

Electoral Engagement among Young Latinos

**By: Felicia M. Sullivan, Senior Researcher; and Surbhi Godsay, Researcher
September 2014**

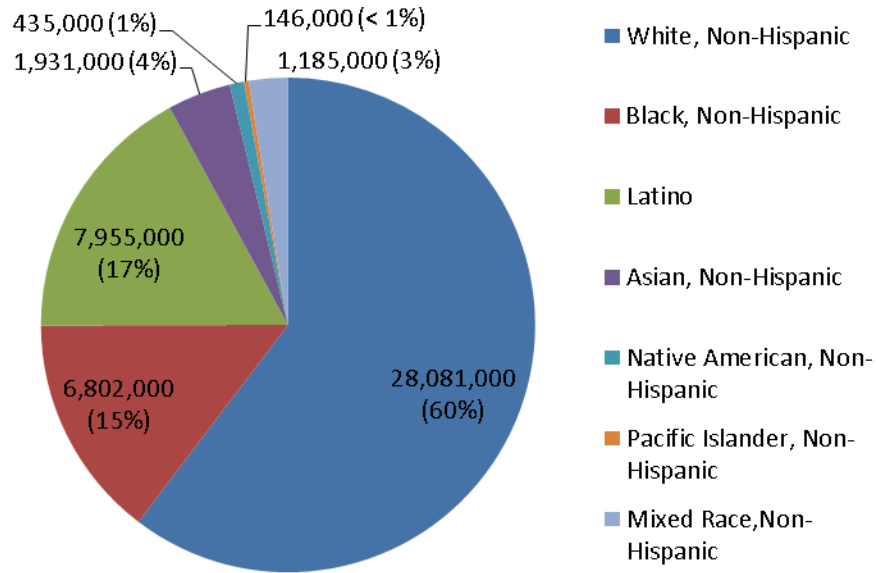
With racial and ethnic diversity among youth (ages 18-29) growing every year, it is increasingly important to understand how young people of different backgrounds participate in the nation's political and public life. Furthermore, young voters are an increasingly powerful part of the electorate, youth constituted 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 [African American youth](#) and [Asian American youth](#)), examines historical data on the civic and political engagement of young Latinos¹. Drawing on this data, we make recommendations on how to engage Latino youth in the upcoming 2014 midterm election.

Traditionally, Latino youth vote and are registered to vote at significantly lower levels than their White and African American peers. They are the most "civically alienated" group and feel their votes don't make a difference. However, between 2008 and 2012, Latino youth saw an increase in their voter registration rates while their peers of other ethnic backgrounds all experienced declines.

¹ The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably through this fact sheet. "Latina" is sometimes used when referring to Hispanic women.

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



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

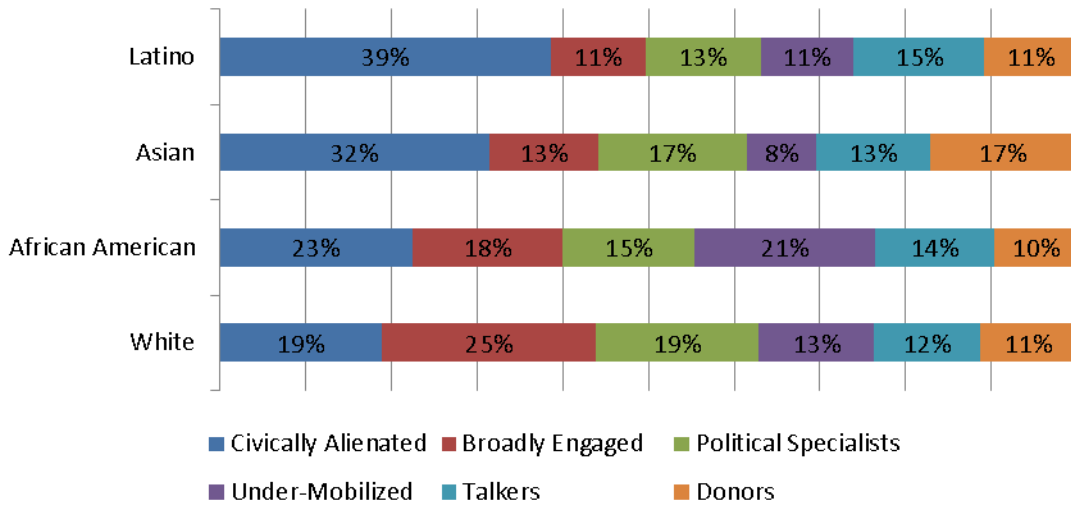
Latino Youth, Political and Civic Engagement Patterns and Clusters

Civic engagement comprises more than just voting, and previous research shows that youth engage politically and civically in diverse ways. To produce an overview of their patterns of engagement, we have used cluster analysis, which groups people into large categories.

