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2016 Election

# Hillary Clinton and Young Voters

Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director  
Noorya Hayat, Researcher  
Abby Kiesa, Director of Impact  
Felicia Sullivan, Senior Researcher

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Jonathan M. Tisch  
College of Civic Life

## Introduction

After accepting the nomination at last month's Democratic National Convention, Secretary Hillary Clinton is now officially her party's candidate for President of the United States. Her path to that nomination, which had once seemed like a foregone conclusion, followed a hard-fought primary with Senator Bernie Sanders that was largely shaped by young people across the country. Now, as we move formally into the general election season, it is useful to review our data on Secretary Clinton's youth support throughout the primaries, what we know about young voters' opinions of the Democratic candidate, and the potential role of youth in her matchup with Republican nominee Donald Trump this November.<sup>1</sup>

Important questions include:

- ★ How did Hillary Clinton perform among young people who voted in the primaries? How did her youth support compare to that of previous Democratic nominees?
- ★ How do young people overall view Hillary Clinton? Which groups of young people are most likely to vote for her?
- ★ Is the general youth electorate more or less favorable to Hillary Clinton than the Democratic primary electorate?

### **How did Hillary Clinton do among young people who voted in the primaries? How did Hillary Clinton's youth support compare to that of previous Democratic nominees?**

Secretary Clinton won 20 of the 27 state primaries for which we have Democratic exit poll data, but won a majority of young voters (ages 17-29)<sup>2</sup> in just two of those states—Alabama and Mississippi. She surpassed 40% of the youth vote in only three other states: South Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia. As this group of five states suggests, Secretary Clinton performed relatively better with young African Americans. She also did better among older youth (ages 25-29). Secretary Clinton's performance with youth lagged far behind that of recent Democratic presidential nominees.

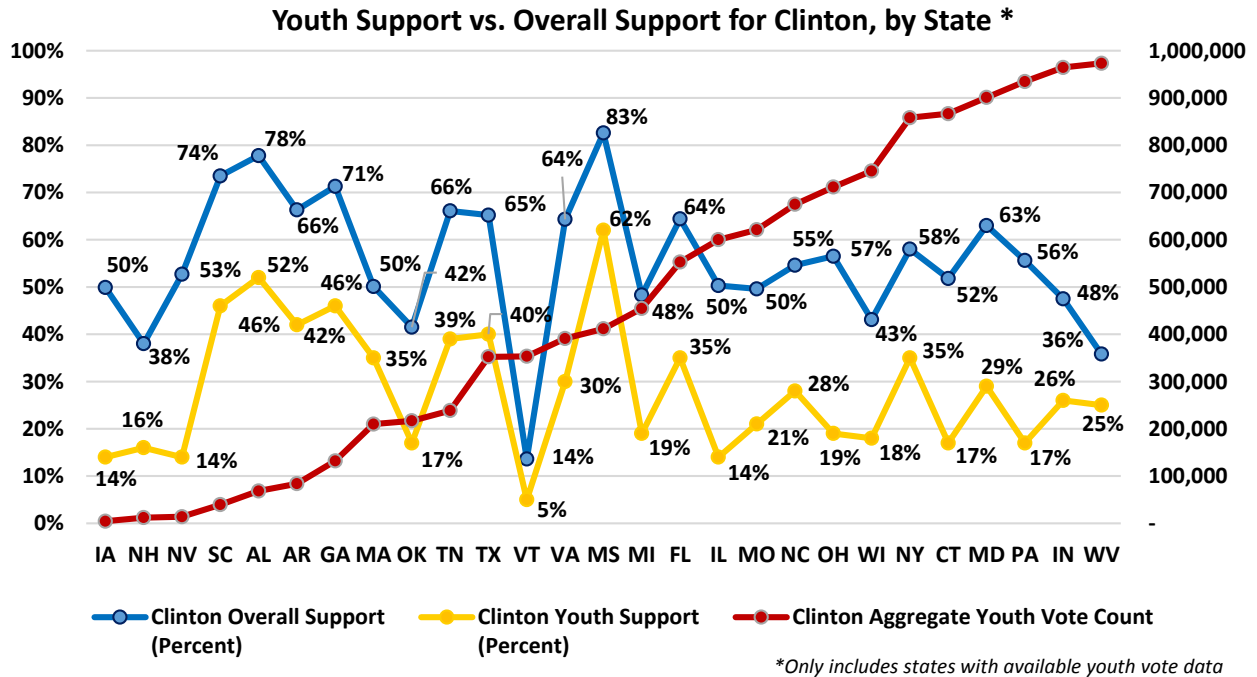
One of the defining trends of the 2016 Democratic primaries was the historic level of youth support for Hillary Clinton's opponent, Senator Bernie Sanders. Indeed, against a challenger who focused intensely on youth and whose progressive proposals seemed to resonate powerfully with many young people, Secretary Clinton struggled to win over pluralities of young liberal or Democratic voters and largely racked up primary victories in spite of youth, not because of them.

