

CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

The California Civic Engagement Project

This brief highlights the growth and geographic disparity of Youth Voter Registration Rates within the state of California.

The Good News:

California youth voter registration has grown substantially over the course of the last decade, just over 25% from 2002-2010 November elections, outpacing growth in the general electorate.

Challenging News:

Despite registration gains, half of California's eligible youth are not registered to vote, resulting in underrepresentation of youth in the political landscape. This disparity is greatest for youth in California regions that also have some of the poorest outcomes for youth in the state.

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The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a new nonpartisan data repository and research initiative for the state of California housed at the UC Davis Center for Regional Change.

The CCEP seeks to address the limited quality and quantity of publicly available civic engagement data. Its mission is to collect and curate civic engagement data from a broad range of sources, making them a publicly available resource to all interested audiences, including political researchers, public officials, advocacy groups and communities themselves. The CCEP invites research and outreach partnerships from interested audiences.

CALIFORNIA'S YOUTH VOTE: STRENGTH AND POTENTIAL

Historically low, growth in the youth vote (18-24 year-olds) has received much media attention over the last decade, both nationally and for the state of California. However, not much is known about variation in youth participation within the state and across its diverse regions.

Strong youth electoral participation is critical to achieving a robust and fully representative democracy. The act of voting involves a two-part process, with registering serving as a substantial barrier to youth's ability to democratically participate. Not only do registration barriers disproportionately disadvantage youth, they are also unevenly felt within the youth population. These challenges can result in disparate participation in youth communities, including those that are resource poor and in most need of an amplified youth voice. Electoral disengagement also has long-term civic engagement implications for California, as a whole, as youth electoral participation is a key gateway to future leadership roles critically needed in the state.

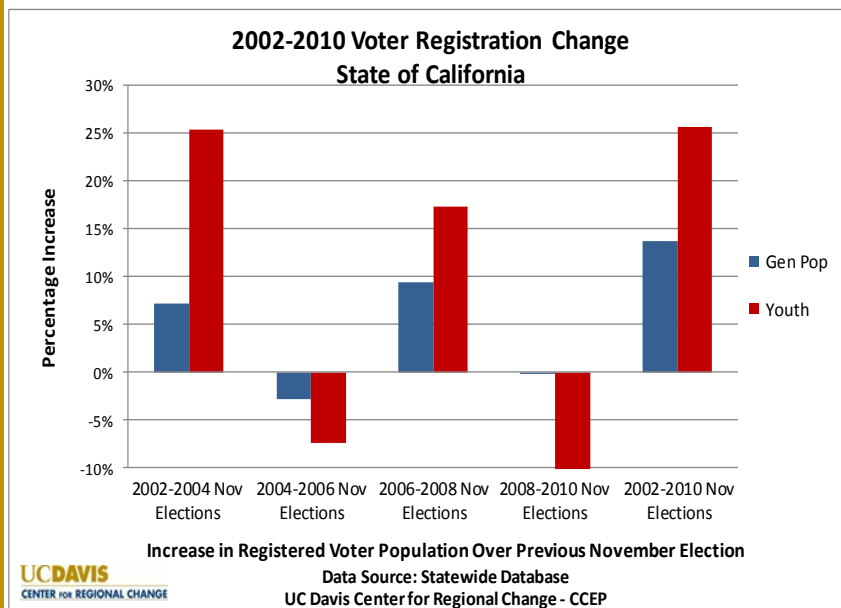
Considering the diversity of the youth population across California, a key question is to what extent has youth registration actually grown in California in recent years and how have these trends varied by region?

To address these questions, the **California Civic Engagement Project** recently examined the state's voter registration rates for the 2002 through 2010 general elections. Utilizing actual voter registration records, we track the growth of the state's registered youth population.¹ **Youth registration numbers in California have grown significantly over the past decade, outpacing general registration. Despite these gains, youth remain underrepresented in California's electorate, with disparity greatest in regions with some of the poorest outcomes for youth.** Removing barriers to youth registration within the voter registration system is critical to reducing these disparities.

