



Greenberg Quinlan Rosner/Democracy Corps

Youth for the Win!

The MySpace Election

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Youth For the Win!

Two outcomes are almost certain in 2008—Democrats will win the youth vote and young people will vote in record numbers. What is less obvious is the size of the margin and the scale of their participation. This survey represents an on-going commitment by Democracy Corps and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner to conduct regular, special surveys – every six weeks – to analyze the youth vote, its political preferences and level of engagement.

In 2007, we highlighted the alienation of young voters from the Republican Party, hostility to the war in Iraq and overriding economic concerns. In this survey, we track young people's political preferences, but we focus specifically on how young people are experiencing the campaign, their preferred sources of information, how they follow the debate, and their level of involvement.¹

We are on track for record participation among younger Americans. In early 2008 Democratic primaries, young people increased their participation by an astonishing 88 percent. Republican involvement also improved, though far less dramatically (by 7 percent). This survey reinforces much of the polling and real life data predicting record turn out among young people, as 72 percent of young people describe themselves as likely to vote in the 2008 election.

The main reason why young people are committed to this election could not be more straightforward: they believe the country is off on the wrong track and want to do something about it. The belief that this election can produce change is the central narrative in their engagement and key to both maintaining and expanding their involvement.

¹ We will present another report focusing on current political preferences of young people.



It is also increasingly clear that young people are experiencing and participating in this election in a different way. Despite the early promise that the Internet would increase political involvement, this really is the first generation that truly experiences electoral politics online. A majority of their direct involvement in this election has taken place online, whether that means watching a debate online, visiting a candidate website or forwarding campaign emails to friends. Fully two thirds of young people subscribe to MySpace or Facebook and 14 percent have “friended” a candidate.

The internet has not replaced good, old fashioned “talk;” the most frequent “action” undertaken is talking to their friends about the election. Young people organize their world through a series of social networks – offline and online. These networks may be maintained through the Internet and social networking sites, but they are also attempts to impose some intimacy and control in the Internet age. Young people may not be satisfied to be one of millions on a server-list. Outreach needs to tap these much smaller social networks that drive much of the political dialogue among young people.

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.

Changing the World

The growing engagement of young people is incontestable. Youth turnout improved in both 2004 and 2006. In primaries through February 19, the turnout among young people in the Democratic primary grew by 88 percent, from nearly 11 million to twenty and a half million. Turnout among youth in Republican primaries also grew, but by a more modest 7 percent. A survey conducted by Lake Research Partners and the Terrence Group for Rock the Vote showed



that 80 percent of young people were following the election closely and 41 percent were following it very closely.

A 54 percent majority describe their likelihood of voting as a ten on a ten-point scale, where ten means very likely. Three-quarters (72 percent) rate their interest in voting as an 8, 9 or 10. We see a modest edge among Obama voters compared to McCain voters, but nothing beyond margin of error, and modest differences between Democrats and Republicans. Vote likelihood improves, however, among women (60 percent “10,” compared to 48 percent among men), college educated youth (63 percent) and African Americans (68 percent).

Young people unite in believing that what is most important about this election is the chance to change the bad direction this country has been on. This is the frame—simple, accessible, empowering—those interested in maintaining the engagement of young people need to advance. We see some evidence of identity politics, which is just as strong among white women as among African American voters and stronger among Clinton supporters than Obama supporters. But the leading reason, for Clinton and Obama supporters, men and women, white and young people of color, is the opportunity this election represents to change the direction of the country.

