%
1992	48.6%	70.5%	52.0%	72.4%	50.6%	46.4%	53.3%	47.9%	45.1%	38.9%
1996	35.6%	61.6%	39.6%	63.6%	38.1%	33.0%	39.5%	33.5%	34.6%	29.9%
2000	36.1%	62.9%	40.3%	64.6%	38.2%	34.0%	39.0%	34.0%	37.5%	34.0%
2004	46.7%	66.3%	49.0%	67.7%	49.7%	43.8%	51.2%	44.6%	43.9%	38.0%
<i>Midterm Elections</i>										
1974	25.4%	51.6%	29.5%	54.0%	24.5%	26.3%	27.8%	27.3%	21.5%	24.3%
1978	25.1%	54.2%	29.3%	57.2%	25.4%	24.7%	28.2%	25.8%	22.4%	22.1%
1982	26.6%	57.2%	31.7%	60.3%	26.2%	27.0%	28.2%	27.8%	23.0%	24.0%
1986	23.9%	53.9%	28.2%	57.2%	24.4%	23.3%	26.2%	24.0%	21.0%	21.0%
1990	22.9%	53.4%	27.3%	56.5%	23.3%	22.4%	25.8%	23.2%	17.5%	18.2%
1994	22.2%	52.2%	26.1%	54.8%	23.6%	20.7%	24.5%	20.6%	22.8%	22.9%
1998	18.5%	49.1%	22.3%	51.6%	19.3%	17.6%	19.4%	17.9%	19.9%	15.6%
2002	19.4%	50.1%	22.5%	52.4%	20.5%	18.3%	20.7%	18.4%	20.7%	18.3%

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004.

**Table A2: Voter Turnout by Race and Ethnicity, 1972-2004**

	18-24								
	18-24 Citizen	25 and older Citizen	18-29 Citizen	30 and older Citizen	White, Non- Hispanic	African- American, Non- Hispanic	Latino	Asian, Non- Hispanic	Native- American, Non- Hispanic
<i>Presidential Elections</i>									
1972	52.1%	68.4%	55.4%	69.5%	54.2%	37.5%	**	**	**
1976	44.4%	65.4%	48.8%	67.0%	47.5%	29.8%	28.6%	**	**
1980	43.4%	68.5%	48.2%	70.6%	46.4%	32.4%	25.6%	**	**
1984	44.3%	68.9%	49.1%	71.2%	45.5%	44.1%	32.6%	**	**
1988	39.9%	65.8%	43.8%	68.5%	41.3%	37.8%	28.3%	**	**
1992	48.6%	70.5%	52.0%	72.4%	52.0%	40.6%	33.1%	31.7%	36.5%
1996	35.6%	61.6%	39.6%	63.6%	37.7%	33.8%	24.0%	35.0%	25.0%
2000	36.1%	62.9%	40.3%	64.6%	38.1%	36.2%	25.6%	27.8%	30.1%
2004	46.7%	66.3%	49.0%	67.7%	49.8%	47.3%	33.0%	35.5%	36.6%
<i>Midterm Elections</i>									
1974	25.4%	51.6%	29.5%	54.0%	27.0%	17.5%	18.0%	**	**
1978	25.1%	54.2%	29.3%	57.2%	26.0%	21.6%	16.9%	**	**
1982	26.6%	57.2%	31.7%	60.3%	26.8%	27.1%	21.4%	**	**
1986	23.9%	53.9%	28.2%	57.2%	23.8%	26.6%	18.6%	**	**
1990	22.9%	53.4%	27.3%	56.5%	23.7%	21.6%	16.4%	27.0%	13.2%
1994	22.2%	52.2%	26.1%	54.8%	23.5%	18.3%	18.0%	20.5%	24.6%
1998	18.5%	49.1%	22.3%	51.6%	19.5%	16.9%	14.7%	16.6%	11.2%
2002	19.4%	50.1%	22.5%	52.4%	20.4%	20.7%	13.2%	15.1%	11.3%

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004.

\*\* Prior to 1990, survey participants of Asian background and Native American background were classified as "other". Only after 1990 are both groups identifiable in CPS data sources.

**Table A3: Voter Turnout by Educational Level, 1972-2004**

	18-24 Citizen	25 and older Citizen	18-29 Citizen	30 and older Citizen	Age 18-24	
					College	Non- College
<i>Presidential Elections</i>						
1972	52.1%	68.4%	55.4%	69.5%	69.6%	37.1%
1976	44.4%	65.4%	48.8%	67.0%	60.5%	31.3%
1980	43.4%	68.5%	48.2%	70.6%	59.3%	31.4%
1984	44.3%	68.9%	49.1%	71.2%	59.5%	32.0%
1988	39.9%	65.8%	43.8%	68.5%	53.1%	26.8%
1992	48.6%	70.5%	52.0%	72.4%	63.6%	33.9%
1996	35.6%	61.6%	39.6%	63.6%	47.4%	24.7%
2000	36.1%	62.9%	40.3%	64.6%	47.7%	24.7%
2004	46.7%	66.3%	49.0%	67.7%	59.0%	33.7%
<i>Midterm Elections</i>						
1974	25.4%	51.6%	29.5%	54.0%	35.3%	17.6%
1978	25.1%	54.2%	29.3%	57.2%	34.8%	17.6%
1982	26.6%	57.2%	31.7%	60.3%	35.2%	19.9%
1986	23.9%	53.9%	28.2%	57.2%	31.3%	17.2%
1990	22.9%	53.4%	27.3%	56.5%	30.4%	14.9%
1994	22.2%	52.2%	26.1%	54.8%	30.7%	13.9%
1998	18.5%	49.1%	22.3%	51.6%	25.7%	11.8%
2002	19.4%	50.1%	22.5%	52.4%	26.1%	12.8%

Source: Authors' Tabulations from the CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Research Director, Research Associate, and Research Assistant respectively. We thank Peter Levine, Carrie Donovan, and Chris Herbst for comments on previous drafts of this document.

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion of the different ways voter turnout can be calculated please see "CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Voter 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 1972-2004." All voter turnout estimates presented in this fact sheet are calculated for U.S. citizens only, and according to the "Census Citizen Method" described in CIRCLE Working Paper 35.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the level of interest among young people prior to the November 2004 election, see the CIRCLE Fact Sheet "The 2004 Presidential Election and Young Voters," October 2004.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see CIRCLE fact sheet, "Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men."

<sup>5</sup> We have defined racial/ethnic groups in the 2004 CPS November Supplements by defining anyone with Hispanic background as Latino, single race or ethnicity individuals who are non-Hispanic as white, African American, Asian American or Native American, and those of mixed race/ethnicity as a separate category. Since 2003, the CPS has allowed survey participants to mark more than once racial/ethnic category in describing their backgrounds. This potentially means that 2000 and 2004 may not be entirely comparable when identifying race and ethnicity categories of survey respondents. All programs used to generate race and ethnicity variables are available from the authors upon request.

<sup>6</sup> For more information see CIRCLE Fact Sheet, "Electoral Engagement Among Minority Youth."

<sup>7</sup> Preliminary analysis suggests that this relationship holds once we control for income.

<sup>8</sup> Multivariate analysis suggests that the difference in voter turnout between married and single young people is not driven by lower levels of educational attainment among young married people. However, young married people are less likely to have college experience or a BA.

<sup>9</sup> For more information see CIRCLE Fact Sheet, "Electoral Engagement Among Non-College Attending 18-25 Year Olds."