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2016 Election

Donald Trump and Young Voters

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Introduction

While the party convention will not officially ratify his nomination until next month, Donald Trump is now the presumptive Republican candidate for President of the United States. As the party's standard-bearer, the Trump campaign will have the opportunity to shape voter outreach for the presidential contest which will also influence down-ballot races, as we saw when the Obama campaign drove a great deal of youth outreach, and subsequent youth impact, in 2008 and 2012. With that in mind, it is worth considering what Trump's performance with young voters throughout the primaries could mean for his prospects in the general election, and for the role of young people in democracy through 2016 and beyond.¹

Important questions include:

- ★ How did Donald Trump do among young people who voted in the primaries?
- ★ How does Trump's youth support compare to that of previous Republican nominees?
- ★ How do young people overall view Donald Trump? What kinds of young conservatives are likely to support him?
- ★ Is the general electorate more or less favorable to Donald Trump than the Republican primary electorate?

How did Donald Trump do among young people who voted in the primaries?

Generally, Donald Trump has enjoyed a lower level of support from youth, ages 17-29, than from older voters, particularly when compared to those over 45. On average, Trump received a third of youth votes (33%), which is 10 percentage points below his average level of support from voters 45 and older.

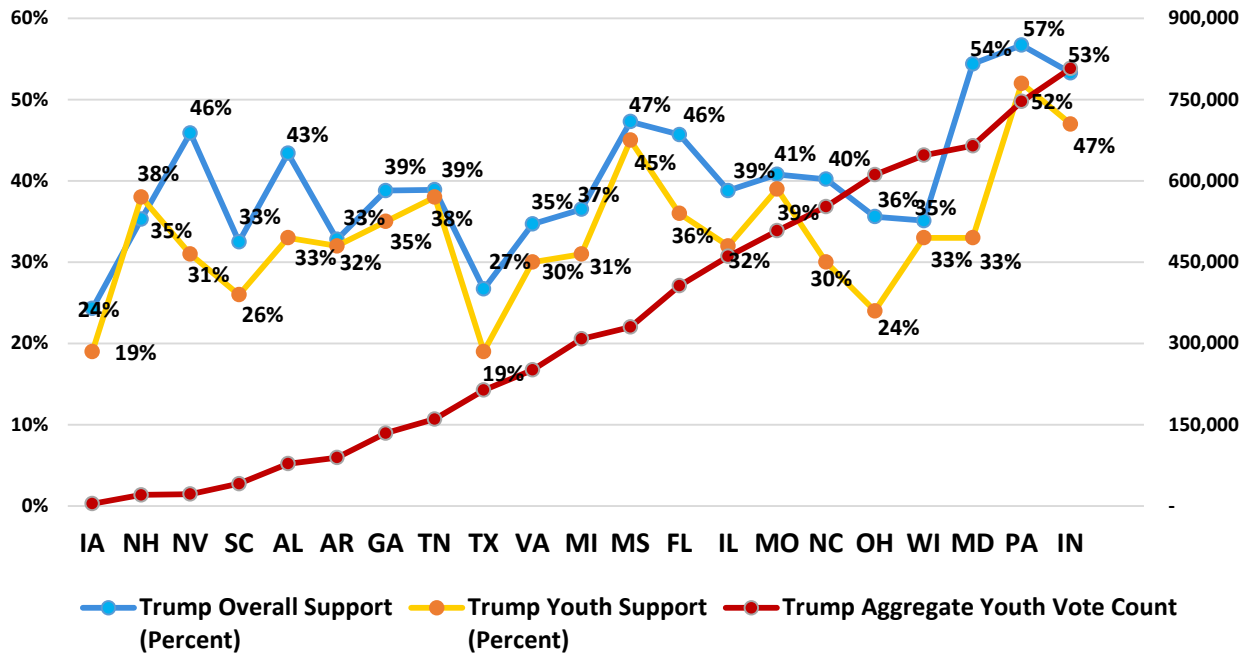
As of June 1, exit polls from 21 states have included data on youth candidate support.² Donald Trump won 17 of those contests, but he won the youth vote in just 11. Overall, before all other candidates dropped out of the race, Trump, on average, won about one third of youth votes, with notable exceptions in states like Mississippi (45%), Indiana (46%), and Pennsylvania (52%). In only one state—New Hampshire—did he enjoy greater support from youth (38%) than his overall percentage of votes in that primary (35%).

