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Voting Patterns of Young People by Race and Ethnicity, 1988 to 2004

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May 2005

Preliminary estimates suggest that voter turnout among young people has surged to its highest level in a decade.² While participation among young people rose, there appear to have been larger surges for some groups. This fact sheet presents patterns of voter participation by race and ethnicity based on estimates from national and state exit polls.

The voter turnout statistics presented here are rough estimates and should be interpreted with caution. There exists no official record of voters that tracks race, ethnicity and age. This is why we must rely on estimates derived from polls and surveys. The estimates presented here are based on national and state exit polls conducted during the November 2, 2004 election. It is unlikely that these numbers will match precisely the results obtained from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS), the other major source for voting statistics. Finally, while this fact sheet is useful for what it tells about voting levels for various groups, it cannot explain why the upsurge in voter participation rates occurred.³

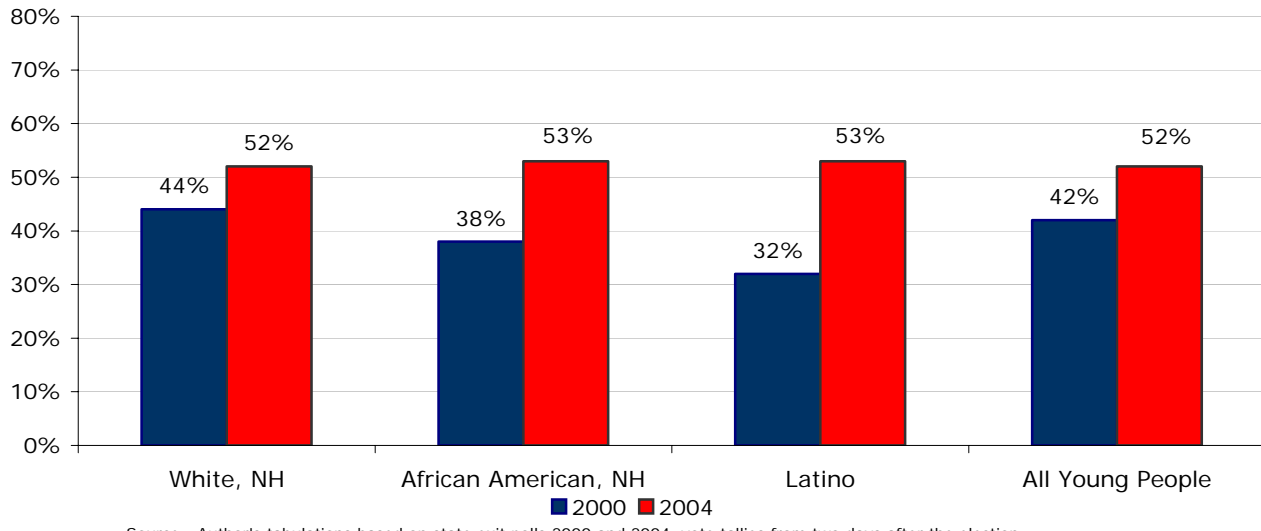
Voter Turnout Among Different Racial/Ethnic Groups, 2000 and 2004

There was a large surge in turnout between 2000 and 2004 among young African Americans and Latinos, based on estimates generated from aggregated state exit poll results.⁴ Between 2000 and 2004, voter turnout among young African Americans rose by 15 percentage points, from 38 percent to 53 percent. Similarly for Latinos, voter turnout rose by 21 percentage points between 2000 and 2004, from 32 percent to 53 percent.⁵

As noted in our fact sheet "Youth Voter Turnout 1992 - 2004, Estimates from Exit Polls," there is more than one way to estimate voter turnout, though we are limited at this time to data available from exit polls, both conducted by the polling firm Edison/Mitofsky. The first is the national exit poll and the second is CIRCLE's aggregation of exit polls from all the states and the District of Columbia. Using these two sources, we are able to generate a range of estimates of voter turnout for 2000 and 2004. For example, there is a range of four points (from 48 percent to 52 percent) in our turnout estimate for young, non-Hispanic Whites, depending on whether we use the national exit poll or the aggregated

state exit polls. See Table 1 on the next page for a comparison of voter turnout estimates for 18 to 29 year olds estimated using both national exit polls and aggregated state exit polls. I have chosen to rely on aggregated state exit poll estimates because of their much larger sample sizes; these figures are presented in Graph 1. For estimates of the number of votes cast by young people by ethnicity and race, see Table 2 on the following page.

Graph 1: Voter Turnout Among Young Voters 18-29 in 2000 and 2004



Source: Author's tabulations based on state exit polls 2000 and 2004, vote tallies from two days after the election, and population estimates from the November 2000 CPS and the March 2004 CPS Annual Demographic File.