In those 27 states for which we have data, Secretary Clinton received around 973,000 of the estimated 3.5 million votes cast by young people in those contests—a per-state average of 28%. By contrast, in 2008, then-Senator Obama received an average of 56% of youth votes in the Democratic primaries and caucuses for which exit polls were conducted. Four years earlier, an

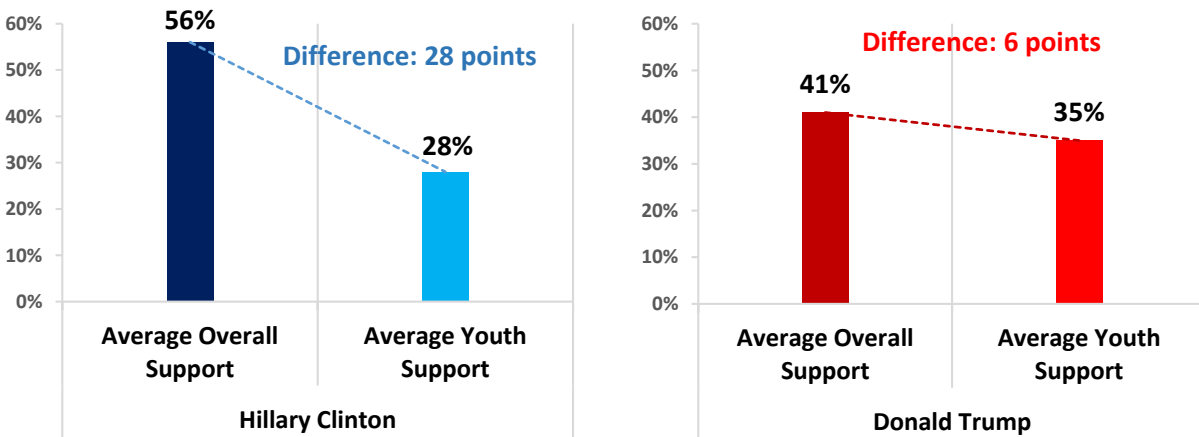
<sup>1</sup> See also CIRCLE's previous analysis: [Donald Trump and Young Voters](#)

<sup>2</sup> In the 2016 cycle, 17-year-olds who will be 18 on the date of the general election were allowed to cast primary ballots in 22 states.

average of 48% of young voters in the Democratic nominating contests supported then-Senator Kerry. Both of these candidates went on to win young voters to varying degrees in their respective general elections: Senator Kerry received 54% of young voters' support in 2004, and President Obama received 66% support from young voters in 2008 and 60% in 2012.



