

Youth Outreach

The Young Vote

Engaging America's Youth in the 2008 Elections and Beyond

Background

Nearly one quarter of eligible American voters is between ages 18 to 30. According to Harvard's Institute of Politics, many young voters are not yet well defined along party lines—nearly two out of five 18 to 24 year olds identify themselves as “independent.” While the lack of party affiliation may prevent many young voters from voting in the primaries, the large number of independents makes the youth vote unpredictable when played out in the general election.

Many young people believe that the 2008 presidential candidates have not yet tried very hard to engage them, though young people offer a significant source of vitality and grass-roots organizing ability, as well as votes. Presidential candidates should carefully consider this young demographic as they decide how to allocate their time and resources in the months ahead.

Recommendations

Presidential candidates and their campaigns—and Presidents—should make concerted efforts to:

- Address the policies and issues of key concern to younger Americans
- Hold events that specifically speak to and target young citizens
- Provide an opportunity for young people to ask them questions through websites, in-person forums, and town hall meetings
- Widen the base of young people participating in campaign activities, fundraisers, and events and provide volunteer opportunities for a greater number of youth
- Continue to involve young adults and seek their opinions in creative ways once in office and
- Leverage the “new media”—the internet, social networking web sites, and mobile phone networks—for all of these efforts



Key Facts

- Twice as many young people say they are paying attention to the 2008 election as were doing so prior to the 2004 election
- The overwhelming majority of young adults, 85 percent, say they are interested in following national affairs
- Young voter turnout increased significantly in recent elections, jumping 11 points from 2000 to 2004 among 18 to 24 year-olds
- Iraq, education, health care, and the environment rank as the most critical concerns for young Americans

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at www.opportunity08.org.

About the Author and the Project

Cali Carlin

Cali Carlin currently works for CBS News in New York. Previously she was working for Channel One, a news program shown daily to middle and high school classrooms across the country, reaching 7 million students. She has volunteered with organizations directed at helping youth.

Opportunity 08 aims to help 2008 presidential candidates and the public focus on critical issues facing the nation, presenting policy ideas on a wide array of domestic and foreign policy questions. The project is committed to providing both independent policy solutions and background material on issues of concern to voters.