As the Republican field narrowed in late April/early May, and Donald Trump solidified his status as the frontrunner, young people who identified as or with Republicans showed greater levels of support for Trump. It remains to be seen whether Republican youth, who voted in record numbers throughout the primary season, will remain as engaged and continue to rally around their nominee come November.

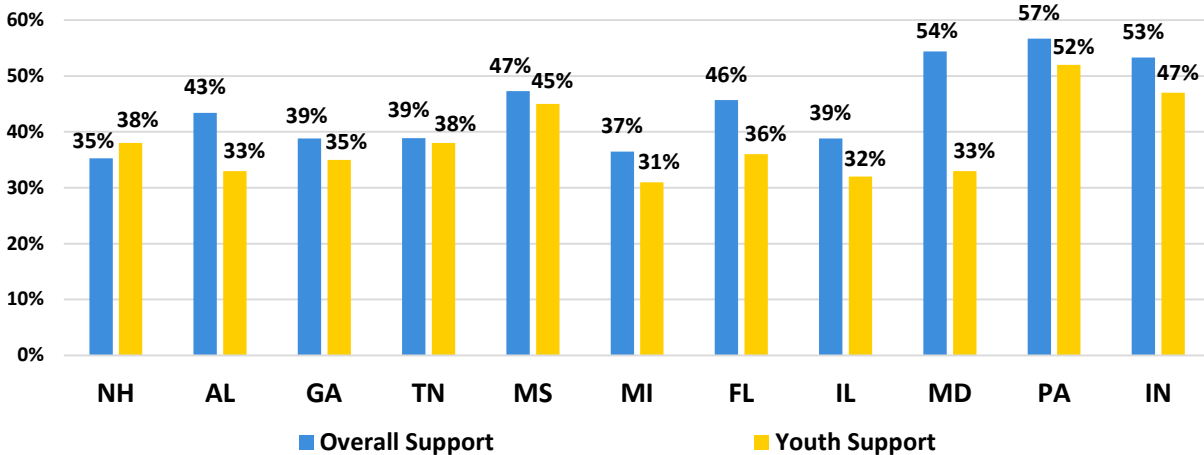
¹ In the coming weeks, CIRCLE will publish a similar analysis of Hillary Clinton and young voters.

² While far more primaries and caucuses have occurred in 2016, exit polls were not conducted in all states. Additionally, some states with exit polls did not report on candidate support among voters under age 30.

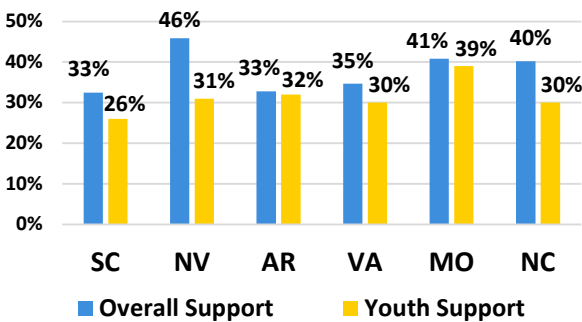
Youth Support vs. Overall Support for Trump by State*



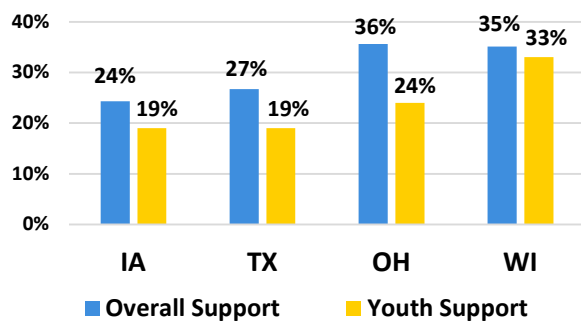
Trump won overall support in the state and won young voters



