

Young oter Fact or Fiction

10 things you need to know about 18-24 year olds and voting in RI

It's easy to assume that 18-24 year-olds don't care about politics. But do the facts match your assumptions? Take our short, 10-question quiz to test what you know about young people and elections in Rhode Island.

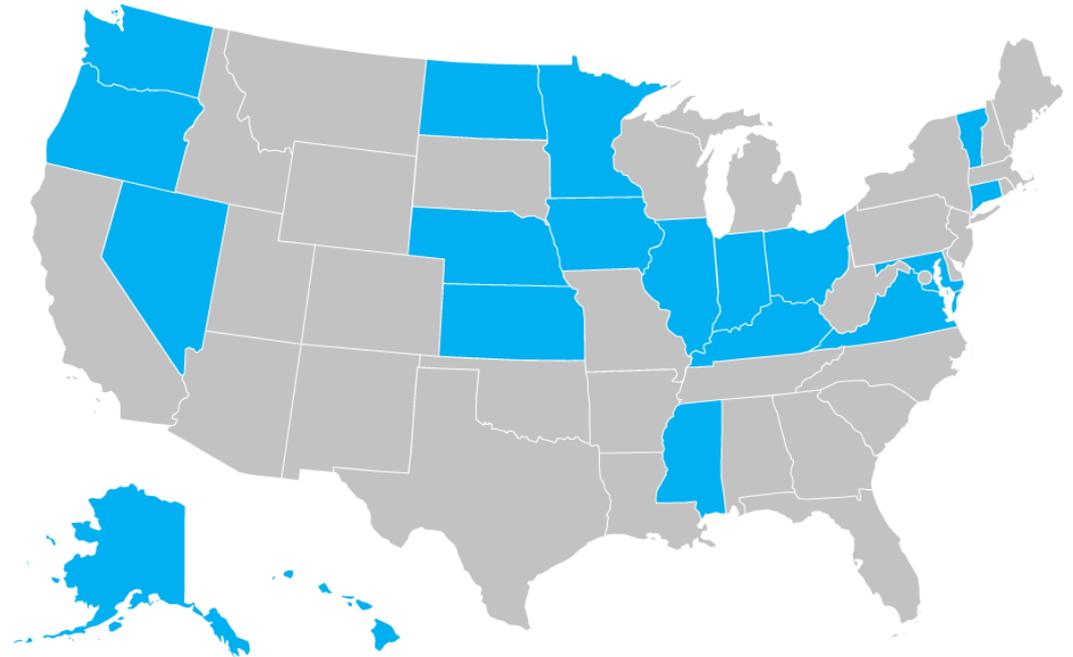
Let's start with a basic question about the minimum voting age:

True or False: You have to be at least 18 years old to vote in Rhode Island.

The answer is true! Yes, that wasn't a trick question. If you remember from school, the 26th Amendment guarantees citizens 18 years of age and older the right to vote. Rhode Island is no exception.

However, some states allow 17 year olds to vote in primaries if they will be 18 years old by the general election. Other localities have gone even farther; Tacoma Park and Hyattsville, Maryland allow 16 year olds to vote in local elections.

States where 17-year-olds can vote in primaries or caucuses
if they will turn 18 by the date of the general election



Now let's talk about who actually signs up to vote.

True or False: Less than 50% of Rhode Island's young adults are registered to vote.

The answer is false! Rhode Island actually has one of the highest rates of youth voter registration in the country. Nearly 70% of Rhode Islanders under the age of 25 are registered to vote.

