



January 2025

## Trump's victory among young voters

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### Summary

Despite polls being all but inconclusive and there being no clear frontrunner in the leadup to the 2024 American Presidential Election, Donald Trump was able to win another term with a significant electoral college victory. One of the main demographics that pushed him to the White House again ended up being a surprising group to many: young voters.

### Key points

- Trump's focus on the economy resonated much more with voters across the board, rather than the protection of reproductive rights campaigning that Democrats heavily relied on.
- The 2024 reflected a major shift in party identification and voting patterns of people between 18 and 29 years old, some of whom feel as though they are underrepresented in the American political scene.
- Targeting specific groups with relevant campaigning measures, such as podcast appearances and social media posts geared at engaging with younger voters, pushed Trump over the 270 electoral vote victory threshold.

## Introduction

Despite there being no frontrunner in the polls leading up to the 2024 United States Presidential Election, many people around the world were shocked when Donald Trump was elected to a second, but nonconsecutive, presidential term. It was also believed that results would take days, or even weeks, to be conclusive, rather than the few hours it actually took. Since November 5<sup>th</sup>, various data sets and exit polls have offered insight as to how Trump was able to pull off another win.

## The key? Making young, white, male voters feel heard.

As a whole, Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2012) has garnered a reputation for being much more progressive than their predecessors, but the 2024 election data proved that that may not necessarily be the case. This was reflected in Democratic Nominee Kamala Harris’ voting numbers; according to the Associated Press, Harris only garnered the support of about 50% of voters under the age of 30, while current President Joe Biden’s 2020 election results had that figure closer to 60%. Furthermore, “while the political leanings of Gen Z women have stayed steadily left of center, Trump’s popularity among young men surged by 15 percentage points from 2020” (Scott, 2024), from 41% to 56% of that demographic’s vote.

**Graph 1: Shifts in youth voter identification since 2020**

### Every Race/Gender Group of Youth Had More Voters Identifying as Republicans than in 2020

Among voters 18-29, there were large shifts in party identification between 2020 and 2024, especially by race/ethnicity. Those shifts were strongest among young men.

	Democrat	Republican	Neither	Swing Toward Republicans
<b>2024</b>				
White men	35%	63%	1%	+11
White women	49%	49%	17%	+6
Black men	63%	35%	13%	+20
Black women	85%	13%	17%	+6
Latino men	47%	49%	20%	+13
Latino women	65%	33%	16%	+9
All others	70%	26%	31%	+1
<b>2020</b>				
White men	32%	41%	27%	
White women	45%	37%	19%	
Black men	69%	11%	20%	
Black women	72%	7%	21%	
Latino men	53%	25%	23%	
Latino women	64%	17%	19%	
All others	54%	18%	28%	

**Notes:** Data as of November 6 at 11am EST.

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Source: CIRCLE Tufts University

A group that was not paid close attention to in the leadup to Election Day, but later proved to be a driving force behind Trump's victory, was white men between the ages of 18 and 29. Arguably the most significant factor in this shift was the amount of time Trump spent on podcasts and streams, as well as at college sporting events, in the leadup to Election Day. By appearing on programs of prominent figures such as Joe Rogan, "Trump was humorous and humanized. And for Gen Z men who consume more news through social media than traditional outlets, he was highly accessible. Suddenly, he wasn't just a presidential candidate, but a certified 'bro'" (Scott, 2024). Trump's joining of TikTok over the summer was also significant, shifting the original goal of "to lose by less" to one of "there might be something bigger," according to Charlie Kirk, co-founder of Turning Point USA, which "focuses on getting young people engaged in conservative politics" (Moore, 2024). Simply reaching these voters was relatively unprecedented in American politics, but proved to be essential, and those appearances were seemingly pushed by his son Barron, who falls into that age bracket. A large part of this audience is a group deemed the "lost boys" who "feel overlooked and shortchanged by left-wing politics and current economic outcomes" (Scott, 2024). Issues such as mental health crises, unemployment and underemployment have younger male members of the working class flocking to Trump as someone who validates their views and acts as "a symbol of empowerment in a world that increasingly leaves them behind," a testament to the necessity of "addressing the needs of a generation still trying to find its place in a confusing world" (Scott, 2024).

Additionally, the president of progressive advocacy and young voter mobilization group NextGen America, said that the Harris campaign "made a mistake by focusing its outreach to younger voters on college campuses. 'A lot was left on the table as far as making sure that organizations had the capacity to reach non-college-educated young people, who are the vast majority,' said Tzintzún Ramirez" (Vielkind & Zitner, 2024). There has long been a correlation between education level and voting trends, with college educated voters tending to lean to the left while less educated voters tend to lean to the right, so if Democrats are looking to regain control of Congress in the 2026 midterms and win back the White House in 2028, they need to start looking at how to appeal to more rural, non-college- educated voters across all age groups and demographics.