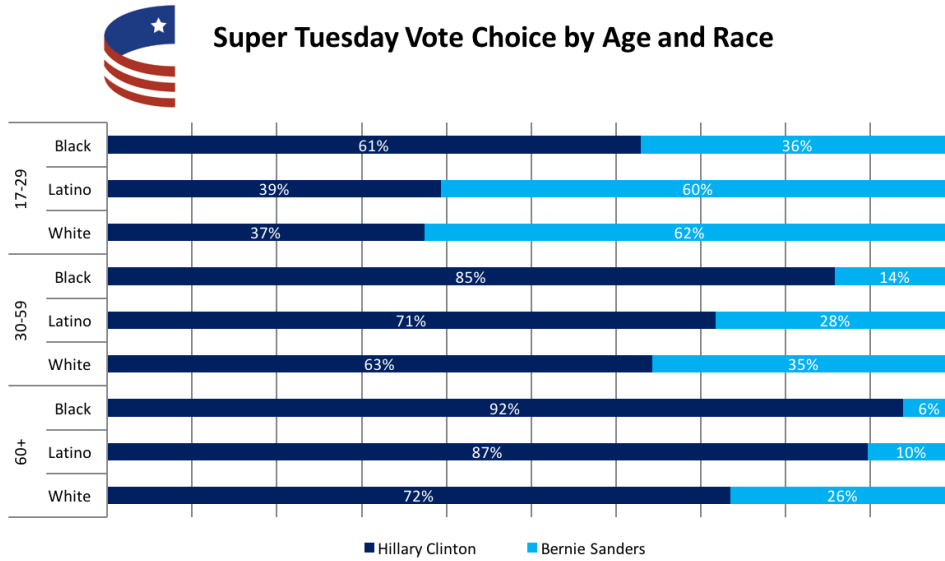
### Average Overall Electorate Support vs. Average Youth Support, by Candidate



CIRCLE analysis of Super Tuesday voting data<sup>3</sup> allows us to dig deeper into Secretary Clinton's level of support among different youth subgroups. As mentioned above, young whites and

<sup>3</sup> Edison Research conducted exit polls in nine of the 12 states that voted on March 1 (AL, AR, GA, MA, OK, TN, TX, VT, and VA) and young Super Tuesday voters were demographically representative of youth nationwide.

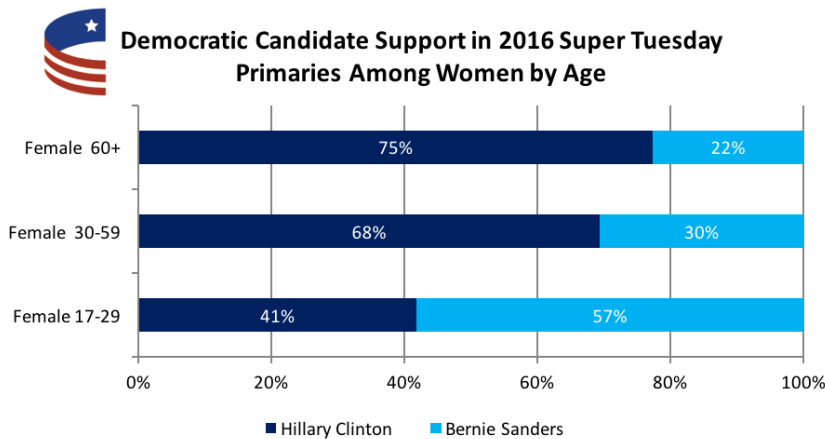
Latinos were less likely to support Hillary Clinton than Black youth; more than half of young African Americans (61%) who voted on Super Tuesday chose Secretary Clinton, while just under 40% of white and Latino youth voted for her.



Source: Edison Research aggregate state exit polls from Super Tuesday 2016.

On average, young Democratic primary voters on Super Tuesday were more educated than the overall electorate: 83% had some college experience and 44% had a college degree. That being said, there was no difference in the level of youth support for Hillary Clinton by educational attainment. Almost two-thirds (62%) of young Super Tuesday voters without a bachelor's degree supported Senator Sanders, and 37% supported Secretary Clinton. Among voters with a college degree, the numbers were exactly the same. That's a marked difference from the Republican race, in which Donald Trump did better on Super Tuesday among youth without a college degree.

Additionally, young women were more likely to support Hillary Clinton than young men (41% vs. 32%). However, young women were less likely to support Secretary Clinton than older women.



Source: Edison Research aggregate state exit polls from Super Tuesday 2016.

