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Youth vote 2 million higher than last midterm

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Two million more young people voted Tuesday than in the 2002 midterm elections — but not because of trendy new campaigning tactics like uploading videos on YouTube or posting candidates' profiles on MySpace. Instead, 18-to-29-year-olds were compelled to vote because of one of the oldest media tactics: Somebody asked them, often in person.

Of course, many were angry with the direction President Bush has taken the country and wanted change, according to a bipartisan exit poll from a youth voter organization. Put the two factors together — and add the growing influence of new media tools — and some analysts say a generation of young voters is solidifying into a Democratic voting bloc.

"The 2006 elections show that Republican campaigns must mobilize their base of young voters to win," said GOP pollster Ed Goetas, who conducted the poll of 500 18-to-29-year-olds with Democratic pollster Celinda Lake for Young Voter Strategies in Washington, D.C. The nonpartisan organization is a project of the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University.

Tuesday "proved that young voters can and will be a force in elections," Goetas said. "Of the 28 seats in the House of Representatives that changed hands so far, 22 were won by less than 2 percent of the vote, 18 by 5,000 or less votes, and 4 by less than 1,000 votes."

A key factor in wooing these 42 million people: campaigns that reached out and talked to them. Forty-six percent of the young people in the survey said they were contacted by a candidate or a campaign.

Of those contacted, 28 percent said they received a phone call, and 22 percent got an in-person visit. Only 3 percent received a text message on their cell phone, and 7 percent were contacted through a social networking site like MySpace or Facebook.

"Reaching young people is not rocket science," said Dave Rosenfeld, organizing director of the nonpartisan New Voters Project, which registered 75,000 voters and ran outreach programs on 80 college campuses in 15 states.

Voter turnout increased dramatically Tuesday, Rosenfeld said, in precincts with the large college-student populations his project targeted.

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