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Youth Voter Turnout and Impact in the 2022 Midterm Elections

A CIRCLE report of early, post-election data
on young people's electoral participation
and influence

December 2022

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About CIRCLE

CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, is a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States. We conduct extensive research on youth participation, and we leverage that research to improve opportunities for all young people to acquire and use the skills and knowledge they need to meaningfully participate in civic life.

In all of our work, we are especially concerned with understanding, addressing, and ultimately eliminating the systemic barriers that keep some young people marginalized from and underrepresented in civic life.

About Our Team

CIRCLE's work is conducted by a dynamic, diverse team of researchers, program coordinators, fellows, research assistants, and support staff. Team members contribute extensive quantitative and qualitative research expertise; ample experience working with partners in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors; and a wide range of interests in myriad aspects of youth participation. Individually and collectively, the staff is deeply committed to CIRCLE's mission of advancing stronger and more equitable youth civic education and engagement. [You can read more about our team here.](#)

While lead authors on several analyses are highlighted throughout the report, the entire CIRCLE team contributed—and continues to work on—our research on the youth vote in 2022.

Inquiries

If you have any questions or requests related to this report, please contact CIRCLE Communications Team Lead Alberto Medina: alberto.medina@tufts.edu.

About Our Youth Voting Research

Voting is a fundamental act of civic participation through which young people contribute to democracy. While it's just one of many ways forms that youth engagement can take, it is a powerful way for young people to make their voices heard and to have an impact on issues that affect them and their communities; it can also serve as an entry point to other forms of participation.

Historically, young people have voted at lower rates than older adults. That may be starting to change: 2018 and 2020 saw major increases in youth voter turnout; and, as you'll read below, youth kept up the trend of strong participation in 2022.



However, there's still much work to do. Our research consistently indicates that the preparation many young people receive (or fail to receive) to become informed voters is inadequate, leading to significant variations in voting rates by race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and other socioeconomic and demographic factors. Understanding all aspects of young people's participation in elections is vital to closing those gaps, expanding the electorate, and strengthening democracy.

About the 2022 Youth Vote and this Report

This report compiles analyses published by CIRCLE in the days following the 2022 midterm elections. (The earliest analyses use data on election results at the time of writing that may not reflect final results.) We used data from the National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research and from AP VoteCast to report on:

- An exclusive estimate of youth voter turnout
- The races where young people had a decisive impact on results
- Youth vote choice by race/ethnicity, gender, education, and other factors
- A demographic analysis of the youth electorate
- The issues that shaped the youth vote
- Young people's views on the political parties and on democracy

In early 2023, we will take a broader and deeper look at young people's electoral participation based on data from an exclusive post-election youth survey. All of that research will be available on our website: <https://circle.tufts.edu>.

Millions of Youth Cast Ballots, Decide Key 2022 Races

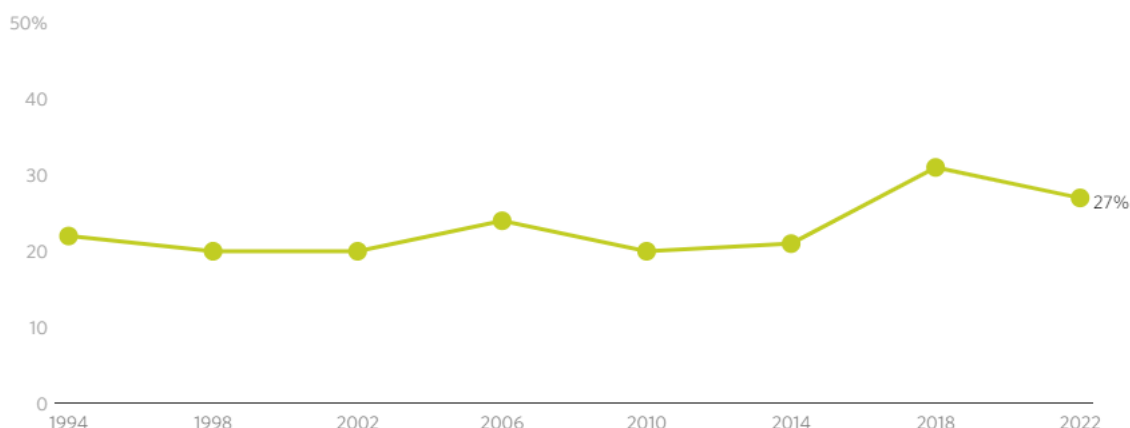
Originally published: November 9, 2022 | [Read it online here](#)

Lead authors: Abby Kiesa, Alberto Medina

According to day-after estimates from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University’s Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, **27% of young people (ages 18-29) turned out to vote in the 2022 midterm election** and helped decide critical races, wielding the growing power of a generation that is increasingly engaged even as many remain disillusioned about U.S. politics. This 2022 youth turnout is likely the second-highest youth turnout rate for a midterm election in the past 30 years, behind only the historic 31% turnout in 2018. Votes cast by young people made up 12% of all votes in this election, nearly matching the 13% youth share of the vote from the 2014 and 2018 midterms according to National Election Pool surveys.

CIRCLE Day-After Estimates of Youth Voter Turnout in Midterm Elections

The percentage of young people, ages 18-29, who cast a ballot in each midterm election (1994-2022)



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research, and Census American Community Survey population data

Nationally, young voters supported Democratic House candidates by a wide margin: 62% to 35%. In several key Senate and gubernatorial elections, youth support for Democratic candidates was even higher, as youth helped hold back a “red wave” even as control of the House and Senate remained undecided Wednesday with races yet to be called.

About the Estimate: CIRCLE’s day-after estimates of youth voter turnout have closely tracked trends confirmed by other data sources, like the Census and voter files, that will become available in the coming months. This estimate is calculated using vote tallies as reported by major news outlets, the youth share of the vote reported by the National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research, and Census American Community Survey population data. This day-after estimate excludes states that had not reported a significant percentage of their vote as of Wednesday afternoon and may be updated in the coming days.

Youth Continue Strong Voting Trend

Our estimate that 27% of youth (ages 18-29) cast a ballot makes 2022 the midterm election with the second-highest youth voter turnout in almost three decades, according to CIRCLE’s day-after calculations. We also estimate that youth turnout was even higher in some battleground states.

After hovering around 20% turnout in midterm elections since the 1990s, young people shifted that trend in 2018, and have maintained that shift in 2022, with more than a quarter of young people casting a ballot. Youth are increasing their electoral participation, leading movements, and making their voices heard on key issues that affect their communities.

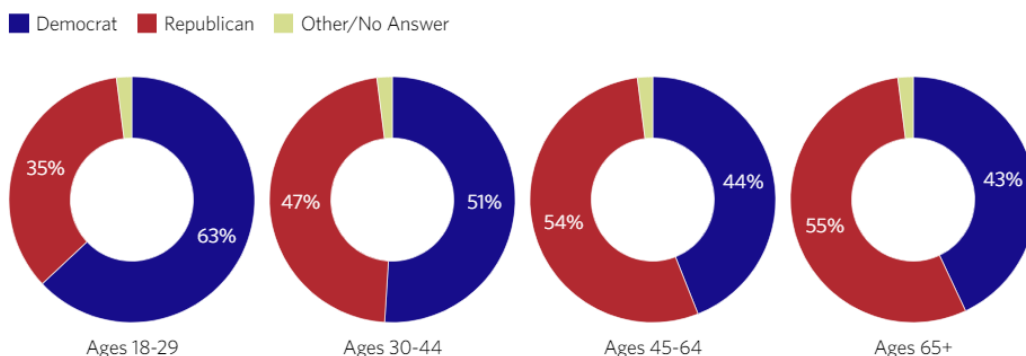
CIRCLE also estimates that, in a group of 10 electorally competitive states for which exit poll data is available (AZ, FL, GA, MI, NC, NH, NV, OH, PA, WI), **the aggregate youth voter turnout was 31%**. Competitive elections that feature more media attention and investment in outreach can influence youth turnout, which is also shaped by [election policies](#), and by how well communities [grow voters](#) by supporting all young people’s electoral participation.

“Young people proved once again that they’ll turn out to vote and impact election results, and their turnout in 2022 is one of the highest we’ve ever seen in a midterm election,” said Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Newhouse Director of CIRCLE. “In many states youth overcame changes to election laws that posed direct barriers to participation and a lack of strong and continued investment in youth registration. There’s both a big need and extraordinary potential to continue building on this trend of strong youth voting by stepping up our support for all youth to have a voice in our democracy.”

Youth Back Democrats, Swing Key Races in PA, MI, WI, GA

Young people also continued their trend of strongly backing Democrats by wide margins and having an impact on elections. According to the National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research, nationally 63% of youth voted for a Democrat, and 35% voted for a Republican candidate to the U.S. House of Representatives. That closely matches 2020 but represents a slight shift from 2018, when 67% of youth voted for a Democrat and 32% for a Republican.

