

DEMOCRACY CORPS
GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH



Democracy Corps/Greenberg Quinlan Rosner

YOUTHSURVEY

Republican Collapse Among Young
Americans

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Introduction

A major, multi-mode survey of America's young people recently conducted by Democracy Corps shows young people profoundly alienated from the Republican Party and poised to deliver a significant majority to the Democratic nominee for President in 2008.¹

The political stakes with this generation could not be higher. In 2008, young people (ages 18-31) will number 50 million, bigger than the baby boom generation. By 2015 they will likely comprise one-third of the U.S. electorate. While participation among young people still lags well behind other generations, turnout increased two election cycles in a row and, in 2004, jumped nine points (to 49 percent).² In 2004, younger voters were the only generational cohort outside of the World War II generation to support John Kerry (56 percent). In 2006, younger voters supported Democrats by a 60 – 38 percent margin, the highest of any generation.³

The looming disaster Republicans face among younger voters represents a setback that could haunt them for many generations to come. Both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama lead Rudy Giuliani—the most acceptable of the Republican offerings among youth—by significant margins, assembling a diverse coalition of support and leading the vote among independents.⁴ Exploring attitudes toward the parties themselves, young voters' reaction to fundamental issues and their perceptions of the GOP suggest a fundamental alienation from the Republican Party, a crisis that will not leave with the Bush administration.

Young people react with hostility to the Republicans on almost every measure and Republicans and younger voters disagree on almost every major issue of the day. The range of the issue disagreements range from the most prominent issues of the day (Iraq, immigration) to burning social issues (gay marriage, abortion) to fundamental ideological disagreements over the size and scope of government. This leaves both potential Democratic nominees with substantial leads over Rudy Giuliani, but importantly, both Democrats still have room to grow their support among younger voters. The current problems with the Republican brand are not fully reflected in young people's preferences in for President.

Moreover, young people, while preferring Democrats on every measure, will need to see them deliver on the issues that matter to them most. Locking down this vote means challenging some of the assumptions and stereotypes about this population and the issues they care about most. Without question, issues like global warming and the Iraq war can drive this vote. But young people's economic struggles, more than any other issue, defines their political agenda. The economy leads their concerns when asked (on a volunteered basis) what issues they want

¹ Greenberg Quinlan Rosner conducted a national survey of 1017 young people ages 18-29 May 29 - June 19, 2007. This survey involved 510 telephone interviews, 407 web surveys and 100 cell phone interviews.

² Data reflect finding in 2004 Census Update.

³ 2006 National Election Pool National Election Poll conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International on November 7, 2006.

⁴ In a June 21-23 RT Strategies National Poll & Cook Political Report, Clinton is tied with Giuliani overall and down five among independents, while Obama ties Giuliani in both the overall vote and in the independent vote.

their President and Congress to address and an economic argument proves the most powerful message tested. Importantly, young people's progressive views on most social issues may not be as important to energizing this vote as their economic situation.

Between May 29 and June 19, Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner interviewed 1,017 young people, ages 18-29. This project looks at the wider population of young people and does not exclude non-voters or unlikely voters. As this population is very difficult to survey, this project involved an ambitious multi-mode design involving cell phone interviewing (100 interviews), web based research (407 interviews) and telephone surveys (510 interviews) using both random digit dial and listed sample. See methodology section in appendix for details.

Democratic Presidential Candidates Dominate Youth Vote

While early in the cycle, Democrats seem well poised to carry the younger cohort. Both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama lead Rudy Giuliani among all young people; among likely voters, they lead by 15 points, 55 percent to 40 percent. They have an advantage across a diverse set of groups including independents, moderates, less and more educated voters and in every region of the country.⁵

This lead is built upon strong Democratic advantages. Among likely voters, a generic Democrat bests a generic Republican in the congressional race by 18 points, 57 to 39 percent.⁶ Young people are much more favorable towards the Democratic Party than the Republican Party with a net 31-point difference in views about the Democratic and Republican parties among likely voters. Among independents just 22 percent describe their view of the Republicans favorably, while 50 percent are critical. Conversely, Democrats fare reasonably well with independents, with 37 percent offering favorable ratings and 27 percent offering unfavorable ratings.⁷