Even among young people between the ages of 17-29, the older group of youth were more supportive of Secretary Clinton. In 12 of the 14 states where voting data allows for comparisons, young people aged 25-29 voted for Hillary Clinton at higher rates than youth aged 17-24. (Only in New Hampshire were the older youth more likely to cast ballots for Senator Sanders, and in Missouri their support was exactly the same.) However, the size of the difference in support between both age groups varied a great deal between states. For example, in Florida, 34% of 17- to 24-year-olds supported Clinton and 36% of 25- to 29-year-olds did, while in New York, 19% of 18- to 24-year-olds supported Clinton while 47% of 25- to 29-year-olds did.

## How do young people overall view Hillary Clinton? Which groups of young people are most likely to vote for her?

At least half of young people have negative views of Secretary Clinton, and similar numbers do not find her honest and trustworthy. While more youth report that they intend to vote for Hillary Clinton than for Donald Trump, who has even lower favorability numbers, her support is not overwhelming, especially in polling that includes third-party candidates. However, Secretary Clinton may enjoy higher support from constituents that have been especially supportive of other recent Democratic presidential nominees, such as young single women, young Black women, and young Latinas.

Data from the recent polls of young people paint a picture of an ambivalent youth electorate, though they certainly see Secretary Clinton in a more favorable light than they see Donald Trump. A [mid-July YouGov poll](#) found 48% of 18- to 29-year-olds had a "favorable" view of the candidate; in mid-to-late June [GenForward survey](#), only 39% of young adults (18-30) had a "very" or "somewhat" favorable view of the Democratic candidate.

Around half of youth believe Hillary Clinton is "qualified to be president" (49% in YouGov poll; 55% in GenForward Poll) while only about one-fifth of young people say the same about Donald Trump (19% in YouGov; 21% in GenForward). Slightly more than a third (35%) of youth in the YouGov poll said that Secretary Clinton is "ready to be commander in chief" (20% for Trump). Just over half (55%) of young people in the YouGov poll did NOT consider Clinton "honest and trustworthy;" in the GenForward poll, nearly three-quarters of young people (72%) gave that answer. Donald Trump, however, is deemed even less honest and trustworthy by youth: 69% in the YouGov poll and 80% in the GenForward poll.

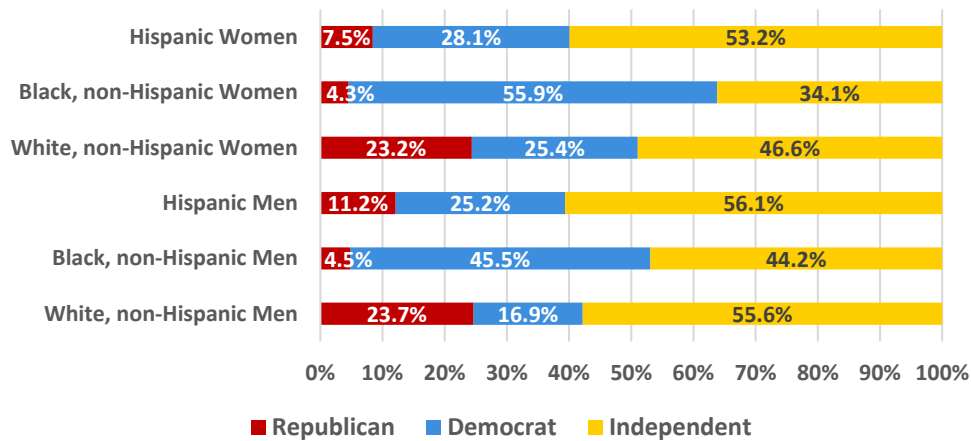
While many youth may have reservations about Secretary Clinton, a plurality (43%) of young registered voters polled by YouGov report that they would vote for her this November, vs. 26% who chose Donald Trump in the same poll. In the GenForward poll, 38% said they would support Clinton, 22% would vote for "someone else," 17% for Donald Trump, and 16% said they probably won't vote. Asian-American (55%) and African-American (52%) youth were the most likely to say they would vote for Secretary Clinton, while white youth were split more evenly between Clinton (30%) and Trump (26%).

