

Youth Voting

Headline

The percentage of youth ages 18 to 24 who reported voting and registering to vote was higher in the 2004 presidential election year than in 1996 or 2000 (42 percent reported voting in 2004, compared with 32 percent in both 1996 and 2000). ([See Figure 2](#))

Importance

Active civic participation is important for the future of a nation and a healthy democracy.¹ In 1971, 18- to 20- year olds gained the right to vote, and 50 percent of young adults ages 18 to 24 voted in the 1972 presidential election.² Since then, however, voting among young adults has dropped significantly, causing concern among lawmakers and other policy makers.³

Studies examining the reasons for this decline in voting find that many youth feel uninformed about politics and the electoral process.⁴ A study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress found that one third of high school seniors lack a basic understanding of how the American government operates.⁵ The New Millennium Report issued by the National Association of Secretaries of State also found that youth believe that government and elections are not relevant to things about which they care.⁶ It has been suggested that this belief may explain why many prefer to engage in community service, which is actually on the rise among youth.^{7,8}

Trends

The percentage of youth ages 18 to 24 who reported voting and registering to vote was higher in the 2004 presidential election year than in 1996 or 2000 (42 percent reported voting in 2004, compared with 32 percent in both 1996 and 2000). However, the percentage remained lower than when 18- to 20- year olds first gained the right to vote in 1972. Fifty-nine percent of youth had registered to vote in 1972, while only 52 percent registered to vote in 2004. In 1972, 50 percent of youth actually voted, compared with 42 percent in 2004. ([See Figure 2](#))

Differences by Type of Election

Substantially fewer youth vote in nonpresidential election years, compared with presidential election years. Seventeen percent of youth voted in the 2002, nonpresidential election year, whereas 42 percent voted in the 2004 presidential election year. ([See Figure 3](#))

Differences by Gender

Females are slightly more likely than males to report both registering to vote and actually voting. In the 2004 election, 55 percent of females ages 18 to 24 reported registering to vote, compared with 48 percent of males the same age. Similarly, 45 percent of females reported actually voting, compared with 39 percent of males. ([See Table 1](#))

Differences by Race/Ethnicity

Hispanic youth are the least likely to report registering to vote and actually voting in both presidential and nonpresidential election years. In 2004, 44 percent of black youth and 43 of white youth reported voting, compared with 20 percent of Hispanic youth. ([See Table 1](#))

Note: Estimates for 2004 by race have been revised to reflect the new OMB race definitions, and include only those who are identified with a single race, however, Hispanics may be of any race.

State and Local Estimates

2004 state estimates for young adults ages 18 to 24 are available from the U.S. Census Bureau at: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html> (See Table 4b)

State estimates for 1998 and 2000 as well as comparisons with youth voter turnout in 1972 and 1978, are available from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at:
http://www.civicyouth.org/research/areas/pol_partic_outside5.htm.

International Estimates

While no voting estimates are available, international data on civic behavior (including political knowledge, attitudes and activities) among youth in 27 countries and the U.S. were collected in 1999 as part of the International I.E.A. Civic Education Study. Results are available at www.wam.umd.edu/~iea/interreport.htm

Additionally, data on the percentage of 14-year olds who expect to vote from various countries are available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005021.pdf> (Figure 18).

National Goals

None

Definition

For 2004, eligible voters were asked if they voted and/or registered to vote in the election held on Tuesday, November 2 (2004). Except where otherwise noted, estimates include all young adults (including non-citizens) in the denominator.

Data Source

Data for 2004: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004." Table 2. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html>

Data for 2002: Original Child Trends' analyses of November 2002 Current Population Survey data.

All other data: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. *Trends in the well-being of America's children and youth, 2002*. Tables SD 1.4.A and 1.4.B. <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/02trends/>

Raw Data Source

November Current Population Survey
<http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/vote/votemain.htm>

Next Update

Winter 2006

¹Gibson, Cynthia. 2001. *From inspiration to participation: A review on perspectives of youth civic engagement*. The Grantmaker Forum on Community and National Service and Carnegie Corporation. <http://www.pacefunders.org/publications/pubs/Moving%20Youth%20report%20REV3.pdf>

²Fetto, John. 1999. Down for the count: Voting rates for young adults. *American Demographics*, 21,11:46-7.