Trump won overall support in the state but did not win young voters



Trump did not win state and did not win young voters



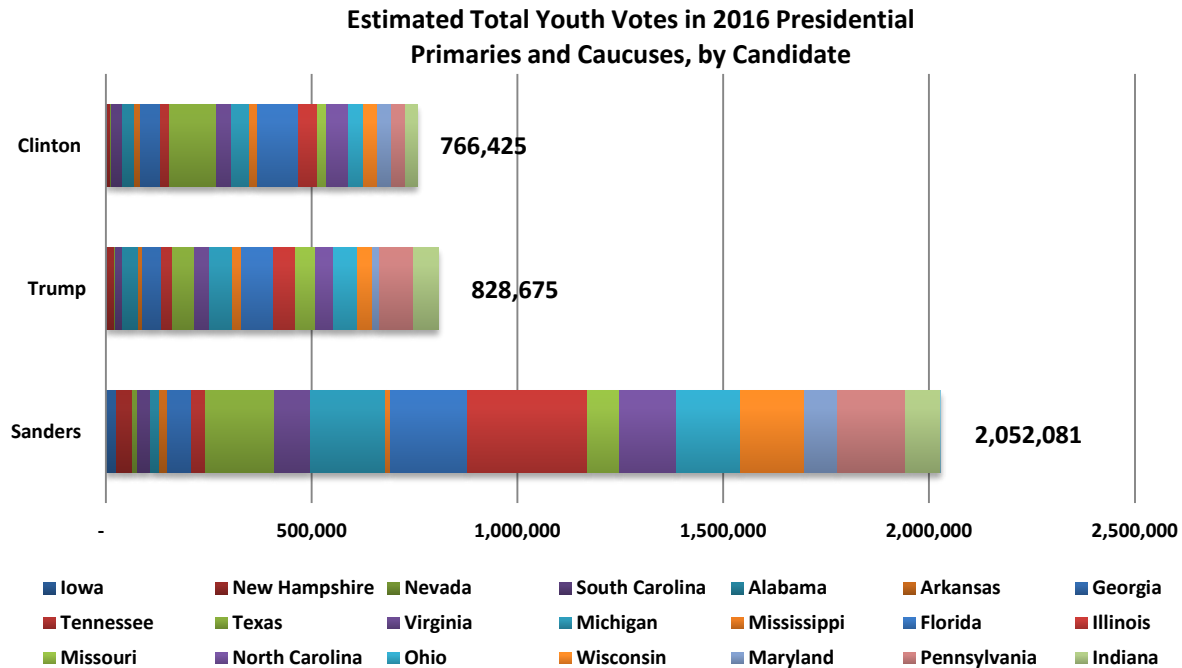
How does Trump's youth support compare to that of previous Republican nominees?

During the primary season, Donald Trump received a slightly larger proportion of youth votes than the two previous Republican nominees, Senator John McCain (2008) and Governor Mitt Romney (2012). Before all other candidates suspended their campaigns, Trump was receiving an average of 33% of youth votes per state, compared to McCain's average of 29% and Romney's 28% in their competitive primaries.

According to our youth vote choice data from 21 Republican primaries before all other contestants dropped out, Donald Trump received over 800,000 of the estimated 2.3 million votes cast by young people in those contests—a per-state average of 33%. Trump's youth support was higher than that of the two most recent Republican nominees: In 2008, Senator McCain received an average of 29% of youth votes in GOP primary and caucuses. Four years later, an average of 28% of young voters in the GOP primaries and caucuses supported Governor Romney. Both candidates went on to lose the youth vote to President Obama, who received 66% support from young voters in 2008, and 60% in the 2012 general elections.

In making comparisons to previous years, however, it is important to keep in mind that this has been an unusual election. The 2016 cycle has been the rare primary season in which both parties' nominating contests remained competitive for many months, which may have driven youth participation.

Likewise, while Republican youth have been underrepresented in recent primary and general elections, this year youth participation in the Democratic and Republican contests has been rather evenly split. Currently, in the states where data are available for both parties, 55% of young primary participants have voted in Democratic contests, while 45% have voted in GOP contests. In 2008, in states with available youth share data for both parties, 68% of youth votes were cast in Democratic contests and 32% were cast in Republican contests. In 2000, Republican primary exit polls continued longer than those for Democratic contests, but in the 14 states where data for both parties are available, 57% of youth votes were cast in GOP contests, and 43% in Democratic primaries and caucuses.



Source: Estimates are based on CIRCLE analysis of vote tallies by state and Edison Research state exit/entrance polls. Only states with vote choice data for contests in both parties included.