Comparing youth (18-24) voter registration rates

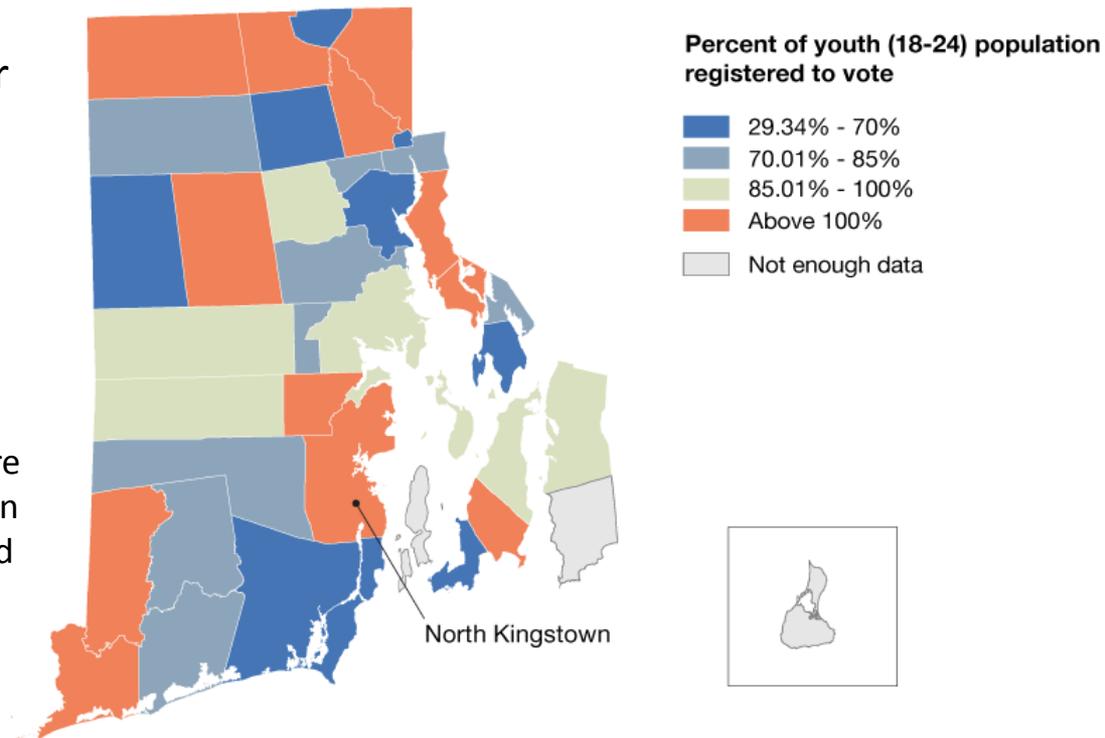


Sticking with youth voter registration...

True or False: North Kingstown has more 18-24 year olds registered to vote than living there.

The answer is true! We might have a problem here...In some Rhode Island cities and towns, the number of registered voters under the age of 25 is higher than the total population of 18-24 year olds.

One reason why: Rhode Island doesn't automatically remove registered voters when they move away or sign up to vote somewhere else. For example, college students can remain on the voter rolls long after they graduate and leave Rhode Island.



So, how many young adults turn out on Election Day?

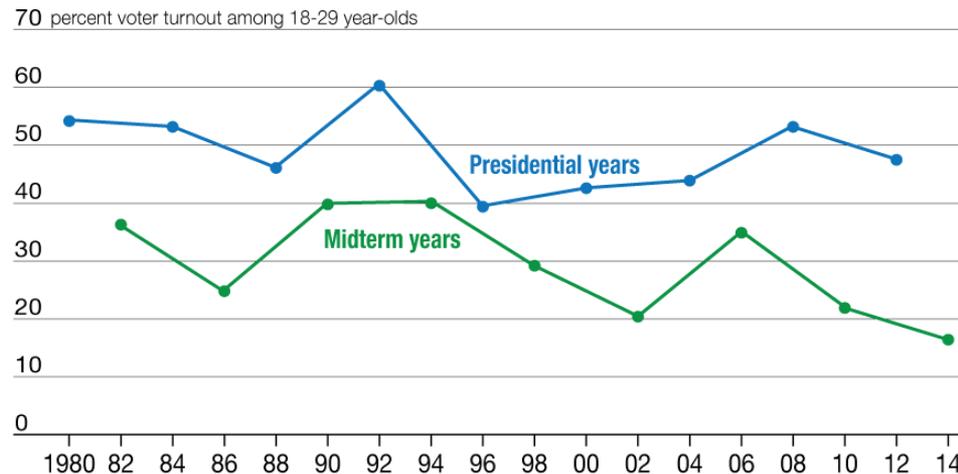
True or False: Only about half of young Rhode Islanders voted in the last presidential election.