## Focus on the right issues

The economy is consistently American voters' top concern, which was no exception in this election, especially among young voters. Broadly speaking, "Trump won primarily because the election was a referendum on the Biden-Harris administration" (Lindsay, 2024). While he is "inheriting a robust economy, even if many voters think otherwise... Election 2024 showed that American politics has at least one iron law: Voters punish the governing party when they believe the economy is faltering" (Lindsay, 2024). Inflation and access to work are some of the main concerns for all Americans, but especially young people that are looking to enter the workforce and set themselves up for financial success. Even if the economy is currently strong, it is not apparent to those struggling to find work that pays enough to put food on the table and afford housing, hence the economic focus at the ballot box.

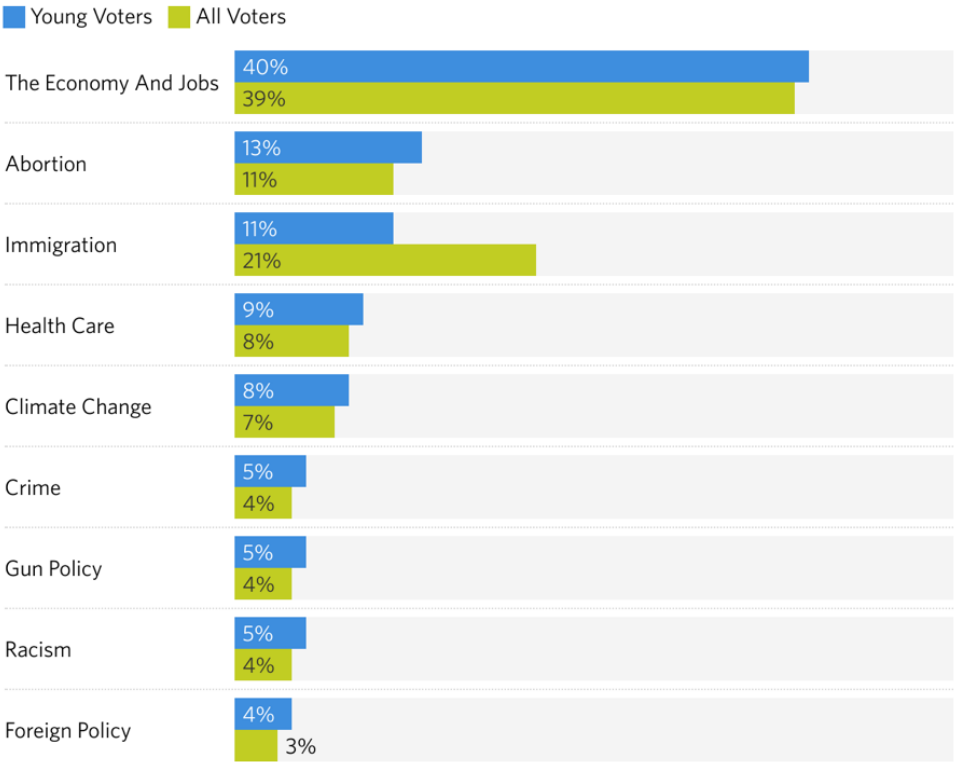
"Gender gap" was a notable buzzword during this election cycle, mainly because experts believed that having a qualified female candidate that championed reproductive rights would cause a stark divide among voters. In reality, it "was not enough to sink Trump. About half of women backed Harris, while about half of men went for Trump, according to AP VoteCast. That appears largely consistent with the shares for Biden and Trump in 2020" (Peoples & Barrow, 2024). Trump has been vocal in his pride about how his Supreme Court selections paved the way for the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 court case that protected the right to an abortion, and since the 2022 midterm elections, Democrats have relied on young voters and women in particular to vote for them in droves, vowing to protect a

woman’s right to choose. While it was certainly a top issue in this election, the economy far and away remained voters’ biggest concern across almost all age groups and demographics. Harris’ vague economic policies made voters weary of what they would actually be voting for, while Trump promised reform and affordability; whether or not that will actually be the case remains to be seen.

**Graph 2: Top issues among young voters in the 2024 US Presidential Election**

### Young Voters Were Much Less Likely to Prioritize Immigration; Slightly More Likely to Prioritize Abortion

The percentage of young voters (ages 18-29) and of all voters who said each was their top issue in the 2024 election.