How do young people overall view Donald Trump? What kinds of young conservatives are likely to support him?

Various polls collectively suggest that young people have not embraced Donald Trump. According to [a mid-May poll](#), he has a 75% unfavorable rating among 18 to 29-year-olds. [Polling released in March](#) of this year showed 19% of all youth would vote for Trump when matched up with Hillary Clinton. Certain subgroups, especially young women and youth of color, view Trump even more unfavorably; others, particularly young people with lower educational attainment, have shown greater levels of support. Meanwhile, a substantial segment of largely unaffiliated but conservative-leaning youth is considered “Young Outsiders” who hold views that are more socially progressive than the rest of the Republican Party but who differ sharply from the Democratic Party on economic policy. Trump’s performance with young people in November will largely depend, then, on which segments of the youth electorate show up to cast a ballot.

Youth polling in 2016 shows that [one-third of young people prefer a Republican for president](#)—15 million potential GOP voters under the age of 30. In our analysis of the large Pew Research dataset on political ideology, among “solid Republican” youth, 8 out of 10 are non-Hispanic Whites who skew slightly male. Young people who identify as Republicans have more formal education than those who do not claim party affiliation, but have slightly less formal education than those who identify as Democrats. Among all young eligible voters, 78% do not have a four-year college degree—whether because they have no college experience or because they are in college but have not yet graduated.

These demographics are in alignment with Trump's base of support throughout the primaries. For example, youth without a four-year college degree made up about half of young GOP primary voters on Super Tuesday, and they were more likely to support Trump (31%) than those with a four-year degree (25%). Young people without any college experience made up 16% of the Young Republican electorate on Super Tuesday, and data suggest they were even more likely to support Trump, though a small sample size prevents us from being conclusive about these "non-college" youth. We do know that non-college youth have consistently voted at a much lower rate than young people with a four-year degree. Turning out this historically less active group of potential voters could be important for Donald Trump, but it will likely take a considerable amount of outreach and resources.

Trump also performs well with young people who are disillusioned with the overall state of the country. A [2015 poll](#) conducted before the primaries showed that, compared to young supporters of other candidates in either party, a larger proportion of young people who favored Trump thought that the idea of the American Dream was "dead."

Given that, questions have been raised about whether young supporters of the other anti-establishment candidate in the race, Senator Bernie Sanders, would potentially turn into Donald Trump supporters in a potential matchup with Hillary Clinton. The March 2016 Rock the Vote/USA Today poll provides an estimate that 9% [would do so](#). Polling conducted in April and May by The Economist/YouGov suggests why young people may be unwilling to join Trump's camp: only 14% of youth believe Donald Trump "has the qualifications to be president," and [only 17% say](#) that Trump "understands the problems a president has to deal with."

Young people's demographic diversity raises even larger questions about a possible "youth ceiling" for Trump. According to recent polling by Rock the Vote, only 5% of African American youth and 14% of Latino youth, compared to 19% of youth overall, would vote for Trump over Hillary Clinton.³ Though most surveys do not report on the views of Asian American youth, a [recently conducted survey of Asian Americans](#) indicates that, among young people registered to vote, only 12% have a favorable view of the Republican Party and only 9% have a favorable view of Donald Trump.⁴ Twenty-five percent of Asian American youth reported that they would vote for a candidate who expressed "anti-immigrant views," though only 15% said the same about a candidate who expressed "anti-Muslim views."

Furthermore, the [most recent polling](#) by Harvard IOP found that Clinton would win by 18 points among young men, and by a staggering 42 points among young women. Young women and non-white youth, combined, make up roughly 70% of the youth electorate, and [young women have historically turned out to vote](#) in general elections at a higher rate than young men.