**Table 1 – Estimates of 18-29 year old Voter Turnout
Using Exit Polls, 2000 and 2004**

	<i>National Exit Poll Estimates</i>		<i>Aggregated State Exit Poll Estimates</i>	
	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004</i>
White, NH	44%	48%	44%	52%
African American, NH	34%	51%	38%	53%
Latino	43%	53%	32%	53%
All Groups, Ages 18-29	43%	48%	42%	52%

Note: Author's tabulations from national exit polls and aggregates of votes cast obtained from state exit polls. Voter turnout rates are for U.S. citizens only, and utilize population numbers from the November 2000 CPS and the March 2004 CPS Annual Demographic File.

**Table 2 – Estimates of Number of Votes Cast
For 18-29 year old Voters
Using Exit Polls, 2000 and 2004**

	<i>National Exit Poll Estimates In Thousands</i>		<i>Aggregated State Exit Poll Estimates In Thousands</i>	
	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2004</i>
White, NH	12,445	13,188	12,342	14,440
African American, NH	2,018	2,985	2,246	3,092
Latino	1,682	2,575	1,259	2,608
All Groups, Ages 18-29	16,650	19,130	16,230	20,572

Note: Author's tabulations from national exit polls and aggregates of votes cast obtained from state exit polls. Table totals in the final row include Asian Americans and other racial/ethnic groups.

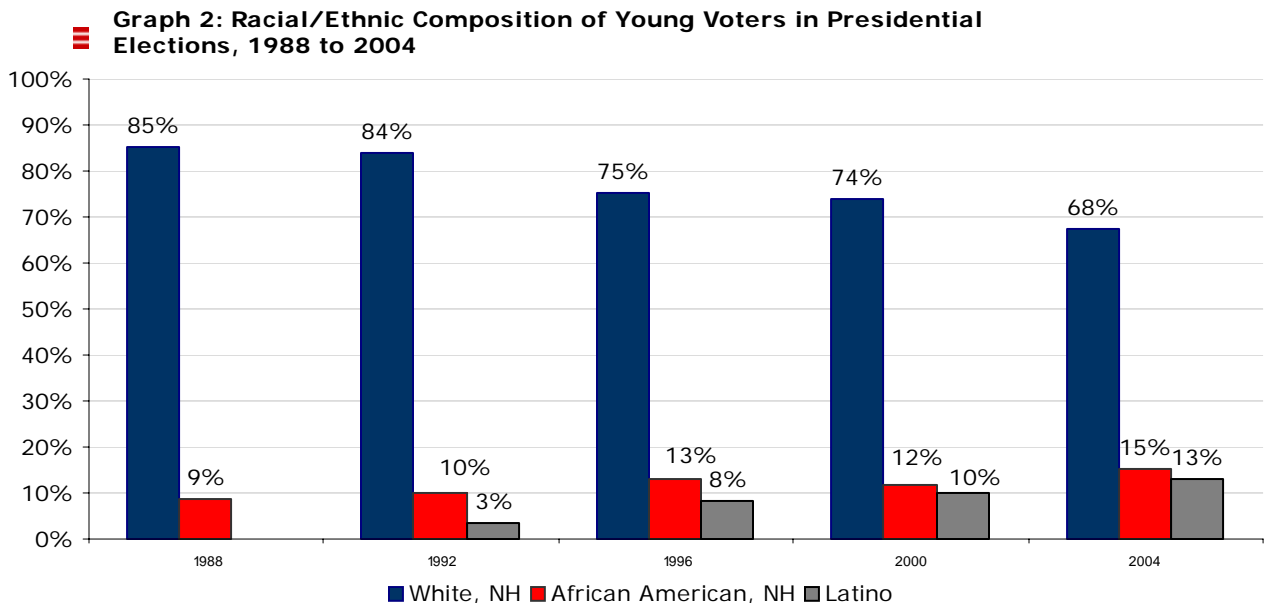
Changing Composition of Young Voters

Based on tabulations from the 2004 national exit poll, young African Americans increased their share of the youth electorate from 12 percent in 2000 to 15 percent in 2004, which is greater than the representation of young African Americans among all young citizens eligible to vote (see Table 3). Similarly, young Latinos increased their share of the youth electorate from 10 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2004. The percentage of young voters who are White non-Hispanic has declined since 1988, as the youth electorate has grown more diverse.