Yet, there is still work for Democrats to do, at least at the presidential level. The lead Clinton and Obama hold are somewhat narrower than generic partisan advantages and certainly do not reach the advantages Democrats have on individual issues such as healthcare or the environment. It is also important to note that the large Democratic margin is driven, in part, by the diversity of this generation. Overall, Democrats are losing among white young voters. Finally, Rudy Giuliani (40 percent warm, 29 percent cool) is relatively popular among younger voters, garnering similar ratings to both Hillary Clinton (49 percent warm, 39 percent cool) and Barack Obama (45 percent warm, 26 percent cool).

⁵ In a June 21-23 RT Strategies National Poll & Cook Political Report, Clinton is tied with Giuliani overall and down five among independents, while Obama ties Giuliani in both the overall vote and in the independent vote.

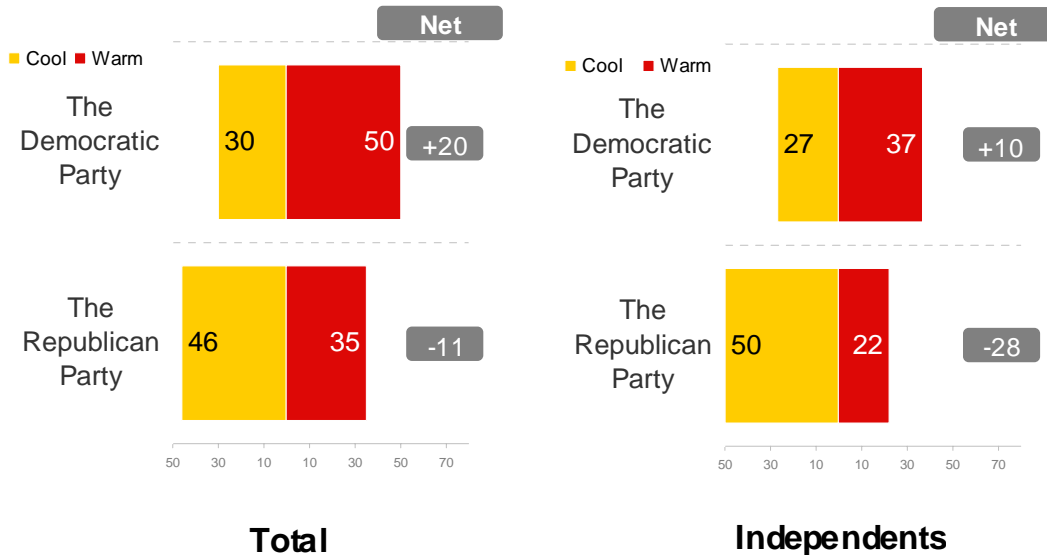
⁶ A June 25-28, 2007 Democracy Corps survey of 1,024 likely voters shows that nationally, Democrats lead 51 – 40 percent in named trial heats for Congress and 51 – 37 percent in generic trial heats for President.

⁷ A June 25-28, 2007 Democracy Corps survey of 1,024 likely voters show Republicans with a 25 – 49 percent warm – cool rating among independents and the Democratic party with a 33 – 40 percent rating among independents.

Figure 1: Thermometer Ratings for Democratic and Republican Parties (Young Likely Voters)

Favorability ratings for Republican Party low

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold.