If the same youth electorate that voted in 2008 and 2012—meaning, one with similar demographic characteristics—goes to the polls this Fall, it will likely not support Trump to the

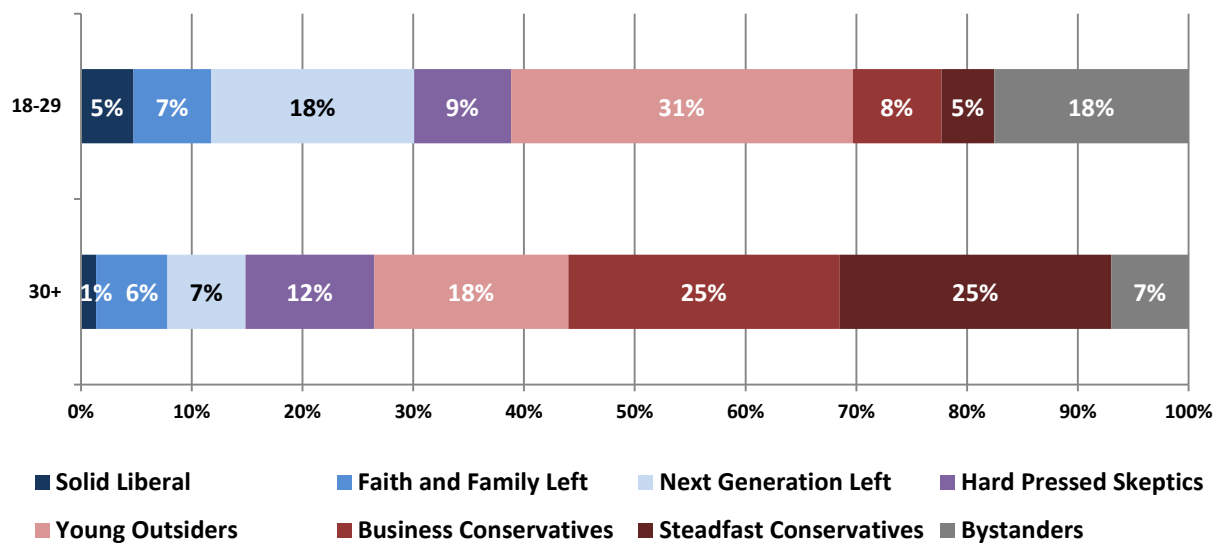
³ To date, there is no equivalent data available for immigrant youth or young Muslim citizens in the U.S.

⁴ <http://www.apiavote.org/press/new-data-shows-exclusionary-rhetoric-prompting-seismic-shift-political-support-among-asian>

same extent as it did President Obama, or even Mitt Romney. In fact, according to the [Spring Harvard IOP youth poll](#), only 60% of young people who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 said that they will vote for Trump, and 27% said they don't know.

Along with their demographic diversity, the ideological diversity of youth—even among young conservatives—presents both challenges and opportunities for Donald Trump. For example, on average, young conservatives are more socially progressive than older conservatives and more likely to embrace the idea of immigrants as an asset to the country. Our analysis of the Pew Research dataset on Americans' political ideologies and opinions beyond party identification suggests that there are several types of conservatism among young people, some of whom may be more or less inclined to support Trump.

Political Ideology Distribution Among Republican/Lean Republicans, by Age



Source: CIRCLE Analysis of Pew Political Polarization Data (18-29)

According to these typologies, the group that would be most likely to vote for Donald Trump is the Steadfast Conservatives, who hold consistently conservative views and, notably, hostile attitudes toward immigrants and the poor. While, according to our analysis, Steadfast Conservatives make up one of the two largest segments of Republicans and Republican-leaners over age 30, it is the smallest segment among young conservatives, and second-smallest among youth overall. This may partially explain why young GOP primary voters were slow to support Trump.

As its name may imply, the largest segment among young Republicans/Republican-leaners is the Young Outsiders group. According to Pew Research, members of this group are relatively detached from politics and political parties but nonetheless hold conservative views on issues like strict enforcement of immigration laws and on the economy. However, they break with Steadfast Conservatives by supporting the environment, same-sex marriage, and unions.⁵

⁵ <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/26/typology-comparison/types/young-outsiders/>

Traditionally, Young Outsiders do not align completely with the Republican Party, but they may find their opinions and voices well-represented by Donald Trump's anti-establishment, populist, and America-first rhetoric.

Is the general electorate more or less favorable to Donald Trump than the Republican primary electorate?

The primary and general youth electorates have historically differed in two important ways that may affect Donald Trump's performance with young voters in November: education and ideology/party affiliation. Young people without a four-year college degree—one of Trump's strongest constituencies among youth—tend to vote at higher rates in general elections than in primaries. However, their overall turnout is still fairly low, meaning the Trump campaign would need to mobilize a great deal of these young people to substantially change the general youth electorate in his favor.

