



## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Voter Turnout Among Young Women and Men

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Civic engagement among young men and young women, while similar, is not equal. In recent years, young women, particularly college educated young women, have voted and volunteered more and been more civically engaged than their young male counterparts. This fact sheet presents information on one measure of civic engagement, voter turnout, across women and men. It also highlights some of the similarities and differences between young women and young men in their attitudes towards voting.

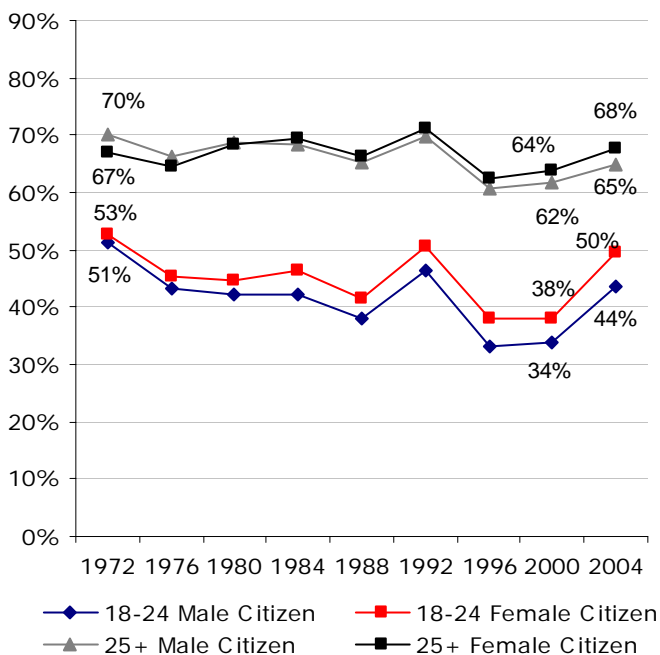
In 2004, there were approximately 12.5 million young female citizens between the ages of 18 and 24 and approximately 12.4 million young male citizens between the ages of 18 and 24.<sup>2</sup>

### Voter Turnout<sup>3</sup>

Voter turnout among young people, as reported in CIRCLE's fact sheet "The Youth Vote 2004" reached its highest level in more than a decade in 2004 after a steady decline since 1972, with the exception of a spike in turnout in 1992. At this point, it is unclear whether 2004 represents another one-time spike in turnout like 1992 or if it signals a new trend towards increasing youth turnout.

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

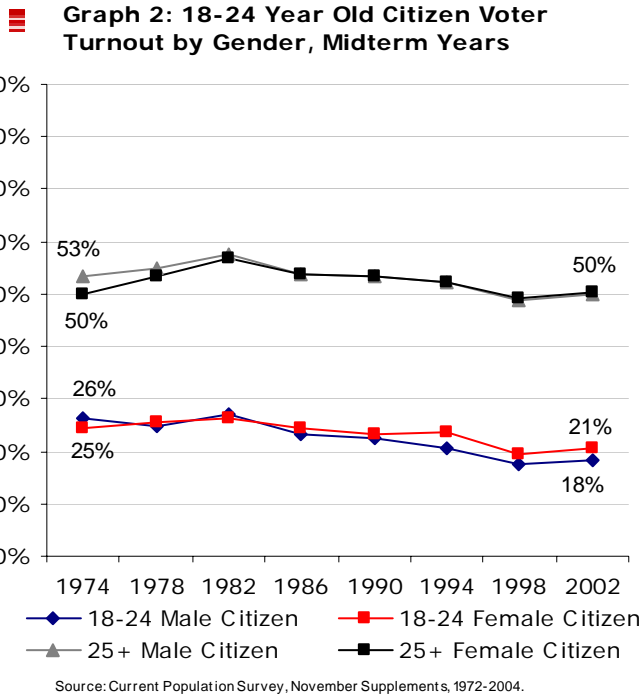
**Graph 1: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter Turnout by Gender, Presidential Years**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004