Youth Underrepresented in the State's Electorate

The percent of youth (18-24 year-olds) within the state's general registration has seen a small but steady rise over the past decade (conducting analysis by comparable election years; registration is typically lower in mid-term elections) increasing for every mid-term election from 2002-2010 (8.2% to 9.1%), and from the 2004 to 2008 general presidential elections (9.6% to 10.1%).

However, the proportion of the state registration rolls that is youth has remained below the youth proportion of the state's overall eligible citizen population. **In 2010, youth in the state made up 14.2% of the general eligible citizen population, but only 9.1% of registered voters.**²



From the November 2002 election to the November 2010 election, the absolute number of registered youth in California **increased 25.6% (319,459 more registered youth voters)**, with these increases outpacing growth in the overall youth population. **Youth are experiencing increases in voter registration at a faster pace than the general population.** The general population's total registered increased only 13.7%. (2,086,737 more general registered voters) - **meaning the state's registration gap (by group) is narrowing.**

Note: Looking at 2008 registration, the data show a smaller increase in registra-

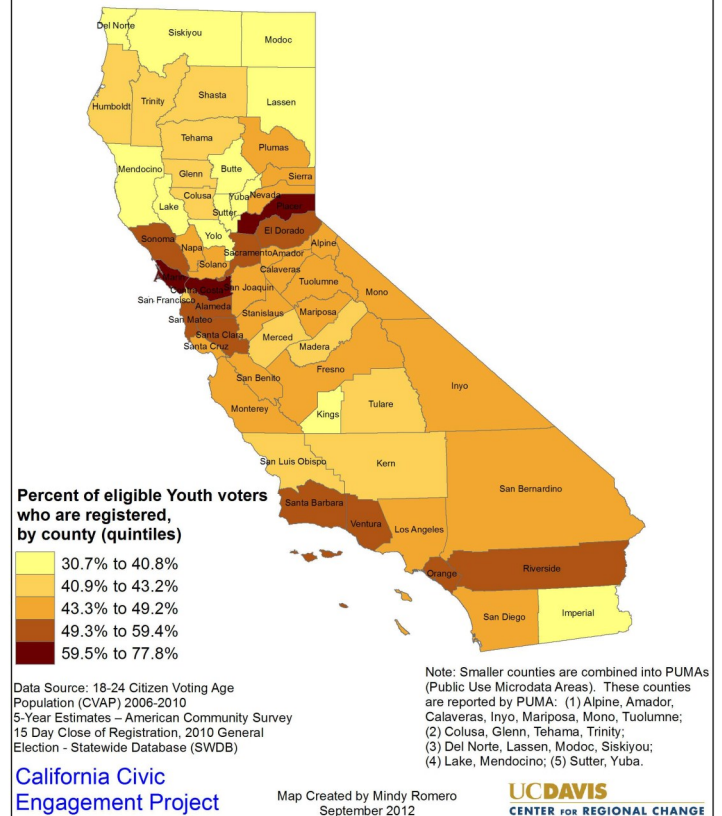
tion than in 2004. This is consistent with national youth registration which actually began its recent rise in 2004.³ When comparing presidential elections, 2004 to 2008, California youth registration increased 11.9%.

Regions in California with the lowest rates of youth registration have some of the poorest outcomes for youth in the state. Consequently, youth that have the most need also have the smallest voice in the resource decisions that effect their lives and their communities.