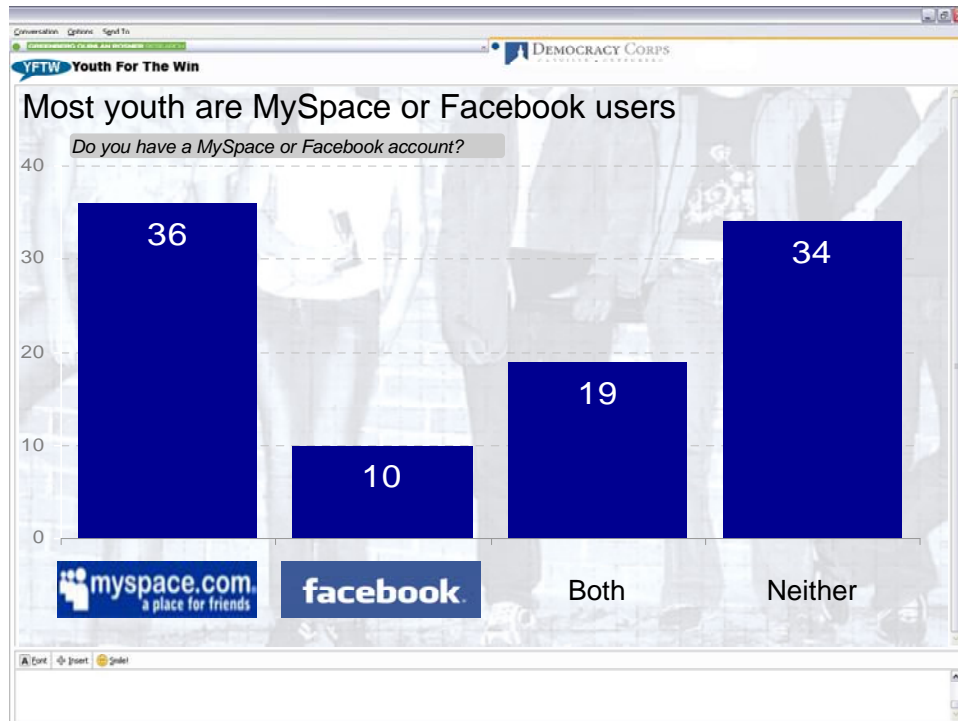
	Total	Clinton Supporters	White Women	Obama Supporters	African American ²
The chance to change the bad direction of the country:	41	45	49	49	34
Issues are care about are being discussed:	28	20	23	29	36
It's the first time a woman has a serious chance of becoming President:	26	42	31	14	22
Young people are getting involved in politics:	18	14	12	24	22
It is the first time an African American has a serious chance at becoming President:	17	11	16	23	29
I'm excited about one of the candidates running:	11	16	7	10	9

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The Internet emerges as the primary medium through which young people participate in this election and the leading instrument through which young people learn about the candidates and issues. This is not surprising; this is a generation that grew up with the Internet. They maintain friendships, find dates and mates, stay in contact with family and, generally, learn about



the world through the Internet. Fully two-thirds of young people maintain a Facebook or MySpace profile. One young focus group participant lamented that he spends so much time maintaining and updating his Facebook profile that he has never gotten around to meeting his actual neighbors.



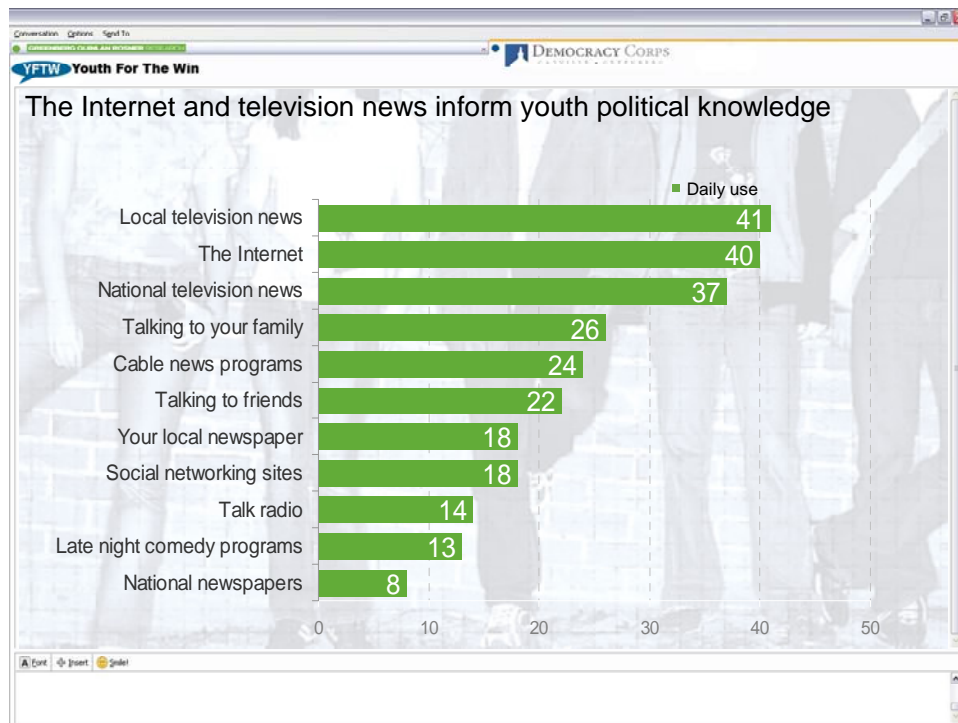
Young people experience this campaign differently from older voters. Almost half (40 percent) of young people say that they get their information about politics from the Internet, as many as who cite local and national television news. In contrast, 24 percent of the general public—and just 15 percent of those over 50—regularly learn something from the Internet about the presidential campaign.² Internet usage is higher among Democrats (47 percent), as well as among those more likely to vote (48 percent “10”), though the most likely voters consume all manner of political information at higher rates.

Of course, young people are not oblivious to more conventional media as well. When asked which sources of information they use to track the election, local TV news and national TV news are nearly as prominent as the Internet. Print, it could be argued, is truly dead among this age group. As many young people track the campaign through social networking sites, like Facebook and MySpace, as track campaigns through the local daily newspapers (each 18 percent). Given the fact that these sites barely existed last cycle, that is a notable finding.

