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2016 Election

Youth Voting in the 2016 Primaries

A state-by-state recap of CIRCLE's
exclusive youth voting estimates

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Introduction

Throughout the 2016 primaries, CIRCLE conducted state-by-state analyses of youth voting in both parties' nominating contests. As this month's Republican and Democratic conventions officially bring the primary season to a close, this fact sheet revisits the day-after youth turnout estimates¹ we calculated for each state contest and expands on the major trend we have highlighted throughout: a considerable increase in young people's electoral participation compared to 2008, the last year both parties had competitive primaries.

Youth Participation Higher in 2016

In 17 of the 24 states for which we have both 2008 and 2016 estimates, the percentage of young (ages 17-29)² eligible voters who cast a ballot in 2016 was equal to or greater than in 2008. These included the states with the lowest ([Nevada, 5%](#)) and highest ([New Hampshire, 43%](#)) youth turnout, both of which were the same in '08 and '16. In several states, the estimated youth turnout jumped by a substantial amount, increasing by 6+ percentage points in [Illinois](#) (18% to 26%), [Missouri](#) (21% to 27%), North Carolina (15% to 24%), and [Wisconsin](#) (25% to 33%). In [Michigan](#), it nearly doubled: from 14% to 27%.

In contrast, in each of the seven states where youth participation was lower in 2016 than in 2008 (Iowa, South Carolina, Georgia, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Texas, and Ohio) the turnout rate dropped by 3 percentage points or less.

It is also worth noting that six of those seven states held their contests on or before Super Tuesday (March 1), which may suggest that young people remained engaged throughout the primary process, even as the field narrowed and clear frontrunners emerged in both parties.

An analysis of our youth votes cast estimates tells a similar story. In the 20 states for which we could estimate, for both parties' primaries or caucuses, how many young people cast ballots, 15 states saw increased youth voting in 2016. (In an additional state, Nebraska, where we estimate that 16,000 young people voted in the Republican caucus but could not produce an estimate for the Democratic caucus, we may safely assume that the youth vote was higher than in 2008, when 20,000 young people voted in both parties' contests combined.) More than 400,000 young people cast 2016 primary ballots in Michigan, in Florida, in Ohio, and in New York—more than half a million voted in Illinois. In 2008, among states for which we have data, only [Ohio](#) crossed the 400,000 young voter threshold.

See the tables on the following pages for full, per-state data.

Estimated Primary/Caucus Turnout among Young Eligible Citizens, by Year (combines data for both parties, if available)

State (in order of primary schedule)	2016	2008	Change
IA	11%	14%	▼
NH	43%	43%	=
NV	5%	5%	=
SC	18%	19%	▼
AL	22%	19%	▲
AR	16%	11%	▲
AK	n/a	n/a	n/a
CO	n/a	n/a	n/a
GA	18%	21%	▼
MA	22%	25%	▼
MN	n/a	n/a	n/a
OK	16%	14%	▲
TN	13%	15%	▼
TX	15%	17%	▼
VT	27%	n/a	n/a
VA	18%	16%	▲
KS	n/a	n/a	n/a
KY	n/a	n/a	n/a
LA	n/a	7%	n/a
ME	n/a	n/a	n/a
NE	n/a	n/a	n/a
HI	n/a	n/a	n/a
ID	n/a	n/a	n/a
MS	16%	14%	▲
MI	27%	14%	▲
DC	n/a	n/a	n/a
WY	n/a	n/a	n/a
FL	17%	13%	▲
IL	26%	18%	▲
MO	27%	21%	▲
NC	24%	15%	▲
OH	23%	25%	▼
AZ	n/a	n/a	n/a
UT	n/a	n/a	n/a
WA	n/a	n/a	n/a
WI	33%	25%	▲
NY	14%	12%	▲
CT	12%	12%	=
DE	n/a	n/a	n/a
MD	18%	15%	▲
PA	18%	14%	▲
RI	n/a	n/a	n/a
IN	25%	n/a	n/a
WV	25%	n/a	n/a
OR	n/a	n/a	n/a
CA	n/a	n/a	n/a
MT	n/a	n/a	n/a
NJ	n/a	n/a	n/a
NM	n/a	n/a	n/a
ND	n/a	n/a	n/a
SD	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Estimates of youth turnout represent CIRCLE analysis of vote tallies as reported by the New York Times at 95-100% reporting (depending on the state), Census Population data and exit poll youth share from Edison Research.