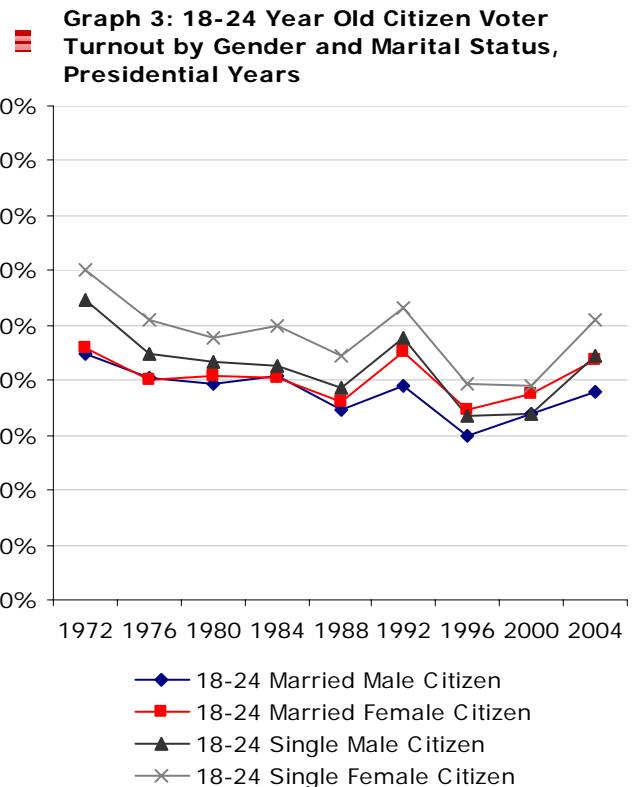
considerably. By 1992, 51 percent of women ages 18-24 voted while only 46 percent of men did so. In 2004, this difference continued to widen to nearly six percentage points, although both genders posted significant gains in turnout over the 2000 election. This is shown in Graph 1.

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.



### Voter Turnout by Gender and Marital Status

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.

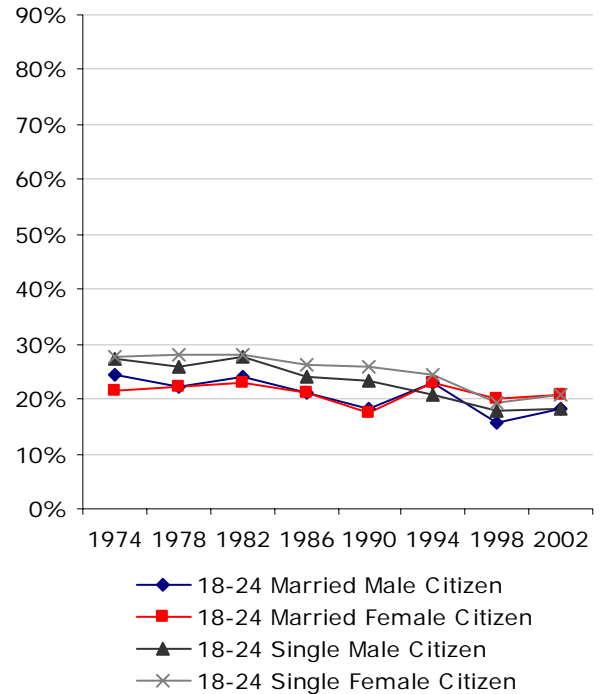


In midterm elections, all four groups have experienced turnout decreases since 1994. The gap that separates each group is only three percentage points from married women (the most likely to vote) to single men (the least likely).

***Voter Turnout among Young Women, by Race/Ethnicity<sup>4</sup>***

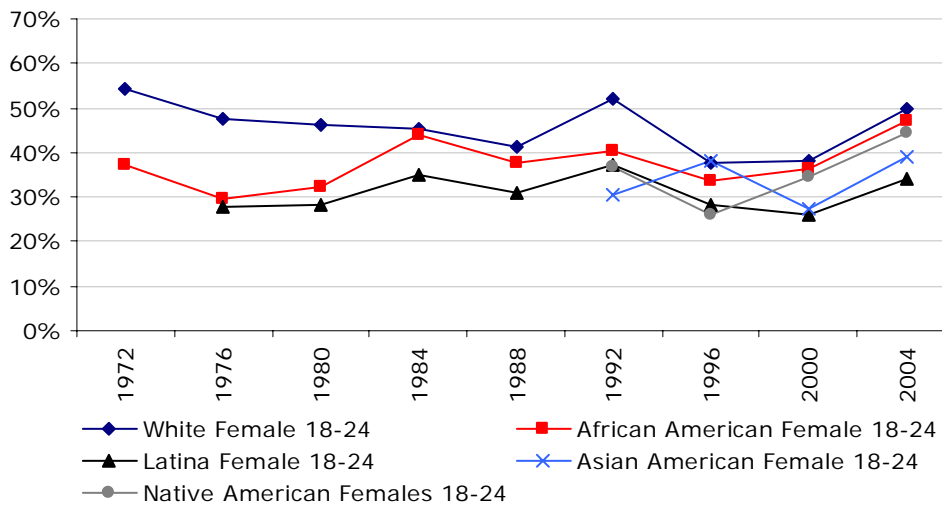
In presidential election years, as shown in Graph 5, the pattern of participation among young women by race/ethnicity is similar to the pattern observed for all minority youth. Voter turnouts for all races improved substantially in 2004, following declines from 1972 to 2000. Before 2004, voter turnout rates for young white women had fallen since 1972, with a spike in 1992. In contrast, turnout rates among young African-American women had improved since 1972, with a large spike in voter turnout in 1984. Both groups posted similarly large gains in 2004. In 2000 and 2004, there is no significant difference in the turnout rate of young African-American women and young white women. (For a table with voter turnout rates among women by race/ethnicity see the appendix.)

