

Young Voter Strategies

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Democratic Strategic Analysis

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Young voters solidly voted for Democrats this November. They began the year focused on change, they were disappointed in the country's direction and had negative attitudes toward the President and Congress. In the end, their attitudes did not shift, the country never righted its ship and Bush and Congress never came out of the doldrums. Young voters believed Democrats embodied the change they were looking for, they supported Democratic candidates, and will now be looking for the new Democratic Congress to deliver on the war in Iraq, the cost of college, and health care. We have consistently pointed our party toward University of Michigan research that shows when people vote for one political party for three consecutive elections they disproportionately vote for that party for the rest of their lives. This was the second of those three elections – 2004 was the first. Another concerted effort in 2008 can help permanently align these voters with our party. Young voters turned out in record numbers and did their part; they rewarded our party for the second consecutive election because our candidates are right on the issues important to young people. Now is the time to keep up the pressure and make this age group a part of our permanent majority party.

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- ü **Young voters turned out in record numbers and were highly engaged in the election.**
 - ü **Democrats had a solid 15-point advantage among young people, though Republicans had their own engaged base. In fact, while Democrats enjoy a 10-point party identification advantage over Republicans, and outperformed that advantage by 5 points, Republican voters were 8 points more likely than Democrats to say they would vote this year.**
 - ü **Young people were most concerned about education and the cost of college, the war in Iraq, the economy and jobs, and immigration. They favored Democrats on the cost of college and Iraq, but turned to Republicans on immigration and terrorism. Independents favored Democrats because they gave Democrats the advantage on Iraq, health care, and the cost of college.**
 - ü **Young voters felt negatively about the direction of the country, the President, Congress, and the Republican Party. They were more positive toward their own Member of Congress and the Democratic Party, though in both of those latter cases their feelings in November had declined since September. The concern here, of course, is that at the campaign's conclusion only a thin majority of young people had a positive image of the Democratic Party. The trend in the end was a negative one that needs to be addressed moving forward.**
 - ü **Young voters relied on the internet and newspapers for information about the candidates. Half said they were contacted about the elections by candidates, the parties, or other organizations.**
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The 2006 Mid-Terms: Change Oriented from Start to Finish

From the beginning of this research this spring, young voters were in a “change” mindset and very little happened over the year to move them from this instinct. They were disappointed in the nation’s direction, disliked Bush and his job performance, and were critical of Congress. Even while they gave somewhat decent ratings to their own member of Congress, they were still inclined to vote for a new direction.

Our last survey this year tells us they did exactly that, and by overwhelming numbers. *By 15 points, young people supported the Democratic candidates.* Half (50%) of young voters said they supported or were planning to support the Democratic candidate for Congress. A third of young voters said they supported or planned to support the Republican candidate (35%). Young voters identify as Democrats by ten points, (40% to 30%) so by five points they outperformed party identification.

The Democrats’ margin narrowed since September among men (from +19 in April to +11 in November), 23 to 30 year olds (from +18 to +7), college graduates (from +23 to +12), non-college educated men (from +24 to +8), college-educated women (from +39 to +8), young people in the Northeast (from +38 to +20) and in the South (from +15 to -1), students (from +26 to +12), and young people who are employed full-time (+22 to +10).

Democrats increased their margin among 18 to 22 year olds (from +20 in April to +28 in November), those with a high school education or less (from +22 to +34), non-college educated women (from +12 to +25), 18 to 22 year old whites (from +2 to +22), and young people in the Midwest (from +18 to +37).

Both Republican and Democratic young voters stayed true to their party – 91% of Democrats voted for the Democrat and 87% of Republicans voted for the Republican – but Democrats made their winning margin by picking up the Independent voters (45% voted for the Democrat, 19% voted for the Republican).

Democrats won each age group but the margin was greater among the youngest voters:

Vote By Age

Age	Republican	Democrat	Net Democrat
18-19	27%	68%	+41
20-22	33%	54%	+21
23-25	34%	45%	+11
26-30	40%	44%	+4

Democrats also won across gender (women: +18; men:+11) and race (whites: +5; African Americans: +58; Latinos: +42).

§ The Democratic candidate was also favored by young people across education levels, even among blue-collar workers (some college: +7; associates degree: +5).

§ Republicans won among those who identified as Republicans (+83), Evangelicals (+18), married young voters (+9), 23 to 30 year old whites (+4), and 23 to 30 year old men (+3).