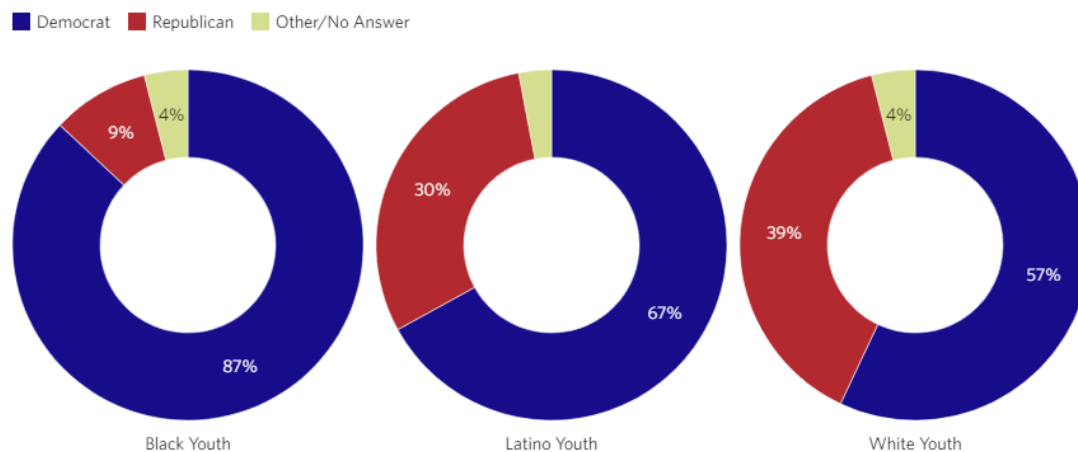
Age Groups: National Youth Vote Choice for the House of Representatives in the 2022 Midterm Election



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 Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison national exit poll data

Young voters are far from monolithic in their political preferences, and youth vote choice differed by race/ethnicity. Nationally, Black youth had an overwhelming vote choice for House Democrats: 89% compared to 9% for Republicans. More than two thirds of Latino youth voted for Democrats: 68% to 30%. Young white voters backed Republican House candidates by a 10-point margin in 2020, but white youth who voted in 2022 favored Democrats by a 58% to 40% margin.

Race/Ethnicity: National Youth Vote Choice for the House of Representatives in the 2022 Midterm



Note: Data for other races/ethnicities was not available.
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 Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison national exit pool data

As in recent elections, young people’s preference for Democrats proved pivotal in key elections where they were the age group that gave Democratic candidates their biggest vote margin:

- In the Pennsylvania Senate race, which Democrat John Fetterman won by a slim 3-point margin, **youth ages 18-29 preferred Fetterman 70% to 28%**, compared to 55% to 42% among voters ages 30-44, with voters over 45 preferring Republican candidate Mehmet Oz.
- In the Wisconsin gubernatorial election, which CIRCLE had ranked as [the #1 race where the youth vote could influence the outcome](#), Democratic Governor Tony Evers won reelection by a 3-point margin. **Young voters gave Evers extraordinary support: 70% vs. 28%** for Republican challenger Tim Michels. Voters 30-44 also preferred Evers by a slimmer 55% to 44% margin, while voters over 45 backed the GOP candidate.
- In the Georgia Senate race that is headed to a runoff election, with both candidates at 49% of the vote, **youth backed Democratic incumbent Sen. Raphael Warnock 63% to 34%**. Voters ages 30-44 backed Warnock 56% to 41%, while voters over 45 gave a majority of their votes to GOP challenger Herschel Walker. Notably, the youth share of the vote in Georgia was 13%, slightly higher than the national rate.

The youth vote was also influential in the Michigan governor race and the Michigan ballot question to enshrine the right to abortion in the state’s constitution, which was approved.

Young Voters Decided Georgia and Nevada Senate Races, Shaped Results

Originally published: November 10, 2022 (Updated November 15) | [Read it online here](#)

Lead authors: Ruby Belle Booth, Kelly Beadle

CIRCLE’s exclusive analysis of youth votes cast and vote choice in major electoral battlegrounds shows that young people had a decisive impact in races across the country, notably in sunbelt states from Georgia to Arizona, and in the upper Midwest like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. We find:

- Young voters provided approximately **3 times the margin of victory in the razor-thin Nevada Senate race** between Catherine Cortez-Masto and Adam Laxalt.
- In the Arizona governor’s race, where Democrat Katie Hobbs is projected to win by 20,000 votes, young people provided a net of 60,000 votes toward her over Republican Kari Lake.
- In the U.S. Senate race which is going to a December recount, **young people contributed 116,000 net votes to Raphael Warnock**, who garnered just 35,000 votes more than Herschel Walker in a race headed to a runoff.
- Young people contributed a significant portion of John Fetterman’s margin over Dr. Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania, where they netted Fetterman 120,000 votes and his margin of victory was roughly 190,000.
- **Young voters were pivotal in the Wisconsin Governor race**, where they cast a net 79,000 voters for Governor Tony Evers, who defeated Tim Michels by a mere 89,000 votes.

Youth Vote Choice and Share of the Vote in Key, Competitive Battleground States

Race	Youth Vote for Democrats	Youth Vote for Republicans	Youth Share of the Vote	Election Result
Arizona Senate	76%	20%	12%	Democratic Win
Arizona Governor	71%	29%	12%	Democratic Win
Florida Senate	58%	40%	11%	Republican Win
Georgia Senate	63%	34%	13%	Heading to Runoff
Michigan Governor	62%	36%	10%	Democratic Win
Nevada Senate	64%	31%	11%	Democratic Win
New Hampshire Senate	74%	23%	10%	Democratic Win
North Carolina Senate	52%	44%	14%	Republican Win
Ohio Senate	60%	40%	10%	Republican Win
Pennsylvania Senate	70%	28%	12%	Democratic Win
Texas Governor	65%	33%	15%	Republican Win
Wisconsin Senate	69%	31%	11%	Republican Win
Wisconsin Governor	70%	30%	11%	Democratic Win

Note: Data and results as of November 15

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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison Research exit poll data.

About the Analysis: What do we mean by “net” votes? The difference between the votes cast in favor of each candidate. Meaning: if youth cast 100 total votes and they preferred one candidate 60% to 40%, they gave that candidate 20 net votes. Vote totals and victory margins were accurate as of Wednesday evening and are subject to change as votes are tallied and canvassed.

For this analysis we used data from AP VoteCast, which both nationally and in nearly all states reported a smaller youth share of the vote for Democrats than other data sources like the Edison Research exit poll. To provide the highest degree of certainty about young voters’ impact, these are the more conservative estimates of their electoral influence, which may have been even larger.

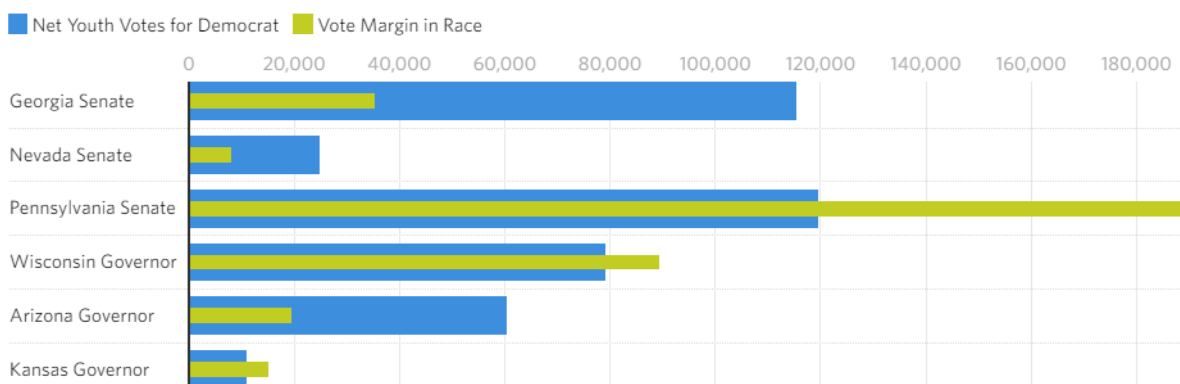
How Youth Swing Elections: “Net” Votes for Winner vs. Margin of Victory

Young people’s voices and votes matter in every single state and race across the country. However, in close elections decided by just a few percentage points, young voters can be more than influential: because of their often vastly different vote choice compared to older voters, they can be decisive. Before the election, [CIRCLE’s Youth Electoral Significance Index](#) ranked the races where youth had the highest potential to help decide election results.

Our analysis of estimated votes cast by youth reveals that young people cast many times more votes than the margin of victory in major 2022 battlegrounds. Because of their strong preference for Democratic candidates in those races, youth gave these candidates their strongest base of support and a number of “net” votes that far exceeds the final difference in each race.

Young Voters Were Crucial to Close Races Across the Country

The estimated number of net votes from young people (ages 18-29) for the Democratic candidates in each race and the vote difference/margin of victory as of November 15



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of AP VoteCast data from The Associated Press and election results reported by major news outlets

More on some of the key races where youth had impact below:

Arizona

Arizona is nearly finished tallying their ballots for the closely watched contests for Governor and U.S. Senate. On November 14, the Governor’s race was called for Democrat Katie Hobbs by just under 20,000 votes. Young people in Arizona favored Hobbs by a 20-point margin, yielding over 60,000 votes for Hobbs, over three times the winning margin of victory. Youth also played a factor in Democrat Mark Kelly’s victory over Republican Blake Masters in the U.S. Senate race.