**Graph 4: 18-24 Year Old Citizen Voter Turnout by Gender and Marital Status, Midterm Years**



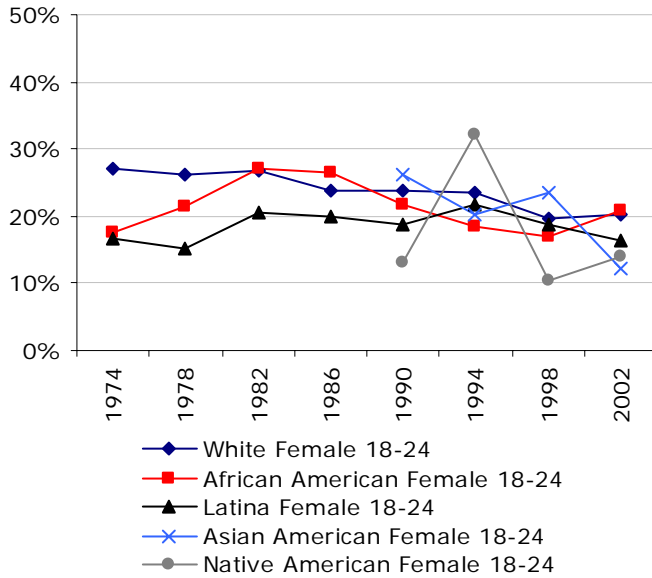
Source: CPS November Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004.

**Graph 5: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among Women Age 18-24, by Ethnicity**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004

**Graph 6: Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among Women Age 18-24, by Ethnicity**



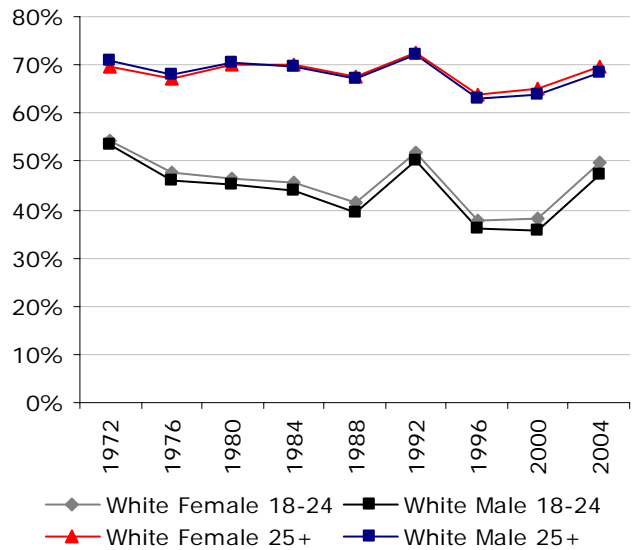
Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004

For young Latina women, voter participation rates between 1976 and 2000 were relatively unchanged before a large increase in turnout in 2004. However, Latinos still turn out less often than any other race. While 1984 and 1992 witnessed a modest improvement in the 30 percent voter turnout rate of young Latina women in 1980 and 1988, by 2000, young Latina women turned out to vote at a rate similar to that of 1972.

In midterm election years, as shown in Graph 6, voter turnout rates across race and ethnicity are surprisingly similar in 2002, but overall low. Young Asian females experienced a very large drop in turnout in the most recent cycle, falling from 25 percent in 1998 to just 11 percent in 2002.

Graph 7 shows voter turnout rates among whites by age and gender in presidential election years. Similar to trends reported elsewhere, with the exception of 1992, the voter turnout rate of young whites had declined steadily since 1972 until the most recent election cycle, where young white turnout nearly matched 1992 levels. However, the gap between young white women and young white men has grown since 1972. In 2004, the turnout rate among young white women was 50 percent. A similar pattern is not evident among older whites.

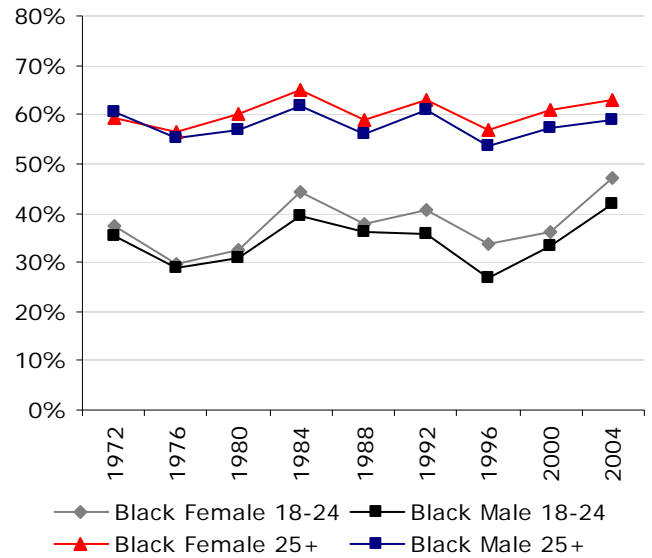
**Graph 7: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among Whites, by Age and Gender**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004