**Notes:** Updated with data as of November 11, 10am ET.

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 Source: AP VoteCast Survey conducted by the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research for Fox News and The Associated Press

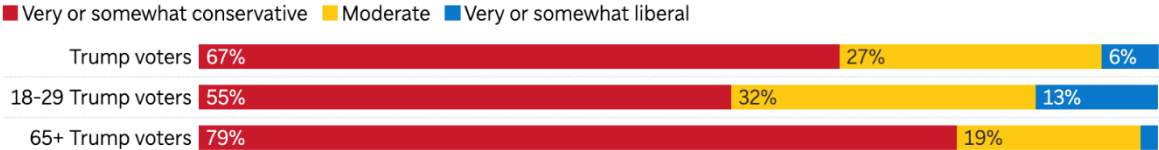
Source: CIRCLE Tufts University

Especially important to note in this election, however, is that just because Republicans gained ground (in Senate and House of Representatives races as well), Gen Z is not identifying as ultra-conservative, or even necessarily conservative at all. They differed themselves from older Republicans in many ways, according to data from the Associated Press; for instance, not identifying immigration as their top issue (6 in 10 older Republicans did, versus about 1/3 of younger Trump voters) and, again, prioritizing the economy (50% of younger Trump voters said it was their top issue, versus 4 in 10 older Trump voters). On top of that, “while most younger Trump voters identified with his ‘Make America Great Again’ movement, they were less likely to say they are MAGA Republicans than are older Trump voters” (Thomson-Deveaux, 2024), suggesting these voters place more emphasis on ideology rather than individual candidates compared to their older counterparts.

**Graph 3: Percentage of voters identifying as conservative, liberal or moderate**

### Younger Trump voters aren't overwhelmingly conservative

Percent of Trump voters who identify as:



AP VoteCast is a survey of the American electorate conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago. More details here: <https://apnews.com/ap-votecast-faq>. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: AP VoteCast



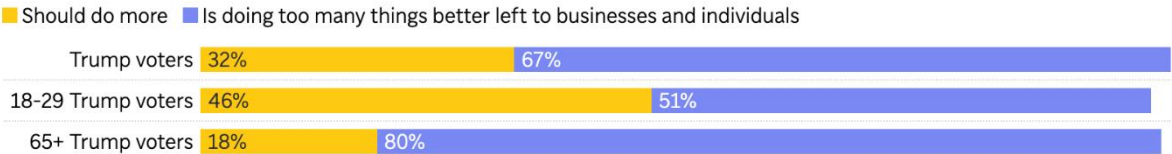
Source: Associated Press

Another key divide between older and younger Trump voters is their stance on how much of a role the government should play in the daily lives of American citizens. Two key issues where this could become a problem in his new administration are healthcare and debt relief. The Associated Press concluded that younger voters are much more in favor of government involvement in healthcare coverage (50% favor it compared to about 30% of older voters) and student debt relief, especially as the price of higher education skyrockets and becomes increasingly inaccessible (50% favor more student debt cancellation versus about 10% of older voters). Climate change, tariffs and immigration policy also revealed a divide between older and younger Trump voters, but skepticism did not jeopardize his victory given his clear plans of action and the fact that economic concerns triumphed over all else in this election.

**Graph 4: Voters' opinions on the role of government**

### Younger Trump voters are split on government's role

Percent of voters who supported Trump who say the government should do more to solve problems, or is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals.



AP VoteCast is a survey of the American electorate conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago. More details here: <https://apnews.com/ap-votecast-faq>. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: AP VoteCast



Source: Associated Press

## Conclusion

If nothing else, this election proved the true power and scope of the youth vote in the United States. Despite estimates that only 42% of voters between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in this presidential race compared to the 2020 and 2016 estimates of 50%, Trump's victory is a testament to the importance of mobilizing young voters and the weight that certain demographics within that bracket hold. While neither candidate actually won a majority of the popular vote (Trump had 49.91% and Harris had 48.43% out of 154.7 million votes), in a winner-takes-all system like the US's electoral college, every single vote is crucial, which was shown in the 312 to 226 electoral vote victory margin. Trump also won all of the battleground states that were too close to call in the days, weeks and months

prior to Election Day. If Democrats hope to rekindle the momentum that they held in the 2020 presidential and 2022 midterm races, they need to reevaluate their approaches to issue focus, take clearer stances on policy and ensure that sure young voters feel as though their voices are being heard and those in government will work to ensure a better future for them.

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