Nevada

Democratic incumbent Catherine Cortez-Masto was declared the winner over Republican Adam Laxalt, winning reelection by under 8,000 votes. This made Cortez-Masto the 50th Democrat elected to the U.S. Senate for the next term, assuring Democratic control of the chamber. Young people in Nevada preferred Cortez-Masto by 21 points over her opponent, meaning that young people accounted for a net 27,000 votes to propel her to victory. In the Governor's race, the Republican Joe Lombardo came out on top and fared slightly better with young voters.

Georgia

For the second straight election cycle, the Georgia race for U.S. Senate will once again head to a runoff. Before the election, we had ranked it as [the #1 Senate race in the country where youth could influence the result](#), and they accounted for an above-average 14% of the votes according to the AP VoteCast exit poll. As of Wednesday evening, incumbent Democrat Raphael Warnock was leading Republican Hershel Walker by 35,000 votes. Young people favored Warnock 59% to 38%, while voters ages 30-44 backed Warnock by a smaller margin and older voters preferred Walker%. In the Governor's race, young people also provided strong support for Democrat Stacey Abrams, who was defeated by Brian Kemp.

Pennsylvania

In the closely watched Pennsylvania Senate race, Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman narrowly beat Dr. Mehmet Oz by 2.5 points. While the youth share of the vote in the state mirrored the national average, Keystone State youth favored Fetterman by 19 points, contributing 120,000 net votes to Fetterman's 185,000-vote victory. Young people favored Pennsylvania Democratic gubernatorial candidate Josh Shapiro by an even larger margin—26 points—over Doug Mastriano, contributing to Shapiro's victory. [Both races ranked highly](#) in our index of projected youth impact.

Wisconsin

As it has in previous cycles, Wisconsin elections were close at multiple levels of the ballot. Young voters were pivotal in Wisconsin, who cast a net 79,000 votes for Democratic Governor Tony Evers, who defeated Republican Tim Michels by a mere 89,000 votes. That Wisconsin Governor race was [#1 in our ranking of potential youth influence](#). Young voters also favored Democratic Senate candidate Mandela Barnes by 19 points (whereas voters aged 30-44 only favored Barnes by 6 points), helping him remain competitive with incumbent Republican Ron Johnson who won a very narrow race.

Kansas

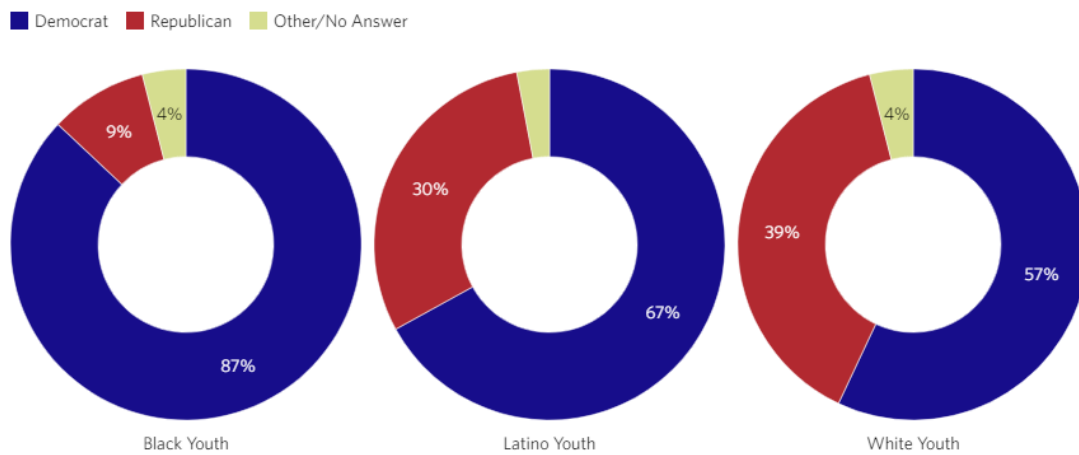
Registrations among 18-24 year olds in Kansas far exceeded their registration rates in 2018, in part due to mobilization around the abortion ballot measure that was included in their August primary. Young people answered questions about if they would show up with the same energy in the general with strong, influential support for Democrat Laura Kelly over her Republican opponent Derek Schmidt. Young voters made up 14% of the electorate, higher than the national average, and supported Kelly by 11 points, casting 11,000 net votes which bolstered her to a 15,000 vote victory.

Youth were also influential in states where Republicans came out on top. That includes Florida, where according to AP VoteCast young voters preferred Republican Senate candidate Marco Rubio, and North Carolina, where youth cast many times more total votes than the margin of victory even as their preferred candidate did not ultimately prevail—underscoring that investing in outreach that may increase youth participation by just a few percentage points can swing electoral outcomes.

Youth of Color Were Especially Influential

In states like Georgia and forthcoming results in Arizona, the votes of young people of color likely proved particularly critical to Democratic victories. While data on youth voting by race/ethnicity at the state level is not immediately available, nationally 87% of Black youth and 67% of Latino youth voted for a Democratic candidate in the U.S. House of Representatives, compared to 57% of white youth. **Note:** the age/race data is from the Edison Research exit poll, as it is not available from AP VoteCast.

Race/Ethnicity: National Youth Vote Choice for the House of Representatives in the 2022 Midterm



Note: Data for other races/ethnicities was not available.

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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison national exit pool data

Georgia, Pennsylvania, Arizona ranked highly in our Youth Electoral Significance Index in large part because of the large and influential populations of young people of color in their electorates.

Youth Are Not a Monolith: How Different Young People Voted in 2022

Originally published: November 15, 2022 | [Read it online here](#)

Lead author: Peter de Guzman

Young people are the most diverse generation in American history, and they bring that diversity into their civic and political engagement. It is reflected in how they engage with, prioritize, and take positions on issues. It is also often reflected in their vote choice, with stark differences in support for Democrats or Republicans by different groups of young people. In the 2022 election, young people's preference for Democratic candidates was almost universal, but with close Senate, Governor, and House elections deciding the balance of power in the United States, the larger or smaller margins from diverse groups of youth proved influential in key races.

Our analysis of the National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research allows us to break down the youth vote by various demographic characteristics. Among young people who cast a ballot, we find:

- Young women's preference for Democratic candidates was far higher than that of young men. Nationally, **71% of young women voted for a Democratic House candidate**, compared to 53% of young men.
- Black (87%) and Latino (67%) youth gave Democrats stronger support than white youth (57%).
- Among both young men and young women, there was only a single-digit gap in vote choice between youth with and without a college degree.
- **LGBT youth** made up 21% of all young voters and had the largest vote choice gap of any group of youth: **93% for Democrats and 5% for Republicans**.
- Among groups of youth for which we have data, only urbanicity emerged as a major difference in vote choice: **64% of youth in rural areas voted for a Republican House candidate**, and 33% for a Democrat.

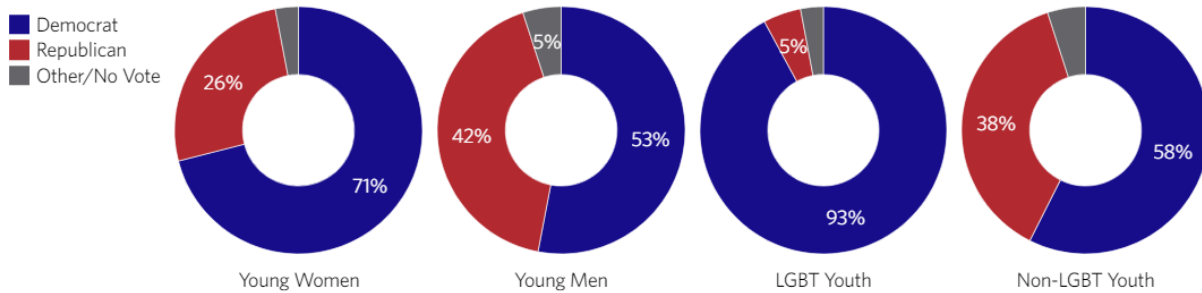
About the Analysis: Our analysis is based on data from the National Election Pool Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research. In the United States a total of 18,571 voters who cast ballots on Election Day were interviewed at 241 Election Day polling places and 72 early in-person voting locations. This survey also includes 1,425 absentee and/or early voters interviewed by telephone using a registration-based sample (RBS). The National Election Pool members (ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC) prepared the questionnaire. An upper bound on the error due to sampling for a 95% confidence interval is +/- 4%. Data on smaller subsamples may have larger margins of error.

Young Women, LGBT Youth Give Democratic Party Major Support

Throughout the summer we tracked as abortion rose among young people's issue priorities. Indeed, according to exit polls, it was the top issue that influenced young people's vote in the 2022 midterms. Young women were more likely than young men to prioritize the issue and that was reflected in their national vote choice for the House of Representatives: 71% for Democrats vs. 26% for Republicans. Among young men, 53% voted for a Democrat and 42% for a Republican.

Youth Vote Choice by Gender and LGBT Identification in the 2022 Midterms

Nationally, the percentage of each self-identified group of young people (ages 18-29) who voted for a Democratic or Republican candidate to the U.S. House of Representatives.



Note: Respondents were asked "Are you gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?" Those who answered yes are described here as LGBT Youth, and vice versa.