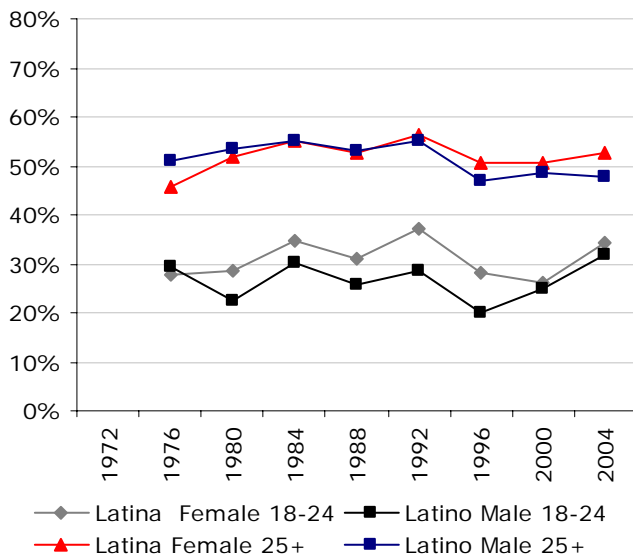
Among young African-Americans, a different pattern is evident. Graph 8 shows patterns of voter turnout in presidential election years among 18-24 and 25+ male and female African-American citizens. Since 1972, there has been a general increase in the voter turnout rates of African-American citizens. African-American young male citizens voted in 2004 at a rate slightly higher to that in 1972. Young African-American males also did not see a spike in voter turnout in 1992 like their female counterparts did. Furthermore, while voter turnout spiked among young African-Americans in 1984, young African-American women turned out at greater rates in 1984 and in subsequent presidential election years than their male counterparts.

**Graph 8: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among African-Americans, by Age and Gender**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004

**Graph 9: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among Latino Citizens, by Age and Gender**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004

Voter turnout rates among Latino citizens, in contrast, have remained flat since 1976 and are consistently below those of whites and African-Americans. Graph 9 shows voter turnout rates for Latinos 18-24 years old and 25 years old and older. Historically, young Latino male citizens have turned out to vote at lower rates than their female counterparts, but by 2004, there was only a very small difference in the voter turnout rate between young Latino male and female citizens.

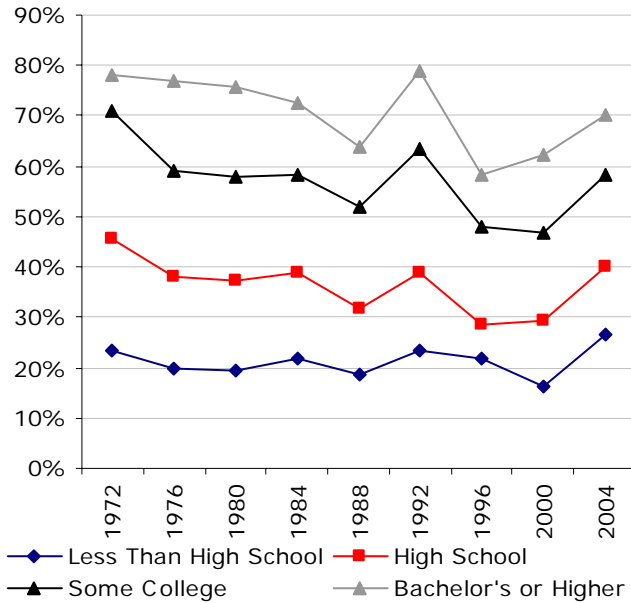
### ***Voter Turnout Among Young Women by Educational Attainment***

Similar to patterns observed for all young people, young women with greater levels of educational attainment are also more likely to vote. Graphs 10 and 11 show voter turnout among young female citizens in presidential and midterm election years, respectively, by level of educational attainment.