Support from young people of color may be especially key in November, as well as support from young women; together, these two groups make up roughly 70% of youth eligible to vote, and young women have historically turned out to vote in general elections at a higher rate than young men. While Secretary Clinton did not do as well with young women as with older women during the primaries, the most [recent polling](#) by Harvard's Institute of Politics (spring 2016) found that Hillary Clinton would win by 18 points among young men and by a staggering 42 points

among young women. It is worth noting, however, that those results are from a nationally representative sample of youth, not all of whom will vote.

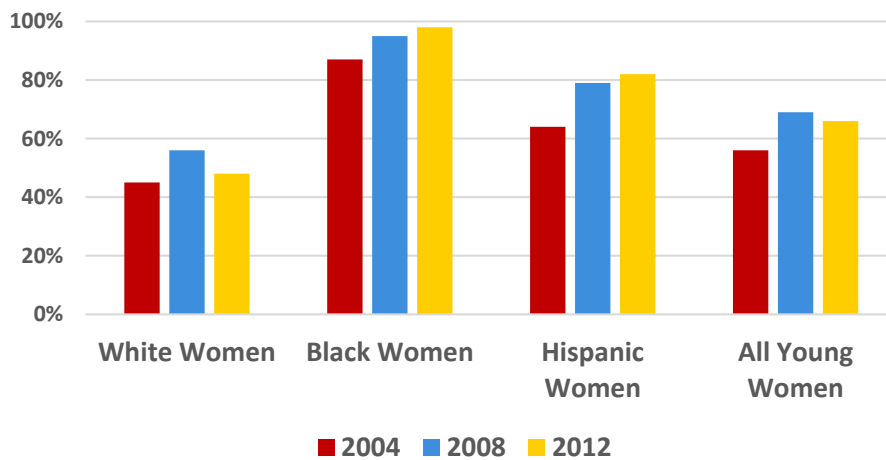
One reason for Hillary Clinton's expected dominance among young women is their historical preference for the Democratic Party. Young women report more favorable views of Democrats than young men, which is evident in both party identification and in young women's vote choice in recent elections. Among all young women, young Black women and young Latinas have been much more likely to support Democratic presidential candidates than young white women. Among young white women, unmarried young white women have been more likely than their married counterparts to support Democratic candidates in the last three presidential elections.

### Political Party Identification, Ages 18-34



Source: CIRCLE's tabulation of Pew Research of Political Polarization Data

### Youth Support for Democratic Presidential Candidates by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

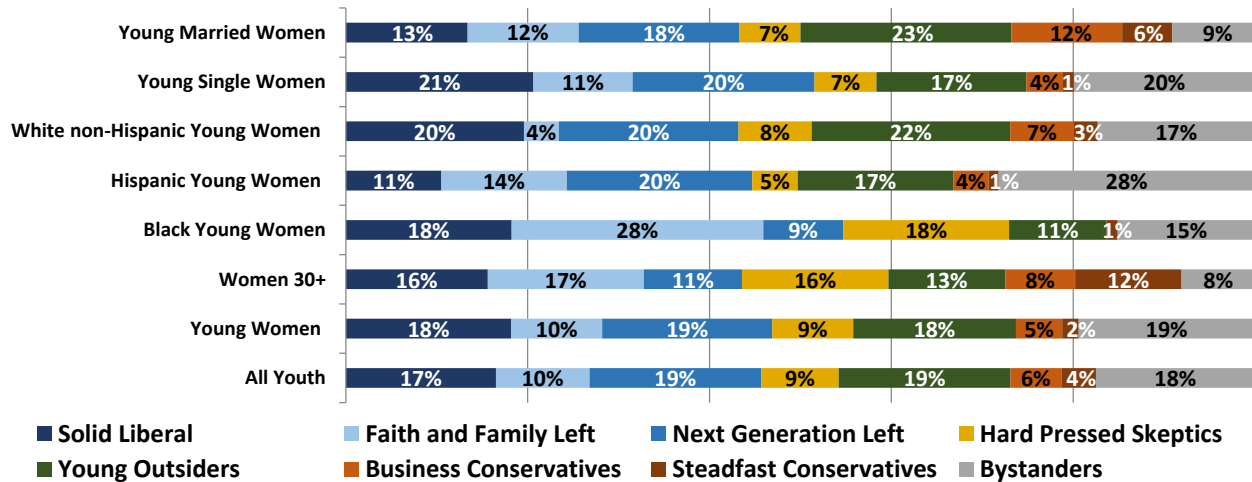


There is also an ideological component, as young women tend to be more liberal than young men on most issues. For example, young women are more likely than young men (91% vs. 80%)