In sum, as we noted in April, the large Democratic advantage was sustainable because it included advantages among whites, men, and blue-collar young people as well as base supporters such as young women, African Americans, and Latino/as; and that held true throughout the year.

Looking ahead, there are reasons to be cautious. First, while young people across the board inflated their registration and participation rates in this survey, we know that young Latinos are the most likely to have not voted. Latinos represent the fastest growing ethnic group in the country and in an election where Democrats reversed the trends from 2004, young Latinos need to become part of our base vote (in this survey they voted for Democrats by 69% to 28% for Republican). Second, as we will speak about shortly, self-identified Republican voters were more likely to vote this year than self-identified Democrats; if our voters were as likely as their voters to participate this could be worth another two to three percentage points in favor of progressives. Again, we can win with young voters but as they become part of our base we need to maximize their support and turnout. Thirdly, the Democratic Party's image took a hit this fall as the campaign closed and barely a thin majority of young voters had a positive image of our party. Our leaders need to demonstrate over the next two years that they can govern and can lead on the issues important to young people. The image of the party has already rebounded, but Democrats want to solidify that.

Clearly, young people went to the polls with change in mind. Three in five think the country is off on the wrong track (61%). Less than a third feel things are moving in the right direction (31%). These pessimistic feelings drove the Democratic vote. Three-quarters (75%) of young voters who chose the Democrat candidate think the country is off on the wrong track. In contrast, 69% of young voters who voted Republican say the country is going in the right direction. Pessimistic feelings had decreased slightly in September (from 63% wrong track in April to 58%). However, it did not prove to be a trend. Pessimism increased again in November as the elections neared and campaigns became more negative and coverage focused on Iraq. This is especially true among Democrats (74% wrong track) and Independents (66%) while just over half of Republicans think the country is going in the right direction (56%). Young women are slightly more unhappy than young men (64% and 57% wrong track, respectively), but attitudes on the direction of the country are stable across the age cohorts. By race, African Americans are most intensely negative (58% strongly wrong track, Latinos 37%) but whites are majority pessimistic as well (59% wrong track), a trend that has been true throughout this research. Notably, even a majority of born-again Christians are pessimistic about the direction of the country (51% wrong track; 40% right direction). Although young born-again Christians broke for Republicans, the margin was smaller than it could have been (54% Republican, 37% Democrat).

President Bush and the Republican party remain unpopular among young people and Bush remained a catalyst for the Democratic vote. Young people maintain an unfavorable opinion of Bush with 58% unfavorable, including 43% very unfavorable. Bush's job performance also remains net negative with 60% disapproving of his job performance and only 38% approving. Notably, however, Bush has rebounded some from earlier this year. In April, only 35% of young people approved of his job performance, and that increased to 37% in September and 38% in November. Still, that number is well under majority support, but nonetheless there was some improvement which could explain the closing of the overall vote.

On the other hand, the political parties did not improve their favorability as the campaign went on and, notably for Democrats, the party's image suffered as well. The Republican Party continues to be net unfavorable (37% favorable to 51% favorable). Democrats are the mirror opposite with 51% favorable and 37% unfavorable. While the Democratic Party still receives net-favorable ratings, it's favorability sunk dramatically as the elections approached. Democrats were at a high in September with 65% favorable, but that dropped to 51% in November. Favorability of the Democratic Party suffered the most among Republicans (from 33% in April to 13% in November), students (from 64% to 45%), born-again Christians (from 58% to 40%), young people with a high school degree or less (from 66% to 49%), full-time employees (from 63% to 48%), and 18 to 22 year olds (from 67% to 52%). To some extent this was a measure of base Republicans becoming more partisan in the closing weeks (born-again Christians, self-identified Republicans), but the more that blue-collar and working young people move against the party, the less likely we are to maximize our vote among this key constituency.

