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Young Voters vs. The Democratic Party?

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See also WireTap's collection of articles on Election 2008 and the youth vote:

<http://www.wiretapmag.org/elections2008>

Sen. Barack Obama is the Democratic nominee largely because of unprecedented turnout by young voters in key primary states. (More data below.) Last week, walking around the speeches, panels and parties at the Democratic National Convention, it was clear that young voters are ascendant. Young people made up 16 percent of the delegates, a 50 percent increase since 2000, and they set the tone in a packed Mile High Stadium on the Big Night. The New York Times gives a flavor of how young people dominated the vibe:

In a twist on the normal convention finale, the prominent figures -- donors, elected officials and media celebrities like Dan Rather -- looked somewhat like the interlopers. Younger people dressed in jeans and shorts -- many not of voting age -- seemed decidedly more at home, as if they were attending an open-air concert and were fully versed in the festival ritual. The wave broke out in Section 338 just after Mr. Gore's speech ended and spread quickly around the stadium.

Justin Rockefeller, a youth voting advocate who has attend several conventions with his father, Sen. Jay Rockefeller, told me that this year's convention was the youngest he's ever seen. "From my memory it definitely looks younger -- not so much on delegate floor, but more so in the hallways and especially outside," he observed.

But all is not well with the youth vote.

Michael Connery, an analyst of youth engagement and the author of "Youth to Power: How Today's Young Voters Are Building Tomorrow's Progressive Majority," worries that young voters were "seen but not heard" at the DNC:

Turnout among young voters in the Democratic primary was double the level recorded in 2004, and young voters broke heavily in favor of Sen. Obama. In the Iowa caucuses, young voters performed on par with the "reliable" senior vote, and were widely credited with providing Sen. Obama's margin of victory... Despite this unprecedented youth involvement at the convention, young people were more likely to be seen than heard by the delegates and party officials in Denver....

Most surprisingly, the one place young voters were completely absent at the Democratic National Convention was at the podium. During my four nights at the convention I did not see one young voter or youth organizer -- from CDA, YDA, SFBO or otherwise -- address the convention. Thursday at Invesco Field was no better. Not one young person took the stage that night.

These are important critiques. It's odd that Obama's team did not tout more youth stories and voices during prime time, since he needs to keep his young base energized for turnout. convention.

There was, however, at least one major youth speaker on Thursday night at the stadium. Ray Rivera, 29, a Colorado state director for the Obama campaign, addressed the 80,000 person crowd -- twice. He was promoting, naturally, a text message organizing program, which recruited 30,000 new numbers that night alone. There was a big map and everything. I followed up with Connery, but he was not impressed. He emailed from the Republican National Convention:

I don't count Ray Rivera's time on the stage. He may be young, but his purpose on stage was not to represent youth at the convention, it was to list build for the campaign. He was not there as an advocate for young people on the many pressing issues we face, and even if he were, one slot in four nights would still be skimpy representation considering what young people have done for Democratic candidates since 2006.

So there. It doesn't count and even if it did it's not enough. But that vision is a bit too cramped.

It is good that Obama entrusted his operation in a key state like Colorado to a young operative; just as it was good for Obama to put so much faith in young web organizers who upended U.S. politics with their online strategy, social networking and web fund-raising. Joe Rospars, Sam Graham-Felsen and Chris Hughes, for example, are all 27 or younger.

In many ways, empowering young people without putting them in youth constituency silos is better than just checking the youth box with some official speaker. Rivera had a huge -- probably nerve-racking -- role on the Big Night to actually do something in his official role, albeit related to the youth vote, rather than just giving a quick talk about how Barack inspires students.

There could have been more young speakers on stage all week -- and it will be interesting to see the contrast for Republicans in St. Paul -- but the text message addresses were a good start.



GOP says it too can draw youth vote

Julian Walker, The Virginian-Pilot

© August 31, 2008

ST. PAUL, Minn.

Advertisers target them.

Companies with products to pitch covet their discretionary dollars.

And every four years, presidential campaigns woo young people to vote, only to be disappointed by low turnout among the group.

While much has been made of the strong showing Illinois Democratic Sen. Barack Obama had with that voting bloc during the presidential primaries, Virginia's Republicans say they, too, have made major strides attracting young voters.

As the GOP faithful gather for their four-day national convention beginning Monday in the Xcel Energy Center, they see younger voters as an important part of their coalition.