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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research

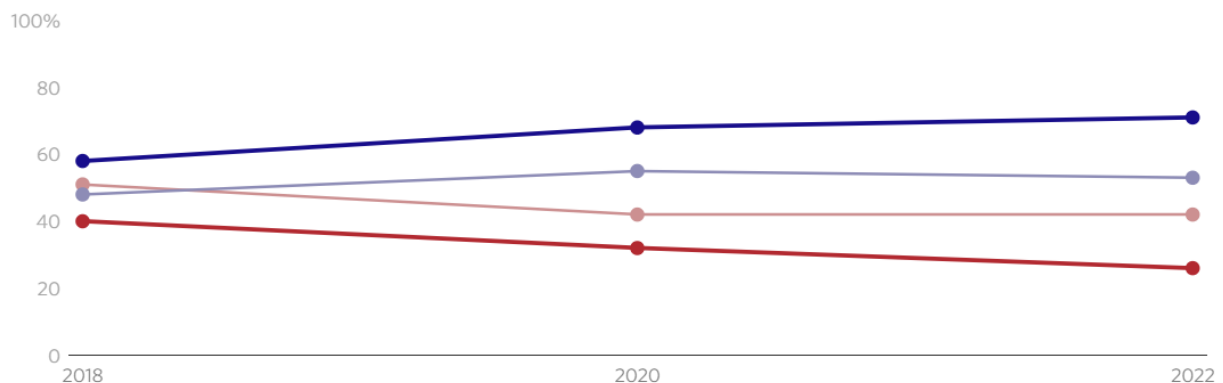
Those numbers represent a double-digit shift in young women’s vote choice compared to the previous midterm election, when 58% of young women voted for a Democrat in the House, and 40% for a Republican. Young female voters in 2022 were also more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. Nearly half (46%) of young women identified as Democrats, compared to approximately one in three (34%) young men.

All youth, but especially young women, [prioritized abortion as a 2022 election issue](#), which may have also been reflected in various statewide ballot questions. In the [five states with abortion-rights-related proposals](#) (CA, KY, MI, MT, VT), voters protected existing access to abortion and did not support measures that would limit abortion access.

Young Women Increasingly Prefer Democratic House Candidates

Nationally, the percentage of young people (ages 18-29), by gender, who voted for each party’s candidate to the U.S. House of Representatives in the past three elections.

— Young Men’s % for Democrats — Young Women’s % for Democrats — Young Men’s % for Republicans
 — Young Women’s % for Republicans



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research

Even more remarkable was the vote choice of LGBT youth. Approximately one in five (21%) of youth identified as LGBT and 93% of them reported voting for a Democratic House candidate, a much higher rate than the approximately two in three (65%) of youth overall who reported doing so. Nearly six in ten (59%) LGBT youth identified as Independents, or with neither the Republican or Democratic Party, nearly double the proportion of non-LGBT youth who identify as Independent (31%). By contrast the percentage of LGBT youth who identify as Democrats (40%) is nearly the same as that of youth overall.

Democratic Vote Strongest Among Youth of Color—Especially Women

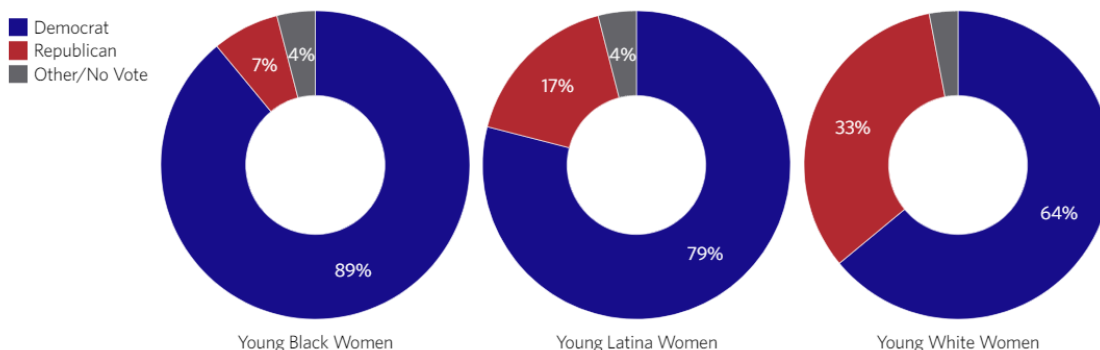
As in recent election cycles, in 2022, most young people of color reported voting for a Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. 87% of Black youth and 67% of Latino youth preferred a Democratic House candidate. Data for young people of other races/ethnicities was not available.

The vote choice of white youth, who in previous elections had either preferred Republicans or backed Democrats by much smaller margins, also benefited Democratic House candidates in 2022. 57% of white youth preferred Democratic candidates for the House, compared to the approximately four in ten (39%) who preferred a Republican candidate.

When we combine the trends by race and gender, we find that while every group voted for Democrats, young women of color gave Democrats the strongest support. 89% of young Black women and 79% of young Latino women voted for a Democratic House candidate, and 64% of young white women did the same.

Young Women's Vote Choice by Race/Ethnicity in the 2022 Midterm Elections

Nationally, the percentage of young women (ages 18-29) by race/ethnicity who voted for a Democratic or Republican candidate to the U.S. House of Representatives.



Note: Data for other racial/ethnic groups was not available

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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research

Nearly six in ten (57%) young Latino men voted for a Democrat for the U.S. House. Even young white men, who had been the subgroup most likely to vote GOP, this time preferred Democrats by a slim margin (49% voted for a Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, compared to 45% who voted for a Republican candidate). Data for young Black men was not available.

Gap in Vote Choice by College Degree Narrow Among Youth

One major political trend in recent cycles has been the [growing gap in party preference between voters with and without a college degree](#). That can often look slightly different among young voters in the 18-29 age group, many of whom are still in the process of getting a degree or may do so in the future but, for the moment, are in the “no degree” category.

That said, among youth in 2022, the gap between the vote choice of youth with and without a college degree was only single digits. For young men it was especially small: 55% of young men with a college degree voted for a Democratic candidate for the U.S. House, compared to 52% of young men without a college degree. Meanwhile, 75% of young women with a college degree voted for a Democrat, compared to 68% of young women.

More research is required to accurately represent the views and experiences of youth with various levels of educational attainment and experience. Next month, our exclusive post-election youth survey will examine the role of education in youth engagement in more depth.

Urban/Rural Divide: Rural Youth Prefer Republicans

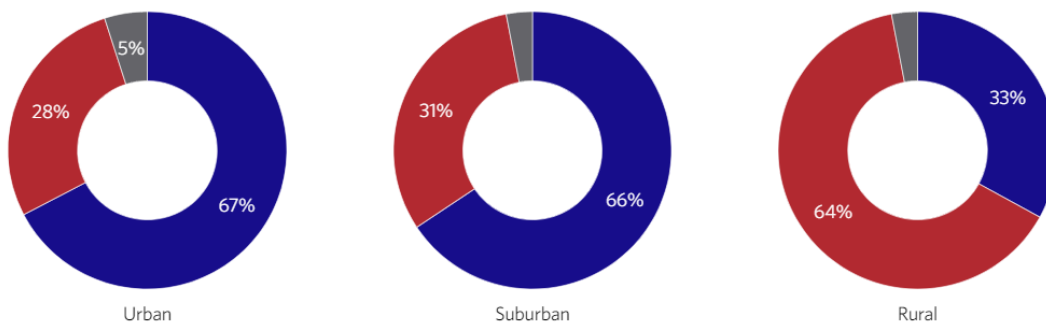
The one demographic characteristic where there was a major difference in party preference among young voters was the type of community they live in. Young people in rural areas or from cities with fewer than 50,000 people supported Republican candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives by 64% to 33%, a remarkable difference that’s nearly the inverse of the vote choice of urban/suburban youth and of young people overall.

That said, white youth are overrepresented among young people living in rural communities, and there were likely major differences within rural youth that the available 2022 data did not allow us to analyze. For example, our research on the 2020 election found large gaps between [the vote choice of young white voters and young voters of color](#) in rural areas.

Rural Youth Were the Only Group of Young People to Prefer Republican House Candidates

Nationally, the percentage of young people (ages 18-29) from different types of communities who voted for each party’s candidate to the U.S. House in 2022

■ Democrat ■ Republican ■ Other/No Vote



Note: Urban is defined as cities over 50,000 people, and rural includes towns or cities under 50,000 people.

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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison Research National Election Pool exit poll

Suburban youth favored Democratic House candidates and identified with the Democratic Party at similar rates to urban youth. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of suburban youth said they voted for a Democratic candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives, compared to 68% of urban youth. 44% of suburban youth identified with the Democratic Party, a similar rate to urban youth (42%).

Only 18% of rural youth identified as Democrats, compared to 40% of youth overall. However, approximately twice as many rural youth (37%) identified as Independent or with neither the Democratic or Republican Party.

Rural youth were also more likely to say that they voted on Election Day, and were the only group of young voters to report this preference over early or mail-in voting methods. Sixty percent of rural youth reported voting on Election Day, compared to 41% of suburban youth and 38% of urban youth. In addition, 15% reported voting early in person, compared to 16% of all youth.

The difference in vote method preference by urbanicity is most evident in the share of rural youth that reported voting by mail. Only 25% of rural youth reported voting by mail, compared to 42% of all youth and nearly half (47%) of urban youth.