The Issue Agenda: The War in Iraq, Health Care, and College Affordability gave Democrats an Edge, Republicans Led on Immigration and Terrorism

Young people continue to prioritize education and the cost of college (15%) and jobs and the economy (13%) as top concerns they want Congress to address. They also rank Iraq (12%), immigration (11%), and health care and prescription drugs (10%) in the top tier of concerns. Education and the cost of college is a primary concern for 18 and 19 year olds (28%), Independent women (27%), weak Democrats (25%), and current students (21%). Jobs and the economy are of particular importance to African Americans (23%), those in the Midwest (19%), especially men in the Midwest (22%), Independent men (19%), and strong Democrats (18%). Young people in the Northeast and Middle Atlantic regions are also especially concerned about Iraq (22% and 20%, respectively). There were key distinctions between young men and women as well; young men were particularly concerned about immigration (16%) and jobs and the economy (14%), while young women were concerned about education and the cost of college (19%) and health care and prescription drugs (14%).

Young self-identified Democrats focused on education and the cost of college (18%), Iraq (15%), and jobs and the economy (15%) -- issues that Democrats had the advantage on in our past research -- and those who voted Democrat focused on those issues as well (17%,

16%, and 15% respectively). In contrast, young self-identified Republicans were concerned about moral values (18%) and immigration (18%) as were those who voted Republican (20% and 18%, respectively). These typical Republican wedge issues attracted support from the base, but proved ineffective in moving independents to their side. Independents prioritized education and the cost of college (20%) and jobs and the economy (14%).

As expected, the war in Iraq proved to be an important consideration in vote choice, and it favored Democrats. Three-quarters of young people (73%) said the war in Iraq was an important issue in deciding their vote, including 43% who said it was the most important issue for them. Health care, homeland security, and creating jobs were also issues young people considered important in their decision. Democrats won most of the issues, however Republicans won among voters who placed priority on considering homeland security and terrorism, moral and values-based issues, and immigration.

Issue	% Important (% Most Important)	Vote		
		Democrat	Republican	Net Democrat
<i>War in Iraq</i>	73% (43%)	55%	27%	+28
<i>Health care</i>	68% (37%)	61%	24%	+37
<i>Homeland security and terrorism</i>	64% (36%)	40%	44%	-4
<i>Creating jobs</i>	63% (36%)	49%	36%	+13
<i>College affordability</i>	54% (31%)	58%	27%	+31
<i>Moral and values-based issues</i>	47% (29%)	41%	48%	-7
<i>Global warming</i>	41% (22%)	58%	20%	+38
<i>Immigration</i>	42% (21%)	38%	40%	-2

Young voters who identify with the Democratic party were most likely to say that the war in Iraq was the most important issue they considered (48%); on a second tier, they prioritized creating jobs (39%) and health care (37%). Democrats were more likely to place importance on the war in Iraq (48% most important) compared to Independents (44%) and Republicans (34%). Independents drove the importance placed on health care; they prioritized health care equally with the war (44% each) followed closely by homeland security and terrorism (42%), and creating jobs (40%). Republicans were most likely to consider homeland security and terrorism (42%) and moral and values-based issues (40%) most important in their vote choice, with the war in Iraq a distant third (34%). *Going forward then, young voters who voted Democratic will look to Congress to make improvements on the war in Iraq, health care, and college affordability. If elected leaders can make a difference on these issues they should be in good shape to reap the rewards in 2008. If not, Republicans could make a play for this age group.*

Turn-out Ups and Downs

Two-thirds of young people surveyed said they had already voted or were likely to vote in this year's election. Sixty-seven percent of young people said they were likely to vote, including 54% who said they had already voted or were almost certain to vote. A third (33%) of young people said they did not vote or were unlikely to vote. Groups who were more likely to say they did not plan to vote or did not vote included Latinos (51%), those with a high school degree or less (46%), non-college educated women (44%), independents (43%), especially independent women (50%), and women in the South (40%).

As we continue to look for the good news in this research for Democrats, we should not ignore the lower intensity among Latino voters. In April, 68% of Latinos said they were likely to vote, including 45% who said they were extremely likely to vote. These numbers decreased in September with 65% saying they were likely to vote and the percent extremely likely to vote dropping to 40%. The trend continued dramatically into the November elections with only 49% of Latinos saying they had voted or would probably vote and over half (51%) saying they were unlikely to vote or did not vote. This was a huge loss to Democrats – Latinos who did vote supported the Democratic candidate 69% to 28% for the Republican candidate, outperforming Democratic party identification by 15 points.