"Republicans are doing a lot to reach out to young voters and we have quite a lot of young voters," said Virginia GOP Chairman Jeff Frederick, 32, who identifies himself as the youngest state party chief in the nation.

Republicans contend that some young voters' loyalty to Democratic ideals shifts quickly after college, which Frederick called bastions of "liberal indoctrination."

"There's no personal experience that makes you want to be a Republican more than looking at your paycheck and seeing how much comes out in taxes," said Ben Marchi, 30, an alternate delegate from Albemarle County who is a lobbyist for a government spending reform group.

While the GOP might still be their fathers' party, younger Republicans maintain it also belongs to them.

"There is kind of this notion that the Republican Party is for your very traditional, middle-age, senior-age, citizens. And that's not true," said Jonathan Krive, a 22-year-old delegate from Falls Church.

A staunchly pro-life veteran of several political campaigns who chairs the city's GOP committee, Krive said, "Republican principles are ones young people care about."

As proof of the youth energy, party elders point to growing activity in GOP clubs on college campuses and among young professionals.

They also cite active voter registration drives, grass-roots efforts ranging from traditional shoe-leather politics to the new reach that technology provides.

"Don't let the press fool you," proclaims the latest e-mail newsletter from the Young Republican Federation of Virginia. "Republican young professionals ages 21-41 are fired up about the upcoming 2008 election year!"

Despite the expressions of confidence, statistical data indicate that the GOP has an uphill climb, however.

Between 2004 and 2008, voters ages 18-29 who identified themselves as Democrats grew from 50 to 58 percent, according to a recent Pew Research Center analysis.

Conversely, the study found GOP identification dropped from 40 to 33 percent among that age group during the same period.

When asked to explain that widening gap, several Republicans offered a similar answer: The Democrats' message appeals to youthful idealism, while the GOP's is tempered with pragmatism that plays better with older adults.

"Change is always exciting, and young people want to be part of that change," said Kate Maxwell, political director for the state College Republican Federation.

"I can relate to that," continued Maxwell, 20, the youngest Virginia delegate to the Republican National Convention, though she rejects the notion that Democrats have a monopoly on youth voters.

Nevertheless, turnout in Virginia's Feb. 12 primary election illustrates the rift between Republicans and some younger voters.

State voters, age 18-29, cast nearly 135,000 ballots in the Democratic presidential primary, more than double the roughly 53,000 tallied for Republican candidates, according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University in Massachusetts.

Some of the difference in those totals can be linked to the contentious Democratic primary race between Obama and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, by then Sen. John McCain was the only viable candidate still on the GOP ballot.

The weaker Republican turnout might also evidence the excitement Obama's campaign has sparked among younger voters; however, those same voters have been historically less reliable come Election Day.

One reason, said Christopher Newport University political science professor Quentin Kidd, is "when you're 21 years old, it's hard to see what you have invested in the system."

In 2004, for example, fewer than half of citizens ages 18-24 voted in the presidential election, compared to two-thirds of those older than 25.

This year, University of Virginia political science professor Larry Sabato predicts "overwhelming" support for Obama among youth voters whose participation, he believes, will be as high as it's been in decades.

However, he added, McCain is "disproportionately" ahead with seniors - a more reliable, and powerful bloc.

"Which segment would you rather have? The answer is voters over 60," Sabato said.

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Young Obama Supporters Make an Old Paradigm New

Posted August 27, 2008 | 04:05 PM (EST)



DENVER -- When the by-then-no-longer-presumptive presidential nominee Barack Obama takes the stage at Invesco Field on Thursday, most of the campaign volunteers staffing the event will be less than twenty-five years old. This fact suggests that Barack Obama has already brought about some of the open-ended change he has now promised for more than a year. In this case, that change is not just the political engagement of the 18-25 year old voting demographic, but also the galvanizing of that demographic on such a scale that it might actually make a difference in November.