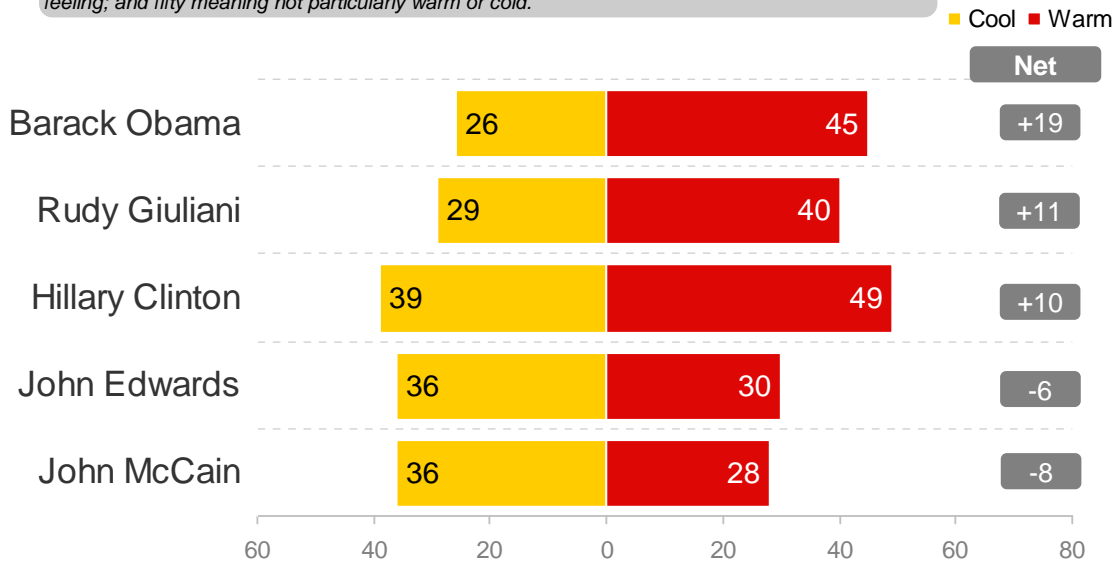
Clinton and Obama bring different strengths to the race. Overall, Democrats fare much better than Republicans with women, African American and Hispanic youth, and lower income youth. But Clinton's margin explodes among younger women, especially those who are unmarried and do not have a college education, while Obama fares better among white voters, especially men and college educated voters.

Either way young voters are clearly ready for a woman or person of color to sit in the Oval Office, and both Clinton and Obama have the potential to increase their margins if more young people turn out to vote. Clinton, in particular, has the potential to garner more Democratic votes as she leads Giuliani by 18 points among non-voters, in part because of her advantages in name identification over Obama.

■ **Figure 2:** Favorability Ratings for Presidential Candidates (Young Likely Voters)

Candidate favorability ratings

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■ **Figure 3:** Democratic Margin in Presidential Trial Heat among Likely Voters

	Democratic Advantage*	Clinton v. Giuliani	Obama v. Giuliani	Clinton/Obama v. Giuliani
Total	+19	+16	+12	+15
Men	+8	0	+15	+7
Women	+28	+32	+10	+21
H.S. or less	+28	+31	+16	+24
Some college	+11	+14	+18	+16
College graduate	+6	-7	+4	-2
Current university student	+17	-8	+27	+8
White	-2	-11	+5	-3
Hispanic	+42	+30	+5	+15
Black	+76	+84	+69	+78

*Number based on young people who describe themselves as Democrats or Independent-lean Democrats; minus the percentage of young people who describe themselves as Republicans or Independent-lean Republicans