In 1992, the spike in youth voter turnout was primarily driven by college-educated youth. However, in 2004, those with bachelor's degrees experienced the smallest increase in turnout (+8 percentage points). Women with less than a college degree increased their turnout by 11 percentage points.<sup>5</sup>

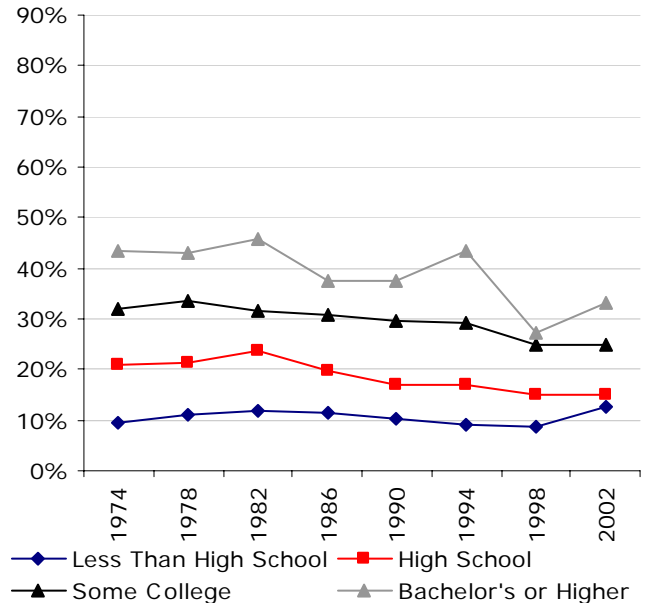
In the 2002 midterm election, turnout among the most highly-educated voters increased substantially while turnout among the other educational levels remained mostly static.

**Graph 10: Voter Turnout Presidential Years Among 18-24 Year Old Female Citizens, by Educational Attainment**



Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004.

**Graph 11: Voter Turnout Midterm Years Among 18-24 Year Old Female Citizens, by Educational Attainment**

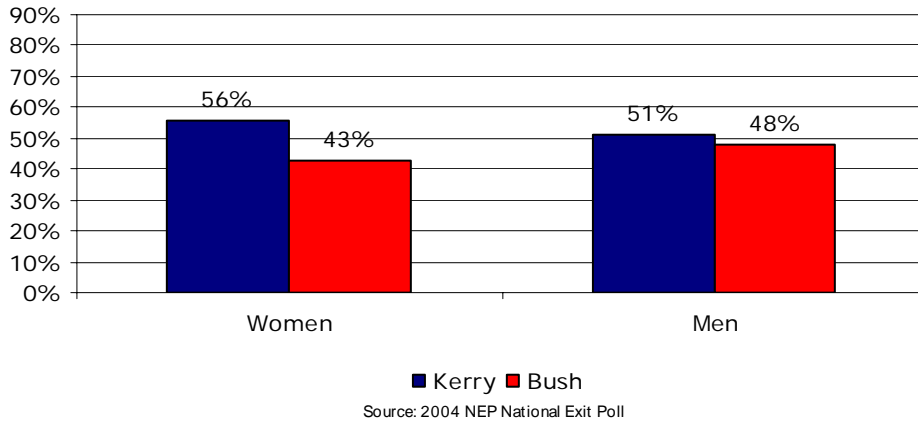


Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements, 1972-2004.

### ***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.<sup>6</sup> Young women were five percentage points more likely to support the Kerry/Edwards ticket than young men.

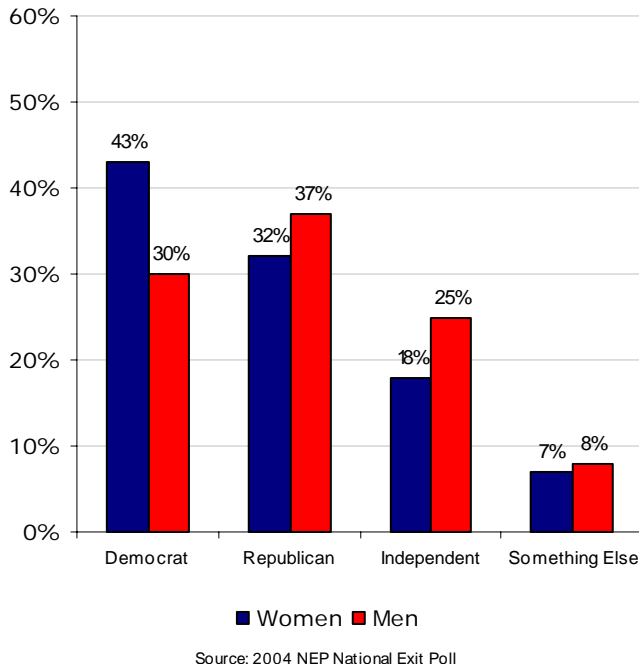
**■ Graph 12: 2004 Presidential Vote According to Exit Polls, Ages 18-29**