In 2004, MTV and P. Diddy, among others, called upon that same demographic to "Vote or Die." When the electoral dust cleared, it appeared that the 18-25 year-old demographic (my demographic) had selected the "Die" option. In a less metaphorical mode, it is worth noting that since the Iraqi war of choice began, the vast majority of the more than 4,000 women and men who have indeed given their lives are of our generation. Yet in comparison with the anti-war activism and civil disobedience of our parents' generation, we have often seemed to take a distinctly relaxed approach to both protest and politics. We have appeared this way to politicians, political observers, and registrars of voters. Of course, many of our critics are veterans of the unprecedented anti-war protests and political upheavals of the 60s and 70s. Their perspective on our generation has certainly been affected by the seemingly more dramatic nature of the events that defined theirs. Though we are the heirs-apparent to the idealistic dreams and aspirations (fulfilled and otherwise) from our parents' generation, we too largely accepted the assessment of our generation as politically disengaged, dispassionate, disaffected.

What I hope will become increasingly clear after Thursday night is how mistaken that fairly damning judgment of our generation's remoteness from politics really is.

We do live in very different, though certainly no less interesting times. Iraq is not Vietnam. The Iraqi and Afghan wars have been fought without even the threat of a draft. Whether this was a deliberate political decision or merely a by-product of an ill-conceived foreign policy is open to question. The absence of a draft has undoubtedly reduced the active and vocal opposition of our generation to the Bush-Cheney-McCain wars.

But the numbers of young volunteers on the Obama campaign and of newly registered voters whom Obama has inspired suggest that, after all, we are deeply engaged in politics, but in a way very different from that of our parents. Rather than staging demonstrations like our parents did, rather than working from outside the political system to affect changes in government policy, Invesco Field's young staffers and the campaign network they stand for illustrate a new political reality: my generation's form of activism is to work within the political process for a candidate who inspires us. That candidate is Senator Obama. It seems that this time we have decided to "Vote" rather than "Die." We won't know the

impact of my generation's version of political engagement till November. But the simple fact that we are finally taking an active role in the political process is, like much here in Denver, a cause for hope.



Religious Youth Vote Could Tip Scales in Battleground States

by Mary Ann Mancuso

Tuesday, August 12, 2008

Barack Obama has cultivated a rock star persona and used “change” as a rallying cry, attracting young, secular voters, but it could be the large segment of religiously-oriented youth who make or break the Democratic presidential candidate and his Republican opponent John McCain this election year.

Three swing states — Ohio, Missouri and Colorado — could tip the scales if religious youth show up the way they have in recent elections, said John Green, director of the Bliss Institute at University of Akron in Ohio.

“These ‘battleground states’ are good reflections of the nation as a whole,” Green told FOXNews.com. “The youth vote — both religious and non-religious — are likely to show the same patterns at the national level. If they [religious youth] can have an impact nationally, they will have an impact in the battleground states.”

Evangelical youth accounted for about 20 percent of the overall youth vote in the last election. In all, more than 4 million practicing Jews, Muslims and Christian youth could show up to vote on Nov. 4.

Winning over increasingly sophisticated young voters — religious or otherwise — means reaching out to them in familiar venues. Facebook is just one of several outlets where religious youth voters have congregated to create groups who share their beliefs and viewpoints.

Bradford Schundler, creator of “Christians for Obama,” said he created the Facebook forum to give young voters from fundamentalist Christian backgrounds who were frustrated with the system a place to come together and rally for change.

For Schundler, Obama embodies that rallying cry.

Change is “the abandoning of politics as usual, an opportunity for the underrepresented to have a voice,” he said. “Obama is the face of the Christian youth generation, moreso than anybody else.”

Schundler said his religion is a huge factor in picking a candidate, and he believes Obama “has a message that can resonate with young Christians.”

Those words are remarkably similar to ones uttered by Matt Russell, who has started another Facebook group called “Christians for McCain.” He said the page is a place for young Christians to discuss issues that matter to them and to help inform undecided voters.

“A vast majority of my friends believe McCain is the face of the Christian youth vote today,” he said.

Russell said he was drawn to McCain because he “upholds the Christian values and he acknowledges that God should be kept in public places.”

With his stance on the war in Iraq and his defense of Israel, Russell said, “McCain supports the conservative Christian views, unlike Obama.”

For both candidates, appealing to religious youth means speaking to them the same way they appeal to their secular peers or devout elders. McCain is trying to reach out to youth, particularly religious youth, by speaking of issues that matter to all Americans, said Joe Pounder, a McCain spokesman.

“Young religious voters are looking for a president who will keep our nation safe while expanding economic opportunity and promoting our common values. In this election, young religious voters will see that John McCain has the leadership, values and vision we need in our next president,” Pounder said.

