

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH



DEMOCRACY CORPS
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Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Democracy Corps

Youth for the Win!

Ready to Change America

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To: Friends of Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

From: Stan Greenberg and James Carville, Democracy Corps
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Ready to Change America

Youth for the Win

Two weeks out, and young people's commitment to changing this country has never been higher. This survey sees record high margins for the Democratic candidate (now 63 percent Obama, 28 percent McCain), record high favorability scores for Obama, and record high negatives for McCain. The economic events of the last few weeks raised the stakes of this election and have left these new voters frightened, but also determined to set things right in November.

Rather than succumbing to despair or cynicism, young people report greater intensity and engagement in the election in November. Young people state the highest commitment to vote we have recorded in this series of surveys. Commitment is disproportionately high among Democrats, as well as among voters who historically have not participated in federal elections. Young people are participating more directly in the campaign as well. Much of this engagement has taken place on-line, reflecting the lifestyle of this generation, but three-quarters watched at least one of the debates and one in four plan on getting involved on Election Day itself, volunteering with efforts urging people to get out and vote.

They will have a voice in November 4th and it will be loud.

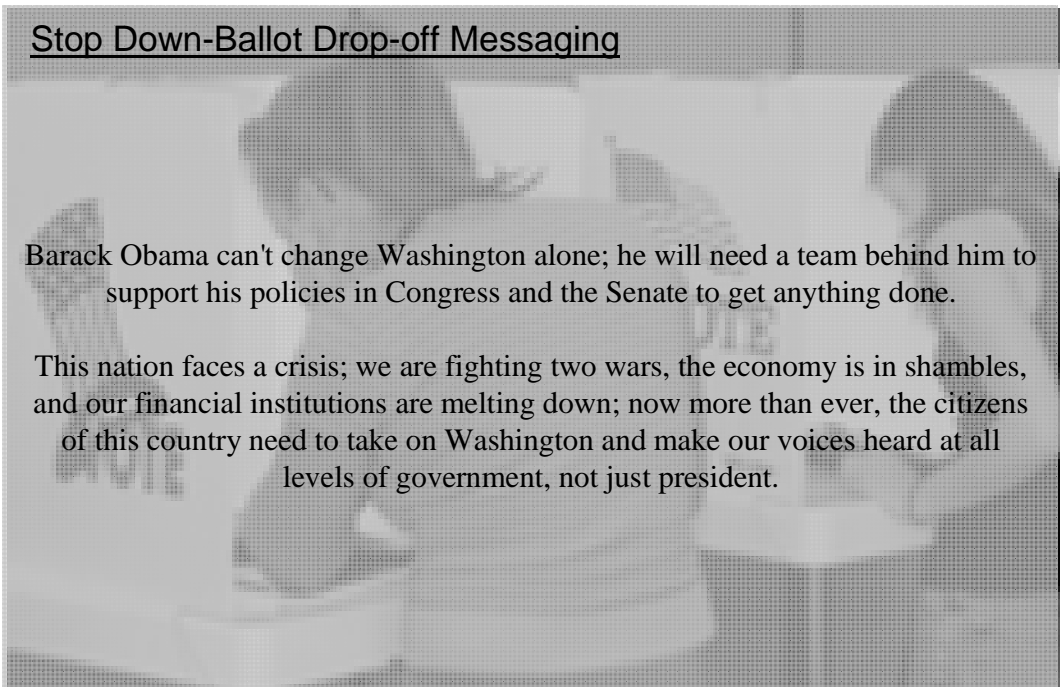
Nonetheless, this research highlights a significant risk of failing to fully tap the progressive energy of this generation. Nationally, 15 percent of voters fail to complete their ballot. They show up, vote for President, and go home. Among younger voters, this number jumps to at least 20 percent and only 62 percent here say they will fill out the entire ballot. Among younger people of color, the number grows higher still.

As we reported a year ago, the political question for young people was never really who was going to win or lose, but how high the Democratic margin and turnout would be. This survey suggests a margin of at least 30 points and a record turnout. One question, in these final days, is how successfully progressives can transfer some of Obama's energy to other Democratic candidates.



