



Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Democracy Corps

Youth for the Win!

Growing the Youth Vote

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GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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Growing the Youth Vote

Youth For the Win!

We reported earlier this week on how young people are experiencing and engaging in this election. This report focuses on young people's political preferences six months into the heat of the Democratic primary.

Young voters at this point are as supportive of Democrats as they were in 2004 and 2006. Democratic identification is stable and young people's support for a generic Democratic candidate for President stands at 59 to 32 percent, a margin which exceeds young voters' Democratic performance in the 2006 elections. There is every reason for Democrats to seek an even bigger youth margin in 2008.

But there are challenges emerging, not least of which is the residue of the long primary potentially producing lowered enthusiasm for Democrats and for voting more broadly. John McCain, moreover, is seen more positively than we anticipated suggesting that Democrats cannot just count on young voters without some real work communicating with them.

There are ways to elevate young voter support and turnout and allow them to play a potentially transformational role. To start, it is critically important we re-brand the Republican nominee as, well, a Republican. As we noted in 2007, young people in general are profoundly alienated from the Republican Party and nothing in this survey suggests this has changed. However, it is also true that many of the biases young people have against the Republicans do not yet apply to John McCain. John McCain does not enjoy great numbers here, but too many young people draw distinctions between him and the Republican Party. In future projects, we will explore messaging that raises doubts about this Republican, as well as positive themes and messages that help sustain their engagement.



How to Survey Young People

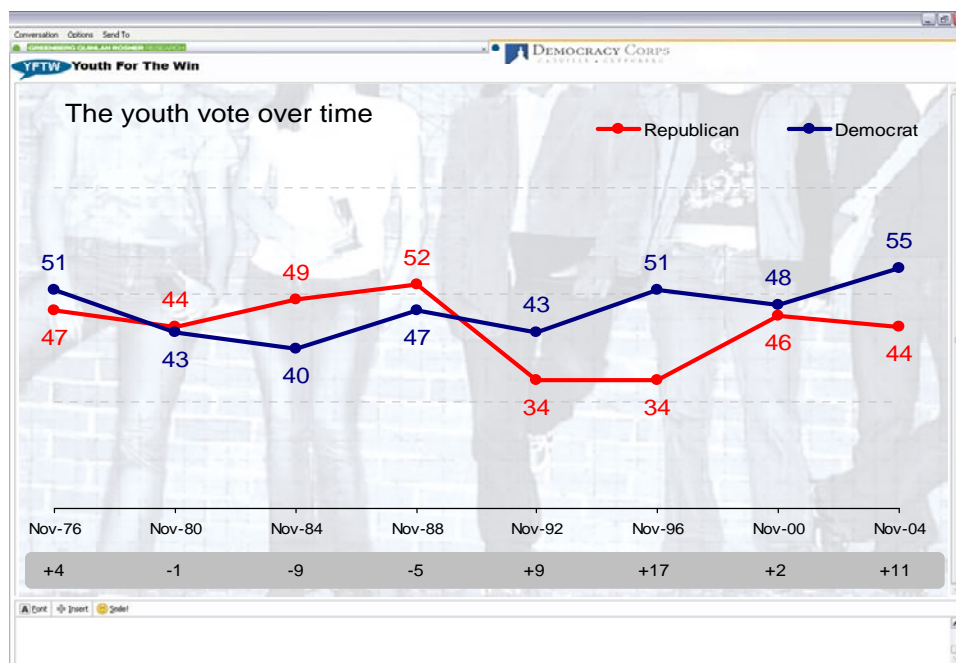
This population is exceptionally difficult to reach through traditional polling methods. More important, traditional polling methods are no longer a reliable way of understanding America's young people. More than a quarter of young people do not have conventional land-line phones and many (63 percent in this survey) of those that have land-lines do not use them as their main service for incoming calls. This means that most will not be reached with a traditional land-line phone survey. Therefore, this project involves a multi-modal approach using web-based interviewing, cell phone interviewing, as well as a land-line sample.

Moreover, as turn out represents such a critical variable in the political disposition of young people, this project does not screen for likely voters.