Estimated Youth Participation in Primaries/Caucuses, by Year (both parties combined)

State (in order of primary schedule)	2016	2008	Change
IA	53,000	65,000	▼
NH	90,000	84,000	▲
NV	20,000	20,000	=
SC	129,000	119,000	▲
AL	167,000	136,000	▲
AR	72,000	50,000	▲
AK	n/a	n/a	n/a
CO	n/a	n/a	n/a
GA	234,000	282,000	▼
MA	314,000	231,000	▲
MN	n/a	n/a	n/a
OK	91,000	83,000	▲
TN	124,000	140,000	▼
TX	566,000	n/a	n/a
VT	26,000	n/a	n/a
VA	249,000	n/a	n/a
KS	n/a	n/a	n/a
KY	n/a	n/a	n/a
LA	n/a	51,000	n/a
ME	n/a	n/a	n/a
NE	n/a	20,000	n/a
HI	n/a	n/a	n/a
ID	n/a	n/a	n/a
MS	82,000	71,000	▲
MI	412,000	214,000	▲
DC	n/a	n/a	n/a
WY	n/a	n/a	n/a
FL	467,000	286,000	▲
IL	508,000	378,000	▲
MO	222,000	191,000	▲
NC	351,000	n/a	n/a
OH	425,000	479,000	▼
AZ	n/a	n/a	n/a
UT	n/a	n/a	n/a
WA	n/a	n/a	n/a
WI	299,000	220,000	▲
NY	408,000	312,000	▲
CT	66,000	51,000	▲
DE	n/a	n/a	n/a
MD	171,000	138,000	▲
PA	356,000	n/a	n/a
RI	n/a	n/a	n/a
IN	247,000	n/a	n/a
WV	69,000	n/a	n/a
OR	n/a	n/a	n/a
CA	n/a	n/a	n/a
MT	n/a	n/a	n/a
NJ	n/a	n/a	n/a
NM	n/a	n/a	n/a
ND	n/a	n/a	n/a
SD	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Estimates of youth participation represent CIRCLE analysis of vote tallies as reported by the New York Times at 95-100% reporting (depending on the state) and exit poll youth share from Edison Research.

GOP Youth Drive Rise in Participation, but Young Democrats Still Vote in Higher Numbers

According to our estimates, the considerable increase in youth voting throughout this year's nominating process was largely due to higher participation on the Republican side. **In every single one of the 21 states for which we can make the comparison, as many or more youth votes were cast in the 2016 Republican primaries or caucuses than in the 2008 contests.** In states like [Mississippi](#) (14,000 in 2008 to 49,000 in 2016) and Nebraska (5,000 in 2008 to 16,000 in 2016), the number of youth votes cast more than tripled. In [Alabama](#), nearly eight times more young people voted in this year's Republican primary than in 2008: from 14,000 to 111,000.

In contrast, on the Democratic side, a majority of states experienced a drop in youth voting. In 14 of the 24 states for which we have comparable data, fewer young people cast ballots in 2016 than in the 2008 Democratic contests. This includes all four states that voted before the March 1st Super Tuesday. In several states, we estimate that youth participation fell sharply, dropping by more than 60,000 votes, between 2008 and 2016, in Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. The largest increases were in the Democratic contests in [Michigan](#) (101,000 in 2008 to 227,000 in 2016) and [Florida](#) (152,000 in 2008 to 255,000 in 2016).

The fact that, in most states, Democratic youth participation did not reach the levels of 2008, is notable in a primary cycle that was often defined by a narrative of young people's marked enthusiasm for Bernie Sanders. While our research shows that young people indeed [heavily favored Senator Sanders](#), these data suggest that in many states the candidate did not inspire a surge in turnout from young Democrats—at least not one large enough to match that of then-candidate Barack Obama in 2008.

Even with fewer youth voting on the Democratic side, and large increases among GOP youth, more young people voted in the 2016 Democratic primaries and caucuses than in Republican contests. In 18 of the 26 states for which we could produce 2016 estimates, the number of youth votes cast in Democratic contests exceeded those for the GOP. In six states, young Democratic voters outnumbered young Republicans at the ballot box by more than 2-to-1.

Meanwhile, in eight states—South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, and Indiana—there were more votes cast by young people in Republican primaries than in Democratic contests. That's an improvement from 2008, when Republican youth outvoted young Democrats in only two states, and additional evidence of GOP youth's rising participation in 2016.

See the tables on the following pages for full, per-state, per-party data.