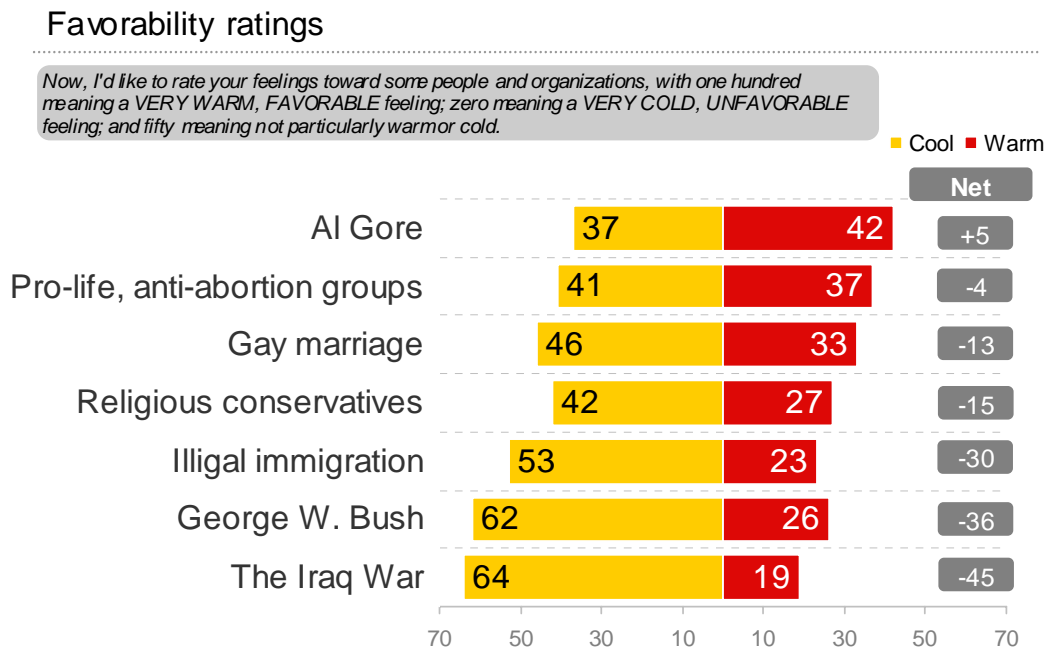
Republican Party Alienated From Youth

The Republican Party suffers from some of the same wounds among young people that damage its standing among voters overall. Its leader, George Bush, is thoroughly discredited. Its war is deeply unpopular. Its basic competence to run the country is discounted. But the Republican's problems among younger people run deeper than this moment in history. Young people disagree sharply with the Republicans on every core issue tested in this survey. More broadly, younger people look at the Republican Party and find very little of their own values or

ideals reflected. We see broad, ideological movement away from the Republican Party among the larger electorate as well,⁸ but the depth and breadth of this population's alienation from one of America's two major parties is striking and previews a problem for the Republicans extending beyond the life of the current administration.

George Bush lost the youth vote in 2004 and he has done little since to cause this population to reconsider that choice. His favorability ratings leave him with an appalling 26 percent favorable-62 percent unfavorable favorability rating; only the Iraq War is less popular in this survey.

■ **Figure 4:** Thermometer Ratings (All Young People)



The problems with the Republican brand among young people run deeper than Bush. Young people are often cynical about politics, but believe in government. By a 68 – 28 percent margin, voters would rather have a bigger government providing more services over a smaller government providing fewer services. Even Republican young people prefer a larger, more generous government (57 – 40 percent for bigger government with more services).

Young people adopt views diametrically opposed from the Republican Party on issues as diverse as the war, global warming, gay marriage and, to some extent, illegal immigration as

⁸ Stan Greenberg, "Democrats are Back – But..." *The American Prospect*, June 18, 2007.

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well. In fact, there is not a single issue in this survey where younger voters line up with the Republican Party.

- On every issue we tested, young people believe the Democrats would do a better job than the Republicans, including the war on terrorism (55 percent Democrats v. 34 percent Republicans) and taxes (50 percent Democrats v. 37 percent Republicans). Sixty percent believe that the Democrats do a better job than Republicans (21 percent) at representing the views of younger people.
- Nearly two thirds of young people believe we need to start reducing troops in Iraq now; just 33 percent would “stay the course.” Similarly, younger people break 66 to 32 percent against giving the President’s plan a chance. Even among younger Republicans, we see four in ten (38 percent) in favor of an immediate withdrawal.
- On global warming, 61 percent of younger voters believe this issue represents an immediate threat that requires immediate action; only 36 believe we need to further study the problem.
- Younger people are well ahead of the rest of the country in supporting gay marriage (52 percent favor, 45 percent oppose). Moreover, 67 percent of younger people believe “same sex couples trying to get married are courageous in facing opposition and really committed to building happy lives together.”
- This cohort is more secular than the rest of the country – 25 percent describe their religious affiliation as “none” compared to 11 percent in the country as a whole⁹ – and 60 percent believe “religion and faith should not play a role in politics.”
- The nation revolted against the immigration bill and we see some of this resistance among young people. Nonetheless, a slim majority support giving immigrants a path to citizenship (53 percent); just 44 percent favor an approach that focuses only on border security.