The most powerful messages to counter ballot drop-off evoke the crisis this country faces. Other research we have done among young people suggests that their commitment to vote—and the appeal of Obama—is rooted fundamentally in “issues,” particularly the economy. We also find traction in the notion that Obama needs a “team” to complete his mandate. Importantly, this is not a partisan appeal, it is about the fundamental changes Obama and a Democratic majority need to accomplish.

Stop Down-Ballot Drop-off Messaging



Barack Obama can't change Washington alone; he will need a team behind him to support his policies in Congress and the Senate to get anything done.

This nation faces a crisis; we are fighting two wars, the economy is in shambles, and our financial institutions are melting down; now more than ever, the citizens of this country need to take on Washington and make our voices heard at all levels of government, not just president.



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 (45 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.

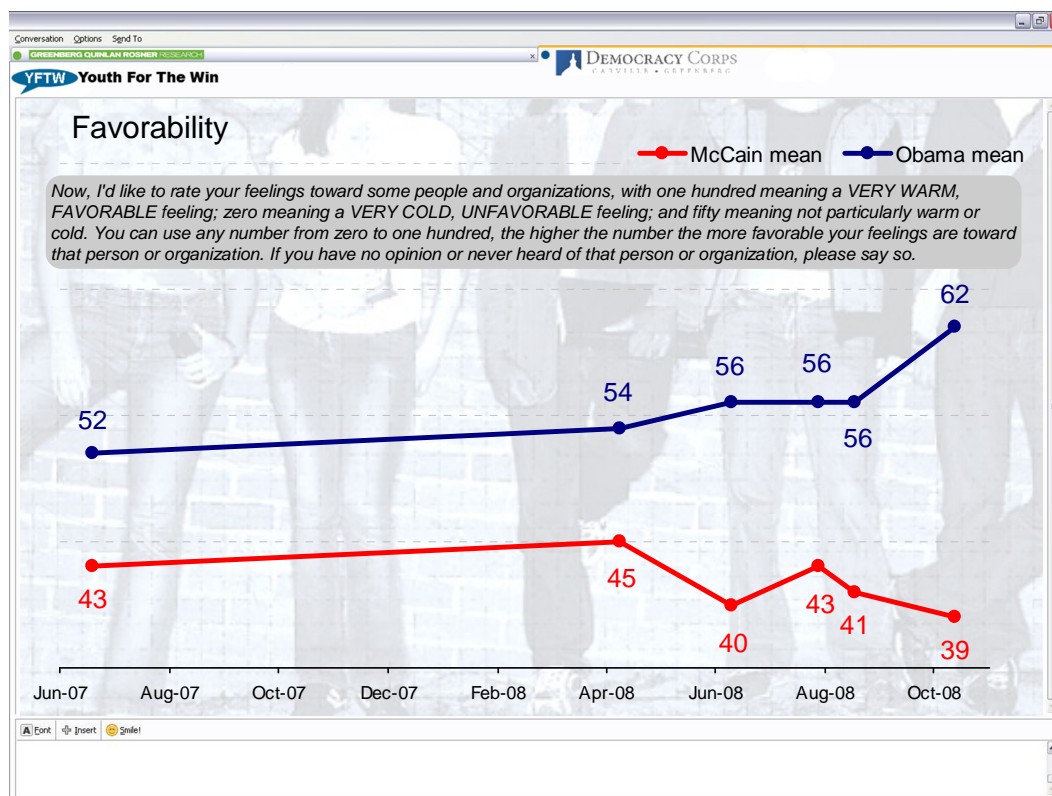
Moreover, as turn out represents such a critical variable in the political disposition of young people, this project does not screen for likely voters.

Between September 29 and October 13, 2008, Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research interviewed 900 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 90 cell phone interviews, 360 web based interviews and 450 interviews using a random digit dial sample conducted over the telephone.