Table 3 – Racial/Ethnic Composition of Young Voters Ages 18-29 and Eligible to Vote Young People Ages 18-29, 1988 to 2004

	1988		1992		1996		2000		2004	
	All Eligible to Vote	Young Voters	All Eligible to Vote	Young Voters	All Eligible to Vote	Young Voters	All Eligible to Vote	Young Voters	All Eligible to Vote	Young Voters
White, NH	78%	85%	77%	84%	73%	75%	71%	74%	68%	68%
African American, NH	13%	9%	14%	10%	15%	13%	15%	12%	14%	15%
Latino	6%	***	7%	3%	9%	8%	10%	10%	12%	13%

Source: Author's tabulations from national exit polls and November CPS estimates, 1988 to 2004. The column "All Eligible to Vote" represents the distribution of race and ethnicity across all citizens. The column "Young Voters" represents the distribution of race and ethnicity across voters on election day based on national exit poll data.



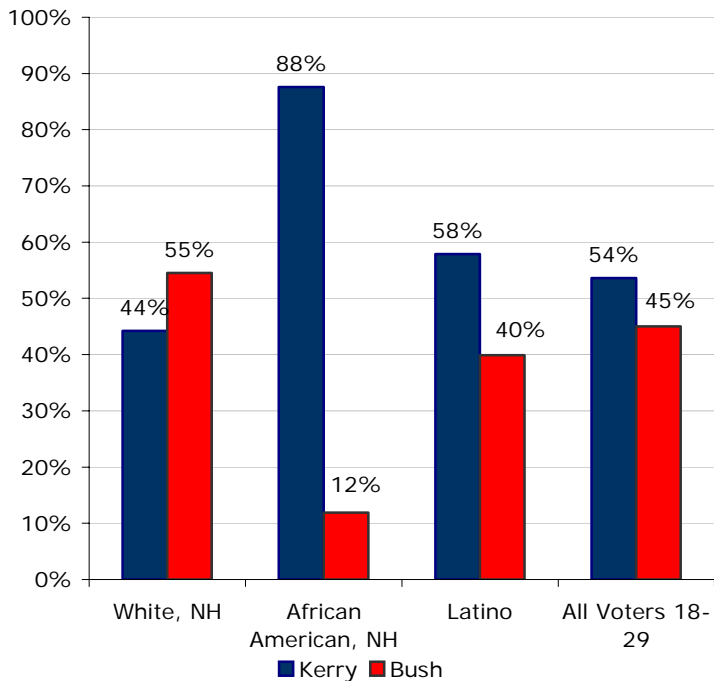
Source: National Exit Polls 1988 to 2004.

Support for Presidential Candidates in 2004

Along with voters age 75 or older, voters ages 18 to 29 were the only other age group to support John Kerry in last fall's presidential election. However, while young people supported Kerry overall, that support was driven by the very strong support of African American youth and the strong support of Latino youth. All African American voters supported Kerry by a margin of 88 percent to 11 percent; that margin was the same for young and older African Americans. All Latino voters supported Kerry 53 percent to 44 percent with support for Kerry stronger among young Latinos (58 percent to 40 percent) than among Latinos 30 and older (52 percent to 45 percent).⁶

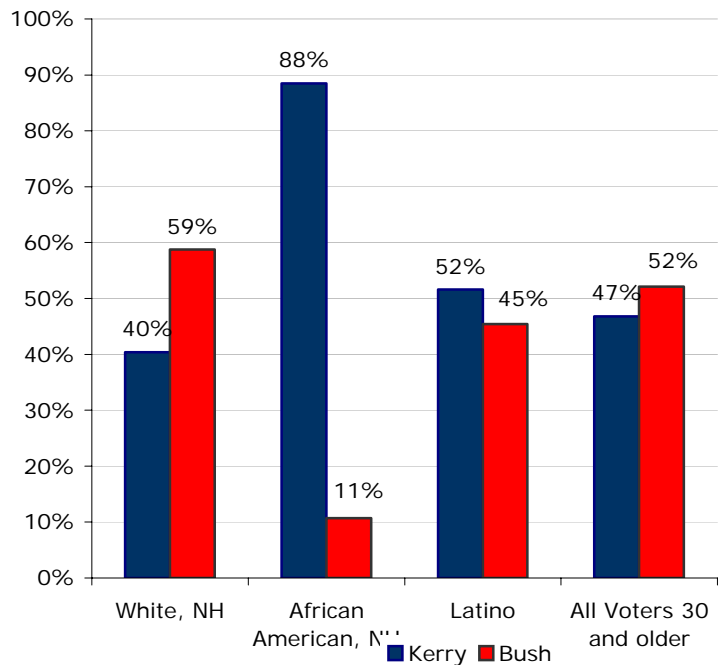
However, White non-Hispanic voters supported George W. Bush. For those White non-Hispanic voters between the ages of 18 and 29, the margin was 55 percent for Bush to 44 percent for Kerry; among those 30 and older, the margin was 59 percent to 40 percent. Voter support percentages for Bush and Kerry are displayed in Graphs 3 and 4, and Table 4 on the following page.

