



Voting is a Habit

***One of the most robust empirical regularities discovered in political science is that past voting behavior is a good predictor of future voting behavior.*¹**

Numerous academic studies and electoral analyses show that voting is habit-forming. Once you vote, you are more likely to vote again—and again, and again, and again.

According to Professor Eric Plutzer, “Virtually all major works on turnout have concluded that voting behavior is, in part, a gradually acquired habit.”²

An individual’s history of voting is predictive of future voting

- In 2000, a paper analyzing the American National Election Panel (ANES) Surveys (1972-76 and 1992-96) found that a person who voted in the previous presidential election is 33 to 36.4 percentage points more likely to vote in the next presidential election. According to the authors, “turnout in a given presidential election is a powerful determinant of turnout in the subsequent presidential contest.”³
- Another NES panel study found that virtually no (3%) respondents who reported voting in 1968 and 1972 missed voting in 1974 and 1976. Of those who reported not voting in two previous consecutive elections, however, more than two-thirds also failed to vote in the next election.⁴
- Results from a randomized field experiment found that the fact that an individual voted in a 1998 election raised the probability of him voting in the subsequent 1999 election by 46.7 percentage points.⁵
- A 2004 paper which analyzes the results of eight field experiment found that a person who votes in one election is 29 percentage points more likely to vote in the next major election.⁶

Young Voters: Increasing Turnout, Forming a Habit

In 2004 and 2006, young voters increased their election turnout over the previous two elections. In the 2004 general election, more than 20 million 18-29 year olds voted (4.3 million more than in 2000); in 2006, about 10 million cast ballots (2 million more than in 2002). All signs indicate that the young adults who voted in these elections are much more likely to vote again in 2008.

In other words, millions more young adults have become voters in the past two elections—and have begun to become habitual voters.

Looking to 2008, young voters are likely to turn out in increased numbers yet again. Given that there are nearly 42 million 18-29 year old citizens in the U.S., increasing turnout means an ever-expanding impact on elections. Young voters turned out in numbers that helped make or break several U.S. House and statewide races in 2004 and 2006; the 2008 elections could be the year the youth vote makes its impact felt on the presidential election.

Young Voter Strategies, a nonpartisan project in partnership with the Graduate School of Political Management at The George Washington University, provides the public, parties, candidates, consultants and nonprofits with data and research on the youth vote as well as best practices to effectively mobilize young people.

For more information, including the latest opinion polling, demographic research, and campaign toolkits, visit www.youngvoterstrategies.org

¹Nickerson, D. *Just How Addictive is Voting and Why?* Yale University, working draft. October 28, 2004

²Plutzer, E. *Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources & growth in young adulthood.* American Political Science Review, 96, p. 42. 2002.

³Green, D. and Schachar, R. *Habit Formation and Political Behaviour: Evidence of Consuetude in Voter Turnout.* Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pages 561-573.

⁴Plutzer, p. 43.

⁵Gerber, A, Green, D, Schachar, R. *Voting May be Habit-Forming.* American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003, p. 540-550.

⁶Nickerson, 2004.