



# Research Memo

**June 9, 2008**

**To:** Interested Parties

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## **Re: Registration and Voting Among Americans Ages 18-29**

Young Americans ages 18-29 appear to be registering and voting at significantly higher rates than in recent elections. If further research bears this out, it will be a welcome development given that young Americans are under-represented in the electorate compared to their voting eligible population.<sup>1</sup> This research memorandum provides registration and voting information on voting-eligible Americans ages 18-24 and 25-29 by age and college experience.

The data raises one cautionary note: to the extent programs to engage young Americans in the democratic process focus primarily on college campuses, they will not only miss half of voting-eligible Americans ages 18-24 but also overlook a majority of Blacks and Latinos in this age group.

## Summary

- There 25 million voting-eligible Americans between the ages of 18-24 but only 46 percent are registered to vote and just 22 percent voted in 2006.
- There are 17 million voting-eligible Americans ages 25-29 but only 57 percent are registered to votes and just 30 percent voted in 2006.
- Registration rates of non-Whites in both age groups lag 10 percentage-points behind Whites.
- Voter turnout among non-Whites ages 18-24 lagged 6 percentage points behind Whites. Turnout rates among non-Whites ages 25-29 lagged 5 percentage points behind Whites.
- Fully half of the 32 million Americans ages 18-24 have no college experience.
- A slight majority of Blacks and large majority of Latinos lack college experience.
- Over 6 recent election cycles (1984-2004), voting by young Americans without college experience lagged approximately 30 percentage-points behind young Americans with college experience.
- Young voters in the 2008 Super Tuesday primaries were overwhelmingly college educated.

1 Americans ages 18-29 made up 22 percent of the country's total voting-eligible population in 2006, but they were only 11 percent of voters. Douglas R. Hess. Representational Bias in the 2006. Electorate. Project Vote. 2007

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# Voter Registration and Turnout of Young Americans

In 2006, there were about 25 million voting-eligible Americans between the ages of 18 and 24. As Table 1 shows, less than half of them (46 percent) were registered to vote. A greater percentage of Whites (50 percent) were registered than non-Whites (39 percent). As a whole, 22 percent of this population cast ballots in 2006. As with registration, Whites voted at a higher rate (24 percent) than non-Whites (18 percent). The largest disparity in turnout was between Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders (15 percent).

**Table 1: Voter Registration and Turnout of Voting-Eligible Americans Ages 18–24, 2006**

| Race                   | Voting-Eligible Population | VEP Registered | % of VEP Registered | VEP Voted | % of VEP Voted |
|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| White                  | 16,800                     | 8,340          | 49%                 | 4,050     | 24%            |
| Black                  | 3,670                      | 1,490          | 41%                 | 741       | 20%            |
| Latino                 | 2,990                      | 1,150          | 39%                 | 497       | 17%            |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 820                        | 280            | 34%                 | 124       | 15%            |
| Other                  | 670                        | 290            | 43%                 | 111       | 17%            |
| Total (Nonwhite)       | 8,150                      | 3,210          | 39%                 | 1,473     | 18%            |
| Total                  | 24,950                     | 11,550         | 46%                 | 5,523     | 22%            |

Numbers in thousands

Source: Project Vote Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 Current Population Survey

Americans ages 25 to 29 were only slightly more likely to be registered to vote than the 18 to 24 year-old cohort. Table 2 shows that 57 percent of voting-eligible Americans in this age group was registered to vote in 2006. Again, there was a ten percentage-point disparity in registration rates between Whites (60 percent) and non-Whites (50 percent). As a whole, 33 percent of this group turned out to vote in 2006. There was an eight percentage-point disparity between the rates at which Whites voted (33 percent) and non-Whites (25 percent). As with the 18-24 year old cohort, the largest disparity was between Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders (18 percent).

**Table 2: Voter Registration and Turnout of Voting-Eligible Americans Ages 25–29, 2006**

| Race                   | Voting-Eligible Population | VEP Registered | % of VEP Registered | VEP Voted | % of VEP Voted |
|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|---------------------|-----------|----------------|
| White                  | 11,670                     | 7,050          | 60%                 | 3,856     | 33%            |
| Black                  | 2,460                      | 1,350          | 55%                 | 732       | 30%            |
| Latino                 | 2,110                      | 1,020          | 42%                 | 452       | 21%            |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 640                        | 270            | 48%                 | 118       | 18%            |
| Other                  | 400                        | 200            | 50%                 | 86        | 22%            |
| Total (Nonwhite)       | 5,610                      | 2,840          | 50%                 | 1,388     | 25%            |
| Total                  | 17,280                     | 9,890          | 57%                 | 5,244     | 30%            |