to say that the government should run programs like Medicare and Medicaid. They are also more likely to support same sex marriage and gun control, and more likely to believe that the country needs to do more work on racial equality. According to our analysis of Pew Research political typology data, nearly half (47%) of young women fit into Pew's three more liberal groups.

Close to one-fifth of young women are "Solidly Liberal," a category that groups those who support a strong role for government and who hold mainstream socially and economically liberal positions. On the other hand, those in the "Faith and Family Left" also support a strong government but are more conservative on social issues; for example, just over half of youth in this group say homosexuality "should be accepted." Members of this group are also more likely to attend religious services regularly and are the most likely (39%) to describe themselves as "politically moderate."

**Political Ideology Distribution among Youth and Women; by Age, Race, and Ethnicity**



Because the group of young women who are "Solidly Liberal" mirror the demographics of the general youth population, the majority of young women in that category are white. Meanwhile, young women in the "Faith and Family Left" are far more likely to be Black and Hispanic women than those who belong to other segments of the typology. These demographic and ideological differences highlight the diversity of potential Clinton voters—some more likely to support her than others—who are attracted to her candidacy based on various reasons and issues.

**Is the general youth electorate more or less favorable to Hillary Clinton than the Democratic primary electorate?**

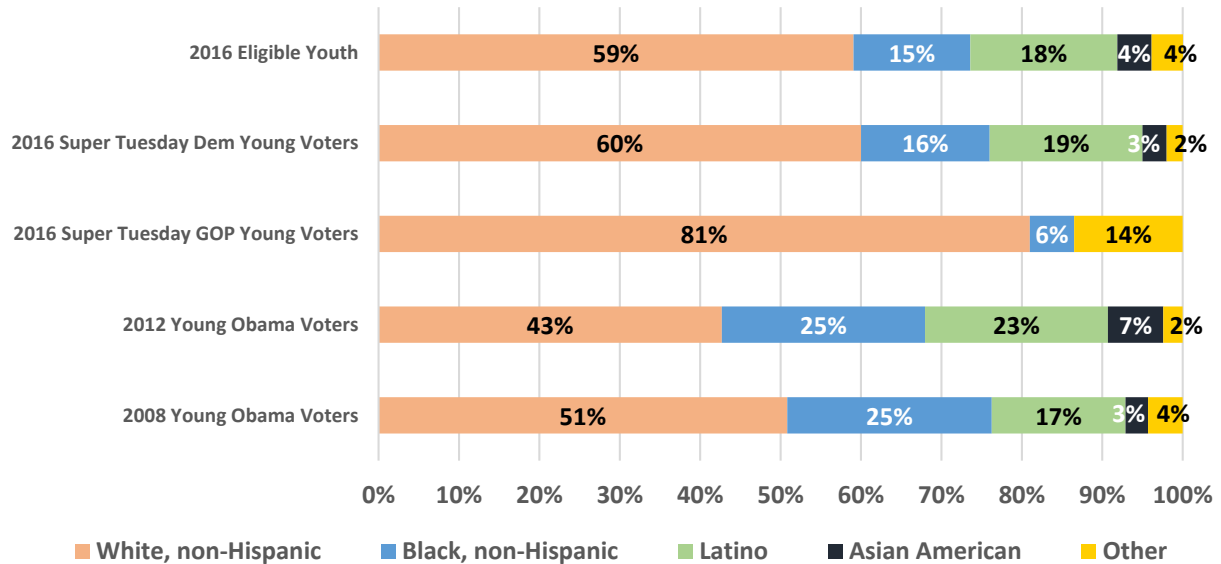
The youth electorate in recent general elections has been more diverse than this year's Democratic primary youth electorate, which may benefit Hillary Clinton given her relative strength—and Donald Trump's significant weakness—with young women and youth of color. Much will depend on how many young people turn out to cast their ballot this November While Secretary Clinton moves into the general election with a large number of young liberal and Democratically inclined potential voters, her campaign has a long way to go to both persuade and mobilize many of these youth.