The answer is true! About half (47%) of Rhode Island's 18-29 year olds voted in the 2012 election. As you can see in the graph, turnout rates are even worse in non-presidential elections. Only 16% of Rhode Island's young adults voted in 2014.

For comparison, the national 18-29 year old turnout average was 45% in 2012 and 20% in 2014.

Turnout in presidential vs. midterm general elections

Turnout tends to be higher in presidential election years. Fewer people vote in midterm years, which are also when most Rhode Island state races occur.



We now know that even during a presidential election, only about half of young adults actually turn out to vote. How do their voting habits compare to older Rhode Islanders?

True or False: Rhode Island 20 year olds vote at a higher rate than 70 year olds.

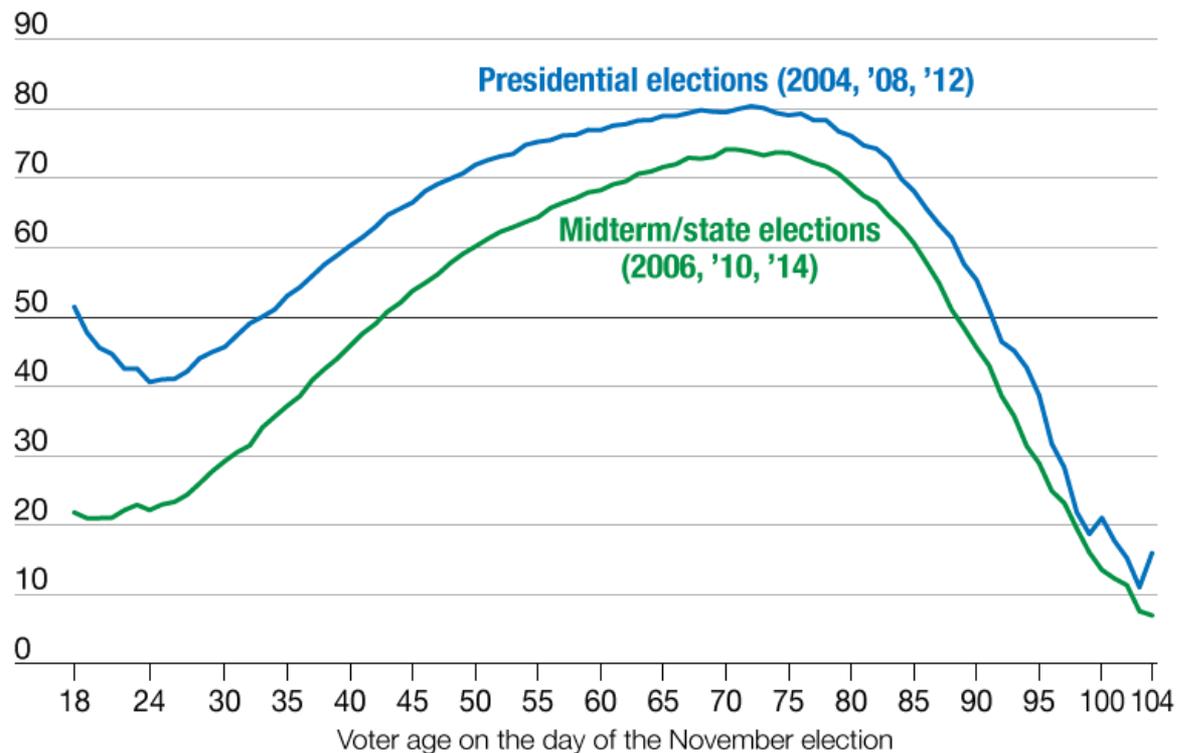
The answer is false!

Rhode Islanders in their seventies consistently have the highest turnout rate in Rhode Island. They are more than 4 times as likely to vote on election day than voters in their 20's.

Voter turnout by age in Rhode Island

The highest voter turnout occurs among those in their early 70s. Young adult turnout is substantially higher in presidential election years than in midterm/state election years.

100 percent turnout among registered voters



Let's talk about the type of young Rhode Islanders who are most likely to vote on Election Day.