Obama campaign spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Obama has packed concert halls to maximum capacity by delivering speeches that are inspiring and hopeful. He is trying to motivate religious youth voters by tapping into their support for collective causes like climate change and faith-based charities.

“Our campaign is reaching out to young people of all faiths, including Evangelicals, by holding house parties, hosting events with key supporters and even holding rock concerts. Faith has been an important part of Senator Obama’s life and he shares the commitment that millions of young evangelicals and people of all faith have to changing the world around them,” Psaki said.

Michelle Lackie, director of Weinberg Tzedek Hillel based in Washington, D.C. said both candidates have something to offer religious youth.

“A lot of people who will vote for McCain because of his view on Israel, and a lot of people will vote for Obama because of his view of change and his objectivity to tackle foreign policy issues.”

Tony Arnold, director of media relations for Campus Crusade, the world’s largest youth ministry, said he has definitely noticed more interest in this election than in previous years. Campus Crusade does not back any one particular candidate, but encourages its members to participate in the political process.

“Because of the nature of the contest this time around, both parties having highly contesting races,” attention is more focused, Arnold said.

Obama's objective to inspire has worked on Jacob Velleman, a member of the Obama for America College Steering Committee. Velleman said Obama's appeal comes from being "in touch with issues that matter to young people, and (he) views them as beneficiaries to today's policies."

"What I am when I hear him is inspired and I don't get that from other politicians," said Velleman, who is Jewish.

Velleman said he and his friends believe Obama has "invested in the youth vote" since the start of the campaign.

"Overwhelmingly, my Jewish friends will be voting for Barack," Velleman said.

That is not the case for Arielle Rosayn, a junior at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, and a member of the Hillel Jewish organization, which has a chapter at FAU. Rosayn said she is 100 percent for McCain because of his policy on Israel.

"McCain has a stronger allegiance and better stance on Israel," Rosayn said, adding that inspirational speech-making isn't the only attribute she seeks in a candidate.

"There is more to electing the next president of the United States than (being) a good speaker," she said.

As with all elections, the key to success will be turnout.

"Turnout is critical and the only votes that count are the votes that are cast," said the Bliss Institute's Green.

Forty percent of registered voters age 18-29 turned out in 2000. In 2004, turnout for young people rose to 49 percent, or 20.9 million young voters. The youth vote accounted for 16 percent of the overall count in 2004.

Noting states where the religious youth vote could potentially have the most impact, Green said Colorado, Missouri and Ohio have in the last two presidential elections narrowly given George W. Bush victories.

In 2004, President Bush beat Sen. John Kerry in Ohio by 118,601 votes or less than 2 percent. In Missouri, Bush defeated Kerry by 198,836 votes, or less than 7.5 percent; and in Colorado, Bush beat Kerry by 107,567 votes, or just under 5.5 percent. In 2000, Bush defeated then-Vice President Al Gore by similar or even tighter margins in all three states.

Voting Matters Blog

News and commentary about elections, voting and politics

07.05.08 | 5 simple ways to increase the youth vote

Much ado is made about the increased participation of the 18-25 demographic in this year's election but their participation still lags behind that of other age groups. Here are several ways to change election law to make their participation easier.

- * Give the office of school guidance counselor in public secondary schools legal status as a designated voter registration agency. That way the voter registration forms can be handed out to students while they are signing up for their class schedule. Then the forms can be sent from the school guidance counselor to the election office. (Louisiana just passed H. 990 to make this happen in that state)

- * Allow 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register so that they are automatically registered to vote when they reach their 18th birthday. If high school juniors and seniors get their paperwork completed well in advance they will be ready and able vote when the next election rolls around. (Rhode Island just passed the "Youth Voting Bill," H 7106 and S 2081 and sent it to the governor for signature)

- * Allow 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the General Election to also vote in the Spring Primary Election. This way their voice can be heard during a contested party primary when excitement is high and they are motivated to participate in support of their candidate. Maryland already has made this a part of their election law, largely because of the efforts of a 17-year-old student who wanted to vote for Barack Obama.

- * Allow all voters, including high school and college students, to register to vote up until the close of polls on Election Day. Young people are often in transition during the run-up to election day—starting college, moving to a new city, starting a new job—and often do not pay attention to an upcoming election until the deadline for voter registration has passed. A handful of states (Wisconsin, Maine, New Hampshire and Minnesota) already allow Election Day Registration—and report the highest voter turnout numbers in the country coupled with virtually no problems with voter fraud.