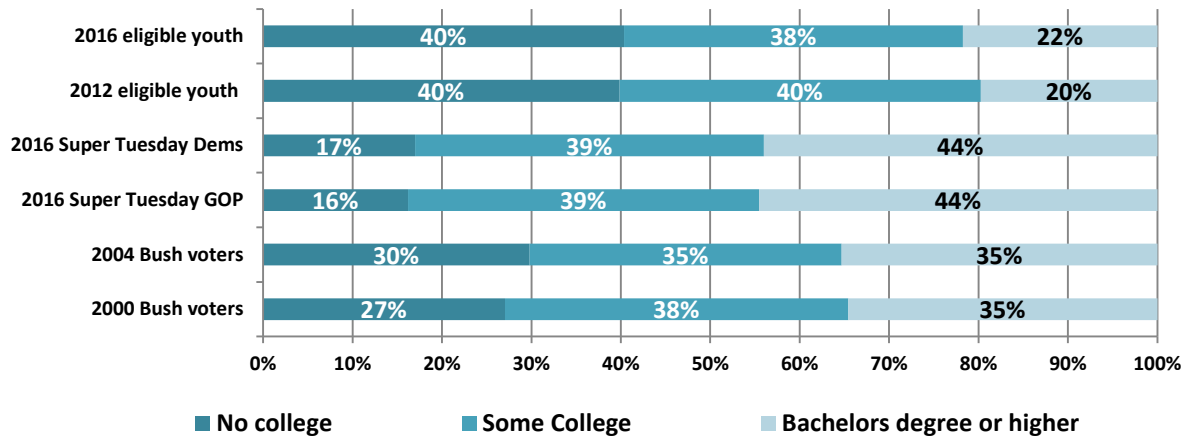
Young voters in the 2016 Republican primaries were, paradoxically, both more ideologically conservative and less likely to identify with the Republican Party than general election voters the last time a Republican won the White House. Two-thirds of young primary voters described themselves as "conservative," while only about half of young people who voted for President Bush in the 2000 and 2004 general elections described themselves that way. On the other hand, 2016 GOP primary voters were less likely to identify with the Republican Party, compared both to older voters this year and to the young Bush voters of years past. These findings are consistent with recent trends of political polarization and with young people's tendency to eschew party affiliations. However, it is difficult to say whether this says something significant about the potential "Trump youth electorate" or whether it simply reflects increased polarization and other wider trends.

It is also difficult to parse the role of young independent voters, both throughout the primaries and, potentially, this November. However, our analysis leads us to conclude that while Trump may have benefited from the support of older unaffiliated voters in open primaries that allowed them to cast ballots, given his lower level of support among youth overall, young unaffiliated voters probably did not help him dramatically in open primaries.

Primary voters have historically had more formal education than voters in the general election, and both of these groups are more educated, on the whole, than the general population. That trend continued in 2016: this year's young GOP primary voters were more likely to have a four-year college degree than the general population.

For example, in both the Republican and Democratic primaries on Super Tuesday (March 1), the share of young voters with a four-year college degree was double the proportion of college graduates in the general population. Moreover, the share of voters with a four-year college degree was similar in that day's Democratic and Republican Party contests, suggesting the GOP was not especially successful in mobilizing young people without that level of educational attainment. In fact, at least, we find little evidence for the proposition that this year's Republican race has inspired large new swaths of young working-class voters.