Republicans were more likely to say they had already voted or were planning on voting (78%) than Democrats (70%) or Independents (57%) indicating that the Democratic advantage could have been much larger had our voters turned out in equal numbers. If young Democrats had turned out at the same rate as young Republicans, Democrats would have increased the Democratic vote share by two points. Among the most likely to be voters were men in the Midwest (85%), college graduates (83%) those who said the country is going in the right direction (82%) and Republican women (80%). Young people in the Midwest were more likely than those in other regions to say they were planning to vote or had already voted (76%) -- they were also more likely than those in other regions to say they followed the elections closely (41%).

Interested and Engaged

Predictably, as November neared, young people's interest in and attention to the elections increased. Over a third of young people (35%) said they were following the elections extremely or very closely, up 20 points from April (15%). Young men were significantly more likely than young women to say they were following the elections closely (42% to 28% respectively) and young people ages 23 to 30 followed the elections more closely than their younger 18 to 22 year old counterparts (38% to 30% respectively). Young people were equally likely to follow the elections across party identification. Among those who were most likely to say they followed the elections closely were college-educated men (66%), college graduates (52%), young people who are not employed full-time (43%), men (42%), especially men 23 to 30 years old (51%), married young people (42%), strong Republicans (41%), and young people in the Midwest (41%).

Additionally, young people were talking about politics with friends and family leading up to this year's elections; over half (58%) of young people said they discussed politics at least some, with 29% saying they discussed politics a great deal. Contrary to conventional wisdom, non-partisan young people were talking about the elections more than their partisan counterparts. Independents were more likely to say they talked about politics a great deal (37%) than Democrats and Republicans (28% and 27%, respectively). Young people who were likely to talk about politics included those who are college-educated (69%), young people in the West region (67%), married young people (67%), Democrats (63%), white men (63%), and 18 to 22 year old whites (63%).

Outreach efforts appeared to have worked as the number of unregistered young people decreased. Voter registration increased prior to the elections; only 12% of young people said they were not registered, compared to 19% in September and 18% in April. Those who were registered were most likely to say they registered at the Department of Motor Vehicles (24%) or by mail (10%). Some young people said they registered to vote at the elections department or other government office (8%) or at a college or university (8%). Groups that showed the largest drops in unregistered voters included men (from 22% unregistered in April to 10% unregistered in November), African Americans (from 21% to 8%) and among 18 to 22 year olds (from 25% to 16%).

*Young voters said they showed up at the polls because they think voting is the right thing to do and to support candidates who share their ideals. Two-thirds of young people (66%) said they had already voted or were likely to vote, including 61% who said they had already voted or were almost certain to vote. A third of young voters (36%) said they vote because it's the right thing to do and another quarter of young voters (27%) said they vote to support a candidate who agrees with them on the issues. Young people were less likely to say they vote to support a political party (12%), to oppose a political party (8%), or to oppose a candidate with whom they disagree (5%). **Independents (12%) and strong Democrats (12%) were among the most likely to say they vote to oppose a political party but overall most young people were more likely to vote for something (39%) than against something (14%).***

Young people were also proactively engaged in the elections. Three-quarters (73%) of young people said they looked for information about the elections. Their information sources are very different from those of older voters. They were most likely to say they looked on the Internet (35%) and in newspapers (30%). Local television programs were also a key source of information (25%) and cable news programs played a role as well (14%). Young men were slightly more likely to look for information than young women (73% to 70% respectively). Young people ages 20 to 22 were the least likely to look for information (62%) while the youngest and oldest in the cohort were the most likely (18-19 year olds: 77%; 26-30 year olds: 75%).

Campaigns and political parties reached out to young people this cycle and their methods of communication were diverse. Nearly half (46%) of young people said they were contacted by a campaign or organization in the past year about the Congressional elections or a specific candidate. In the six months prior to the elections, over half of

young people were contacted about the elections by mail (56%) and nearly as many (54%) said they were contacted by phone with a pre-recorded message. At least one in four young people were contacted by phone with a live person (28%), by someone in person at their home or some other place (22%), and over the Internet or via email (21%). Seven percent of young people said they were contacted through a networking site like MySpace or Facebook and three percent said they received a text message to their phone.

African Americans were more likely to say they had been contacted (53%) than whites (46%) and Latinos (37%). Young people who were most likely to say they had been contacted by a campaign or organization in the last year included those in the East North Central region (58%), college graduates (56%), especially male college graduates (60%), young people in the Midwest (55%), especially women in the Midwest (61%), and Republican women (56%). Republicans were more likely (52%) than Democrats (47%) or Independents (42%) to say they had been contacted in the last year.

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