³Horwitt, Sanford. 1999. *The NASS New Millennium Survey: American youth attitudes on politics, citizenship, government and voting*. Washington, D.C.: The National Association of Secretaries of State. <http://www.stateofthevote.org/survey/index.htm>.

⁴Hinds, Michael DeCourcy. 2001. Youth Vote 2000: They'd Rather Volunteer. *Carnegie Reporter*: Volume 1, Number 2. Carnegie Corporation of New York. <http://www.carnegie.org/reporter/02/vote2000/>.

⁵The National Center for Education Statistics. 2000. NAEP 1998 Civics Report Card Highlights. The U.S. Department of Education. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pdf/main1998/2000460.pdf>.

⁶Horwitt, 1999.

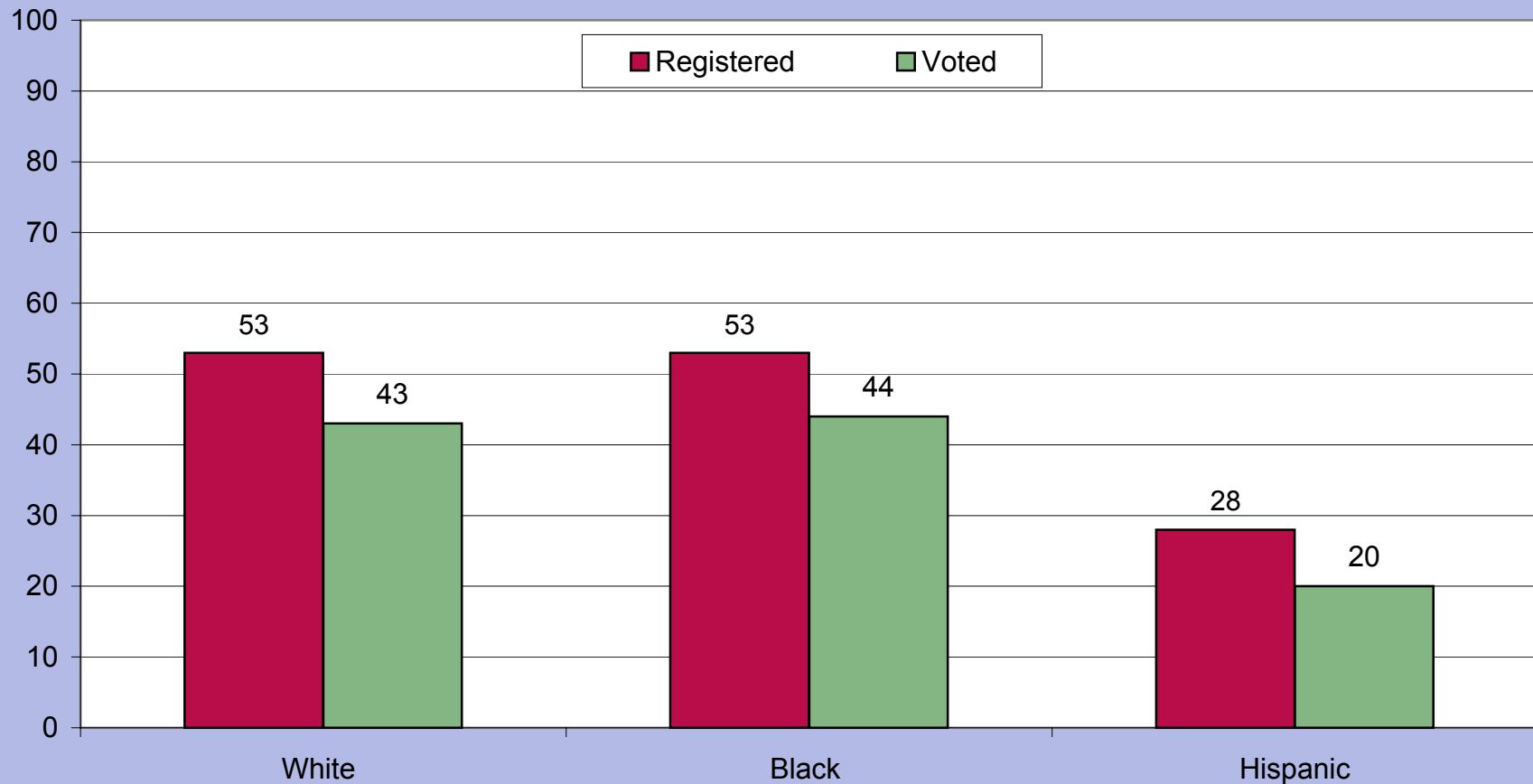
⁷Gibson, 2001.