McCain and Obama Head in Two Different Directions

Barack Obama has never been more popular among young people. John McCain has never been less popular. Since August, Obama has improved from 51 percent positive, 32 percent negative to 58 percent positive, 30 percent negative. Most notably, Obama posts huge gains among younger white women, moving from 35 percent positive, 38 percent negative to 52 percent positive, 33 percent negative.

The last few months—and last few weeks—have not been as kind to John McCain. The Republican nominee dropped from 31 percent positive, 48 percent negative to 33 percent positive, 53 percent negative. In the summer, this candidate had some standing among younger white Independents; this is no longer the case (29 percent positive, 52 percent negative).



McCain's decline likely relates to a number of dynamics, not least of which is reaction to his campaign tactics. Two contributors that emerge in this survey is the further alienation of the Republican Party and George Bush from America's youth and the hostility these voters show toward his running mate. Bush generates a 70 percent negative score among Americans under 30; rarely has the nation's leadership been so estranged from its youngest voters.

More interesting, there is no differentiation between McCain and Sarah Palin's (28 percent positive, 53 percent negative) ratings. Palin fares just as poorly among younger white women (35 percent positive, 48 percent negative) as among younger white men (36 percent positive, 50 percent negative). Among college educated women, she draws a 69 percent negative favorability score.

