



November 27, 2006

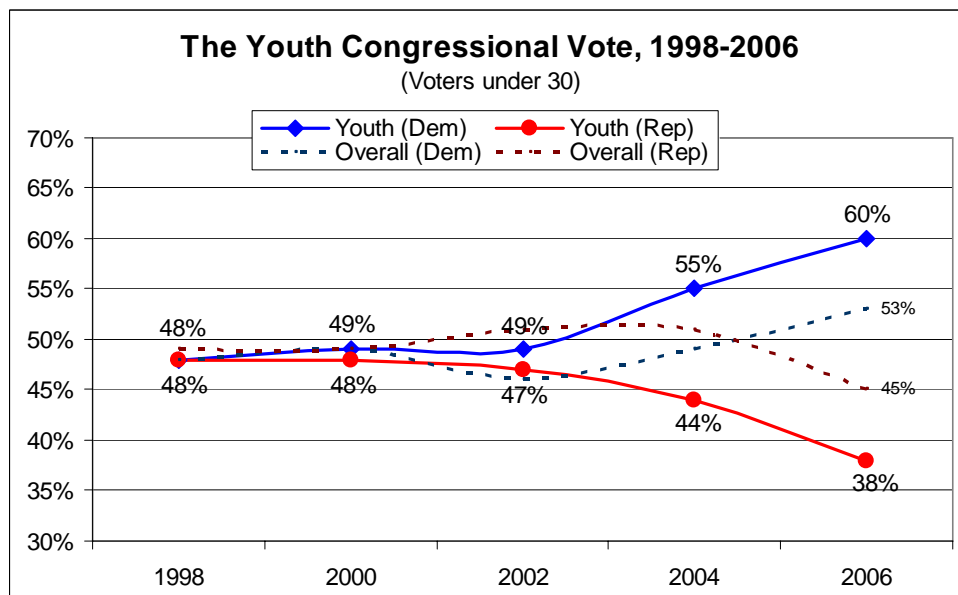
To: Editorial writers, producers, reporters, columnists

Fr: Dan Cox, Policy and Values Research Associate
Robert P. Jones, Ph.D., Director and Senior Fellow
Center for American Values in Public Life at People For the American Way Foundation

Re: The Youth Vote in 2006: Rising Turnout and Increasingly Democratic

The 2006 election marked not only a significant increase in youth voting for the second consecutive election but a rising partisan tide among young voters who supported Democratic candidates by significant margins. In the 2004 presidential election, youth voting increased by nine points over 2000 (40% to 49%), an increase of more than 10 million voters. In 2006, the youth vote increased by more two million since 2002, a remarkable 25% increase.¹ The 2006 election marks the second election in a row that saw a significant increase in the youth voter turnout.

The first major youth voter increase in 2004 also witnessed the first major partisan voting gap. In 2004, younger voters preferred candidate John Kerry to George Bush by 8 points (54% to 46%). Young voters were the only age group that Kerry won. House Democratic candidates also fared well among young voters, outdistancing their Republican opponents by an even larger 11-point margin (55% to 44%). Two years later, Democrats have doubled their advantage among young voters, who preferred Democratic candidates to Republican candidates 60% to 38%, a 22-point gap.

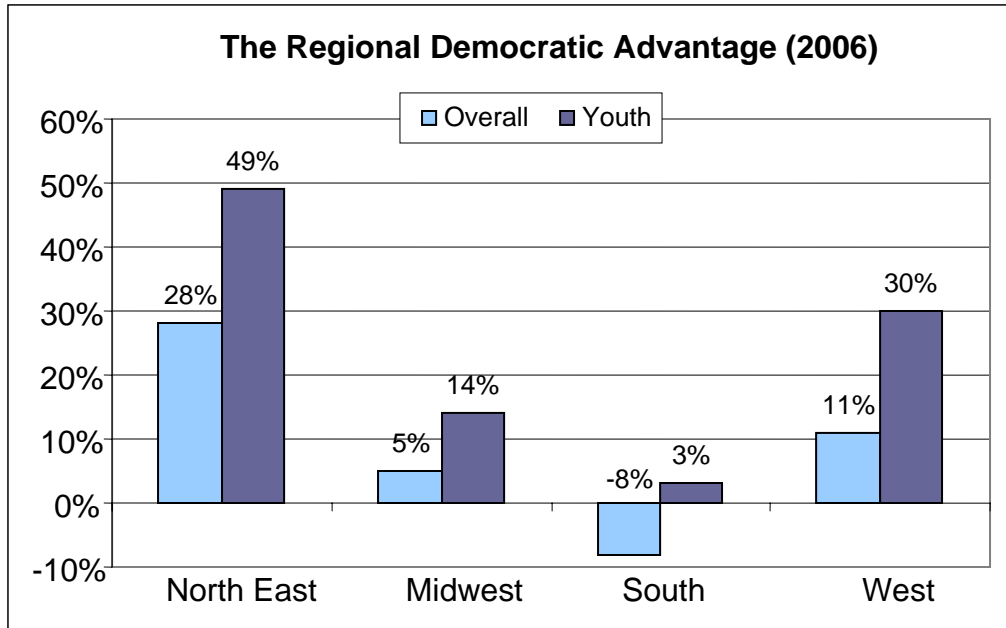


Source: National Election Pool Exit Polls, 1998-2006

¹ CIRCLE, "Youth Voter Turnout Sharply Up in 2006 Midterm Elections," Nov. 8, 2006.