⁸Zaff, Jonathan F. and Erik Michelsen. Encouraging civic engagement: How teens are (or are not) becoming responsible citizens. *American Teens*. Child Trends. 2003.

<http://www.childtrends.org/files/K6Brief.pdf>.

Figure 1

Percentage of Young Adults (Ages 18-24) Who Reported Registering to Vote and Voting in the 2004 Presidential Election, By Race and Ethnicity*

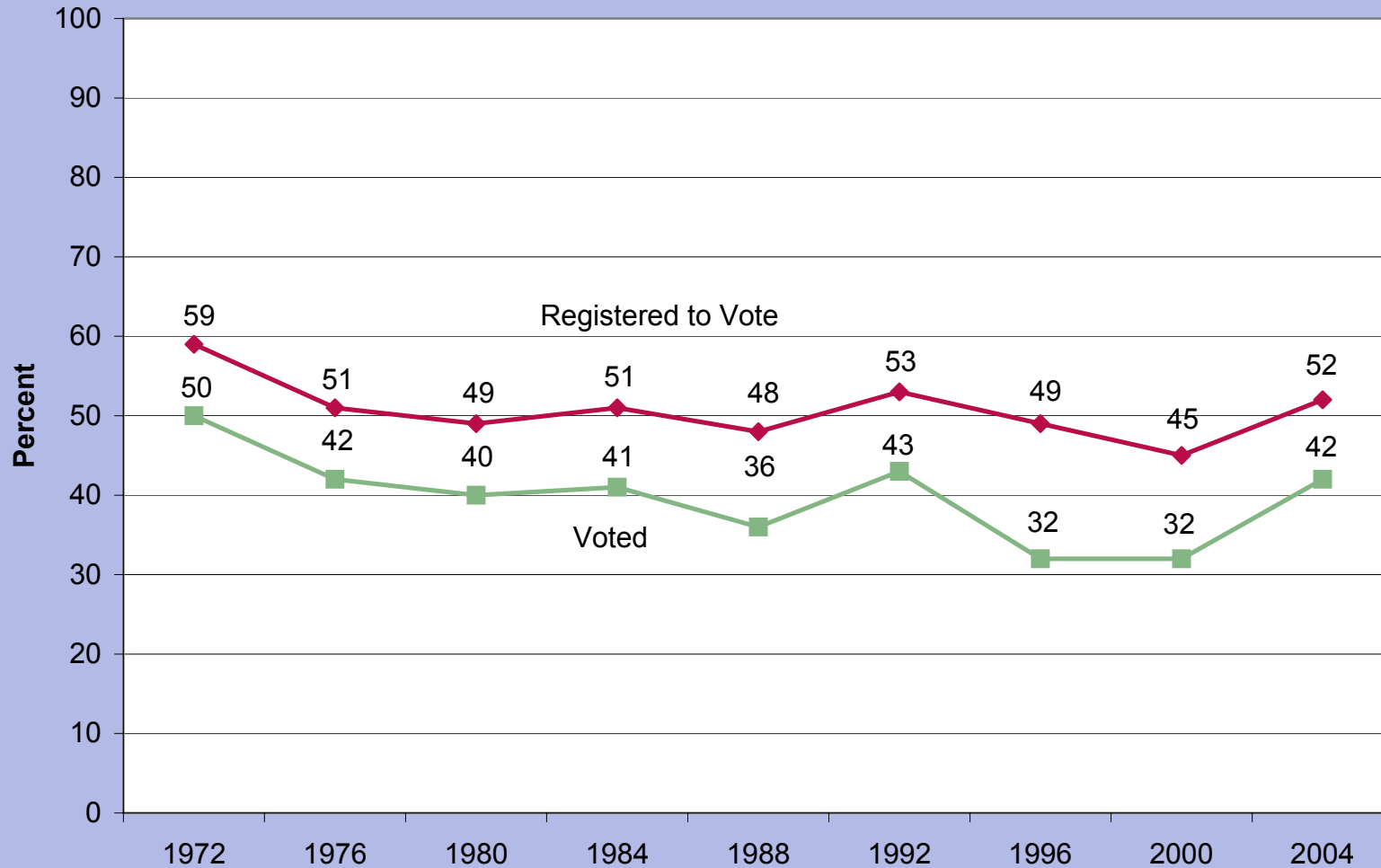


*Note: Estimates for 2004 by race have been revised to reflect the new OMB race definitions, and include only those who are identified with a single race. Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004." Table 2. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html>

Figure 2

Percentage of Young Adults (Ages 18-24) Who Reported Registering to Vote and Voting in Presidential Elections, 1972-2004