In 2010, youth overall broke into six different clusters of engagement (or lack thereof), with just over a fifth (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*). During the last midterm election, Latino youth were by far the most “civically alienated” and the least likely to be “broadly engaged.”

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

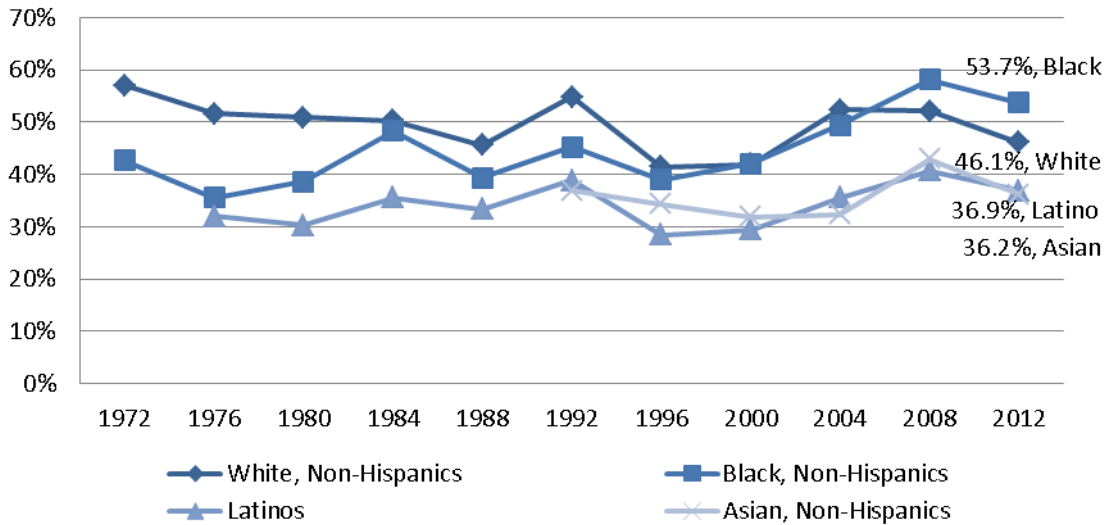


Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey (CPS) November Civic Engagement Supplement, 2010

Voter Turnout among Latino Youth

In the last presidential election, young Latinos voted at rates significantly lower than their African American or White counterparts. A similar gap was also seen during the 2010 midterm election. Despite their lower turnout in 2012, young Latinas, along with young African American women, were the strongest supporters of President Obama. Young men of Hispanic descent also showed significant support of the president. Those [high levels of support for President Obama](#) translated into increased turnout in the 2008 and 2012 elections, compared to previous presidential contests. However Latino youth have consistently fallen behind in voter turnout and registration compared to African American and White youth.

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, 1972-2012²

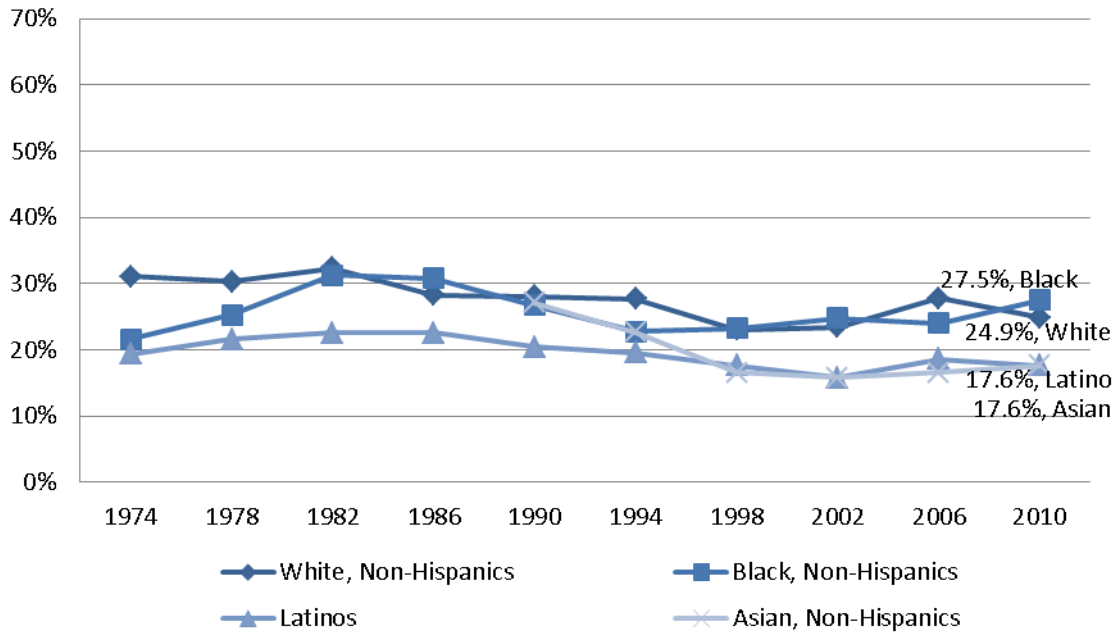
Reasons for Not Voting among Latino Youth