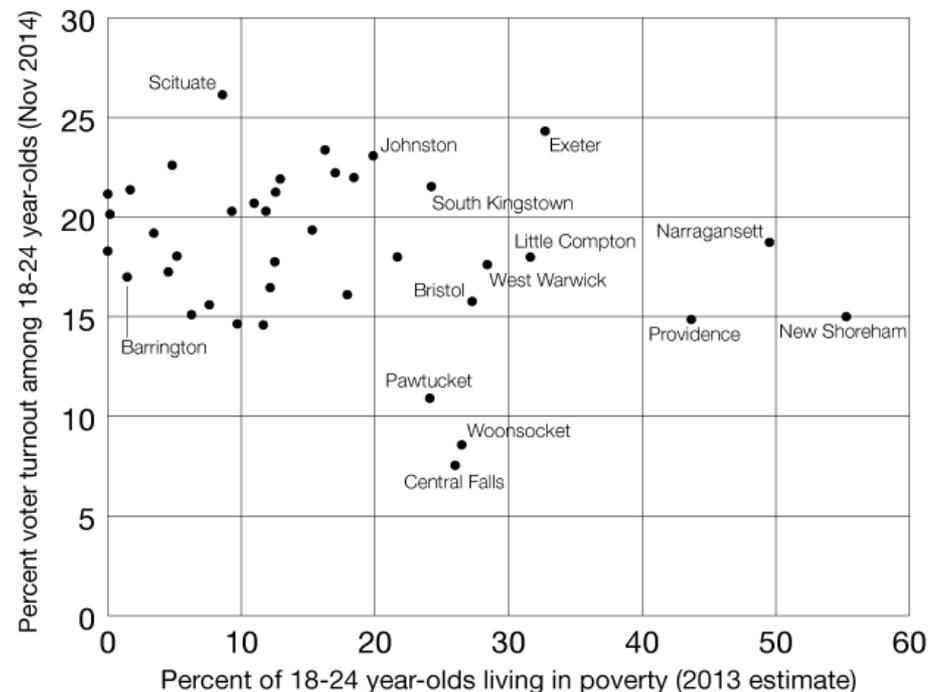
True or False: Young Rhode Islanders who live in cities and towns with high rates of youth poverty are much less likely to vote.

The answer is false! Statewide, there is a slight relationship between youth voting and the percentage of young adults living in poverty, but the connection is pretty weak. That said, national research has shown a correlation between income and turnout at an individual level.

Looking at specific locations, Johnston and Exeter both have more residents ages 18-24 living in poverty than the wealthier town of Barrington, but their young adult turnout rates are higher.

Youth poverty vs. youth voter turnout

In the 2014 general election, there was little relationship between Rhode Island municipalities' youth poverty rates and youth voter turnout rates.



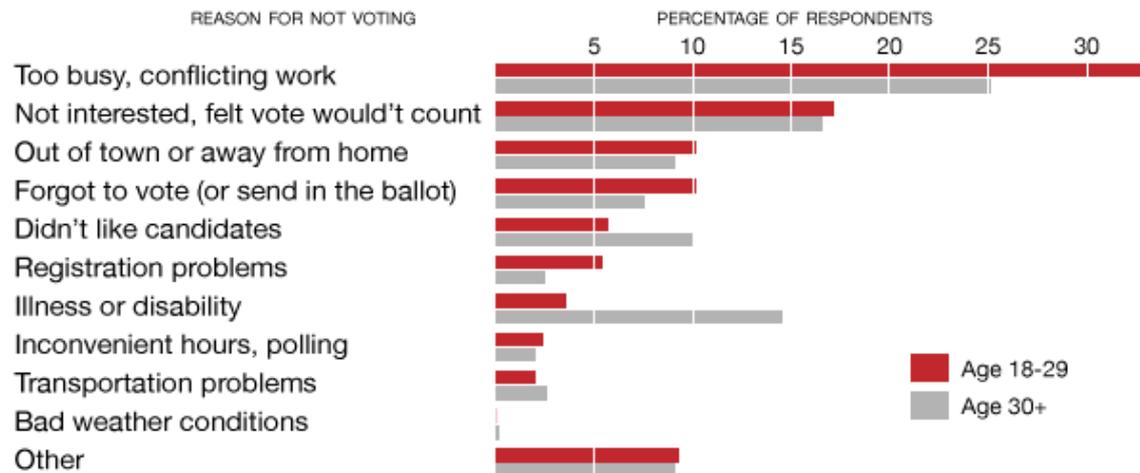
We see that poverty rates don't tell the whole story. What are some other reasons young adults skip voting?