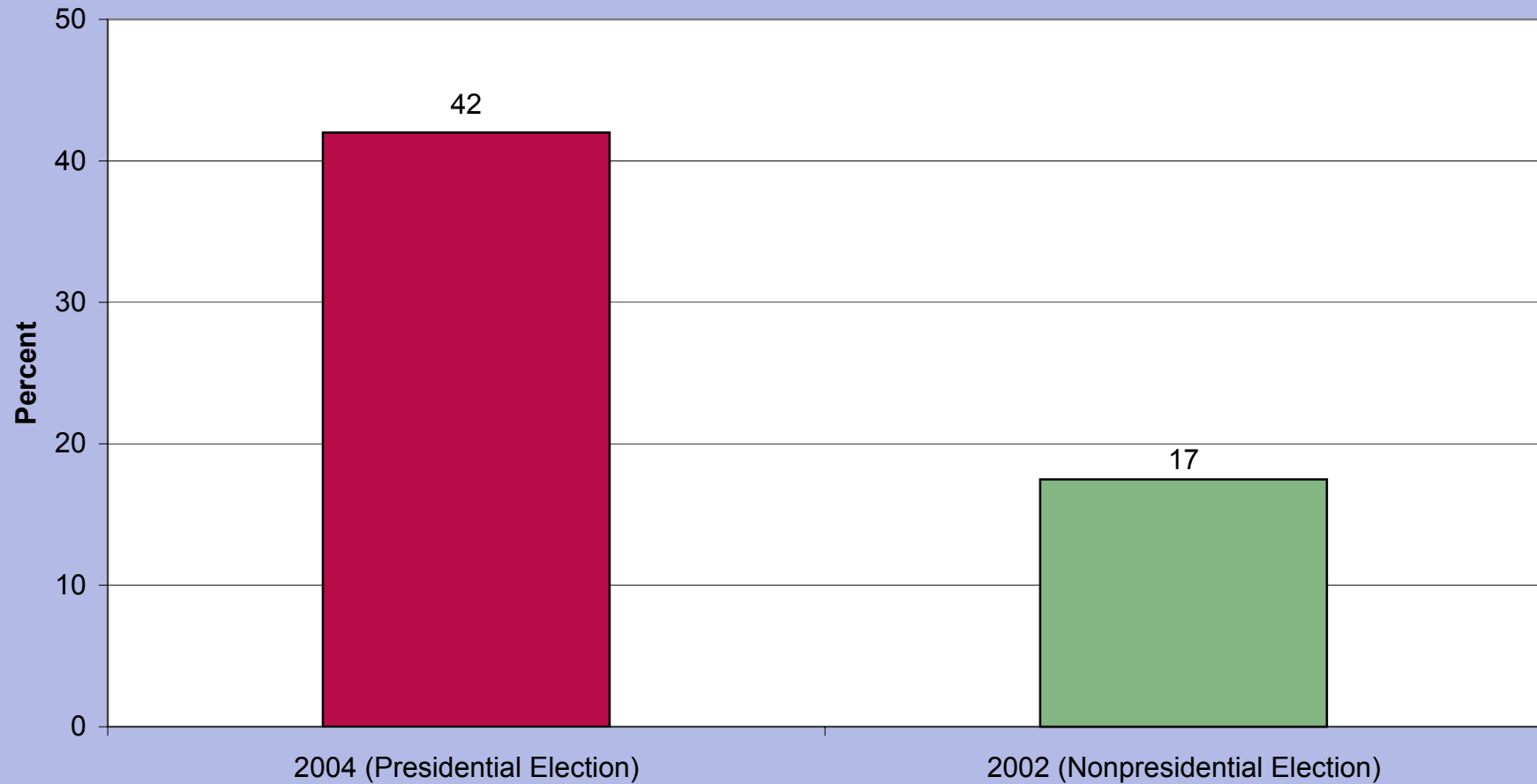


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004." Table 2. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html>



Figure 3

Percentage of Young Adults (Ages 18-24) Who Voted in Presidential and Nonpresidential Elections, 2004 and 2002



Note: Estimates include all young adults (including non-citizens) in the denominator.

Sources: Data for 2002: Original analysis by Child Trends of November 2002 Current Population Survey data. Data for 2004: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004." Table 2.

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html>

Table 1

Percentage of Youth Ages 18 to 24 Who Reported That They Had Registered to Vote and Percentage Who Reported That They Had Voted in Presidential Election Years, 1972-2004

	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Registered									
Total	59	51	49	51	48	53	49	45	52
Gender									
Male	58	51	48	50	46	51	47	42	48
Female	59	52	50	53	51	54	51	49	55
Race/Ethnicity¹									
White	61	54	51	52	49	55	50	46	-
White alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	53
Black	48	39	41	54	50	49	49	48	-
Black alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	53
Hispanic	39	29	23	30	25	25	28	23	28
Voted									
Total	50	42	40	41	36	43	32	32	42
Gender									
Male	49	41	39	39	34	41	30	30	39
Female	50	43	41	43	38	45	35	35	45
Race/Ethnicity¹									
White	52	45	42	42	37	45	33	33	-
White alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	43
Black	35	28	30	41	35	37	32	34	-
Black alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	44
Hispanic	31	22	16	22	17	18	15	15	20
¹ Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Estimates for whites and blacks include Hispanics of those races.									