In 2012, when asked why they did not 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. Another 12.1% said they were out of town. For Latino youth, being busy or unavailable was the most cited reason for not voting, followed by feeling that their vote did not make a difference. Overall, 17.4% of all young people felt similarly disempowered.

Furthermore, [previous research documents how youth without college experience are less likely to vote](#) than youth with college experience. In comparison to the general youth population, Latino youth are overrepresented among youth without college experience (21.2%). However, research also shows that youth without college experience are interested in participating, but can face a [systemic lack of political and civic opportunities](#) that can consequently have negative effects on self-efficacy and motivation.

² 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 were 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



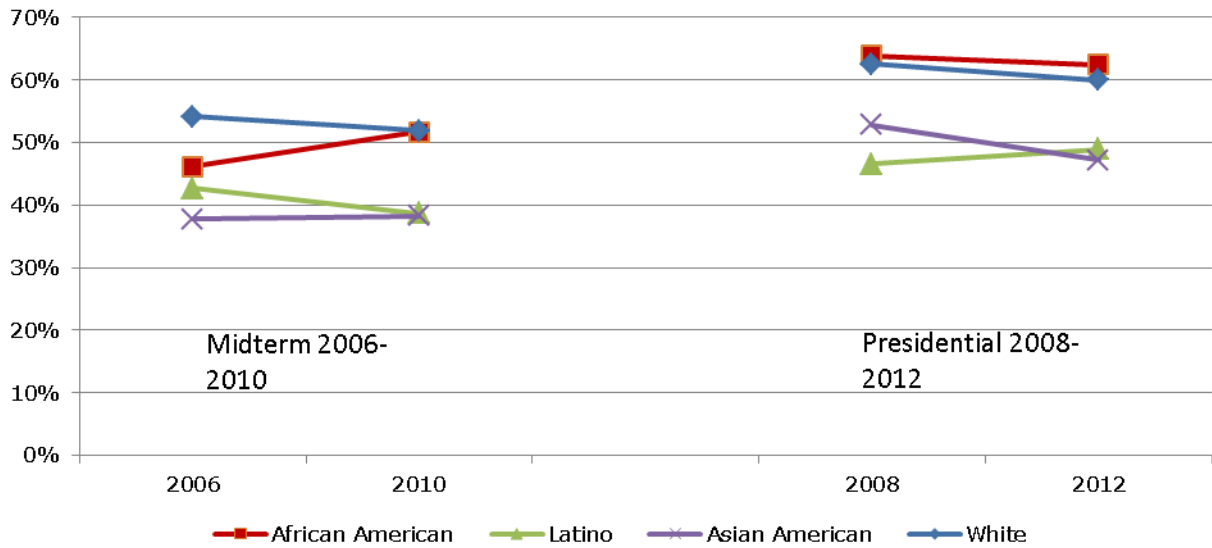
Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey November Voting & Registration Supplement, 1974-2010

Voter Registration among Latino Youth

Registration is a precondition of voting, and [getting young people to register](#) can be a bigger hurdle than getting them to vote. The voter registration rate for young Latinos (38.7%) in the last midterm election was far lower than that of their Black and White counterparts (both at 51.9%) and had decreased from 2006, when it was 42.7%. However, in presidential elections, the registration rate for young Latinos increased from 46.6% to 48.9%³ between 2008 and 2012, while the registration rates for youth of most other ethnic backgrounds decreased.

³ The increase in registration rates between 2010 and 2012 does not reflect an upward trend in youth registration rates. This is a normal pattern between Midterm and Presidential Elections, as shown in Figure 5.

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 Latino 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.