Between March 30 and April 9, 2008, Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research interviewed 602 young people, ages 18-29. This project does not exclude non-voters or unlikely voters in order to look at the wider population of young people. It used a multi-mode design including 60 cell phone interviews, 300 web based interviews and 242 interviews using a random digit dial sample conducted over the telephone.

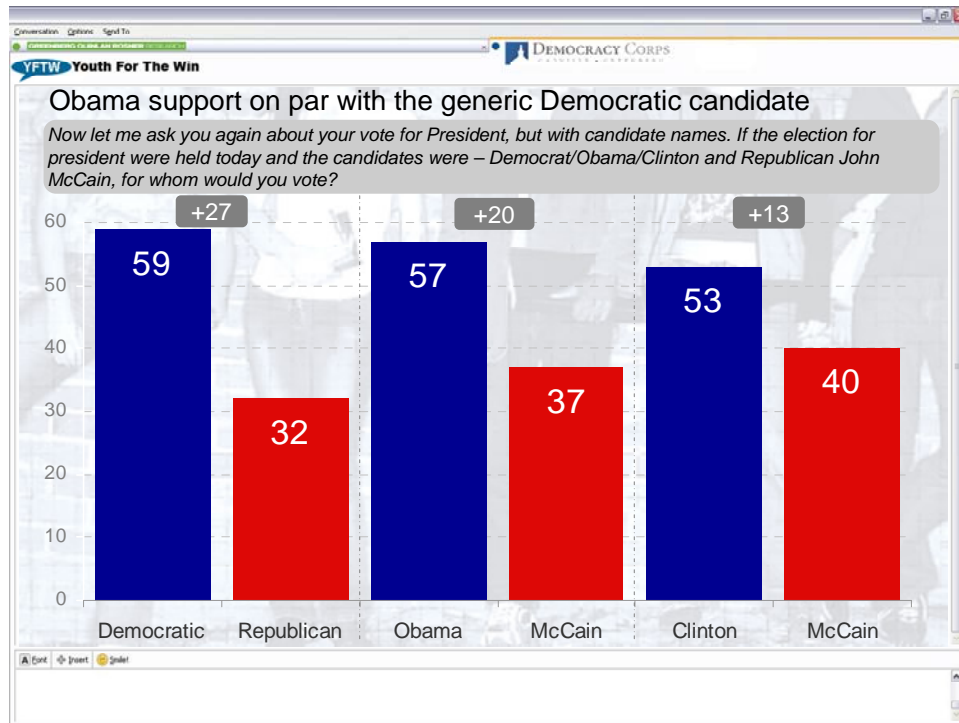
Hitting Recent Historical Benchmarks

Democratic gains among the youth vote started in the Clinton era. While the 2000 election proved competitive among young people, Democrats broke out in 2004 with Kerry winning 55 percent of the vote among voters under 30 years of age. In the 2006 election, Democrats won young people with a 20-point margin (60 – 38 percent).



Democrats are currently poised to deliver numbers comparable to 2004 or, even 2006 to Democrats in November. A 56 percent majority of young people identify themselves as Democrats or as Independents who lean Democratic, a number that has been stable over the last year. The Democratic disposition of this generation is, in part, a reflection of their racial diversity -- this is the most diverse generation in our history; but even among young white people self-ascribed Democrats outnumber Republicans, something that is not true of any other generation outside of the World War II generation.