² Based on a December, 2007 survey of 1,400 adults by the Pew Research Center.



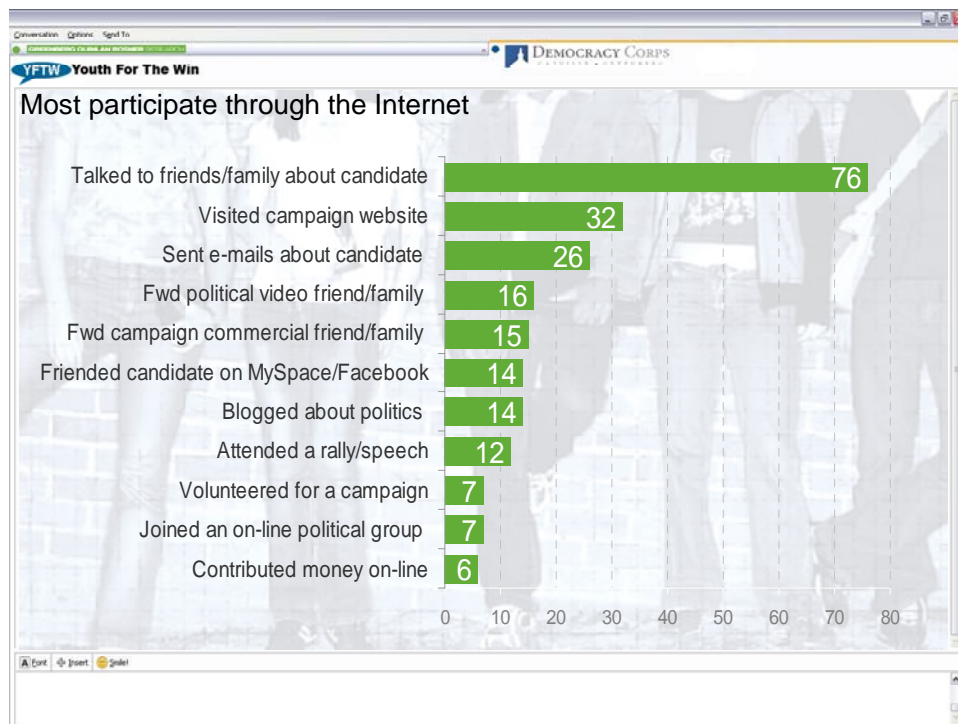
The most prominent specific sites included are TV news sites (36 percent total, including CNN.com, MSNBC and FoxNews.com) and search engine sites (37 percent total for AOL.com, Yahoo.com, MSN.com, Google.com). Campaign websites and social networking websites account for 7 percent respectively with other political websites at 5 percent.



Young people have so far been extraordinarily active in this campaign, and most of this engagement has taken place on the Internet in a viral context. That is to say, it has largely involved forwarding e-mails, ads and the like to their friends and family. Nearly one in four subscribers to a social network site have “friended” a candidate.

This on-line participation grows, naturally, among young people who spend more time in front of their computers and those more likely to vote. There is not, however, a substantial difference among Democrats and Republicans on these measures. For example, 17 percent of Democrats have blogged on a political issue or candidate, compared to 14 percent among Republicans.³

³ An interesting modal effect also emerges; respondents in our web sample are more likely to participate in most (not all) on-line activities, but less likely to have simply talked to friends or family about the campaign (just 66 percent).



Of course the most frequent campaign activity by youth is simply talking to friends and family about the candidates. A 76 percent majority have discussed politics with those close to them; this jumps to 91 percent among Obama voters. This seems like an unremarkable finding. But ask a young person in a focus groups whom they trust when it comes to learning about issues or candidates, and they will invariably tell you their family and their friends. Ask a young person who they do not trust, and the answer will be just about everyone else. This latter list includes newspapers, television news, even Internet sources, as well as candidates, parties and most political actors.

The implication strategically is that organizing young people means tapping these rather small, social networks of friends and finding leaders within each peer group. This dynamic may help explain why the social networking sites have experienced such a rapid growth as a means of political communication and outreach.

Conclusion

Efforts to amplify young people's engagement in the 2008 election need to address both the message and the medium. The message is fairly straightforward. Young people believe the country needs changing and that this election is a means through which they can execute that change. This sentiment is as old as our democracy, but what is new for this generation is the absence of cynicism ("our vote won't matter," "things won't really change," and so forth). The medium is the Internet, but the process is more complicated than simply "broadcasting" over the world-wide net. Young people may live in an electronic global village, but they crave the intimacy and experience of smaller, more manageable social networks. More so than trying to organize a list serve of millions of names, it is really about trying to find peer leaders and social



leaders to talk to their friends. This is where the social networking sites will likely play a dominant role.