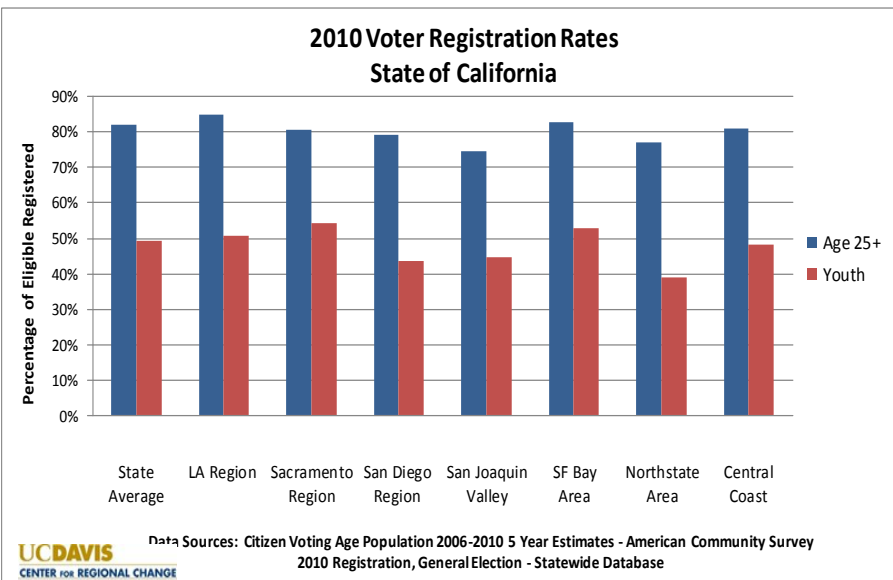
YOUTH STATE VOTER REGISTRATION RATES

- Since the of the establishment of the 26th amendment in 1971, California youth registration rates have consistently fallen far below those of the general population.² The November 2010 election was no exception. **Slightly less than half of the state's eligible youth (citizens) registered to vote, 49.4%** compared with 77.5% of the eligible general population.
- Registering an estimated **additional 890,000 youth would be required in order for youth to raise their registration rates to the statewide average** in the 2010 general election.
- **The gap is even wider when comparing youth registration to those age 25 and older (the rest of the adult population).** The state registration rate for eligible 25 and up is 82.1% - 32.5 percentage points higher than eligible youth rates.⁴
- This disparity in registration is repeated throughout the state. Youth registration rates are lower than the rest of the population in every county. Further, youth registration rates are over fifty percent in fewer than a quarter of the state's counties.
- Not only are youth underrepresented in the state's electorate, there is great disparity within the youth electorate itself. Although on the rise, national registration rates for youth of color still lag behind those of white youth.⁵
- Because Latino and Asians make up a larger proportion of the youth electorate versus the general population, future increases in their registration performance would mean greater representation for youth, overall, in the state's registered population.

2010 Voter Registration Rates: Youth
State of California



REGIONAL DISPARITY IN CALIFORNIA YOUTH REGISTRATION RATES



Looking across California's regions (see notes section for regional definitions), **we also see striking geographic disparity in registration rates for youth**, demonstrating the importance of examining registration rates at a sub-state level.⁶

Youth of the Sacramento and Bay area regions are registered to vote in higher rates (54.2% and 53%, respectively) than the rest of the state's regions, as well as the state average.

The lowest youth registration rates are found in the North State (39%), San Diego (43.7%) and San Joaquin Valley (44.7%) regions.

Los Angeles, San Diego and North State are also experiencing the widest gaps in registration rates between youth and the 25 and older population (gaps of 34.1%, 35.6% and 38.1%, respectively). In other words, youth in these regions have significantly less representation than the rest of the adult population. These data suggest a need for further investigation.