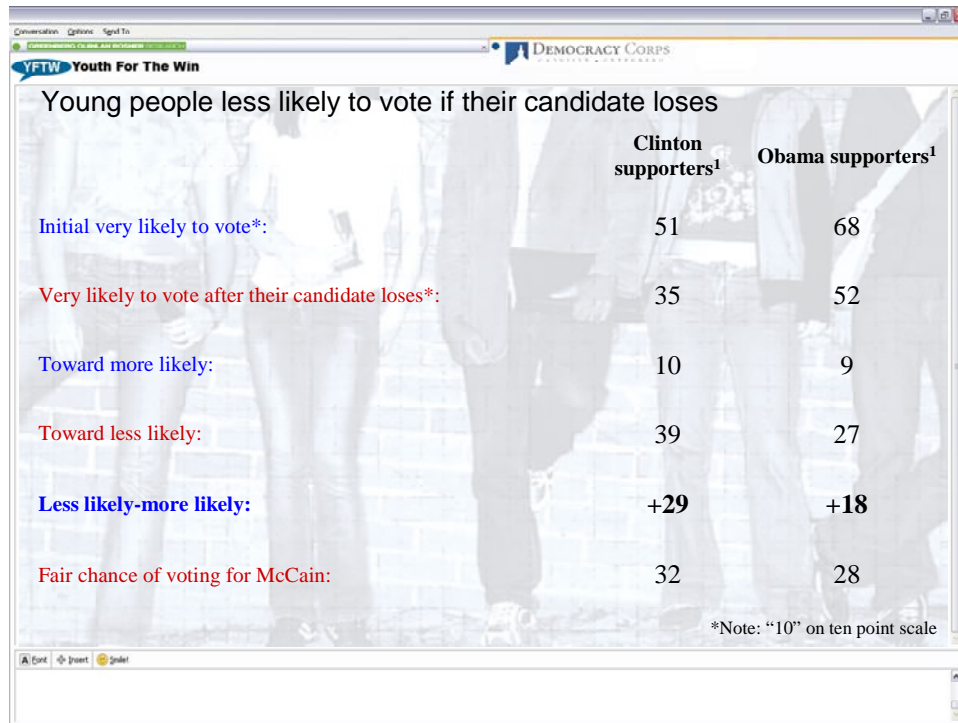
Young people translate their Democratic proclivities into considerable margins for a generic Democratic candidate and deliver numbers echoing the 2006 result. In a match-up with John McCain, Barack Obama generally holds the same number of voters who want to vote Democratic. There are some exceptions — among white young people in the south, white men and Catholics — but on balance Obama matches the generic candidate for Democratic support and does not suffer the defection we see in other polling among older, blue collar voters. The same thing can not be said of Hillary Clinton, whose losses among younger white men in particular leave her underperforming relative to a generic Democratic presidential candidate.



The lengthy and increasingly negative primary process has hurt both Democrats. Clinton's overall favorability scores have slipped from 47 – 37 percent positive to 40 – 40 percent. Much of the damage here occurs among young Democrats (an 11-point drop to 62 percent warm). Obama also draws more criticism (from 37 percent warm, 25 percent cool last June to 46 percent warm, 35 percent cool currently), reflecting the inevitably more partisan reaction of young Republicans (from 42 percent cool to 58 percent cool). Among younger white people, however, he now draws more unfavorable (43 percent cool) than favorable (39 percent warm).

The Primary

Overall, we see a high interest in voting. A 54 percent majority describe their likelihood of voting as a ten on a ten-point scale, where ten means very likely; 72 percent describe their likelihood of voting as an 8, 9 or 10. This enthusiasm is threatened, however, by the protracted Democratic nomination process. In the focus groups, we saw considerable frustration with the drawn out Democratic fight and growing negative tenor of the campaign among young people. In this survey, Democrats who prefer Clinton over Obama are already less inclined to vote than Obama supporters (51 percent "10" and 68 percent "10" respectively). In a hypothetical question, we asked Democrats — including participants in Democratic primaries — what would happen if their candidate did not win the nomination. Overall, 30 percent of these Democrats move toward being less likely to vote (11 percent would be more likely), with the drop in participation more acute among Clinton supporters.



Clinton supporters — and remember these are Democrats — also show some hostility to Obama in the thermometer ratings (just 29 percent warm, 45 percent cool); we do not see reciprocal hostility toward Clinton among Obama supporters (42 – 34 percent warm). However, nearly a third of both Obama and Clinton voters say there is a fair chance they might support McCain if their candidate does not win the primary. We saw some of this sentiment in exit surveys in Pennsylvania; young people prove they are not immune.

These feelings can and likely will change once the nomination is settled and once Democrats have the opportunity to apply as much scrutiny on John McCain as is being currently applied to Obama and Clinton. However, it is clear that some young Clinton voters might pull back if their candidate does not win. Some may also be vulnerable to defection. While the problem is less severe, Democrats face similar issues if Obama does not win the nomination, and the process by which he could be denied might leave Obama supporters even more alienated. These wounds will need to be healed if Democrats are to reap full advantage of the youth vote.