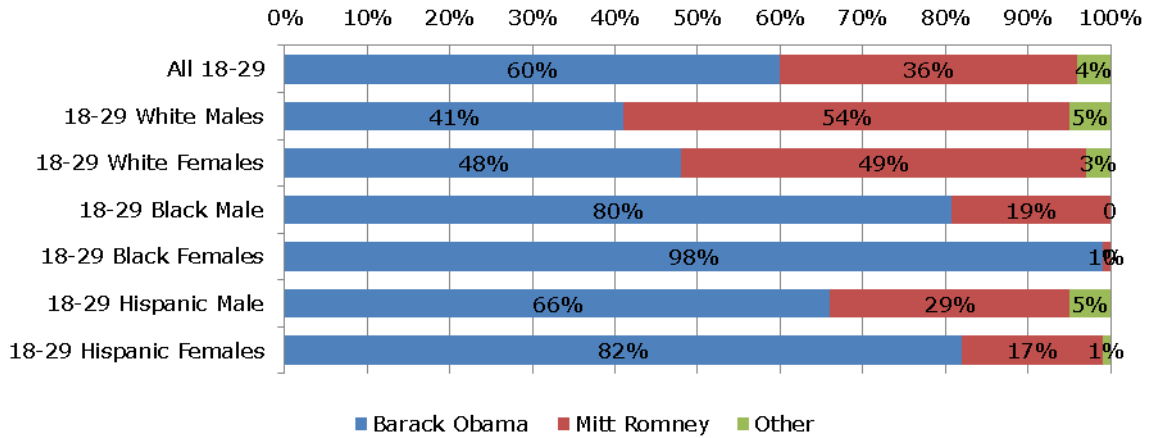
There were no large differences in the reasons for not registering given by youth of different racial and ethnic groups. However, Hispanic and Black youth were most likely to report they did not meet registration deadlines or they did not know how or where to register, compared to their peers of other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

Ideology, Issue Priorities, and Candidate Support among Latino Youth

In 2012, youth who voted were divided in their candidate support and partisanship by race and gender. For instance, non-White young women were the most enthusiastic about President Obama. Non-White men were satisfied with the President, but not enthusiastic, with Hispanic men even less enthusiastic than young Black men. Young White men were dissatisfied with President Obama and voted for his opponent.

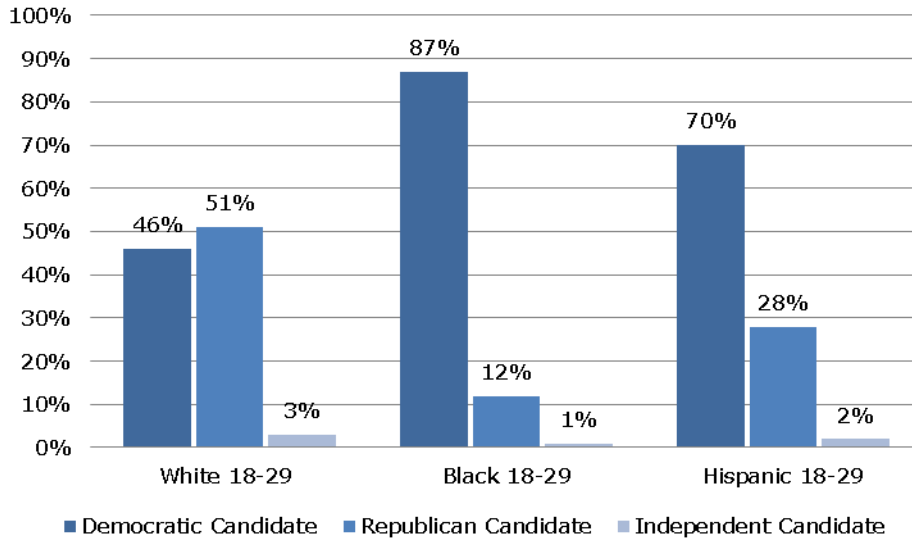
Similarly, in 2010, Latino and Black youth were significantly more likely to support Democratic House candidates, while over half of White youth supported Republican House candidates. Young Latinos, however, did make more conservative choices than their African American counterparts. In terms of presidential choice in the 2012 election, young Latino men were very much in line with the average for all young voters.