- * Allow high school juniors and seniors to work at the polls. If students can be appointed as official poll workers two problems can be solved at once—greater involvement by high schoolers in the electoral process—and trained replacements for the current crop of aging poll workers, whose median age is in the 70's in most jurisdictions. (in Rhode Island, H 7833, which allows high school juniors and seniors to be appointed as election officials, has been sent to the governor for signature)

Rock the Vote, Project Vote and similar voter registration outreach efforts have done outstanding work but are frequently hampered by state election laws. If the five simple changes recommended above were to be enacted in all 50 states, their job would be much

easier because they would be filling a much smaller gap and we would not have so much handwringing about the low rate of participation by the 18-25 year old demographic.



Record Youth Voter Turnout for '08 Presidential Primaries & Caucuses

Contact: David Roscow, 703.276.2772 x21

Washington, DC - 06/13/2008 - A record 6.5 million citizens under the age of 30 participated in the 2008 presidential primaries and caucuses, according to data compiled by CIRCLE (The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement). This marks a dramatic increase in the youth voter turnout over the last comparable election in 2000, and the first time the youth vote has risen in three consecutive election cycles since 1971 when the voting age was lowered to 18.

Overall the national youth voter turnout rate¹ almost doubled, rising from nine percent in 2000 to 17 percent in 2008. Of the seventeen states in which exit polls were also conducted in 2000, sixteen saw increases in youth voter turnout with some states seeing triple or quadruple increases. The complete fact sheet including a state-by-state and candidate breakdown of the 2008 primary youth vote can be found at www.civicyouth.org.

"This primary season the Millennials have gone to the polls in record numbers, showing they are an influential voting bloc in American politics. They realize what's at stake and the impact this election will have on their future and the future of our country," said CIRCLE Director, Peter Levine. "Since 2000, young people have been volunteering at high rates and are becoming more interested in news and public affairs. With the large turnout this election cycle, they now understand the importance and power of voting in making a difference."

Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama was the clear choice among young Democrats, winning the support of 60 percent of young voters and a majority in 32 of the 40 states. The Republican preferences were not as clear-cut with GOP presidential nominee John McCain winning the support of 34 percent of young Republicans, while Gov. Mike Huckabee garnered 31 percent and Gov. Mitt Romney 25 percent.

The massive turnout of young people in these primaries punctuates the findings of national focus groups that CIRCLE conducted last fall. The research showed that college students are deeply concerned about issues, involved personally as volunteers and ready to consider voting. But they want political leaders to be positive, to address real problems and to call on all Americans to be constructively involved.

The increase in youth turnout continues a trend observed in other elections since 2000. In the 2006 congressional elections, the voter turnout rate among 18-to 29-year-olds increased by three percentage points compared to the previous congressional election in 2002. And in the 2004 presidential election, the national youth voter turnout rate rose 9 percentage points compared to 2000, reaching 49 percent.

“All key indicators and trends point to a predicted record turnout of young people voting this coming November,” Levine continued. “Now it’s up to the candidates to run campaigns that address the real issues and concerns that young Americans care about rather than the negative mudslinging tactics that have turned off young voters in the past.”

Any comparisons of youth voter turnout among states should be made with caution since each state has different rules governing who can participate in their primaries. Furthermore, we cannot compare all state youth turnout levels in 2008 to youth turnout to 2004 or 2000 since many states did not have exit polls conducted for those years.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) conducts and promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and several other foundations provide funding for CIRCLE. Currently based at the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy, CIRCLE will be moving on July 1, 2008, to the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Politics™

Will the Youth Vote Deliver for Obama?

By Ryan Reeh 5/29/08

Like many politicians, Sen. Barack Obama takes great care courting young voters, saying that they will "make the difference" in the nation's future. But what will it take for young voters to make a significant impact in November-for Obama or any other candidate?

The youth vote is like the Holy Grail-and just as elusive. In 2004, campaigns like Rock The Vote, Choose or Lose and Vote or Die went after young people in a big way. The final turnout, though, came to about 19 percent of the total vote-nowhere near the pre-Election Day hype.