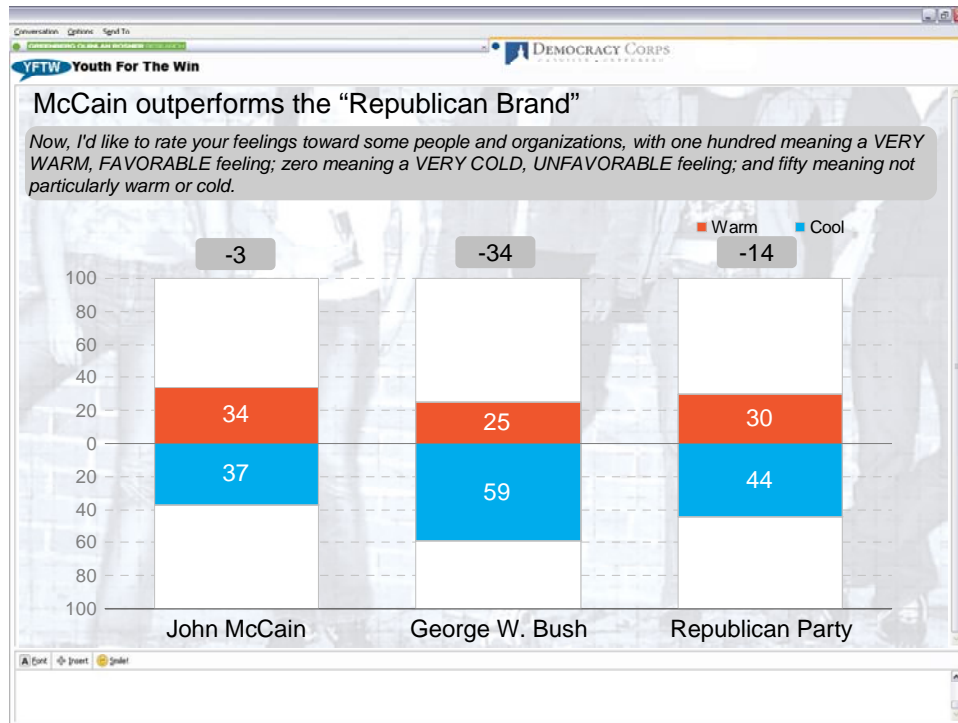
The McCain Brand: Too Cool for a Republican

Last month, we reported on John McCain’s considerable appeal among swing young people from focus groups in Denver and Milwaukee. This appeal, driven by perceptions of his independence and standing up to his own party, is reflected in this survey as well. Overall, his

¹ Includes young people who have supported Clinton or Obama in primaries, say they will support Clinton or Obama in future primaries or Democrats who do not participate in primaries but simply prefer Clinton or Obama.



standing among young people is only modest (34 percent warm/favorable, 37 percent cool/unfavorable) and he is the least popular of the three remaining candidates. But young people, particularly young Independents, draw distinctions between McCain, Bush and the Republican Party as a whole.



Winning the Republican nomination cost McCain his once impressive favorability scores among young Democrats, but he also won a conservative primary while improving his standing among moderates and Independent young people. McCain is also the only candidate of the three to improve his overall standing among young people since last year.

In our survey of youth last year, we reported significant generational alienation from the Republican Party. Youth were disconnected from the GOP not only on specific issues like the war and the economy, but ideologically as well. Young people simply rejected the conservative world-view, their laissez-faire approach to the economy and support for an intrusive government in non-economic spheres. In focus groups in particular, young people hated what they saw as the Republican tendency to tell them how to live. McCain's record shows little deviation from these anti-Republican biases among young people, but too little of this brand applies to this Republican nominee.

Conclusion

This research affirms the huge advantages Democrats enjoy among this country's largest (numerically) generation of potential voters; Democratic identification is stable, Gen-Y remains alienated from the Republicans and, for the most part, the Democratic front-runner is where he is



supposed to be. However, there are also signs in this research of potential problems that could diminish the Democratic advantage, from challenging numbers among Clinton supporters, to the distinctions some young people make between John McCain and other Republicans, to the ongoing threat of the contested Democratic nomination fight to young people's enthusiasm. This research also challenges Democrats to stretch its margin and further improve participation among young people. There is no reason why Democrats should not fare better in 2008 than they did in 2006.