Young Voters in 2022: Black and Non-College Youth Were Underrepresented

Originally published December 9, 2022 | [Read it online here](#)

Lead Author: Sara Suzuki

CIRCLE estimates that [27% of young people \(ages 18-29\) turned out to vote](#) in the 2022 midterms and had a major [impact on key elections around the country](#). Young voters were also not a monolith, with sometimes large differences between youth of different genders and ethnicities in [which party they supported](#) and in [their positions on key issues that influenced their votes](#). For example, nearly 9 out of 10 young voters of color (86%) indicated that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, compared to about two-thirds (65%) of white youth.

It's also important to consider potential differences between youth who voted in 2022 and those who did not participate and the extent to which the 27% of young people who cast a ballot in the midterms are representative of youth overall. As we work to grow the number of young people who show up to vote, we must also focus on reaching youth who may be underrepresented due to their lack of access to the necessary resources, support, and cultural conditions.

In this analysis, we compare the demographics of young voters to the demographics of all young U.S. citizens ages 18-29. We find:

- White youth were overrepresented among voters in 2022 and have been since 2006. In contrast, Black youth are consistently underrepresented among voters.
- That pattern is driven in large part by an overrepresentation of white women, who make up 27% of all citizens in that age group but 33% of the youth electorate), and an underrepresentation of Black men: 7% of young citizens but only 4% of young voters.
- Among and across all racial groups, youth who have not attended college were heavily underrepresented among voters in 2022.
- Many of these patterns of underrepresentation can be traced back to structural barriers and ongoing inequities in young people's civic education and engagement.

About the Analysis: We used data from the National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research between 2006 and 2022, as well as analyses of the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (the most recent data available at the time of writing). The comparison is not perfect: for example, the questions about race/ethnicity were not asked in the same way, and sampling in both surveys was shaped by different design decisions and may have different biases. That said, the trend of white youth being overrepresented in the electorate and some youth of color being underrepresented is consistent with [findings about the representativeness of the electorate among adults of all ages](#).

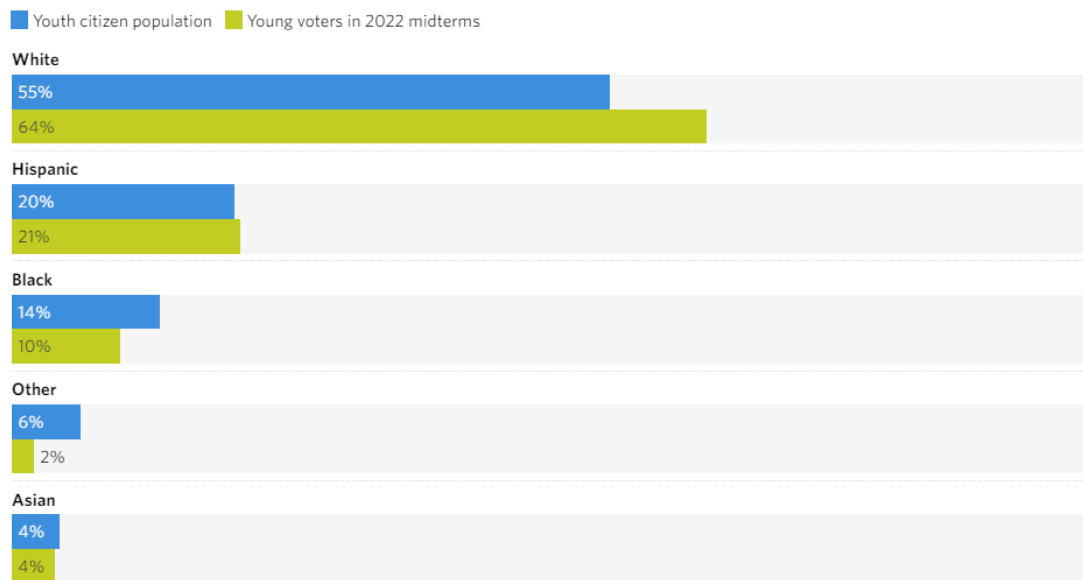
White Youth Were Overrepresented among 2022 Voters

According to 2022 exit poll data, 64% of young voters (ages 18-29) identified as white, which is higher than the 55% of citizens in that age group who identified as white according to 2021 U.S. Census data. That 9-percentage-point difference represents a fairly significant overrepresentation

of white youth in the electorate. At the same time, youth who identified as Black and youth who identified in the “Other” racial category (i.e., did not identify as white, Black, Asian, or Hispanic) were underrepresented among voters. The proportions of young Hispanic voters in 2022 and young Hispanic citizens in the voting-age population are similar, and the same is true for Asian youth.

White Youth Overrepresented; Black and “Other” Youth Underrepresented Among Young Voters

The proportion of youth (18-29 years old) in different racial/ethnic groups among young voters in 2022 and among the youth population



Note: “Other” includes youth who did not identify as Asian, Black, Hispanic, or white

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Source: Exit poll data from the National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research; population data from the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey

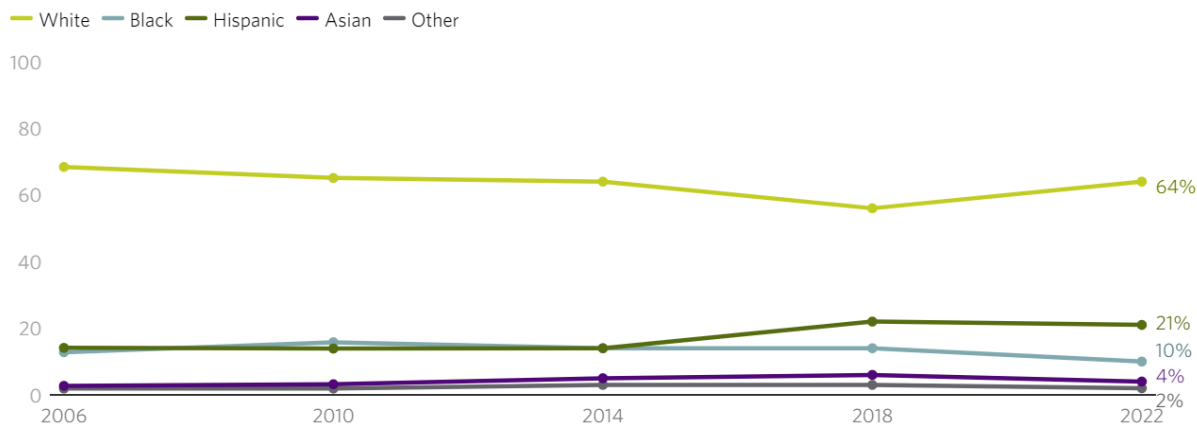
According to our examination of exit poll data dating back to 2006, the demographic breakdown of young voters has largely remained the same. One exception is in 2018, when the proportion of Hispanic voters increased and has remained at a higher level in the past two election cycles. (We do note that, starting in 2018, the Edison Research incorporated [new statistical weighting procedures](#) designed to improve the accuracy of the size of groups reported by age and education. The increase in Hispanic voters in 2018 may be attributed in part to these survey design changes.)

But the trend showing overrepresentation of white youth and underrepresentation of Black youth and “Other” youth has remained consistent.

Underrepresentation in the electorate should not be seen as a sign of political apathy. Our research shows that youth of color are enthusiastic about and engaged in civic life. For instance, in our nationally representative survey conducted in 2020, [more than 1 in 4 Black and Hispanic youth reported interest in running for public office](#). They were also about as likely as white youth to say that [they felt like part of a group or movement that would vote to express their views](#).

2018 Was a High Point for the Representation of Youth of Color Among Young Voters

The percentage of youth of each race/ethnicity among young voters in midterm elections: 2006-2022



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Source: Exit poll data from the National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research

However, youth of color may be more likely to face barriers to voting. For example, [restrictive voter ID laws are more likely to negatively impact turnout among voters of color](#), and young people of color are [more likely to report facing barriers like a lack of transportation and long lines at the polls](#). In addition, at a time when mail-in voting is becoming an increasingly important voting method, states with a high proportion of Black youth in their population are [less likely to have policies like all-mail voting in place](#).

Electoral Representation at the Intersection of Race and Gender

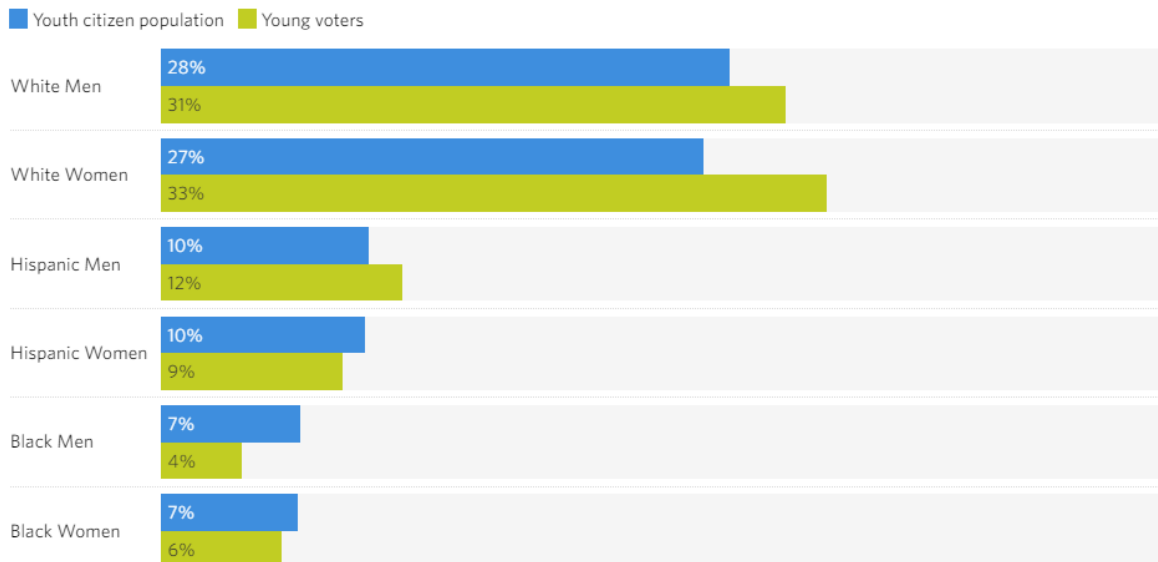
Young women have been at the forefront of civic and political participation in recent years—[especially young women of color](#). In 2020, we found that young women had a [significantly higher youth voter turnout than young men](#): 55% vs. 44%. We find that young women were very slightly overrepresented in the 2022 youth electorate: making up 51% of all youth who voted, compared to their 49% share of the population in that age group.