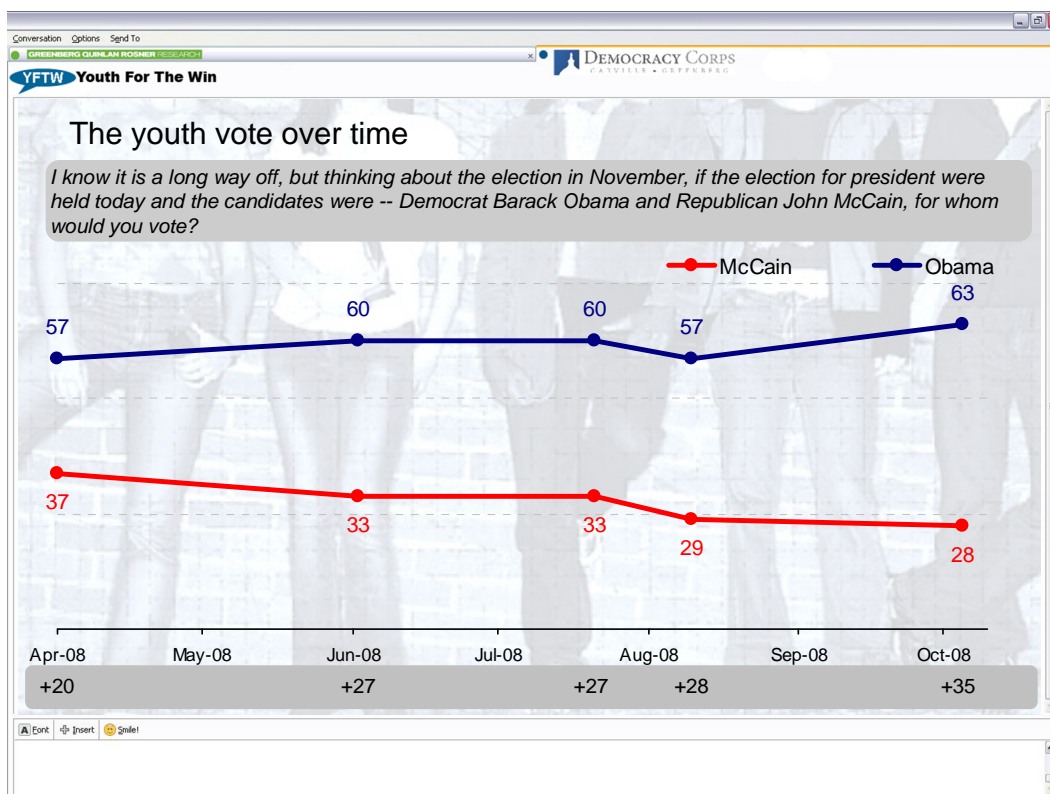
Ready to Deliver the Decisive Verdict

Young people now deliver a 63 – 28 percent majority to the Barack Obama. Not only is this a record margin for this series of surveys, but three times higher than the margin young people delivered to John Kerry in 2004 (54 – 45 percent). This survey shows very impressive gains for Obama at all levels, including white Independents (+12 to 51 percent Obama, 26 percent McCain) and white women (+16 to 55 percent Obama, 36 percent McCain). Any lingering "bitterness" from the Democratic primary seems long forgotten. Among college students, Obama rolls up a 69 – 21 percent margin, but his growth since August has not come



just on four-year college campuses, but among community college students (now 76 – 17 percent Obama) and even non-college voters (59 – 30 percent Obama).

One of the few groups where Obama does not dominate the vote is among white married voters. Among younger white married women, he only manages a 45 – 46 percent split, while among younger white unmarried women, he wins 60 – 30 percent.



Some academics have reported a “reverse Bradley” affect, where rather than inflating the vote of a minority candidate, current polling actually undercounts Obama’s support.¹ Some reasons for this dynamic may be psychological, but far more persuasive is the argument that Obama’s support is undercounted by structural deficiencies in current polling techniques that have a hard time representing cell phone users and new registrants. This survey speaks to that point. Among voters interviewed over their cell phones, Obama receives 72 percent of the vote. Among voters who identify cell as their main telephone service—most of these were interviewed over the Internet—he reaches 64 percent of the vote share.

¹ http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/1008/A_reverse_Bradley_Effect.html



The Stakes Have Been Raised

For most of the year, young people approached this election with a seriousness and earnestness that defied the unfortunate stereotypes of this generation. As we have previously written, what drives their support for Obama is not his “style” or rhetoric, but his ability to speak to the issues they most care about, principally the economy. The crash of Wall Street created fear among younger Americans, but also resolve to do something to change the direction of the country.

A 56 percent majority of young people are afraid for their country’s future. Just 34 percent are optimistic about their country’s future. Even more so than older voters, young people believe we are on the brink of financial collapse. By a 62 to 28 percent margin, young people argue “this financial crisis puts us on the edge of a crash like the Great Depression.” In a Democracy Corps battleground survey taken two weeks ago, just 44 percent of likely voters believed we were on the brink of a Great Depression.² Not surprisingly, both big banks (20 percent positive, 39 percent negative) and Wall Street (24 percent positive, 38 percent negative) suffer some in the opinion of young people.

In the 1920 and the 1930’s, voters drew lessons about what was going on around them that informed their political decision-making for the rest of their lives. It is worth remembering that in 2004, John Kerry held only two generations, Gen-Y and the children of the Great Depression. We cannot predict, of course, the long-term consequences of the current economic turmoil or these voters’ reactions to conservative governance, but the short-term reaction is evident in these findings. They are getting involved in this election and trying to change America.

Disengaged No Longer

At all levels, young people report heightened participation in this election. It begins with their commitment to vote, here we record the highest levels yet and disproportionately high numbers among Democrats and Obama voters. Young people are getting involved in other ways too. The primary medium is the Internet, where young people show increased participation in trading campaign spots, “friending” candidates on social networking sites and reading (and writing) blogs. (It is interesting that in the most conventional means of participation—donating money and attending rallies—we see no real movement from last spring). Young people commit to working on Election Day as well.