Young Democratic primary voters in 2016 were not as racially diverse as the young people who voted for Barack Obama in the 2008 and 2012 general elections. For example, Black youth made up 16% of young voters in this year's Democratic contests, while they made up 17% and 18%, respectively, of young Democratic voters in the past two presidential elections. Young Latinas, who made up 14% of the Democratic youth electorate in the 2008 general, and 9% in 2012, represented just 6% of young people who cast ballots in this year's Democratic primaries and caucuses.

If those trends hold, and the youth electorate this November is more ethnically diverse than in these Democratic primaries, Secretary Clinton may face a more favorable electorate, given her strength with many youth of color. However, it is possible that the higher diversity in '08 and '12 was a result of the notably diverse "Obama coalition" and that the numbers from 2016 so far are a return to the norm.

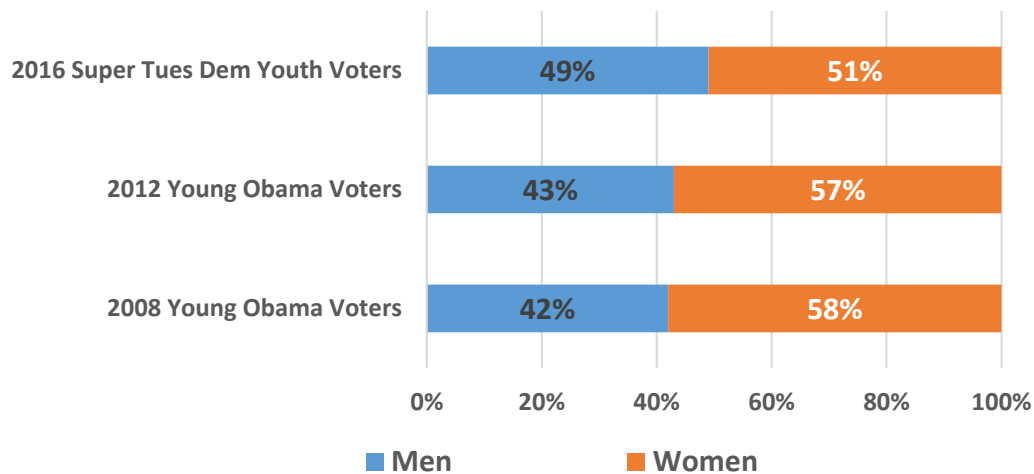
Additionally, women made up a larger proportion of the Democratic youth electorate in President Obama's two general elections (52% and 55%) than in this year's Democratic primaries (51%). President Obama's youth electorate was also older: 42% and 46% of youth who voted for him in '08 and '12 were aged 25-29, while it was 41% in the 2016 Democratic primaries. These two other Clinton strengths outlined above, young women and older youth, may also help her in November if they are once again more heavily represented.

**Race and Ethnicity among General Youth Electorate and Primary Voters**





### Obama Voters and 2016 Democratic Primary Voters, by Gender



Beyond the potential for a more demographically favorable youth electorate, the greatest difference between Hillary Clinton's performance with young people in these primaries and this November will surely come from the change in opponent. Secretary Clinton will go from a rival, in Bernie Sanders, who was historically popular with youth, to an opponent in Donald Trump who is historically unpopular with youth.