⁹ Based on June, 2005 survey of American adults by the Religion and Ethics Newsweekly.

■ **Figure 5:** Who is Doing a Better Job? (All Young People)

Now I am going to read you a list of issues and I want you to tell me whether, overall, you think the Democrats or the Republicans would do a better job with this issue. If you do not know, just tell me and we will move on to the next item.

	Democrats Better	Republicans Better	Net
Paying attention to issues that affect younger people	60	21	+39
The environment	63	25	+38
Health care	61	26	+35
The situation in Iraq	60	27	+33
Becoming energy independent	59	27	+32
The federal budget	55	30	+25
The economy and jobs	57	33	+24
The war on terrorism	55	34	+21
Sharing your values	52	37	+15
Taxes	50	37	+13
The gun issue	44	40	+4

More than seven in ten young people (74 percent) see “real differences” between the parties on important issues, with half citing big differences. The distinction runs a bit sharper among likely voters (80 percent), but even non-voters see important differences between the parties (63 percent). On Iraq, 75 percent see real differences and 58 percent see big differences between the parties. On jobs and the economy, 69 percent report real differences between the parties (47 percent big differences).

Financial Challenges Dominate Youth Agenda

Reaching full Democratic potential among younger voters, including a continued improvement in participation and turnout, means focusing more attention on their economic struggle. Without question younger voters believe global warming represents a near-term threat that requires taking action now, and the war is substantially less popular here than among other generations. These issues represent areas of profound disagreement with the Republicans. But young voters' political agenda is more accurately defined in economic terms.

The leading volunteered issue for the President and the Congress is not the war (19 percent), but the economy and economic issues (39 percent in total). A majority (58 percent) of young people say they are “one paycheck away from having to borrow money from their parents or credit cards.” Two thirds are working for an hourly wage and 60 percent worry a great deal or some about their debt load. Most do not earn a four-year university degree (just a quarter in this survey are currently in a four-year college or have graduated from one).¹⁰ Young people of color, women (especially unmarried women) and the less educated in particular report a real financial struggle.

In thinking about how progressives and Democrats could reach out to younger people, economic themes dominate. By a 9-point margin, the most successful argument for a candidate trying to appeal to this cohort addresses their economic concerns explicitly; economic arguments are also the leading themes among independents, moderates and white men, and do particularly well among women and young people of color.

A message that speaks to their economic struggles proves more compelling than a raw, populist message, which generates less enthusiasm. Iraq can also drive this vote, of course, and an Iraq argument that notes the particular price paid by this generation does better still. Young people also find a message calling for unity in order to get something accomplished on major issues like terrorism and health care fairly compelling, a finding we see elsewhere. Despite the divisiveness of the current political debate—or more accurately because of it—voters want leaders willing to work with both sides to move the country ahead on important issues. This remains true even among more partisan and liberal progressive voting blocks, including young people.

¹⁰ Only 18 percent of this age group has graduated from a four-year university according to Census data, though many, of course, are currently students.

Economic Arguments, More So than Global Warming or Even Iraq, Drive the Youth Vote

Figure 6: Messaging (All Young People)

<i>Here are some comments a candidate for public office has used in their campaign. After each phrase, please tell me whether it would make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, a little more likely no more likely, or less likely to support this candidate?</i>	Much more likely
Many young people today struggle to get by, balancing work and sometimes school, trying to make ends meet with low wage jobs and a rising cost of living. We need policies that help young people too, jobs with decent salaries, affordable health insurance programs for young people, as well as seniors, and cheaper student loans.	58
Like most wars, the Iraq War was decided by older men, but is being fought by young people, mostly in their twenties, who are dying for no good reason; we need to get our troops out of Iraq by the end of the year.	49
The Iraq war has already wasted 3,000 lives and \$300 billion dollars, money which could have helped address problems here at home; we need to get our troops out of Iraq by the end of the year.	46
After the 9-11 attacks, this country came together. We need to recapture that spirit of unity in taking on today's challenges, not only in fighting the war on terrorism, but in addressing issues like health care, education and global warming.	44
To move ahead, we need more unity in this country, where the two parties work together to fight the war on terrorism and address issues like health care, education and global warming.	43
We need a new, more moral direction in our country, a foreign policy where we work with other countries and the United Nations, not only to end the war in Iraq, but stop the genocide in Darfur, a domestic policy that promotes economic justice where everyone has a chance to succeed and an environmental policy that honors our commitment to future generations and helps reduce global warming.	36
These days, too many people in government are too busy trying to tell other people what to do and how to lead their lives. We are told what we can eat, whom we can marry, what we can watch on TV. Sometimes, people need to be free to make their own mistakes.	34
Big corporations in America are hurting this country. Not only have they shipped jobs overseas, but they are polluting the environment and cutting benefits and wages for the few jobs they keep here.	33
There is too much mixing of religion and government these days and too many examples of the religious right forcing their views on everyone else, from stopping stem cell research, restricting abortion and teaching creationism in schools.	28