At least one political consultant believes that that number may jump as high as 60 percent in November. "High turnout will depend on informing and persuading young people to turnout, which is what makes this year different ... candidates are finally ready to forcibly push young people into the process," says Paul Wilson, a Republican consultant who specializes in voting behavior.

But what is the best way to reach that lofty turnout goal?

"The best way to get out the youth vote in 2008 will be a strategy that focuses on phone calls, registration drives, campus canvassing and online appeals," says Democratic strategist Joe Binnis, a veteran of former president Bill Clinton's 1992 bid. "And to guarantee their votes in November, you have to keep their interest and follow up on the get out the vote drives with 'knock-and-drag' tactics on Election Day."

Binnis adds that candidates who master the Internet have a huge leg up in courting young people. Republican strategist Nino Saviano agrees, pointing to how Obama and Ron Paul used Facebook and MySpace to gain traction with the under-30 set. Saviano says he's also noticing increased participation in groups like the College Democrats and College Republicans.

"Obama's job [to get the youth vote] will be a lot easier because he has energized young people into politics," Saviano says.

For McCain to compensate for Obama's natural youth appeal, strategists say he should take a page from Ron Paul's book and get young Republicans to reach out on his behalf. "Ron Paul was seen as an alternative to typical Republican politics, which is what young Republicans want," says Republican consultant Marty Youssefiani, who has worked on several grassroots political campaigns. "If the opposition is lining up behind a transformational figure like Obama, a committed young Republican needs to see McCain as a different brand of Republican."

There are some early signs that the much-hyped youth demographic is more interested in voting than in previous years. Youth primary turnout this year was up 9 percent in Iowa and Florida, 10 percent in Ohio and 25 percent in New Hampshire.

"State by state, we are seeing higher youth turnout, which bodes well for our campaigns and our democratic process," says Chrissy Faessen, communications director for Rock The Vote. "All this talk of young people not caring about politics is going to seem silly by November."

And as presidential races are increasingly determined by razor-thin margins, every vote is worth fighting for, especially in swing states. In November, Ohio and Pennsylvania will have a combined 5.1 million youth votes up for grabs—more than enough to help break McCain's current 4-point lead in Ohio or Obama's 6-point lead in Pennsylvania.

"Grabbing a few percentage points from young voters in any swing state will be essential," says Brian Franklin, a Florida-based Democratic consultant. "Florida will be important for the margin of victory, as it has been, but there are enough young people registered in swing states like Ohio and Pennsylvania to make a difference."

Republican consultant Paul Wilson says candidates need to leverage campaign tactics aimed specifically at young voters.

"The main thing campaigns should be doing is making their messages highly viral and making these politicians 'hip and cool,'" he says, citing the presidential candidates' appearances on shows like "The Colbert Report" and "Saturday Night Live." "Strategists have to go after where young people get their information on the candidates."

Translating this youthful momentum into votes in the general election may be the tipping point for Democrats or Republicans.

However, there hasn't been a guaranteed way to get high youth turnout in 22 years, says political consultant Tom Nolan. "The only way I've seen to get this demographic is to have a nucleus of politically interested younger people reaching out to other young people."

The candidates have yet to exploit this method, but other groups have been doing it on their behalf. Rock The Vote has a text messaging program that has young people sending texts to their friends to encourage registration. Brown University has a "Campus Vote" initiative that asks other institutions to encourage young voters to participate in democracy. And while the Democratic National Committee has already started working on a "neighbor to neighbor" program that gets neighbors canvassing neighbors, there hasn't yet been a college campus equivalent. Though it doesn't mean young voters will not be interested in such programs, or in the November election.

"Young people will want change and this slogan of change is the thing that will resonate most with them," says Nolan.



Young voters getting engaged with politics They bring energy, enthusiasm and fresh ideas to this election

By Rod Garvin, Decker Ngongang, and John White
May 6, 2008

This year, 2008, will go down in the history books as the year young voters forever changed the face of politics by proving they are a political force to be reckoned with. According to Rock the Vote and CIRCLE (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement), voter turnout among 18- to 29-year-olds has doubled and tripled in almost every state primary and caucus.

This constituency also comprises one-fifth of the electorate, or a total of 44 million potential voters. The size of this group should have made competition for young votes a given in previous elections, but unfortunately that has not been the case.