True or False: Most young registered voters say they don't participate in elections because they're disinterested in voting.

The answer is false! In a national survey of registered non-voters under the age of 30, more than 35% said they didn't vote because they were too busy. Only about 18% skipped the election because they were disinterested.

Why don't young people vote?

Being too busy or having conflicting work disproportionately affects young people's turnout.



If young adults in Rhode Island don't vote on Election Day because they're too busy, what would happen if they could cast their ballots in advance?

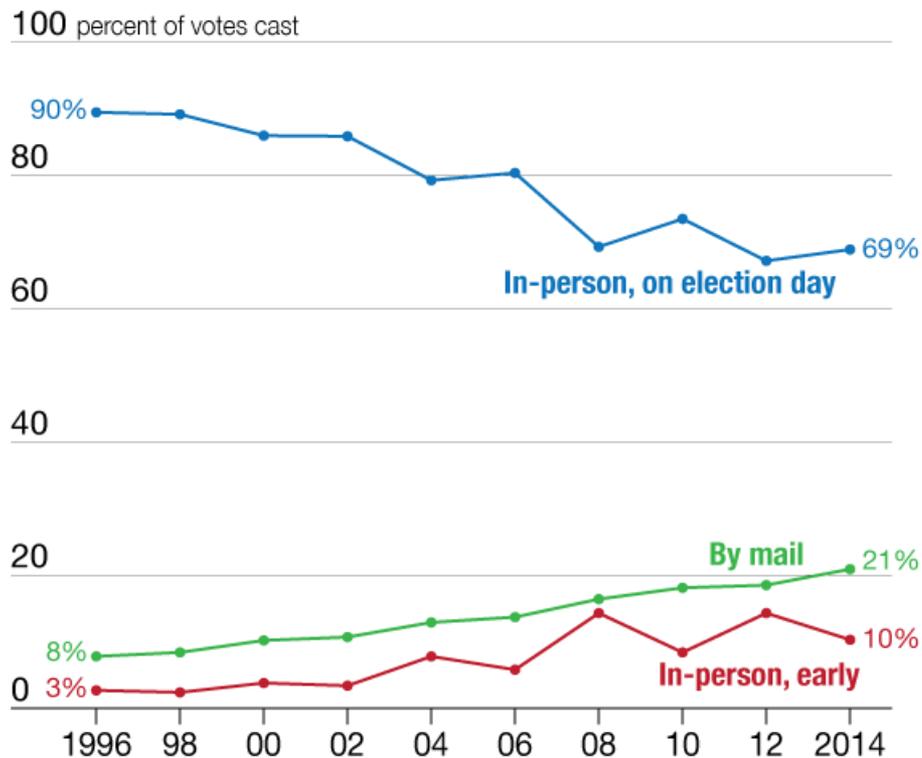
True or False: Less than 10% of Americans take advantage of laws that let them vote before Election Day.

The answer is false! There has been a steady increase in the use of early voting in the United States since the late 1990s. Almost one-third (31.2%) of voters across the United States reported voting early in the last election: either in person or by mail.

Rhode Island does not offer early in-person voting, but it does have early mail-in voting. In the last election, about 6% of voters age 18-24 used this method.

Increase in alternative voting

Over the past 20 years, use of alternative voting has almost tripled, including both early in-person voting and mail-in voting.



We see that early voting is becoming popular in other states. What about online voter registration?

True or False: States with online voter registration have seen an increase in young adults signing up to vote.

The answer is true! Arizona and California both saw a jump in youth voter registration when they allowed for online voter registration.

In 2012, Californians under age 25 accounted for 30 percent of all online registrants, helping to drive an 8% **increase** in youth voter registration.

In Arizona, youth registration **increased** from 28% to 53% after online registration was implemented.

So, online voter registration can increase the percentage of young people who sign up to vote.

True or False: Rhode Island allows for online voter registration.

The answer is false! Rhode Island is one of twenty-two states that do not currently have online voter registration, but the *Voting and Elections Modernization Act* would give Rhode Island the ability to implement online registration.

States with online voter registration

Listed by year of implementation