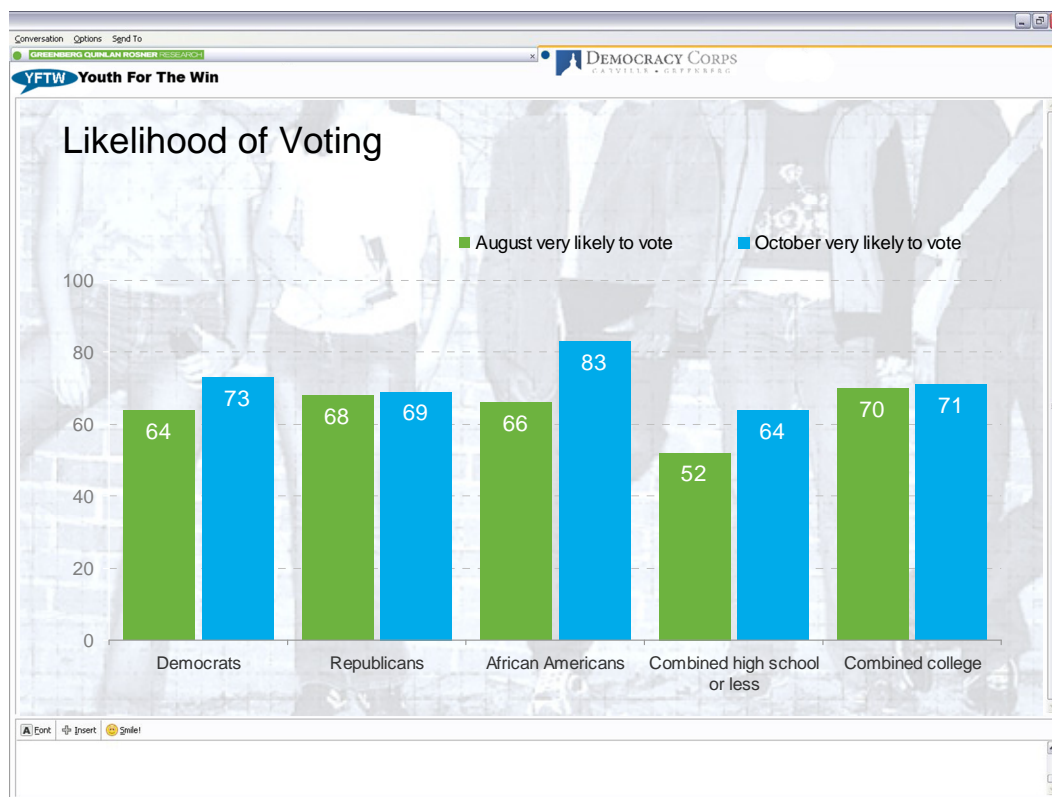
What makes these results most striking is that this is not simply a reaction among young elites, college educated voters and students at four-year universities. Indeed, the biggest gains come among non-college young people and young people who have not, historically, participated in electoral politics, people of color, high school graduates and unmarried women.

² It is worth considering that the Great Depression is as distant to the younger generation as the Civil War was to the generation who lived through the Great Depression.



A 70 percent majority of young people agree that they are more involved in this election than in previous elections, up from 56 percent two months ago. Among Democrats, this number jumped from 63 percent to 75 percent. As dramatic is the rise among African Americans (from 59 percent to 77 percent. Nearly a third of young people say they plan on getting involved, urging people to vote on Election Day. No doubt, this is overstated, but it is an important indicator of young people's commitment. As striking, however, is exactly who makes this commitment. The number is higher among community college students than four-year college students (33 percent and 27 percent, respectively). The number jumps to 41 percent among African Americans and 30 percent among Hispanic voters.