While some have raised questions about whether young Sanders supporters might flock to Donald Trump as an anti-establishment option in the general election, signs point to Secretary Clinton being able to attract many Sanders voters. The late-June GenForward Survey asked youth who would have supported Senator Sanders in a Sanders/Trump match-up what they would do if Clinton was on the ballot instead of not Sanders. Fifty-one percent said they would support her, 26% reported that they would not support her, and 23% were not sure. Similarly, a [battleground state poll](#) released in late July found that 58% of Senator Sanders' supporters would support Hillary Clinton. These polls were conducted before the Democratic National Convention, in which Sanders endorsed both Secretary Clinton and a party platform he and his supporters helped shape, and could therefore be higher now.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump faces a steep hill to climb in order to make headway among youth, especially among youth of color, less than 10% of whom report they intend to vote for him (GenForward). The above-mentioned polling, which found that a large majority of youth believes he lacks the "qualifications to be president," suggests why young people may be unwilling to join Trump's camp. In addition, 72% of young people in the YouGov poll described Trump as "dangerous." (For more, read our previous report, [Donald Trump and Young Voters](#).)

These numbers point to extraordinary potential for Hillary Clinton to garner a significant proportion of the youth vote this November, but they are not a guarantee that young people will turn out to vote. Voter outreach, crucial in every cycle and with every segment of the population, is especially critical with youth; our research has shown that young people who are contacted about voting are more likely to cast a ballot on Election Day.

The nature and tenor of that youth outreach may also make a difference. Many young people are already turned off by the negativity and polarization in politics. While Donald Trump's controversial comments about certain groups, which many have deemed offensive, may be ripe for attack ads targeted at young liberals who are particularly sensitive to issues of identity, this kind of negative messaging runs the risk of alienating youth even more. In fact, our research has also shown that young people vote based on a candidate's positions on the issues they care about, not on their perception of a politician's personal qualities.

## APPENDIX

## State-by-state\* youth vote choice in Democratic primaries

State	Who Won the State?	Who Won Young Voters?	Difference in Youth Vote Choice
IA	Clinton	Sanders	84-14
NH	Sanders	Sanders	83-16
NV	Clinton	Sanders	82-14
SC	Clinton	Sanders	54-46
AL	Clinton	<b>Clinton</b>	<b>40-52</b>
AR	Clinton	Sanders	58-42
GA	Clinton	Sanders	54-46
MA	Clinton	Sanders	65-35
OK	Sanders	Sanders	82-17
TN	Clinton	Sanders	61-39
TX	Clinton	Sanders	59-40
VT	Sanders	Sanders	95-5
VA	Clinton	Sanders	69-30
MI	Sanders	Sanders	81-19
MS	Clinton	<b>Clinton</b>	<b>37-62</b>
FL	Clinton	Sanders	64-35
IL	Clinton	Sanders	86-14
MO	Clinton	Sanders	78-21
NC	Clinton	Sanders	72-28
OH	Clinton	Sanders	81-19
WI	Sanders	Sanders	82-18
NY	Clinton	Sanders	65-35
CT	Clinton	Sanders	83-17
MD	Clinton	Sanders	68-29
PA	Clinton	Sanders	83-17
IN	Sanders	Sanders	74-26
WV	Sanders	Sanders	70-25

\*Only states for which data is available

## State-by-state\* youth vote choice in Democratic primaries, by age group

State	Clinton, 17-24	Clinton, 25-29	Sanders, 17-24	Sanders, 25-29
IA	11%	17%	86%	81%
NH	17%	14%	82%	85%
NV	12%	n/a	83%	n/a
SC	40%	52%	60%	48%
AL	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
AR	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
GA	38%	n/a	61%	n/a
MA	28%	42%	71%	58%
OK	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TN	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TX	36%	45%	62%	55%
VT	n/a	5%	n/a	95%
VA	26%	n/a	72%	n/a
MI	15%	24%	85%	75%
MS	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FL	34%	36%	66%	61%
IL	10%	18%	88%	82%
MO	21%	21%	78%	78%
NC	19%	37%	81%	62%
OH	15%	23%	85%	77%
WI	16%	20%	84%	79%
NY	19%	47%	81%	53%
CT	15%	n/a	85%	n/a
MD	26%	n/a	74%	n/a
PA	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IN	18%	35%	82%	65%
WV	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

\*Only states for which data is available

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## Hillary Clinton 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.

Learn more at [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