By analyzing electoral representation by race/ethnicity and gender together, we glean more detailed insights into differences in electoral participation that may be driven by disparities in access. Notably, our analysis shows that the overrepresentation of white youth is largely driven by an overrepresentation of young white women in the electorate. On the other hand, the underrepresentation of Black youth is largely driven by the underrepresentation of young Black men; the proportion of young Black women in the population and in the electorate was nearly the same.

With Hispanic youth the trend was reversed: young Hispanic men were overrepresented in the 2022 electorate compared to their share of the population, and young Hispanic women were slightly underrepresented.

White Women Most Overrepresented among Young Voters: Black Men Most Underrepresented

The proportion of youth (18-29 years old) in different racial/ethnic + gender groups among young voters in 2022 and among the youth population



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Source: Exit poll data from the National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research; population data from the 2021 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey

In addition to the logistical and legal barriers to participation discussed earlier, contact from campaigns and organizations can also influence whether youth turn out to vote. Our research has found differences in outreach to various groups of youth that could explain the data above. For example, in our analysis of youth outreach in several battleground states in the month leading up to the 2020 election, young Hispanic men were [more likely to be contacted by a Democratic or Republican campaign than Black men](#).

At the same time, outreach to young Black men from local organizations in the regions analyzed surpassed outreach to young Hispanic men, pointing to a need to explore whether and how various institutions are reaching youth and what it may mean for their access to voting.

Major Underrepresentation of Youth Without College Experience

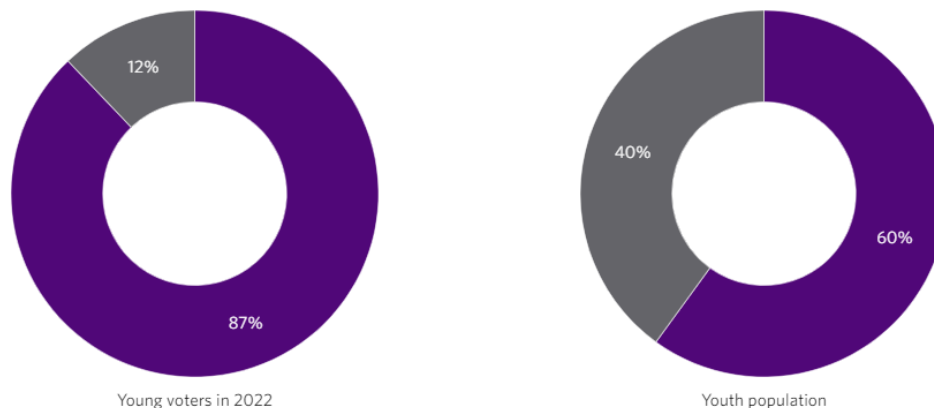
For many young people, educational institutions play a large role in their experience of emerging adulthood. However, it is important to note that less than half of young citizens who are 18-29 years are currently attending school (high school or higher education institutions). That has major implications for our democracy, as educational experience has been [associated with voter turnout among young people stretching back as far as the 1970s](#).

In 2022, we found an extraordinary level of electoral underrepresentation of youth who have never attended college. Among all young voters in 2022, 12% had no college experience and 87% had at least some college experience. In contrast, 2021 U.S. Census data showed that among young citizens ages 18-29, 40% had no college experience, while 60% had at least some college experience. That large, 28-percentage-point gap between the percentage of youth without college experience in the

population and in the electorate represents a major disenfranchisement of youth who have a high school degree or lower educational attainment.

Nearly 9 in 10 Young Voters in 2022 Had Some College Experience

■ College Experience ■ No College Experience



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Source: Data on young voters in 2022 from the National Election Pool survey conducted by Edison Research; population data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

We also examined whether this trend was consistent across multiple groups of youth by race and gender. We found that the underrepresentation of youth who have not attended college was consistent across all subgroups that we had data for: white men and women, Black men and women, and Hispanic men and women.

As with the trends among some youth of color, our research points to some possible explanations for the underrepresentation of youth without college experience in the electorate. Our survey of 14- to 17-year-olds found that [many teens are not learning about elections and voting in school](#) and that this has implications for their level of civic engagement. Youth who do not attend college may have had limited exposure to civic education, whereas youth in college may have additional opportunities for civic education. Our [previous study](#) in partnership with Opportunity Youth United also found that among a group that primarily consisted of young people experiencing poverty, many reported barriers to voting including lack of knowledge about the process, difficulty reaching voting locations, and cultural barriers such as an absence of poll workers who “look like them.” Young people who have not had access to institutions of higher education may be more likely to experience the barriers reported by Opportunity Youth United study participants.

The underrepresentation of some youth in the 2022 electorate, and the fact that some of these trends are persistent across almost two decades of data, point to major inequities in how we prepare and engage young people to become informed voters. Closing these gaps will require concerted efforts from institutions and communities to ensure that [election policies](#), civic education, campaign outreach, and other elements of the ecosystem that reaches youth are working together to grow voters equitably.

The Abortion Election: How Youth Prioritized and Voted Based on Issues

Originally published: November 14, 2022 | [Read it online here](#)

Lead author: Ruby Belle Booth

Young voters had a major impact on the 2022 midterm elections. Their voter turnout was [the second-highest level of youth participation in at least 30 years](#), while their strong preference for Democratic candidates nationally and in most states across the country [boosted the party to critical wins](#) on its way to defying expectations and retaining control of the U.S. Senate.

As in every election, young people were motivated to vote by a range of issues; and different youth may prioritize and view those issues differently based on their identities and experiences. In this cycle, after the Supreme Court decision this summer, concerns about abortion from youth on both sides of the issue were especially notable. Our analysis of Edison Research National Election Pool exit poll data sheds light on the issues youth cared about most and how it shaped their vote choice. Understanding how young people connected with various issues in this cycle is critical to engaging them effectively and authentically in elections.

We find:

- Young people (18-29) who voted in the 2022 midterms said **abortion was the top issue influencing their vote**, followed by inflation and crime, out of five possible choices which they were presented.
- **4 in 5 youth who believe abortion should be legal in most or all cases voted for a Democratic candidate** to the House of Representatives.
- More young female voters cited abortion as a top motivating issue than young men
- **Gun control continues to draw significant support** and climate change remains a serious concern for young voters.
- Among all age groups surveyed, youth were the most likely to say that their views of President Biden played no role in their 2022 midterm vote.

About the Analysis: Our analysis is based on data from the National Election Pool Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research. In the United States a total of 18,571 voters who cast ballots on Election Day were interviewed at 241 Election Day polling places and 72 early in-person voting locations. This survey also includes 1,425 absentee and/or early voters interviewed by telephone using a registration-based sample (RBS). The National Election Pool members (ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC) prepared the questionnaire. An upper bound on the error due to sampling for a 95% confidence interval is +/- 4%. Data on smaller subsamples may have larger margins of error.

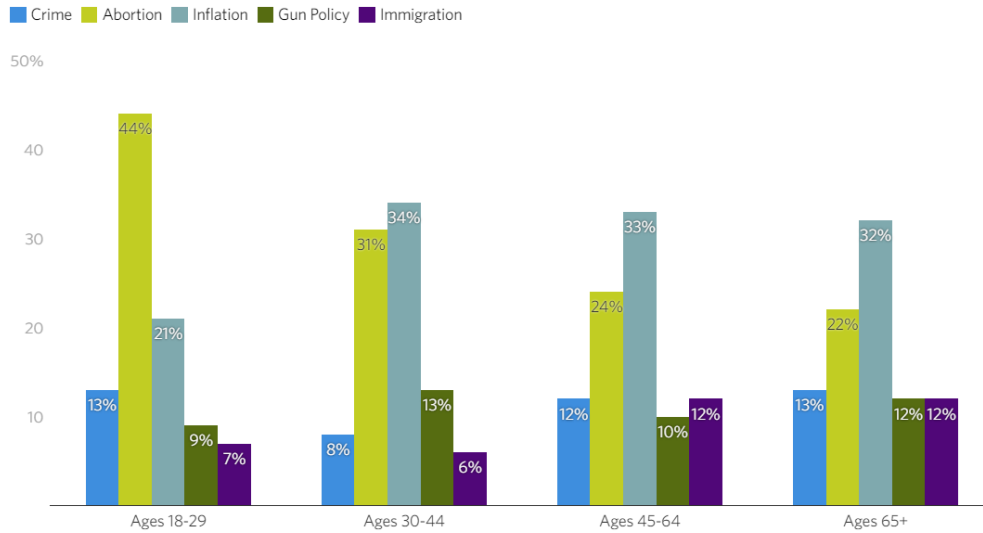
Youth Were Only Age Group to Cite Abortion as #1 Priority

In the months leading up to the election, the economy/inflation and abortion emerged as the top issue concerns for young people. According to exit polls, by a large margin, youth prioritized the latter. Out of five possible options given for this question in the survey (abortion, crime, inflation, immigration, and gun policy), 44% selected abortion as the most important issue in deciding their

vote and 21% cited inflation. Notably, for every other age group, those priorities were reversed: inflation first, and abortion second.