Figure 6: Youth Vote Choice in 2012 Presidential Election, by Race and Gender



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

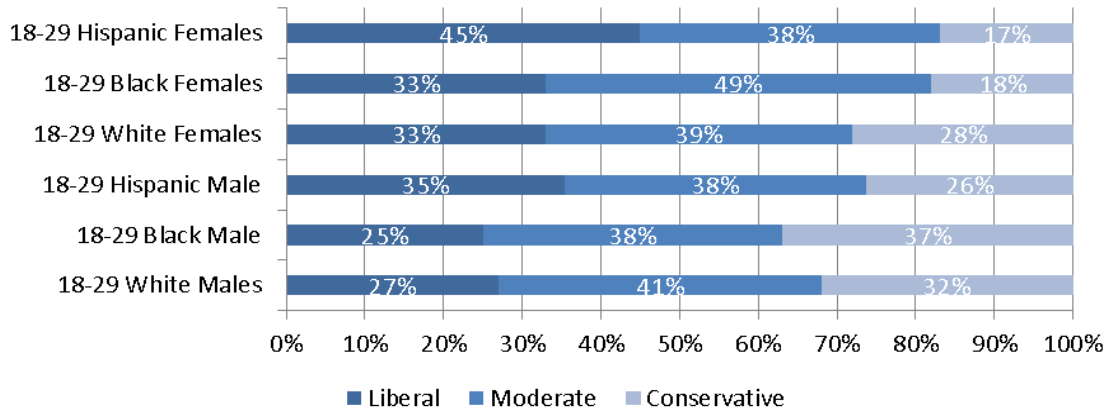
Figure 7: House Candidate Support in 2010 Midterm Election, by Race



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

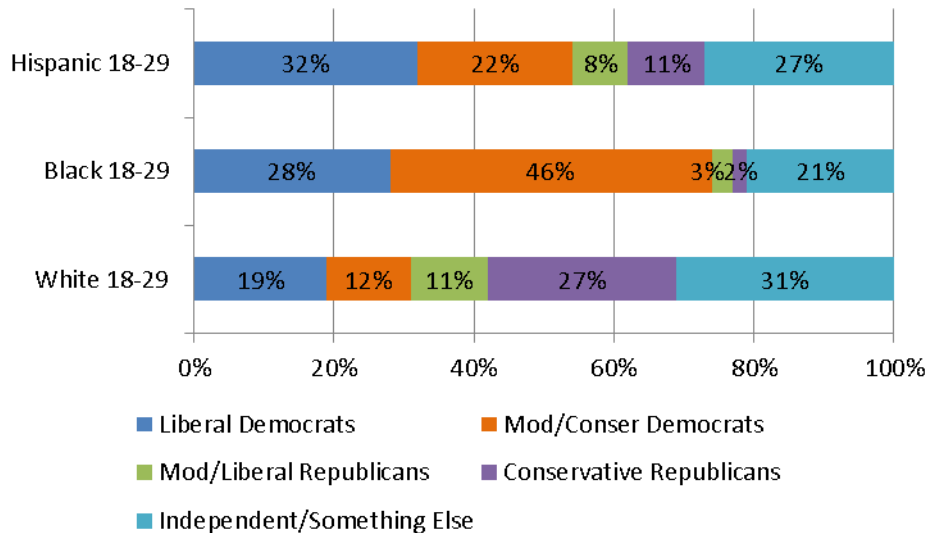
In an early July 2012 poll commissioned by the Youth Engagement Fund and analyzed by CIRCLE, young people across ethnic backgrounds were [concerned primarily about economic issues](#), such as college loan debt, the federal deficit, and a lack of jobs during that presidential election. In 2012, White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

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



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

In 2012, Latinos who cast a ballot were more likely to identify as liberal and less likely to identify as conservative than their counterparts in other ethnic groups, with young Latinas even more so than their male peers. In the last midterm, over half of young Latinos (54%) who went to the polls identified as Democrat. However, 22% of these individuals placed themselves in a more moderate ideological or conservative camp. Another 27% indicated they were Independents, or had some other identification.

Conclusions 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 key to increasing turnout. In the long-term, educating youth through strengthened civic education initiatives is a promising mechanism to engage youth in politics.

Some vital points:

- Given that they are the biggest “talkers” among of youth of different ethnic backgrounds, consider engaging Latino youth in conversations about important public issues. These entry points may help connect them to civic organizations and activities.
- Unlike other youth, Latino youth do not find lack of information about the issues or process as their primary barrier to participation; instead, they feel disempowered. Those working with young Latinos should work to connect them to institutions and community-based activities where their contributions to public issues are valued and their efforts yield concrete results beyond the ballot box.
- Nationally, Latino youth are more likely to have no college experience than youth as a whole; therefore, mobilization strategies solely focused on college campuses may have less significant impact on this demographic group.
- It is important to understand the gender differences between young Hispanic men and women when it comes to past voting preferences, in order to tailor messages to each group.
- As with all young people, Latino youth must be provided with concrete information on how or where to register to vote. This should be delivered through trusted individuals and organizations; direct personal contact has the most impact.
- Though a majority identify as Democrats young Latinos do not solidly fit into one ideological camp. Work to understand the issues of importance to them, and make sure campaigns address those issues in a personalized and tailored manner.