### ***Political Party Identification***

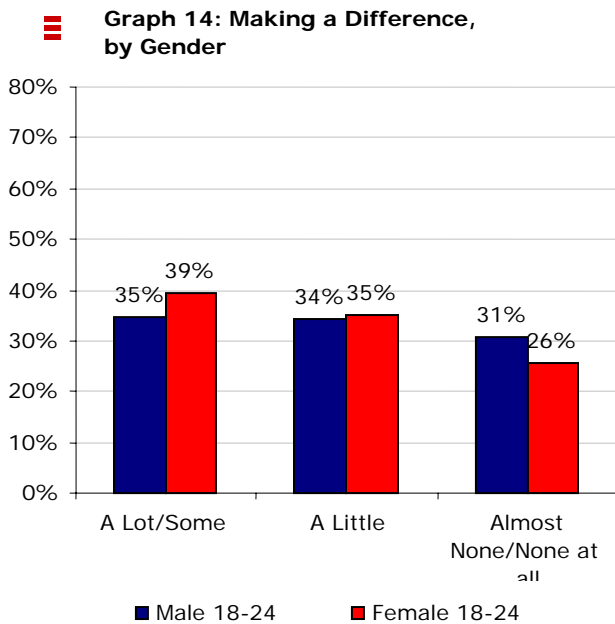
In 2004, 18-29 year old female voters were more likely to identify with the Democratic party while young male voters were more likely to identify with the Republican party. Young male voters were also more likely to identify as Independent than their female counterparts.

**■ Graph 13: Political Party Identification, Young Voters Age 18-29**



### Attitudes Towards Voting

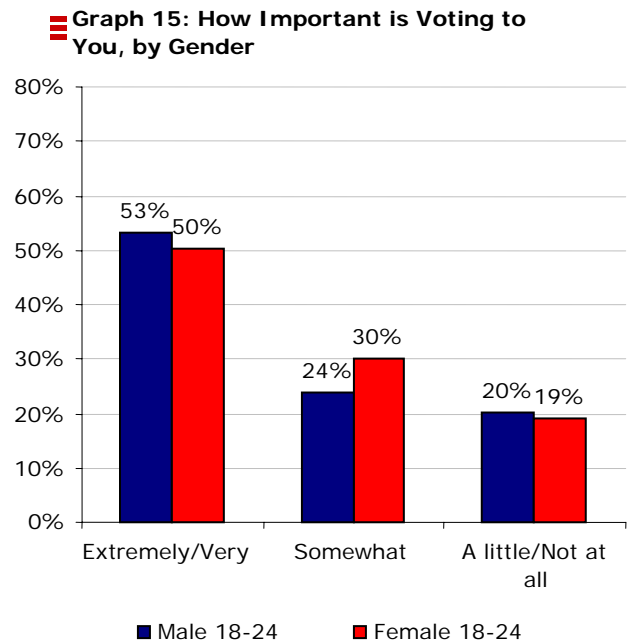
In January of 2002 and 2004, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, in conjunction with the Council for Excellence in Government, sponsored the *National Youth Survey* of 1000 to 1500 young people ages 15 to 25. The youth surveys asked several questions about youth attitudes towards voting, and other forms of civic engagement. The next section of the fact sheet presents findings from these two surveys.



Employing data from the 2004 survey for 18-25 year olds, several measures of young people's attitudes towards voting can be compared. First, as shown in Graph 14, young women are more likely than their young male counterparts to feel they could make a difference in their communities. Research has shown that young people who feel that they can make a difference, or feel efficacious, are more likely to vote.

Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2004

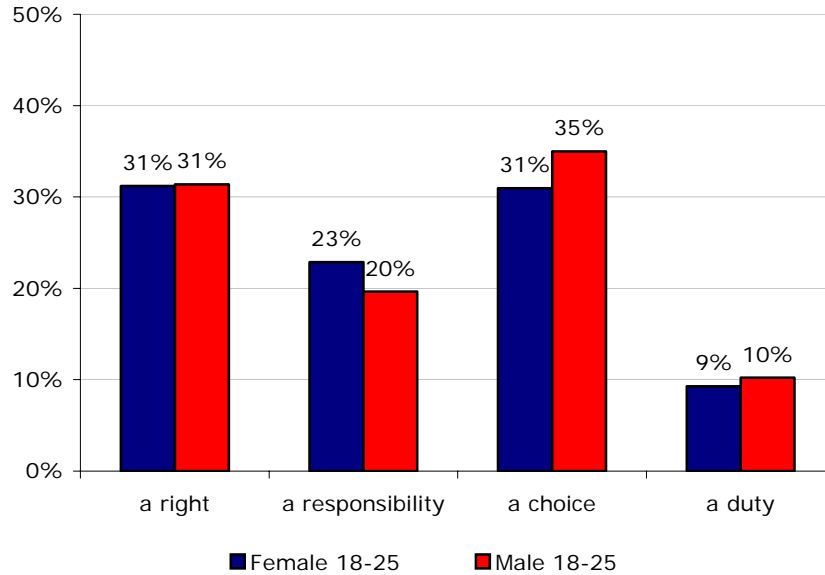
However, as shown in Graph 15, young men and women were approximately equally likely to report that voting is an important thing to do.