Young Voters Prioritized Abortion: Older Voters Prioritized Inflation

The percentage of voters, by age group, who chose each issue as the top issue in deciding their vote.



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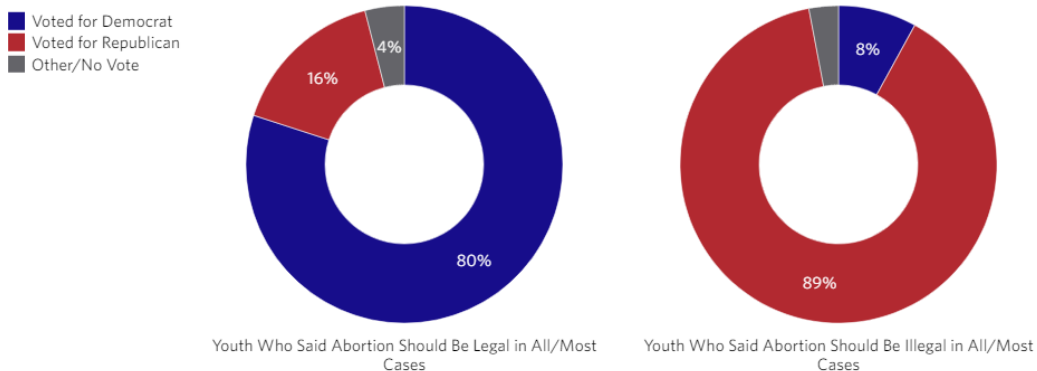
Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison Research National Election Pool exit poll

While both sides of the abortion issue motivated young people at the ballot box—a concern that may encompass both those who are for and against abortion— pro-choice youth were more likely to say it was the most important factor when voting for a candidate for a U.S. House candidate.

[As pre-election surveys also indicated](#), according to the exit polls, youth were the age group most likely to say abortion should be legal in all or most cases (72%). That view was reflected in their vote choice, as young people who expressed that position on abortion voted for Democratic candidates by an extraordinary 64-point margin: 80% for Democrats vs. 16% for Republicans.

Abortion Shaped Young People's Vote Choice in the 2022 Midterm Elections

Nationally, the percentage of youth who voted for each party's candidate for U.S. House based on their position on abortion.



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison Research National Election Poll exit poll

At the same time, abortion may also have been influential to the quarter of youth who said they believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. Young voters with that position on abortion supported Republican candidates by an even larger 81-point margin. A third of youth who favor abortion restrictions listed it as the top issue motivating their vote in the 2022 midterms. However, a slightly higher percentage of young people who believe abortion should be illegal chose inflation as their top issue (37%), compared to half of young people who believe abortion should be legal.

Views on abortion and its importance in this election differed across demographic groups. White youth were both more likely than youth of color to say that that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases (33%) and to rank it as their top priority (51%). By contrast, 84% of youth of color, including 89% of Latino youth, shared that they believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

Young men and women were about as likely to say abortion should be legal. But young women, who are often more directly impacted by abortion restrictions, ranked it as a higher priority: 56% compared to 36% for young men. That was reflected in vote choice as well: young women's vote choice nationally was 71% for Democrats and 26% for Republicans, compared to 53% vs. 42% for young men—a 34-point difference in vote choice margin by gender.

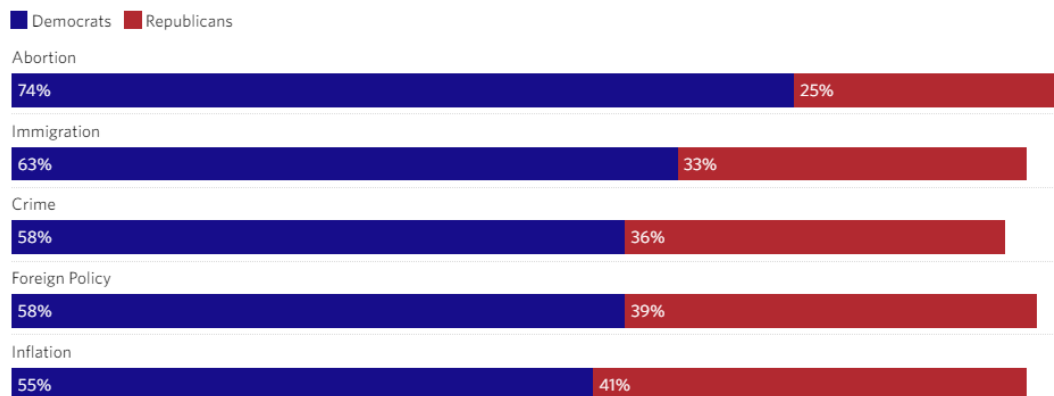
Multiple Priorities: Youth Also Motivated by Inflation, Crime, Gun Control

Of the five options provided, inflation was young voters' second most-commonly selected top priority: nationally, 21% said it was most influential to their vote for the House of Representatives. Concern about inflation was highest among young men, particularly young white men and those with a college degree. While, in the past, young people have indicated in surveys that they trust Republicans to best address economic issues, exit polls showed that the majority of youth (55%) trusted Democratic candidates on inflation. Voters in all other age groups trusted Republicans.

Likewise, youth were also the only age group to say they trust Democrats more on immigration. They also reported trusting Democrats more on crime and foreign policy, which may reflect some of the ideological differences driving the major difference in vote choice between age groups.

Young Voters Trust Democrats More on Major Issues, Especially Abortion

The percentage of young voters, ages 18-29, who said they trusted each party more to better handle various issues.



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison Research National Election Pool exit poll

The third most-cited priority, crime, was the top issue for 13% of 18- to-29-year-olds. Latino youth (30%), young men (19%), and especially young men without a college degree (26%) were more likely to name crime as the top issue that decided their vote.

Gun policy was the most important issue for 9% of young voters, and gun control policies continue to get broad support from young people. Seventy percent of young voters said they support gun control, with Latino (77%) and female respondents (82%) offering especially strong support. Notably, young women without a college degree were just as likely to say gun policy was their top priority as inflation.

Though not included among the options in this survey for young people’s top issue priorities, other questions reveal that climate change continues to be more of a concern for youth than for older generations. By a 21-point margin, more young people identify climate change as a very serious concern than any other age group, with 81% saying that they consider it a very serious or somewhat serious issue.

A Referendum on Biden? Young Voters Weigh President’s Impact

With the midterms often framed as a referendum on the sitting president and his party, President Biden’s actions and favorability among young people was closely scrutinized in the weeks leading up to the 2022 midterms. Many of the issues that majorities of young people expressed their support for were priorities for the Biden administration and a Democratic Congress that took action on gun control, climate change, and economic issues like student loan forgiveness, which 75% of young voters said they support.

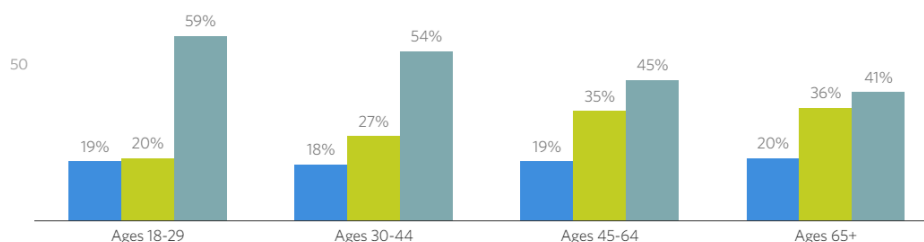
Young people who voted in the 2022 election had the highest approval rating of President Biden of any age group (53%). This was an improvement on Biden’s approval among youth from polling earlier in the year, and young people were the only age group whose presidential approval in exit polls was a net positive. When asked if they saw their vote in the midterm election as a way to support or oppose President Biden, 20% said it was to oppose him (the lowest of any age group). Young people were the age group least likely to say that the President’s policies hurt the country—29%, 16 points less than the next closest age group.

Young Voters Were the Most Likely to Say President Biden Was Not a Factor in the 2022 Midterm Vote

The percentage of voters in each age group who said their vote in the 2022 midterms was:

■ To Support Biden ■ To Oppose Biden ■ Biden Not a Factor

100%



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of 2022 Edison Research National Election Pool exit poll

That said, 59% of youth (the highest of any group) said President Biden was not a factor in their vote. Youth were also the age group most likely (37%) to say that they thought President Biden's policies made no difference on the country. This data underscores our research showing that young people vote based on the issues more than their allegiance to parties or candidates. To the extent that those candidates want to earn young people's support, they must reach and communicate with youth about how their policies connect to the concerns that drive youth to the ballot box.