Educational Attainment Among General Youth Electorate and Primary Voters

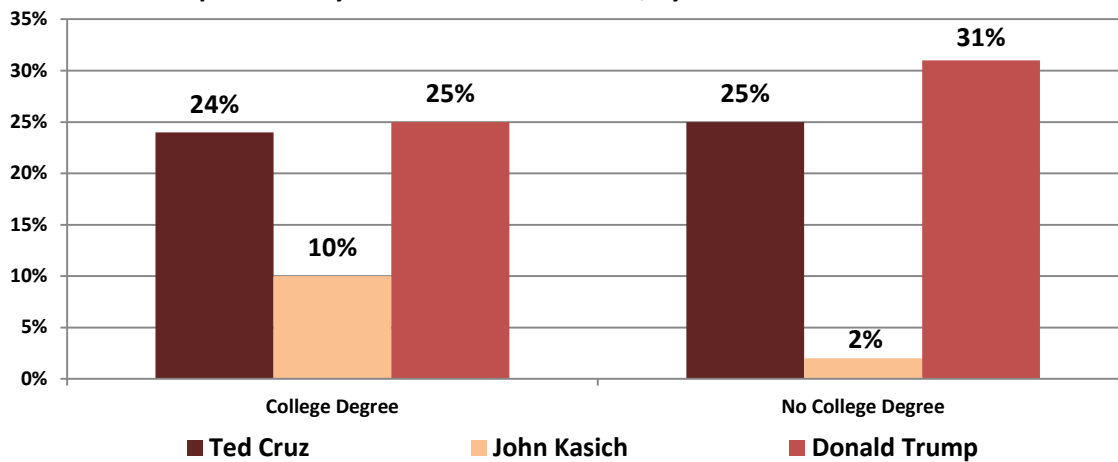


Source: Edison Research's aggregated Super Tuesday Exit Poll Youth Data (2016, 2000, 3004) and CIRCLE analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (2012, 2016). Data are for 18-29 year old citizens.

It is worth noting that Donald Trump’s support from youth with less formal education cannot fully be attributed to the fact that the youngest of young voters (ages 18-24) may not yet have received their degrees even if they are in college. Data from the Indiana and Texas primaries, for example, show that youth aged 25-29, who are comparatively more likely to have finished college, supported Trump at higher levels than their younger peers.

Differences by education level remain one of the most stubborn inequities in youth political engagement. Campaigns that are serious about getting “the youth vote” in the general election must undertake serious efforts to engage young voters without a four-year college degree, though Trump’s relatively high level of support from those voters in the primaries may give him a leg up.

Super Tuesday GOP Youth Vote Choice, by Educational Attainment



Source: GOP Super Tuesday crosstabs

As these and other disparities we have outlined suggest, youth voting in the general election will be highly dependent on mobilization and outreach—who is contacted and who turns out. The high, often historic, youth participation in the 2016 primaries once again showed that youth turnout is driven by infrastructure and information; in these primaries, competitive races in both parties garnered extraordinary amounts of media attention, and at least some campaigns made concerted efforts to engage youth. That offers lessons for both parties in November, who will need to invest in a strong youth outreach operation and facilitate varied ways for young people to participate up and down the ballot.

Some signs point to Trump's candidacy inspiring increased participation, not for him but against him, especially among groups that have traditionally had lower turnout such as Latino and Asian American youth. Given his controversial rhetoric and proposals regarding Hispanic immigrants and Muslims, for example, it is possible that those who strongly oppose his views will be mobilized and feel particularly motivated to go to the polls. Some have posited that Trump may even inspire a surge in recently naturalized citizens who register to vote against Trump. These will be important storylines to follow as the general election nears.

APPENDIX

Donald Trump Performance with Young Voters, by State*			
State	Did Trump Win the State?	Did Trump Win Young Voters?	% Youth Votes for Trump
IA	No	No (3 rd)	19%
NH	Yes	Yes	38% (more than older voters)
NV	Yes	No (2 nd)	31%
SC	Yes	No (2 nd)	26%
AL	Yes	Yes	33% (much less than older voters)
AR	Yes	No (2 nd)	32%
GA	Yes	Yes	35%
MA	Yes	n/a	n/a
OK	No	n/a	n/a
TN	Yes	Yes	38%
TX	No	No, 3 rd)	19%
VT	Yes	n/a	n/a
VA	Yes	No (2 nd)	30%
MI	Yes	Yes	31%
MS	Yes	Yes	45%
FL	Yes	Yes	36% (10 pts less than older voters)
IL	Yes	Yes	32%
MO	Yes	No (2 nd)	39%
NC	Yes	No (2 nd)	30%
OH	No	No (2 nd)	24% (much less than older voters)
WI	No	No (2 nd)	33%
NY	Yes	n/a	n/a
CT	Yes	n/a	n/a
DE	Yes	n/a	n/a
MD	Yes	Yes	33% (much less than older voters)
PA	Yes	Yes	52% (almost same range as older voters)
RI	Yes	n/a	n/a
IN	Yes	Yes	47% (10 pts below age 45+ group)

*Only includes states where data are available

Donald Trump and Young Voters

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University.

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