



Young Voters: Facts vs. Myths

As the November elections approach, Rock the Vote created this factsheet outlining common youth vote myths and facts. For more information, visit www.rockthevote.com/about/about-young-voters

Myth - Every election year, reporters and organizations hype the youth vote as the next big thing, but come Election Day, young voters fail to materialize at the polls.

Fact - It's true that there was a lot of talk about young voters in 2004, 2006, and during the 2008 primaries – but for very good reason. After a nearly continuous downward turnout trend since 1972, **turnout among 18-29 year olds was up significantly in 2004 and 2006, and more than doubled during the 2008 primaries.**

- In 2004, **20.1 million 18-29 year olds voted, a 4.3 million jump over 2000.** The turnout increase (9% points, from 40% to 49%) among the youngest voters was more than double that of the overall electorate (4% points). (U.S. Census Bureau)
- In 2006, the **youth vote grew by 1.9 million over 2002 levels.** Turnout among the youngest voters grew by 3% points over 2002, twice the turnout increase (1.7% points) of older voters. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- During the 2008 primaries, turnout among 18-29 year olds increased by more than 100% over the 2000 and 2004 primary levels. In many states, turnout doubled, tripled, and even quadrupled. Further, young voters made up a bigger portion of the electorate in virtually every state: for example, 18-29 year olds were 22% of caucus-goers in Iowa (up from 17% in 2004), and 18% of primary voters in Georgia and New Hampshire (up from 14% in 2004). (RTV calculations of exit poll data and official turnout numbers)

Myth – Even if more are voting, the youth vote can't make much of a difference in elections. They still vote at lower rates than senior citizens and other older voters.

Fact - The youth vote can make – and has made –the difference in close elections. Their sheer size, combined with growing rates of voter turnout, makes them a politically powerful voting bloc.

- Size matters. In 2004, the size of the 18-29 year old electorate (20.1 million voters) rivaled that of the much-coveted senior vote (22.3 million voters over 65). This year, it's likely to be even bigger. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- In 2008, there are 44 million 18-29 year olds eligible to vote – one-fifth of the voting eligible population. (U.S. Census Bureau)
- In 2006, the youth vote was the deciding factor in several races.
 - **Montana Senate:** Tester defeated Burns by 3,562 votes; 18-29 turnout was up by 39,106 votes over 2002.
 - **Virginia Senate:** Webb defeated Allen by 9,329 votes; 18-29 turnout was up by 110,453 votes over 2002.
 - **CT-02:** Joe Courtney won this congressional election by 83 votes; turnout at the University of Connecticut polling place was up 10x that.
- In the 2008 primaries, young voters propelled the winners to victory in several states, including Barack Obama and Mike Huckabee in Iowa, and Hillary Clinton and John McCain in New Hampshire. Ultimately, the candidates who won the nominations – Obama and McCain – were the candidates who won their parties' youth vote across the board.

Myth – Just because they registered doesn't mean they will vote. Historically, new registrants vote at low rates.

Fact – In fact, new registrants vote at high levels, as do young registrants. In 2004, **81.6 percent of registered 18-29 year olds voted.** (U.S. Census Bureau) Broken down among the youngest and newest voters, the Census data shows that:

- 83% of registered 18-year-olds voted;
- 79% of registered 19-year-olds voted;
- 81% of registered 20-year-olds voted;
- 82% of registered 21-year-olds voted.

Nearly all of these voters were "new" by virtue of age, and all were new to a presidential election. Overall, newly registered young adults voted at very high rates.

Further, the amount of mobilization directed at these new, young voters is unprecedented – turnout efforts in 2008 are bigger and better than they were even in 2004. Rock the Vote and our nonpartisan youth group partners will reach more than two million young adults with online, broadcast, and peer-to-peer get-out-the-vote reminders, the presidential campaigns have invested resources in youth vote outreach at levels never before seen, and partisan youth organizations are running aggressive efforts in several states.

Myth – Howard Dean lost the 2004 primaries because young people didn't vote, John Kerry lost the 2004 election because young people didn't vote, and so on – there's a long history of candidates relying the youth vote and losing because of it.

Fact – Correlation does not equal causation. Especially when you look at the facts.

Howard Dean, 2004 caucuses – Lost the Iowa caucuses, yes. Because of the youth vote, no. Youth turnout to the 2004 caucuses quadrupled in 2004 over 2000 (CIRCLE) – but they went for John Kerry, not Howard Dean. (CNN entrance poll) And Kerry won.

John Kerry, 2004 general election – Lost the election, yes. Because of the youth vote, no. 18-29 year olds voted by a nine-point margin for John Kerry (CNN exit poll) and turned out in record numbers. (U.S. Census Bureau) But Kerry lost because 18-29 year olds were the *only* age group he won – he lost every other age cohort. He had no chance no matter how many 18-29 year olds voted – no single age group could swing a national election, from the youngest to senior citizens. It's mathematically impossible.

Examples from the primaries and 2006 show, however, that in a close race a candidate can win if he or she mobilizes the youth vote – in an age of razor-thin margins, a group as large as young voters can certainly make the difference.

On November 4th, the presidential election will almost certainly be close, as will dozens of state, congressional, and local races. Candidates who successfully mobilize the youth vote will benefit. Young people will turn out in large numbers and will play a major role in the outcome of the election. All that remains to be seen is exactly what the role will be.

About Rock the Vote: Rock the Vote's mission is to engage and build the political power of young people in order to achieve progressive change in our country. Rock the Vote uses music, popular culture and new technologies to engage and incite young people to register and vote in every election. And we give young people the tools to identify, learn about, and take action on the issues that affect their lives, and leverage their power in the political process. Rock the Vote is creative, effective, and controlled by nobody's agenda but our own – we tell it like it is and pride ourselves on being a trusted source for information on politics. We empower the 44 million young people in America who want to step up, claim their voice in the political process, and change the way politics is done. www.RockTheVote.com