Youth More Optimistic about Democracy than Older Voters, Less Inclined to Identify with Major Parties

Originally published: November 16, 2022 | [Read it online here](#)

Lead author: Kelly Beadle

Concerns about the health of American democracy, and the security and legitimacy of elections, have been central to American politics in recent years. That has included [several states changing their election laws and policies](#)—some to expand access to the ballot box, but others to restrict it. After 2020, [our polling found](#) that 50% of young Trump voters and 32% of young Biden voters said it was “somewhat” or “very” likely that the U.S. would no longer hold “free and fair elections.”

Our analysis of the National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research allows us to get a sense of how young people (ages 18-29) are feeling now about the state of democracy, about the country, and about the major political parties. We find:

- Young people have higher faith in democratic institutions and are more optimistic about the country than older voters
- Young people are more likely than older voters to identify as independent or with neither major party, but those who do affiliate with one prefer the Democratic Party by a large margin
- Young voters were the age group most likely to say that the Republican Party is too extreme, and least likely to say the same about the Democratic Party.

About the Analysis: Our analysis is based on data from the National Election Pool Exit Poll conducted by Edison Research. In the United States a total of 18,571 voters who cast ballots on Election Day were interviewed at 241 Election Day polling places and 72 early in-person voting locations. This survey also includes 1,425 absentee and/or early voters interviewed by telephone using a registration-based sample (RBS). The National Election Pool members (ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC) prepared the questionnaire. An upper bound on the error due to sampling for a 95% confidence interval is +/- 4%. Data on smaller subsamples may have larger margins of error.

Youth Trust Democracy and Elections More than Older Voters

While the majority of all voters, regardless of age, feel that our democracy is threatened, young voters in 2022 were slightly more likely to feel like it is “very” or “somewhat” secure (35%). That sentiment is much more prevalent among young men (47%) than young women (24%)—though it’s worth noting that young white men were overrepresented and data on young Black and Latino men was not available.

We previously reported that all youth, but especially young women, cited abortion as [the top issue influencing their 2022 midterm vote choice](#). Given this large gender gap in trust, and the fact that a majority of young women want abortion to be legal, it is possible that some young women’s view of democracy includes the protection of a right that they feel is threatened.

In a shift from what many youth reported after a 2020 election that was marked by widespread allegations of fraud, young voters in 2022 report high levels of confidence in elections (82%),

similar to or higher than other age groups. Young men (84%) and Latino youth (88%) were even more likely than all young voters to say they are confident in elections. Young women who haven't obtained a college degree were slightly less likely to say that they have confidence in elections, but nearly three in four (73%) do. Youth were also the most likely age group to say that they believe President Biden's election in 2020 was legitimate: 71% said so, compared to 25% who do not believe so. Among older voters, at least a third said that the 2020 presidential election was not legitimate.

Young People Are More Likely to Say the 2020 Presidential Election Was Legitimate

The percentage of 2022 midterm voters in each age group who said they believe the 2020 election was:



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research

That said, because this data reflects only the views of young people who voted in the 2022 midterm elections, it's possible that this is a self-selecting group and that some youth who lost their trust in elections may not have participated. We also did not have data for every subgroup of youth by race, gender, and education.

The fact that young people have higher levels of faith in democracy may also be reflected in their optimism for the future of the country. When asked about how things are going in the country today, young people are the age group least likely to say they are angry (26%), and most likely to be satisfied (23%). Latino youth were even more likely to say they're satisfied with the direction of the country: one-third of those in the survey said that they are satisfied with the direction of the country.

Notably, young men report much higher levels of dissatisfaction (53%). Given the data available, that is likely to especially reflect the views of young white men.

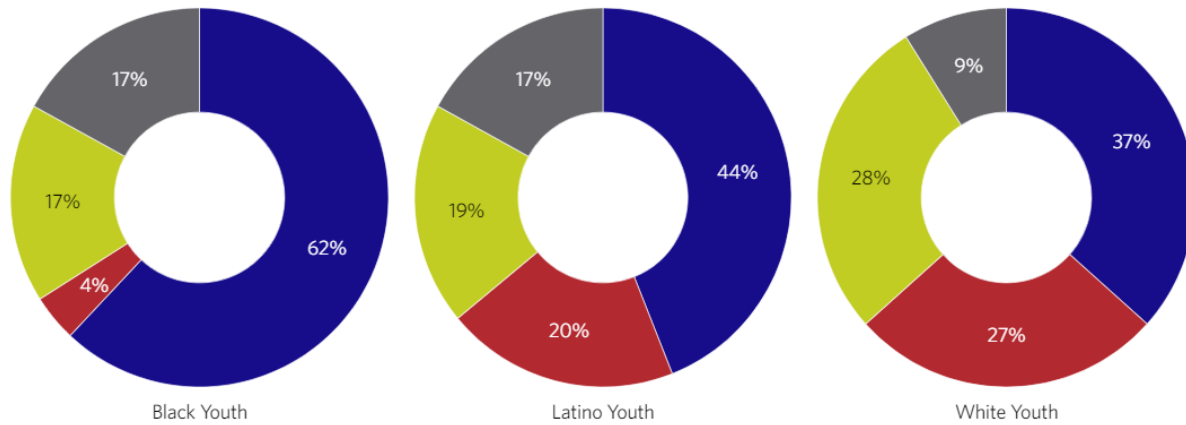
Youth Are Less Committed to Political Parties

While young people have relatively more positive views of democracy than older voters, they are less likely to identify with one of the two major parties. They report high shares of people who do not identify with either political party. Nearly two in five youth (38%) said they identify as either Independents or "something else," compared to 35% of the 30-44 age group and 30% or fewer of older voters.

Black Youth More Likely to Identify as Democrats, White Youth As Independents

The percentage of each group of young voters (ages 18-29), by race ethnicity, who said they identified as:

■ Democrat ■ Republican ■ Independent ■ Something Else



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of the National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research

Young men and youth in urban areas (both 42%) were even more likely to identify as Independent or as something else. In addition, almost one in four 18- to 29-year-olds (23%) do not have favorable ratings of either major political party; that number is 13% or lower for other age groups.

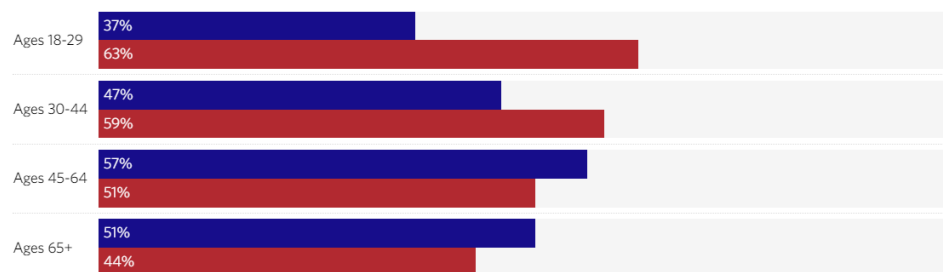
Among those who did identify with a political party, young people were much more likely to identify as Democrats (40%) than as Republicans (22%). Young women (46%), Latino youth (44%) and especially Black youth (62%) were even more likely than youth overall to identify as Democrats. Only 4% of Black youth said they identify as Republicans.

Additionally, young voters were more likely than older voters to say the Republican Party is too extreme (63%), and least likely to say that about the Democratic Party (37%). At the same time, when asked whether “both” or “neither” political party was too extreme, young voters were also the age group most likely to say neither. Latino youth were especially likely to respond they think neither party is too extreme.

Young Voters Least Likely Age Group to Consider Democrats Too Extreme

The percentage of voters in the 2022 midterms, by age group, who expressed each opinion about the major parties.

■ Democratic Party Is Too Extreme ■ Republican Party is Too Extreme



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of the National Election Pool Survey conducted by Edison Research

Young voters' belief in democracy and trust in elections is a positive sign for their civic engagement as voters and leaders, and the fact that they report higher trust and optimism than older voters belies some stereotypes about youth as cynical or apathetic. Their independent streak when it comes to party affiliation means that the Democratic and Republican parties should neither take young people's votes for granted nor give up on being able to earn them, though their view of the Republican Party as too extreme may signal that they expect candidates and parties to take positions on issues that match their own values and priorities.

What's Next: A Framework to Grow Voters in 2024 and Beyond

The research in this report underscores that young people participated at a near-historic rate in the 2022 midterm elections and had a major impact on the results. But the fact that barely a quarter of young people cast a ballot, the underrepresentation of some youth among voters, and other inequities highlight a need to transform the ways we prepare all young people for democratic participation.

In early 2023, we will share data and insights from an exclusive CIRCLE post-election survey of all young people—not just those who participated in 2022. That research will continue to inform the implementation of our CIRCLE Growing Voters framework: a new way to envision and put into practice equitable civic education and engagement for a wide diversity of youth.



[Learn more about CIRCLE Growing Voters](#) here, explore our website throughout 2023 for more data on young voters, and strengthen your commitment to ensuring that all youth have pathways to learn about and participate in elections—in 2024 and beyond.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and 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 circle.tufts.edu