Democratic Regional Advantages and the Youth Vote

Nationally, Democratic congressional candidates had an 8-point advantage in 2006 (53% to 45%). However this 8-point lead was not evenly distributed across every region. In the Northeast, which has long been considered a Democratic stronghold, Democratic candidates held a 28-point advantage over their Republican opponents. In the Midwest and West, the advantage was a much more modest 5% and 11% respectively. Republicans fared much better in the South, where they held an 8-point lead over the Democrats. Given the overwhelming regional advantage Democrats had in the Northeast, it is perhaps not surprising that they picked up more new seats in this region than any other; more than a third of the new Democratic House members are from the Northeast.



Source: National Election Pool Exit Poll, 2006

Across every region, young voters supported Democratic candidates at higher rates than the general public. In the Northeast, young voters preferred Democrats to Republicans by a whopping 49-point margin (74% to 25%). In the West and Midwest, young voters preferred the Democrats by 30 points and 14 points respectively. Despite the overwhelming 22-point advantage enjoyed by Democrats nationally, southern Democratic candidates held just a 3-point advantage over Republicans among southern youth.

Regional Differences in 2004 and 2006: Looking Back, Looking Forward

Democratic congressional candidates in 2006 improved on Kerry's 2004 performance among young voters in every region of the country, but the largest increases came in the Northeast and especially in the West, where Democratic candidates led Republicans among young voters (74% to 25%) and (63% to 33%) respectively. In the West, young voters increased their margin of support for Democrats from 4 points in 2004 to 30 points in 2006, a 26-point increase. In the Northeast, Democratic House candidates built on already robust advantage, increasing their margin of support among young voters by 13 points, from 36% to 49%.

| Democratic Advantage Among Young Voters by Region | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Region | 2004 Presidential Election | | | 2006 Congressional Election | | |
| | Democrat | Republican | Advantage '04 | Democrat | Republican | Advantage '06 |
| Northeast | 68% | 32% | 36% | 74% | 25% | 49% |
| Midwest | 53% | 47% | 6% | 56% | 42% | 14% |
| South | 47% | 53% | -6% | 51% | 48% | 3% |
| West | 52% | 48% | 4% | 63% | 33% | 30% |
| <i>Source: National Election Pool Exit Polls, 2004 and 2006</i> | | | | | | |

In both the Midwest and the South, Democrats saw more modest but significant gains among young voters. In the Midwest, the Democratic advantage among young voters increased from 8 points (53% to 47%) to 14 points (56% to 42%), and in the South a 6-point Democratic deficit reversed to become a 3-point advantage. Yet despite these impressive gains in the South, southern Democratic congressional candidates ran almost even with Republicans among young voters with Democrats achieving a bare majority of support (51% to 48%). The difference between the young voters in the Northeast and the South is striking: almost twice as many young voters in the South voted for Republicans (48%) than young voters in the Northeast (25%).

Youth Partisanship, Ideology and Issues

While it is too soon to tell whether the increasing Democratic advantage among youth constitutes a trend, several findings suggest these recent patterns reflect a cohort that is significantly progressive. The 2006 national election exit poll found that 43% of young voters identify with the Democratic Party, and only 31% identify with the Republicans, a 12-point advantage and a significant shift since 2004. Among all voters, the partisan identity gap is much smaller, with 38% identifying as Democrat and 36% identifying as Republican.

Young Americans are also more likely to self-identify as liberal or progressive. Almost a third of young Americans identify as liberal, twice the number of Americans over 60 who self-identify that way; 58% of young Americans said they are politically progressive, compared to just 40% of Americans over the age of 60.

| Political Ideology by Age (2006) | | | | |
|--|--------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| Age | Conservative | Moderate | Liberal | Progressive |
| 18 – 29 | 30% | 36% | 30% | 58% |
| 30 – 44 | 40% | 32% | 22% | 47% |
| 45 – 59 | 41% | 35% | 22% | 48% |
| 60+ | 52% | 27% | 15% | 40% |
| Total | 41% | 33% | 22% | 47% |
| <i>Source: American Values Survey, Aug. 2006</i> | | | | |

Younger Americans are also more likely to support progressive policies even on some controversial social issues. On the question of whether gay and lesbian people should be able to adopt children, the country is evenly divided; 49% support adoption rights for gay couples and 47% oppose them. Among young Americans a majority (63%) support gay adoption. Finally,

younger Americans are much more diverse than older cohorts; more than a third (35%) are non-white, primarily African American or Latino.²

Conclusion

Young voters are turning out to vote in rising numbers, and they are increasingly voting Democratic. In 2006, young voters in every region of the country preferred Democratic candidates, although strength of support varied greatly by region; Democratic support is greatest in the Northeast and West, followed by the Midwest and the South, where young voters supported Democratic candidates by only a slim majority. Young voters are more diverse than older voters, self-identify as more liberal or progressive, and hold more progressive positions than the public on a variety of issues, including controversial social issues.

In our currently polarized political environment, which often produces tight elections, young voters are positioned to play a critical role. For example, in the 2006 mid-term elections, they were crucial in Jon Tester's 2,800-vote victory in Montana, providing the Democrat with a 12-point advantage, and in the defeat of an anti-gay ballot initiative in Arizona, which garnered 48% support but which was opposed by young voters by a substantial 61% to 39% margin. If younger Americans continue to increase their share of the vote, they will have a significant impact on the American political landscape by shaping the political agendas of both political parties.

More post-election analysis and information on our American Values Survey can be found at www.centerforamericanvalues.org. We would be pleased to discuss the topline findings as well as the more detailed analysis of religious and other subgroups that the size of our survey permits. Feel free to contact the Center at 202-467-4999.

² CIRCLE, "Youth Demographics," October, 2002.