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2004



**Graph 16: How do you describe voting, by Gender**

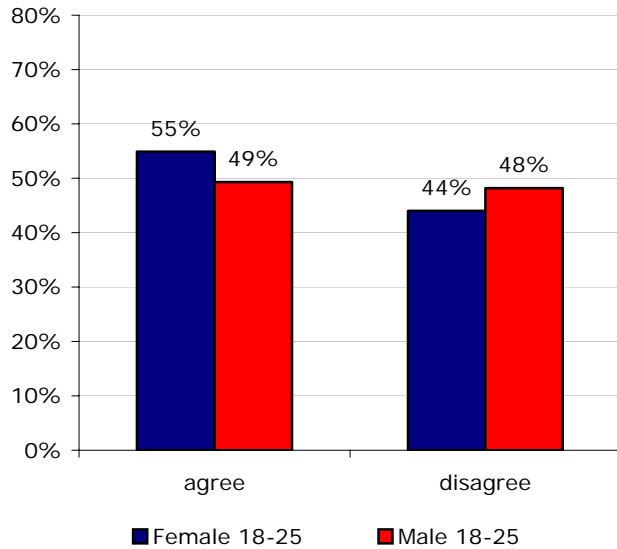


Young men and young women had slightly different views of voting. In the 2002 survey, respondents were asked to describe voting as a "right," "responsibility," "choice," or "duty." Young women were more likely to view voting as a responsibility than their young male counterparts. However, as shown in Graph 16, young men were more likely to call voting a choice than their young female counterparts.

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

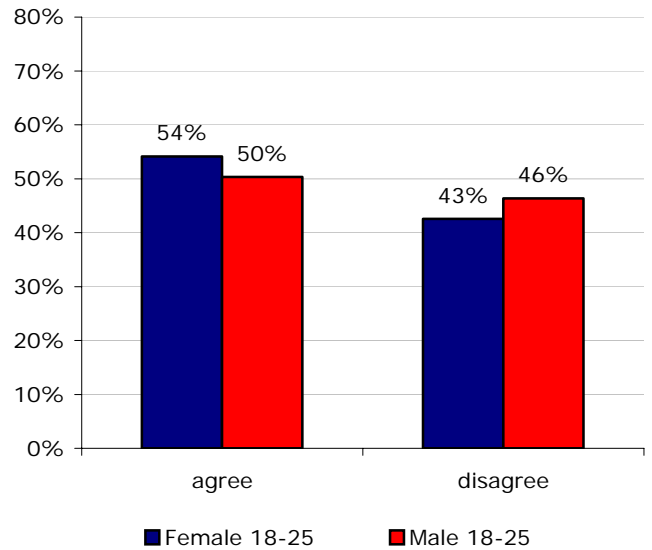
Graphs 17 and 18 show whether young people believe that government addresses the needs of young people, or that elections and politics address the needs of young people. In both cases, according to the 2002 survey, young women are more likely to view government and politics and elections as addressing the needs of young people than their young male counterparts.

**Graph 17: Government Addresses the Needs of Young People, by Gender**



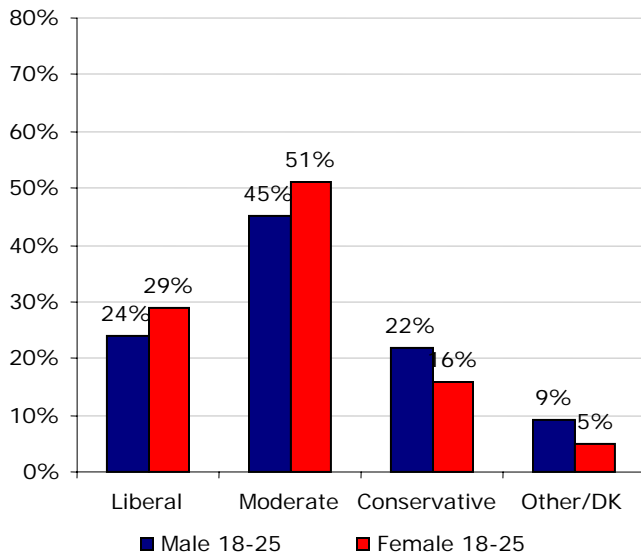
Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2002

**Graph 18: Politics and Elections Address the Needs of Young People, by Gender**



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

**Graph 19: Ideological Identification, by Gender**



Source: CIRCLE/Council for Excellence in Government National Youth Survey, Jan 2004

In terms of political ideology, young women are more likely to identify themselves as moderates than their young male counterparts, who are more likely to identify themselves as liberal. However, as with political party identification, young people are evenly distributed across ideological categories.