Regions with the greatest disparity in youth registration also have some of the fewest resources for youth. For instance, Los Angeles, North State and the San Joaquin Valley have the highest poverty levels in the state (14.1%, 17.6% and 19.9%, respectively), as well as some of the highest drop out rates and lowest college going rates.⁷ **Consequently, youth that have the most need also have the smallest voice in the resource decisions that affect their lives and their communities.**

Implications for the Strength of the Youth Vote

- If registration patterns over the last decade hold then the youth percent of the registered electorate will most likely grow in the upcoming November 2012 election and beyond, particularly as youth continue to increase their state population share. However, if these **increases continue to be modest then there will be a continuing gap in representation between eligible youth and the rest of the adult population.**

Removing Barriers to Youth Registration

- Registration itself actually involves multiple steps that all necessitate information on how to navigate elements of the system such as deadlines and ID requirements. **Removing barriers to youth registration that are present within California's voter registration system is a critical step to further increasing the inclusion of youth in the state's political landscape.**⁸ Without the removal of these barriers, the system will likely continue to yield a youth registered voting population that does not represent the proportion of youth in the state's citizen population. Earlier and greater inclusion of voters when they are first age eligible also leads to a more diverse and participatory electorate (essential for a robust and fully functioning democracy) as youth transition through the life course.
- The structure of California's current voter registration system continues to be a challenge to access for our state's youth, as well as other groups not as familiar with the registration and voting process. Most efforts to remove registration barriers involve simplifying the voter registration process, with same day registration estimated to have the largest and most immediate impact on youth turnout, including turnout of most youth demographic groups. In 2008, youth whose home state offered same day registration voted, on average, nine percentage points higher than those who did not live in same day registration states (CIRCLE Fact Sheet: State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout).⁹
- Key areas of action also involve education and outreach to youth prior to even turning eighteen. **Preregistration and high school civics education are simple, yet critically effective ways to reach youth**, particularly underrepresented youth of color, before they become eligible to vote. California, is already one of a handful of states that does allow pre-registration of 17 year-olds but it is often a little known and utilized option.¹⁰ Furthermore, research shows that involvement of schools themselves in preregistration produces far more successful registration results. Existing preregistration programs, nationally, were most successful when voter registration was included during school activities, providing guidance on the voting process.¹¹
- Voter registration outreach programs for high school students were established by California Elections Code §2131 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002. In addition, **California is currently one of at least 10 states that have policies requiring schools to assist in student voter registration on campus (California Education Code §49040).**¹² However, resources actually dedicated to registration outreach can vary greatly by county, including limited youth outreach efforts by registrars offices themselves.¹³
- It should be noted that lower levels of electoral involvement do not necessarily equate with lower participation in the broader political landscape. Many youth today that do not directly engage with the electoral system are increasingly engaged in other forms of political involvement in their communities (both locally and online), finding greater relevancy in these alternative forms of participation. Further, youth are not only very diverse demographically, but also in the ways they become involved.¹⁴ The state's challenge will be in addressing actions to help transition these youth into also participating in its electoral system. **Familiarity, connection and access are all essential for youth participation and voice, particularly for youth of color that face greater challenges to accessing and navigating the political system in California.**
- **Targeted and widespread outreach from within the existing educational and voter registration system, is needed to support youth** in creating early and salient connections to the electoral process, including youth residing in resource poor communities, enriching both their lives and the democratic landscape in California.

Do you want to access specific voter registration data by region and county?

Download our newly created California Voter Registration Tracking File at our website:

<http://regional-change.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-voter-registration-tracking-file-2002-2010>

NEXT BRIEF

The Latino Promise vs. Reality: A Closer Look at the Latino Registration Gap in California