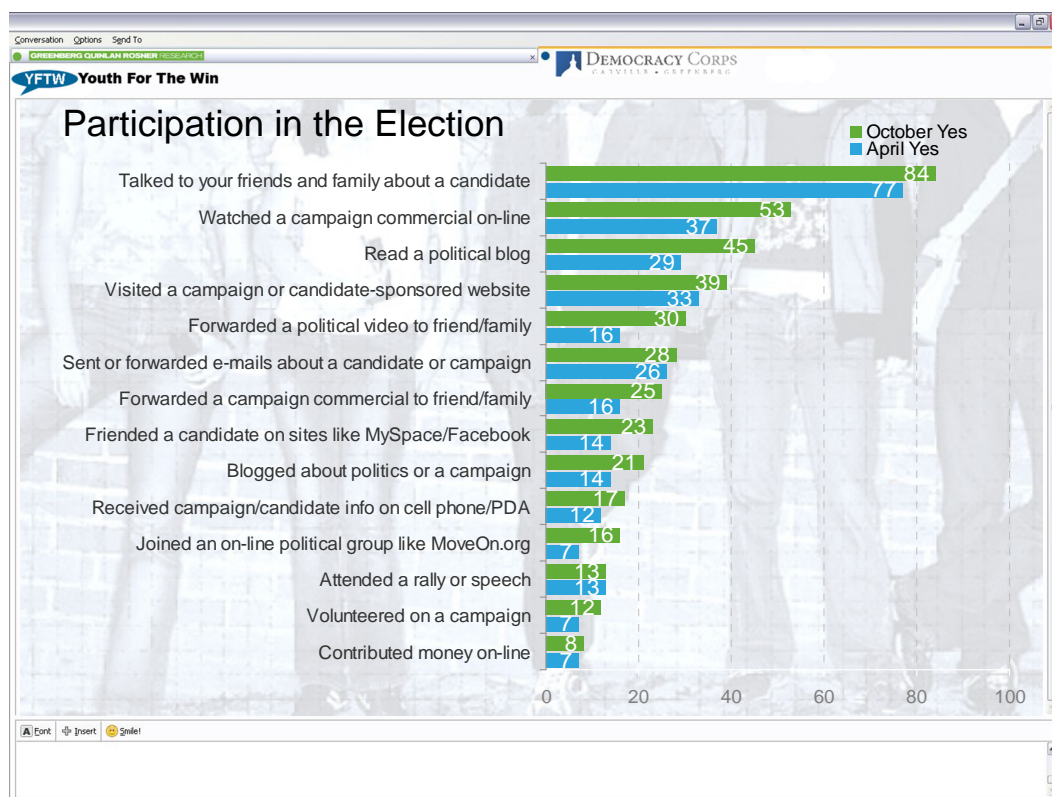
When asked to rate their likelihood of voting, a 66 percent majority describe their chances of voting as almost certain (a "10" on a 10-point scale), up from 58 percent two months ago and the highest number we have recorded. Although we see no evidence of young Republicans pulling out of the election—the number here is high as well—we see somewhat more commitment among Democrats. Much more dramatic is the growth seen among two previously disenfranchised groups: African Americans and unmarried women. Moreover, the growth here comes among young people who are not college educated.



We also see rising levels in other kinds of participation, particularly on-line participation, to the degree that nearly one-quarter of young people have “friended” a candidate on a social networking site and more than half have watched a campaign commercial on-line. Though still



not on par with broadcast television, the viral distribution of campaign ads is a significant political dynamic, at least among youth.



The Problem of Ballot Drop-off

Nationally, 15 percent of ballots returned in federal elections are not completed. This research, and other research conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, suggests the problem is exacerbated among younger voters and people of color. In other words, a significant number of the most progressive vote showing up on election day—or voting earlier—may not cast ballots for Congress, the Senate, gubernatorial elections, state legislature or some of the more important ballot initiatives, such as the marriage referendum in California.

Thinking specifically about late game strategies among young people, addressing this problem may be as important as any other task, particularly given the indication of a significant turnout and huge progressive margins.