The youth voting bloc has always been substantial, but it has been largely overlooked because it has been assumed that young people are too apathetic and self-consumed to be concerned about politics. It is true that large youth voter turnout in the past has been triggered by historic events such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. However, politicians, political consultants, pundits and baby boomers have misinterpreted a relative absence of public protest and low voting as signs of disinterest.

Negative ads a turnoff

Young people care about the quality of education, job creation, health care and keeping our country safe while protecting individual rights, but they have been turned off by negative attack ads, divisive partisanship and an inability to engage political leaders in real dialogue. The fact that unprecedented numbers of young voters are participating so early in the election season does not necessarily mean these factors are no longer obstacles, but it is evidence of a new generation that refuses to be silent any longer.

Here in North Carolina we find ourselves in a unique and exciting position. Our state primary is usually rather insignificant in regards to the presidential race, but this year North Carolina will help determine the Democratic nominee.

The opportunity to vote for a candidate who could become the nation's first female or African American president surely enhances the significance of the primary for many young adults, but at the end of the day, like the vast majority of Americans, they will vote based on which candidate they believe will provide the best leadership for our country in these challenging times.

Research shows that partisan loyalty or political allegiances are often solidified in a young person's first election. A contrasting trend shows that young adults are increasingly identifying themselves as "independent" or "unaffiliated."

Young swing voters matter

In a political climate where elections are often determined by swing voters who do not align themselves with either of the two major parties, the growing independence of this constituency will only add to their importance in the future.

It may be difficult to sustain the energy of young voters after Election Day on Nov. 4. Yet, it is possible if civic leaders choose dialogue over monologue, make themselves accessible through local forums and utilize communication tools such as conference calls and internet videoconferences.

We hope that from this election forward, the political establishment will no longer ask whether young people are interested, but rather will ask how they can get young people more involved.

When young voters are engaged, democracy wins.

washingtonpost.com

This Time We Mean It: The Youth Vote Matters

By Chris Cillizza and Shailagh Murray

Sunday, April 27, 2008; A08

Election after election, when all the obvious story lines are exhausted, the media tend to turn to an oldie but goody: "Will this be the race where young people finally start voting?"

Youth vote advocates insist that young people are more dialed in than ever this year, while political hacks who have been in the business for decades roll their eyes at the notion.

Given that, The Fix recognizes the danger in making the following statement: The youth vote will matter in 2008. A look back over the last few months shows a massive increase in youth (people ages 18 through 29) voting; the number of young people voting quadrupled in Tennessee and tripled in states such as Iowa, Missouri and Texas, according to a new study by Harvard University's Institute of Politics.

The report goes on to say that the growth in young people's participation in the electoral process is not a "one-time phenomenon" but, rather, represents a "civic reawakening of a new generation."

That conclusion is affirmed by polling conducted by MTV and CBS News -- survey data that provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of the burgeoning 18-to-29 vote.

Some of the results from the polls will surprise no one.

Sen. Barack Obama (Ill.) leads Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (N.Y.) 48 percent to 37 in a Democratic primary matchup. In general-election trial heats, both Clinton and Obama best Sen. John McCain (Ariz.). Obama leads McCain 52 percent to 39 percent, while Clinton holds 51 percent to 41 percent.

While none of those hypothetical results turns conventional wisdom on its head (younger voters tend to favor Democrats, and Obama has spent considerable time in the campaign courting young voters), the issues that the MTV-CBS poll unearthed as most important to young voters might flip the script, at least a bit.

The economy was by far the most important issue to the group -- a noteworthy development that suggests the concerns of young voters are not so different from the worries of the older electorate.

Twenty-two percent of the MTV-CBS sample named the economy as the top issue facing their generation, more than double the proportion who said the same in June 2007.

Much of the unrest among young people about the state of the economy may have to do with their declining job prospects. In the poll, just 3 percent said the job prospects for their age group were "excellent," while a whopping 67 percent called their chances of getting a job either "fair" (42 percent) or "poor" (25 percent).

While about half of the poll's sample said politicians were paying the "right amount" of attention to the economy, 29 percent said those same politicians were devoting enough time to talking about jobs for young people.

The poll also contained heartening news for the mainstream media. More than 7 in 10 respondents said "a lot" of their information about politics comes from either newspapers or television news; 15 percent said they get most of their information about politics from blogs -- Fix readers, unite! -- while 12 percent said they get "a lot" of political information from "late night talk and comedy shows."