Conclusion

Partisanship and political participation are both habit-forming and this population has the numeric strength to change American politics for the next 20 to 30 years once fully engaged. Given the Republican brand crisis among younger voters, progressives are very close to locking down this vote. While Democrats will win the youth vote in 2008, this cohort needs continued outreach to increase turnout and engagement. The scale of the Democratic margin and the degree to which progressives can energize young people remain in doubt. Young voters are alienated by Republicans but waiting to see if anyone delivers on the issue that concerns them most, their financial struggles. While not necessarily populist in their outlook – in fact, a majority say globalization has been a good thing – they are deeply anxious about how they are going to pay their bills and achieve financial stability in the long term. In focus groups, the depth of their ambition and their attempts to improve their lot in this economy are often very inspiring. But they are also pressed economically by jobs with few benefits, low hourly wages, and rising costs of living. They need help.

The next President will need to deliver that help to secure the long-term loyalty of this generation.

Appendix

This project employed four different sampling frames in order to capture the full diversity of the youth population.

1. Nearly half the sample (410 completes) was collected with random digit dial (RDD) technology, supplanted with listed sample (100 completes) in high density minority areas because RDD under-represents minority respondents. This approach, however, misses the 19 percent of young people currently estimated to be unreachable through a landline.¹¹ While listed sample is an efficient means of finding minority interviews, listed sample under-represents more mobile youth and misses minority youth living outside of high density areas.
2. Nearly half (407) of the respondents were interviewed via the web, using web panel sample.¹² Members of this panel agree to take a certain number of surveys in a year after being provided with an incentive, though respondents are not allowed to take more than a set number of surveys each year. This approach allows the study to include young people who do not have a landline. Using an opt-in panel, of course, means these data are not representative of the overall youth population, and web panels seriously under-represent minority populations.
3. Finally, the study includes 100 cell phone respondents. The survey instrument for this sample was extremely short in order to improve the cooperation rate. Half were offered incentives to take part in the survey as compensation for the minutes used during the survey.¹³

As table Appendix A makes clear, there are important sample differences that have implications for understanding the political views of the youth population. The web sample, for instance, is much better educated and liberal than the RDD sample. The RDD sample is the most racially diverse. The cell phone sample is very young.

¹¹ Nineteen percent of people in this survey say they do not have a landline. A report by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 14, 2007, estimates that more than 25% of adults under age 30 use a cell phone only.

¹² Web panel sample drawn from Survey Sampling Inc.

¹³ Interestingly, these incentives did not change cooperation rates.

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■ Appendix A: Demographics by sample type

	RDD	Listed*	Web	Cell
Total (unweighted)	410	100	407	100
19-20	17	20	15	29
21-23	25	27	24	29
24-26	27	24	28	25
27-29	31	29	33	17
H.S. or less	42	46	32	42
Some college	24	23	26	15
College graduate	32	30	42	37
White	66	23	74	70
Hispanic	13	38	15	9
African American	11	29	13	7
Liberal	25	24	39	19
Moderate	34	34	38	39
Conservative	33	32	22	31

*Listed Sample consists of Hispanic Surname sample and African-American Density (minimum 40% of the census tract identifies as African-American)