Graph 3: Presidential Vote among 18-29 year old voters, 2004



Source: 2004 National Exit Poll from the National Election Pool.

Graph 4: Presidential Vote among 30 and older voters, 2004



Source: 2004 National Exit Poll from the National Election Pool.

**Table 4 – Support for Kerry and Bush by Racial/Ethnic Group and Age
November 2004 National Exit Poll**

	<i>White, NH</i>	<i>African American, NH</i>	<i>Latino</i>	<i>All Voters</i>
<i>Voters Ages 18 to 24</i>				
John Kerry	48%	89%	55%	56%
George W. Bush	51%	10%	43%	43%
Margin of Error	3.2% points	4.4% points	6.8% points	2.5% points
<i>Voters Ages 18 to 29</i>				
John Kerry	44%	88%	58%	54%
George W. Bush	55%	12%	40%	45%
Margin of Error	2.3% points	3.1% points	5.1% points	1.9% points
<i>Voters Ages 30 and Older</i>				
John Kerry	40%	89%	52%	47%
George W. Bush	59%	11%	45%	52%
Margin of Error	1% point	1.8% points	3.9% points	0.9% points
<i>All Voters Ages 18 and Older</i>				
John Kerry	41%	88%	53%	48%
George W. Bush	58%	11%	44%	51%
Margin of Error	1% point	1.6% points	3% points	0.6% points

Source: Author's tabulation, National Election Pool November 2004 National Exit Poll.

Notes

¹ I thank Peter Levine, Tobi Walker, Lynda Edwards, Kevin Bonderud, Bill Galston, Emily Kirby, and Carrie Donovan for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

² See the CIRCLE fact sheet [Youth Voter Turnout 1992 to 2004: Estimates from Exit Polls](#) January 25, 2005 and [Youth Voting in the 2004 Election](#) November 8, 2004 for estimates of the increase in youth voter participation in 2004.

³ The differences can be glaring, and they are the result of different data collection methodologies. For example, national exit poll voter turnout estimates for African American youth from 2000 are much lower than voter turnout estimates obtained from the CPS. The CPS, conducted a week or more after election day, asks a random sample of respondents whether they voted in the last election, whereas the national exit poll surveys people at randomly selected polling places on election day (along with some absentee voters, who are reached by telephone). There are advantages and disadvantages to both methods, and it is desirable to compare CPS and exit poll figures to assess trends in voting behavior before reaching firm conclusions about turnout by race and ethnicity. Unfortunately, CPS numbers will not be available for several months. For more on the differences between Census and exit poll voter turnout estimates, see [Youth Voter Turnout 1992 to 2004: Estimates from Exit Polls](#), January 2005, by the CIRCLE Staff.

⁴ Estimates of voter turnout are presented only for white non-Hispanic, African American non-Hispanic, and Latino youth. Estimates for other ethnic groups are unreliable as sample sizes in exit polls, especially state exit polls, are too small to produce reliable estimates. Voter turnout estimates generated using exit poll results are calculated in the following way. First, the exit poll provides an estimate of the demographic composition of voters on election day. Second, we combine these demographic composition figures from the exit polls with published vote tallies from two days after an election to generate an estimate of the number of votes cast by each demographic group of interest. Third, we can generate a voter turnout estimate by dividing the estimated number of votes cast by a population estimate. For 2004, population estimates were obtained from the March 2004 Annual Demographic File of the CPS.

⁵ Note that turnout for African American, non-Hispanic youth appears, using exit poll estimates, to have surged tremendously between 2000 and 2004. However, the exit poll may have underestimated African American youth turnout in 2000. According to figures from the 2000 November CPS, voter turnout among African American non-Hispanics and White non-Hispanic youth were virtually the same, with voter turnout for 18-30 year old African American non-Hispanic youth estimated at 51 percent in 2000, and voter turnout for White non-Hispanic youth estimated at 48 percent in 2000. For voter turnout estimates based on the CPS, see the CIRCLE fact sheet [Electoral Engagement Among Latino Youth](#). Until the CPS containing data from November 2004 is available, there is no data source against which we can compare this result.

⁶ While the publicly released national exit poll data addressed many issues by adjusting sampling weights, there is still concern that estimates of Latino support for Bush may be overstated. For more on this controversy, see ["Hispanics paint a new picture"](#) in *USA Today* by Martin Kasindorf, November 10, 2004.