Estimated Youth Participation in Democratic Primaries, by Year

State	2016	2008	Change
IA	31,000	53,000	▼
NH	47,000	51,000	▼
NV	14,000	15,000	▼
SC	55,000	74,000	▼
AL	56,000	68,000	▼
AR	37,000	27,000	▲
AK	n/a	n/a	n/a
CO	n/a	n/a	n/a
GA	105,000	177,000	▼
MA	222,000	169,000	▲
MN	n/a	n/a	n/a
OK	40,000	36,000	▲
TN	56,000	80,000	▼
TX	284,000	n/a	n/a
VT	20,000	n/a	n/a
VA	126,000	n/a	n/a
KS	n/a	n/a	n/a
KY	n/a	n/a	n/a
LA	n/a	36,000	n/a
ME	n/a	n/a	n/a
NE	n/a	15,000	n/a
HI	n/a	n/a	n/a
ID	n/a	n/a	n/a
MS	33,000	57,000	▼
MI	227,000	101,000	▲
DC	n/a	n/a	n/a
WY	n/a	n/a	n/a
FL	255,000	152,000	▲
IL	338,000	291,000	▲
MO	100,000	115,000	▼
NC	203,000	222,000	▼
OH	180,000	349,000	▼
AZ	n/a	n/a	n/a
UT	n/a	n/a	n/a
WA	n/a	n/a	n/a
WI	189,000	176,000	▲
NY	322,000	258,000	▲
CT	49,000	35,000	▲
DE	n/a	n/a	n/a
MD	119,000	104,000	▲
PA	198,000	276,000	▼
RI	n/a	n/a	n/a
IN	115,000	213,000	▼
WV	35,000	46,000	▼
OR	n/a	n/a	n/a
CA	n/a	n/a	n/a
MT	n/a	n/a	n/a
NJ	n/a	n/a	n/a
NM	n/a	n/a	n/a
ND	n/a	n/a	n/a
SD	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Estimates of youth participation represent CIRCLE analysis of vote tallies as reported by the New York Times at 95-100% reporting (depending on the state) and exit poll youth share from Edison Research.

Estimated Youth Participation in Republican Primaries, by Year

State	2016	2008	Change
IA	22,000	13,000	▲
NH	43,000	33,000	▲
NV	5,000	5,000	=
SC	74,000	44,000	▲
AL	111,000	14,000	▲
AR	36,000	22,000	▲
AK	n/a	n/a	n/a
CO	n/a	n/a	n/a
GA	129,000	105,000	▲
MA	91,000	62,000	▲
MN	n/a	n/a	n/a
OK	51,000	46,000	▲
TN	68,000	60,000	▲
TX	281,000	n/a	n/a
VT	6,000	n/a	n/a
VA	123,000	n/a	n/a
KS	n/a	n/a	n/a
KY	n/a	n/a	n/a
LA	n/a	16,000	n/a
ME	n/a	n/a	n/a
NE	16,000	5,000	▲
HI	n/a	n/a	n/a
ID	n/a	n/a	n/a
MS	49,000	14,000	▲
MI	185,000	113,000	▲
DC	n/a	n/a	n/a
WY	n/a	n/a	n/a
FL	212,000	134,000	▲
IL	170,000	88,000	▲
MO	121,000	76,000	▲
NC	148,000	n/a	n/a
OH	245,000	131,000	▲
AZ	n/a	n/a	n/a
UT	n/a	n/a	n/a
WA	n/a	n/a	n/a
WI	109,000	44,000	▲
NY	86,000	54,000	▲
CT	17,000	17,000	=
DE	n/a	n/a	n/a
MD	52,000	34,000	▲
PA	157,000	n/a	n/a
RI	n/a	n/a	n/a
IN	133,000	n/a	n/a
WV	33,000	n/a	n/a
OR	n/a	n/a	n/a
CA	n/a	n/a	n/a
MT	n/a	n/a	n/a
NJ	n/a	n/a	n/a
NM	n/a	n/a	n/a
ND	n/a	n/a	n/a
SD	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Estimates of youth participation represent CIRCLE analysis of vote tallies as reported by the New York Times at 95-100% reporting (depending on the state) and exit poll youth share from Edison Research.

Conclusion

Millions of young people participated in the 2016 Republican and Democratic nominating contests. Youth voters surpassed previous participation records in GOP primaries, while young Democratic voters, though generally less numerous than in 2008, played a significant part in shaping that party's race for the presidency. In some states, youth may have even [swung the primary](#) in favor of their preferred candidate.

As we consider the potential for young people to continue having an [impact this November](#), in both the presidential and in congressional races, these data are a useful guide to where young voters have been participating in this election cycle—and need continued outreach so that they remain engaged through November—and where even more effort is needed to reach and encourage young people to participate in the democratic process.

¹ The youth turnout estimates in this fact sheet should be treated as just that: estimates. CIRCLE calculates estimates of primary participation in the same way each presidential primary cycle so that comparisons can be made. For each state, a denominator of the youth citizen population was calculated using the Census Current Population Survey March 2016 Population Supplement. An estimate of the number of youth participating in each state is developed using the share of voters who are young (18-29 or 17-29, depending on the state) along with the number of votes cast in the state reported by major media outlets.

² In the 2016 cycle, 17-year-olds who will be 18 for the general election were allowed to cast primary ballots in 22 states.

Youth Voting in the 2016 Primaries

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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