Notes

- ¹ Registration data (15 day close of registration) was acquired from the Statewide Database and aggregated to the county, regional and state level. These data are the actual registration records and not representative samples. Because of this, the level of confidence in the data is not susceptible to estimates as are survey or exit poll results. For more information on methodology and limitations, please see: <http://swdb.berkeley.edu/d10/Creating%20CA%20Official%20Redistricting%20Database.pdf>.
- ² Percent youth of the state's eligible general population is measured using general population and 18-24 Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2006-2010).
- ³ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Voter Registration Among Young People in 2008, November. Please see: 2010http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/FS_10_Registration.pdf.
- ⁴ Percent registered of the eligible general population is measured using citizen voting age population data from the American Community Survey 5-year (2006-2010) estimates. For more information on the limitations of the data, please see: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/resources/voter-registration-data>. Percent registered of the eligible youth population and the eligible 25 and up population is measured using the Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2006-2010), by county and aggregated PUMA. Citizenship data by age is only available through ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files and presented by Census Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMA) designations. Due to smaller populations, multiple contiguous counties were aggregated by the ACS to create one PUMA. Because these counties share the same PUMA, values presented are for these counties combined. For more information on PUMA composition, see http://www.census.gov/geo/puma/puma_tutorial.pdf. Registration data is 15 day close of registration, 2010 General Election - Statewide Database (SWDB).
- ⁵ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Voter Registration Among Young People in 2008, November. Please see: 2010http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/FS_10_Registration.pdf.
- ⁶ Regions defined to include the following counties. Sacramento Region: Sacramento, El Dorado, Placer, Sutter, Yolo, Yuba; San Francisco Region: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin; Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma; LA Region: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura; San Joaquin Valley: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Kern, Tulare; North State: Butte, Del Norte, Lassen, Modoc, Siskiyou, Humboldt, Shasta; Central Coast: Monterey, San Benito, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara; San Diego: San Diego.
- ⁷ American Community Survey. 5-year (2006-2010) estimates, Poverty Status in the US.
- ⁸ For a discussion of barriers to voter registration that are present within California's voter registration system, see: "Future of California Elections", James Irvine Foundation (2012).
- ⁹ Please see CIRCLE Fact Sheet State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout, 2009 at http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State_law_and_youth_turnout_Final.pdf.
- ¹⁰ CCREC Policy Brief Number 1, April 2012. Please see: http://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/ccrec_policy_brief_1_final_apr2012_color_0.pdf.
- ¹¹ Project Vote Legislative Brief: Expanding the Youth Electorate through Preregistration, March 2010. Please see http://www.whatkidscando.org/youth_on_the_trail_2012/pdf/2010%20Legislative%20Brief%20-%20Preregistration.pdf.
- ¹² CA EC §2131 was established to meet requirements of the Help American Vote Act. HAVA encourages outreach to high schools by establishing programs that conduct mock elections and provide voter registration of students. Please see: California Elections Code §2131 at <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=elec&group=02001-03000&file=2130-2131> and the Help America Vote Act of 2002 at http://www.fec.gov/hava/law_ext.txt. This code allows registrars of voters to register students on high school campuses during April and September.
- ¹³ CCREC Policy Brief Number 1, April 2012. Please see: http://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/ccrec_policy_brief_1_final_apr2012_color_0.pdf.
- ¹⁴ see CIRCLE Report: Understanding a Diverse Generation: Youth Civic Engagement in the United States at <http://www.civicyouth.org/featured-new-study-dispels-stereotypes-about-young-voters-ahead-of-2012-elections/>.

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The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is a unique publically available resource of civic engagement and election data in the state of California. A key focus of data analysis is identifying disparities in participation across place and population. The project also aims to support research that explores non-traditional measures of civic engagement, particularly those that may be more likely experienced by disadvantaged or disconnected groups. The CCEP's research is intended to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in the state of California and across its metropolitan and rural regions. The CCEP invites inquiries from all interested parties to access these data.

For more information about the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, Project Director, at 530-665-3010 or msromero@ucdavis.edu. Visit our website at: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-civic-engagement-project-ccep>.

Launched in 2007, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change is dedicated to producing research that informs the building of healthy, equitable, prosperous, and sustainable regions in California. To accomplish this, the CRC builds two kinds of bridges. One set is on campus between faculty and students from different disciplines and departments; the other between the campus and regions throughout the state. These bridges allow us to bring together faculty, students and communities to collaborate on innovative action research that identifies and directs resources to communities struggling with the most challenging environmental and social conditions.