## Appendix

### *Voter Turnout Tables, 1972 – 2004*

**Table 1a – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2004**  
Selected Series

<i>Year</i>	<i>Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Women 25+</i>	<i>Men 25+</i>	<i>White Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>White Young Men 18-24</i>
1972	53%	51%	67%	70%	54%	54%
1974	25%	26%	50%	54%	27%	28%
1976	46%	43%	65%	66%	48%	46%
1978	25%	25%	53%	55%	26%	26%
1980	45%	42%	68%	69%	46%	45%
1982	26%	27%	57%	58%	27%	28%
1984	46%	42%	70%	68%	46%	44%
1986	24%	23%	54%	54%	24%	24%
1988	42%	38%	66%	65%	41%	40%
1990	23%	22%	54%	53%	24%	23%
1992	51%	46%	71%	70%	52%	50%
1994	24%	21%	52%	52%	24%	23%
1996	48%	33%	63%	61%	38%	36%
1998	19%	18%	49%	49%	20%	20%
2000	38%	34	64%	62%	38%	36%
2002	21%	18%	50%	50%	20%	20%
2004	50%	44%	68%	65%	50%	47%

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

**Table 1b – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2004**  
Selected Series

<i>Year</i>	<i>White Women 25+</i>	<i>White Men 25+</i>	<i>African-American Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>African-American Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>African-American Women 25+</i>	<i>African-American Men 25+</i>
1972	70%	71%	38%	35%	59%	61%
1974	53%	55%	18%	17%	40%	41%
1976	67%	68%	30%	29%	56%	55%
1978	56%	57%	22%	21%	45%	44%
1980	70%	71%	32%	31%	60%	57%
1982	59%	59%	27%	25%	51%	49%
1984	70%	70%	44%	40%	65%	62%
1986	55%	55%	27%	25%	50%	49%
1988	68%	67%	38%	36%	59%	56%
1990	55%	55%	22%	21%	47%	45%
1992	73%	72%	41%	36%	63%	61%
1994	55%	55%	18%	15%	43%	43%
1996	64%	63%	34%	27%	57%	54%
1998	51%	51%	17%	14%	47%	44%
2000	65%	64%	36%	33%	61%	57%
2002	53%	53%	21%	18%	47%	43%
2004	69%	68%	47%	42%	63%	59%

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

**Table 1c – Voter Turnout Among U.S. Citizens, 1972-2004**  
**Selected Series**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Latina Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Latino Young Men 18-24</i>	<i>Latina Women 25+</i>	<i>Latino Men 25+</i>	<i>Single Young Women 18-24</i>	<i>Married Young Women 18-24</i>
1972					60%	46%
1974	17%	20%	35%	39%	28%	22%
1976	28%	30%	46%	51%	51%	40%
1978	15%	19%	40%	44%	28%	22%
1980	28%	23%	52%	53%	48%	41%
1982	21%	22%	43%	44%	28%	23%
1984	35%	30%	55%	55%	50%	40%
1986	20%	17%	43%	43%	26%	21%
1988	31%	26%	53%	53%	44%	36%
1990	19%	14%	41%	40%	26%	18%
1992	37%	29%	56%	55%	53%	45%
1994	22%	14%	37%	38%	25%	23%
1996	28%	20%	51%	47%	40%	35%
1998	19%	11%	37%	37%	19%	20%
2000	26%	25%	51%	49%	39%	38%
2002	16%	10%	36%	35%	21%	21%
2004	34%	32%	53%	48%	51%	44%

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

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Research Director, Research Associate, and Research Assistant respectively at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. We thank Carrie Donovan and Peter Levine for comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

<sup>2</sup> These population estimates are based on weighted counts from the November 2004 supplement of the Current Population Survey.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on youth voting rates see CIRCLE Fact Sheet “The Youth Vote 2004.” For more information on how CIRCLE calculates turnout see “CIRCLE Working Paper 35: The Youth Vote 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns 1972-2004.”

<sup>4</sup> All results are for non-Hispanics Whites, non-Hispanics African Americans, Latinos, non-Hispanic Asians, non-Hispanic Native Americans, and mixed races. All race/ethnicity categories are mutually exclusive.

<sup>5</sup> One difficulty with the results reported in graphs 10 and 11 is that many 18 to 24 year olds are still in school pursuing degrees at the time of the survey. Thus it is difficult to draw conclusions about voter turnout among young people by level of educational attainment since all education has not been attained.

<sup>6</sup> Exit polls are a good data source for estimating youth support for a particular candidate. We have chosen to present data on 18-29 year olds as opposed to 18-24 year olds since the sample sizes are larger and likely give a more accurate estimate.