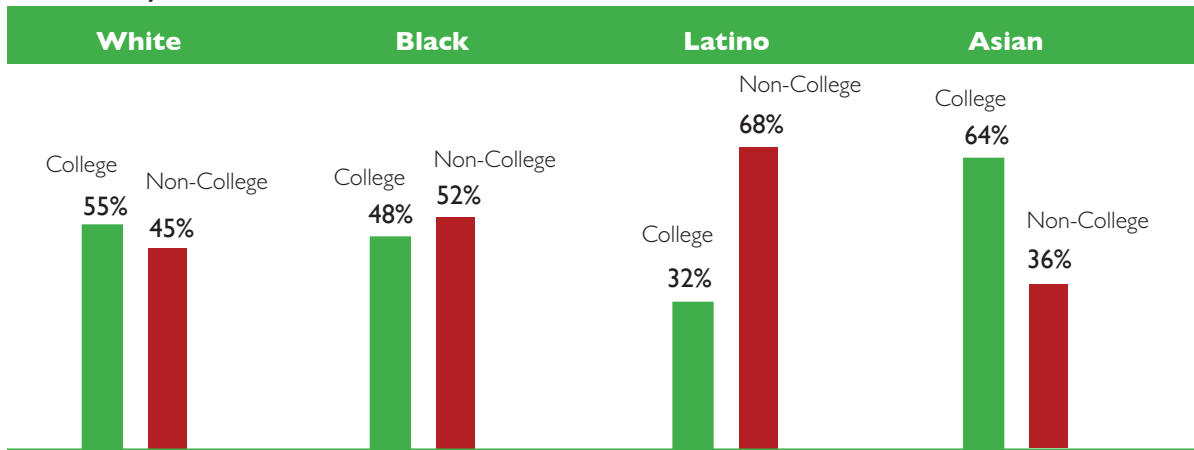
Numbers in thousands

Source: Project Vote Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 Current Population Survey

# College Experience of Young Americans

In 2006, there was an estimated 12.1 million Americans ages 18 to 24 that had no college experience. This comprised almost half of the estimated 24.9 million Americans in the voter eligible population for this age group. Figure 1 below shows the racial and ethnic composition of Americans ages 18 to 24 with and without some college experience. Fifty-one percent of Black Americans have no college experience of any kind and fully 69 percent of Latinos lack college experience.

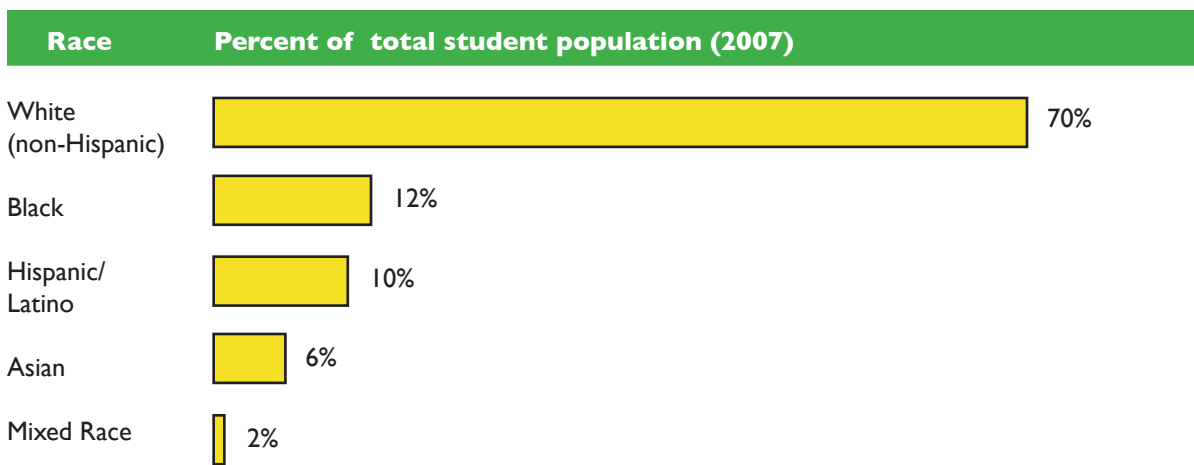
**Figure 1: Percentage of Total Population Age 18-24 with College Experience by Race or Ethnicity, 2006**



Source: CIRCLE Youth Demographics, November 2006

Figure 2 presents information on the race or ethnic composition of the college student population in 2007.

