



Making Sense of the Youth Vote: What a Massive Turnout Could Accomplish



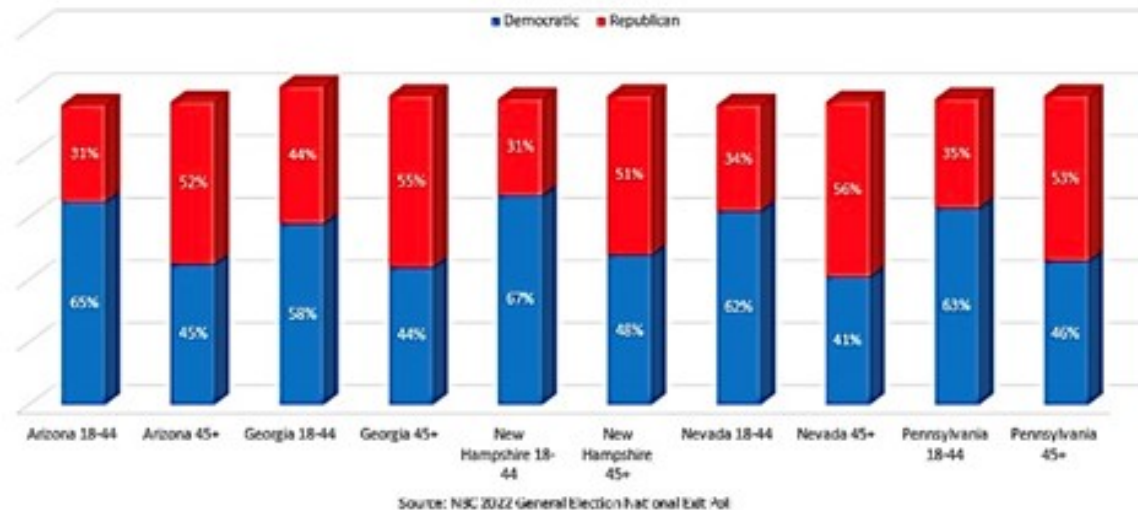
Four million Americans turn 18 years old each year and almost all of them are eligible to vote. But during the 2022 midterm elections, less than a quarter of new 18-year olds voted. This is bad for democracy. It is also a missed opportunity for those of us who support liberal policies because young voters tend to prefer Democratic candidates by a 2-to-1 margin. Getting them registered and to the polls is critical to the 2024 election strategy.

To be sure, young voters, like all other groups of voters, turn out in greater numbers during presidential elections than in off-years. By one estimate, 50% of people ages 18-29 voted in the 2020 presidential election. This constituted a large increase from 2016, when just 39% of young people voted, and it was one of the highest rates of youth electoral participation since the voting age was lowered to 18. The upswing in youth voting has not been limited to presidential elections. In battleground states, there was a large increase in youth mid-term voting from 2014 to 2018 with a sizeable turnout again in 2022 (although somewhat lower relative to 2018). Over the past decade, the increases in youth voting have far outpaced increases by older generations.

The largest increases in youth voter turnout in 2020 were in New Jersey (+22 percentage points), Arizona (+18), California (+17) and Washington (+17). Notably, all of these states except Arizona automatically mailed absentee

ballots to all registered voters. This suggests that states could increase youth turnout by sending mail-in ballots to the electorate. It also explains why Republican state legislatures are passing laws to restrict it.

Democrats should be particularly interested in a large youth turnout. In battleground states in 2022, 18-44 year-olds strongly supported Democrats while a majority of older voters in those states supported Republicans. The graph below shows two columns for each key state. The first column shows the percentage of younger voter support for the two political parties while the second shows the percentage of support by older voters.



This partisan tilt is most dramatic among the youngest voters, those born after 1996. Of those who voted in congressional races in 2022, 77% voted for Democrats. The Democratic advantage is even more pronounced among young Blacks. During the 2022 midterms, 89% of Blacks ages 18-29 voted for Democratic candidates. And once young people start voting, they usually make voting a habit for the rest of their lives. This provides Democrats with a lifelong advantage, despite a tendency by some to become politically more conservative as people age.

Why do young voters favor Democratic candidates so strongly? A big reason is that they overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party's positions on cultural issues such as abortion and racial justice. Gen Z (born 1997-2012) was the only generation where a far greater percentage (29%) ranked abortion and reproductive rights as their most important political issue in 2022 with the economy/inflation less a political priority (12%).

Interestingly, even a majority of young Republican voters are closer to the Democrats' positions on these issues than they are to their own party's positions. This might partially explain why voters in the bright red state of Kansas **rejected** a ballot measure that would have removed protections for abortion rights from the state's constitution. Voters under the age of 30 comprised **over 14% of ballots cast**, exceeding the youth vote share for each of the past three general elections in the state.

Other issues that get the attention of young voters are tackling climate change, curbing gun violence, and lowering the cost of college, aligning them with the

Democratic Party platform and with the executive and legislative achievements of President Biden and the Democrats in Congress.

Younger voters have not always been so liberal. In 1984, Americans under 30 strongly backed Ronald Reagan's re-election. In 2000, they split almost evenly between George W. Bush and Al Gore. But in the two decades since, major events, including the Iraq war, the financial crisis, Barack Obama's presidency, the chaos of Trump's presidency and the Republican Party's dramatic swerve to the right appear to have created a more progressive younger generation.

Despite gains in youth turnout in recent years, youth voting continues to lag behind the participation of older generations. But research suggests that that the trend toward better youth turnout could continue, and several groups are focused on achieving that goal.

The importance of youth voters in 2024 explains our [Special Event on July 26](#) entitled, "[The Youth Vote: What if they Don't Show Up?](#)". We will have the participation of **CIRCLE**, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. It's a nonpartisan research organization affiliated with Tufts University. CIRCLE Director Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg will provide additional insights into youth voting trends and civic engagement. CIRCLE has been with us before as it probably provides more detailed insights into youth voting trends than any other organization in the U.S.

[Contribute to CIRCLE](#)

And once again, Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, President and Executive of [NextGen America](#) will participate. NextGen is the country's largest youth voting organization that uses digital and field strategies to turn out young voters in key states. It has registered more than 1.4 million young people to in the 2020 election.

[Contribute to NextGen America](#)

The Special Event on July 26th will begin at 7pm (EDT).

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