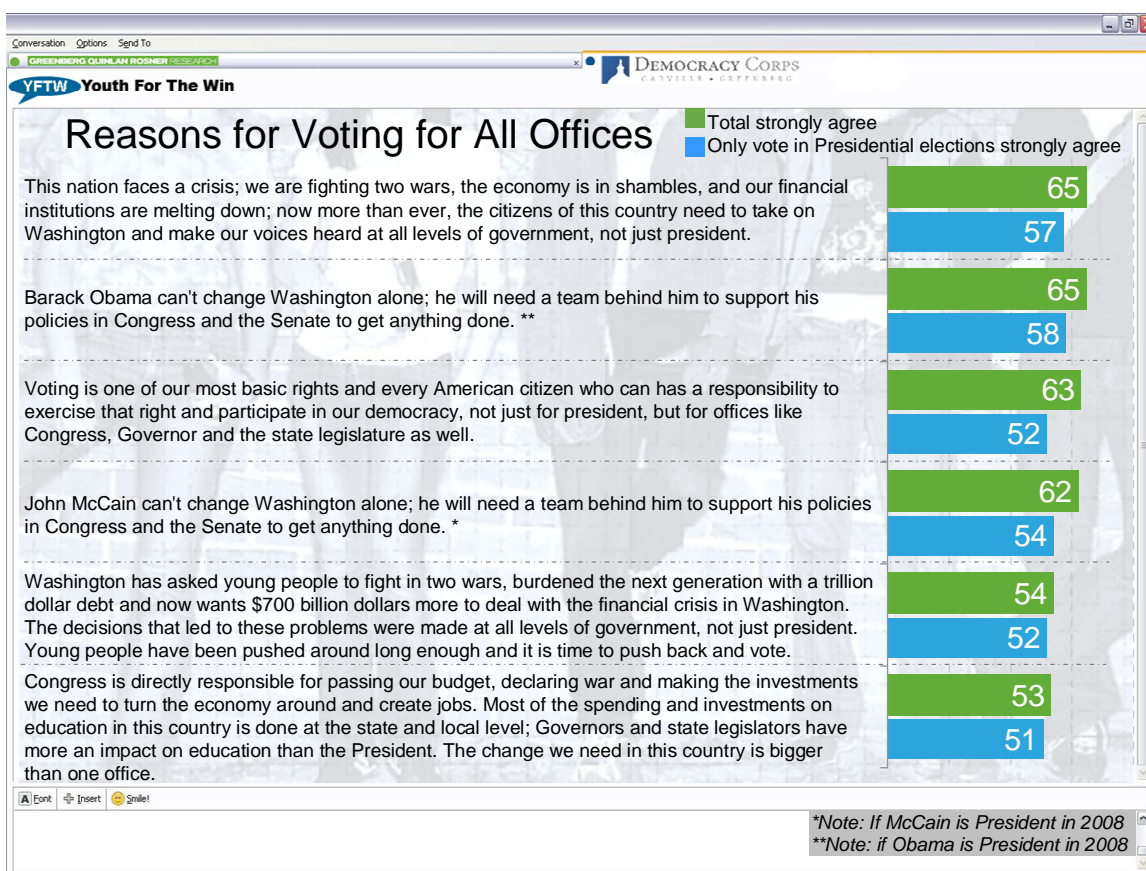
All told, 20 percent of young people who are likely voters say they will only vote for President and just 62 percent commit to finish the entire ballot. In the web sample, the problem grows worse.³ Less than half (47 percent) of minority voters, who identify themselves as a

³ Unlike phone surveys, there is no social pressure on web surveys and we have found more candor in this kind of interviewing.



Democrat, interviewed on the web say they will finish the ballot. Among all young people of color, just 57 percent say they will complete the ballot.

Two arguments in particular seem effective in helping improve ballot drop-off. One argument conveys the notion of an “Obama team.” This is NOT a partisan argument. In independent focus group testing among young people, we found that these voters resist “straight ballot” partisan appeals, particularly straight-ballot punches in those states where this option is available. Rather, it is about a common vision and attacking common problems. To state the obviously, this messaging needs explicit references to Obama. Another argument that found traction among drop-off voters directly referenced the crises in the country and made the obvious point that real change requires change at all levels of government.



Conclusion

Young people stand poised to change this country. They deliver huge margins to Obama, are motivated to vote, reveal due appreciation for the seriousness of some of the challenges facing this country and have found an outlet—politics!—both for their commitment and their frustration. There is still work to do in the next two weeks. Just because 86 percent of young people say they probably will vote does not mean that 86 percent of young people will make it to the polls. Turning out young people remains a huge progressive priority. Progressives also need



to make sure, however, that the energy and commitment of this generation extends up and down the ballot.