Note: Current Population Survey figures routinely overestimate voter registration and turnout when compared with official rates. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch. "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2004." Table 2.									
http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2004.html									



Table 2

Percentage of Youth Ages 18 to 24 who reported registering to vote and percentage who reported voting in nonpresidential election years, 1974-2002

	1974	1978	1982	1986	1990	1994	1998	2002
Registered¹								
Total	41	41	42	42	40	42	39	39
Gender								
Male	42	39	42	41	39	41	36	36
Female	41	42	42	43	40	44	42	42
Race/Ethnicity ²								
White	43	41	43	42	40	44	41	40
White non-Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	44
Black	34	37	42	46	40	42	38	40
Hispanic	23	20	24	22	19	20	22	21
Hispanic Citizens	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	34
Voted¹								
Total	24	24	25	22	20	20	17	17
Gender								
Male	25	23	25	21	20	19	16	16
Female	23	24	26	23	21	22	18	19
Race/Ethnicity ²								
White	25	24	25	22	21	21	17	18
White non-Hispanic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20
Black	16	20	26	25	20	17	16	19
Hispanic	13	12	14	12	9	10	9	8
Hispanic Citizens	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13

¹ Estimates include all young adults (including non-citizens) in the denominator.

² Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race. Except where otherwise noted, estimates for whites and blacks include Hispanics of those races.

Note: Current Population Survey figures routinely overestimate voter registration and turnout when compared to official rates.

Source: Data for 2002: Child Trends original analyses of November 2002 Current Population Survey data; All other years from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. *Trends in the well-being of America's children and youth, 2002*. Table SD 1.4.B