**Figure 2: Race or Ethnic Composition of College Students, 2007**

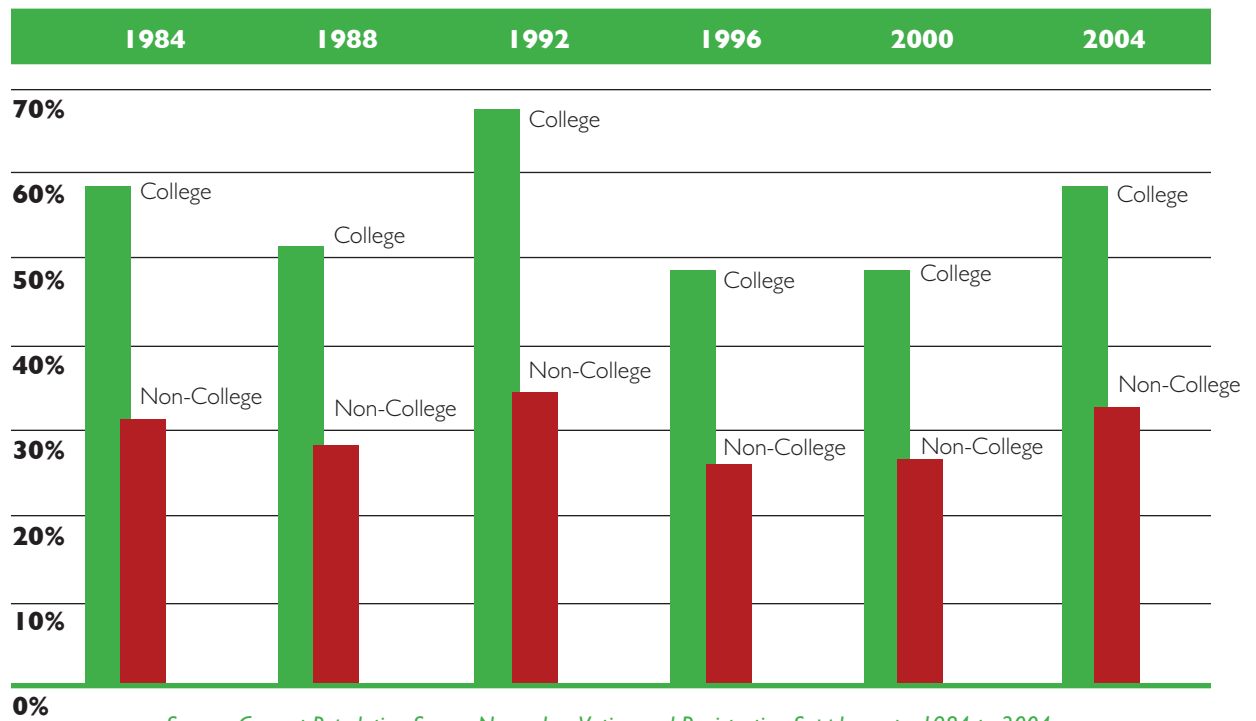


Source: CIRCLE (2008)

# Voter Registration and Turnout by Young American With and Without College Experience

Young citizens without college experience consistently vote at rates below those of youth with college experience in both presidential and midterm election years. Over the past 20 years, non-college youth have lagged about 30 percentage points behind college youth in voter turnout. And despite the fact that between the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, youth turnout increased, it increased by 11 percentage points among college-educated young people but only by nine percentage points among non-college attending youth. Figure 3 below illustrates this disparity.

**Figure 3: Turnout by Voting-Eligible Americans Ages 18-24 by Educational Level, Presidential Election Years, 1984-2004**



Although only half of Americans ages 18-29 have college experience, fully 79 percent of the young voters on Super Tuesday in February 2008 had attended college, according to CIRCLE . Overall, one in four eligible young voters with college experience voted on Super Tuesday 2008, compared with only one in 14 eligible young voters with no college experience.

Table 3 below shows the racial makeup of young voters (18-29) from the February 2008 Super Tuesday states by college experience.

**Table 3: Race or Ethnicity of 2008 Super Tuesday Voters Ages 18-29**

| Percent Voted               |             |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| <b>College Educated</b>     |             |
| White                       | 52%         |
| Black                       | 9%          |
| Latino                      | 10%         |
| Asian                       | 5%          |
| Other                       | 3%          |
| Sub-Total                   | 79%         |
| <b>Non-College Educated</b> |             |
| White                       | 12%         |
| Black                       | 4%          |
| Latino                      | 4%          |
| Asian                       | 1%          |
| Other                       | >1%         |
| Sub-Total                   | 21%         |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>100%</b> |

Source: “Deep Divide in Primary Youth Vote” CIRCLE (2008);  
 “The Youth Vote in the 2008 Super Tuesday States” CIRCLE (2008)

## Conclusion

This research memorandum shows that there are approximately 21 million Americans ages 18-29 who could register to vote and that this unregistered population is 62 percent White and 38 percent non-White. It is likely that the majority of this population cannot be reached through campus-based programs. Finally, we can reasonably speculate from the information that to the extent campaign-based phenomenon drive youth registration and turnout, the effect is largely confined to young Americans with college experience.



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