

California's Youth Vote: 2020 Primary Election



California's voter turnout had been on the decline in recent primary elections until 2016. In the state's June Primary that year, we saw a reversal of this trend and an increase in turnout rates for young voters (defined here as age 18-24). This CCEP fact sheet provides a look forward to what we might expect for the participation of youth in California's March 2020 Primary Election.

California Youth Presidential Primary Turnout

- Youth eligible turnout (the turnout of citizens age 18-24) was 17.1% in the 2016 Primary, compared with 33.5% for the total population.
- Youth eligible turnout was 11.9 percentage points higher in the 2016 Primary election over the previous 2012 Presidential Primary.
- Even accounting for these increases, voter turnout of youth continued to remain much lower than turnout of the total population eligible to vote.

FIGURE 1

California Eligible Voter Turnout
2010-2018 Primary Elections

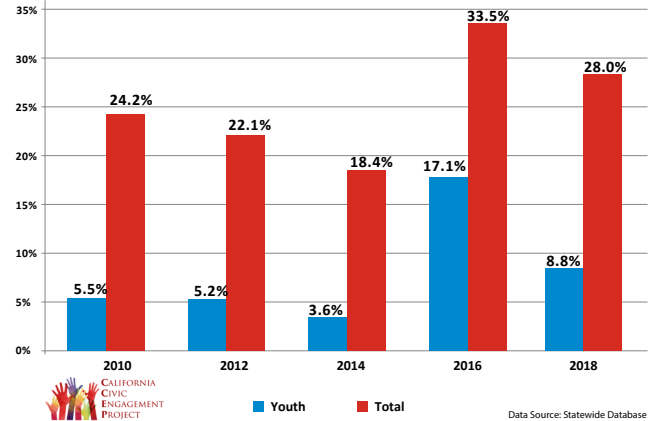
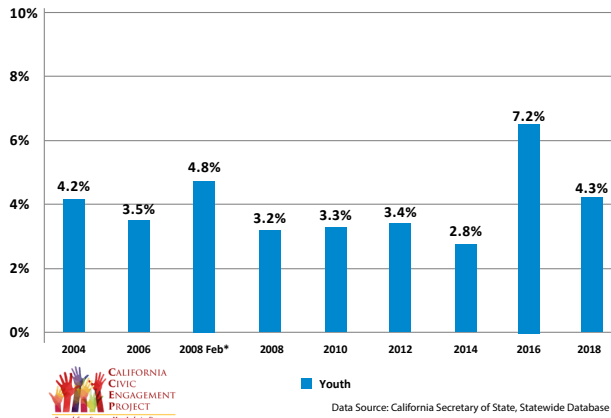


FIGURE 2

Youth Representation Among California Voters
2004-2018 Primary Elections



- The youth share of California's total voters declined 1.4 percentage points from the 2004 through 2014 Primary Elections. In contrast, the youth share of the state's 2016 Primary voters increased significantly to 7.2%.
- Youth remain significantly underrepresented at the ballot box
- Despite their gains in eligible turnout in 2016, the youth share of primary voters in 2016 was still much smaller than the youth share of the state's eligible (adult citizens) voter population (14.2%).

Projecting the Age Composition of the Eligible Voter Population in California

FIGURE 3

2020-2040 Projected Total Population
California

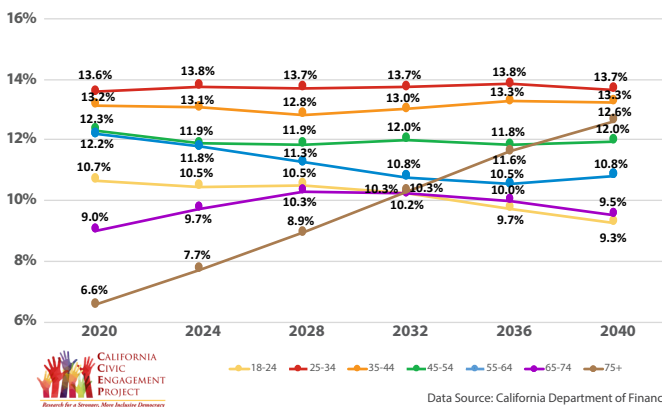
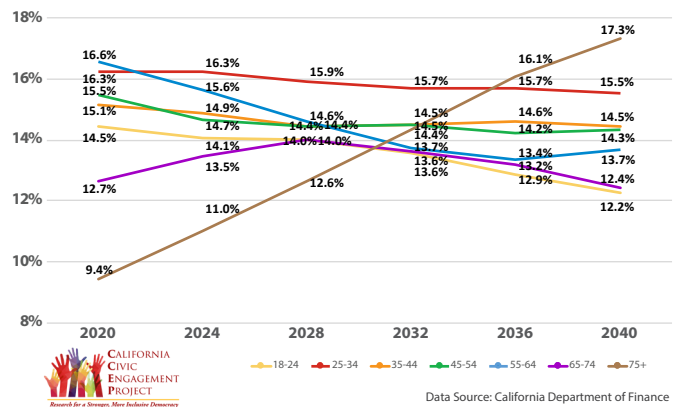


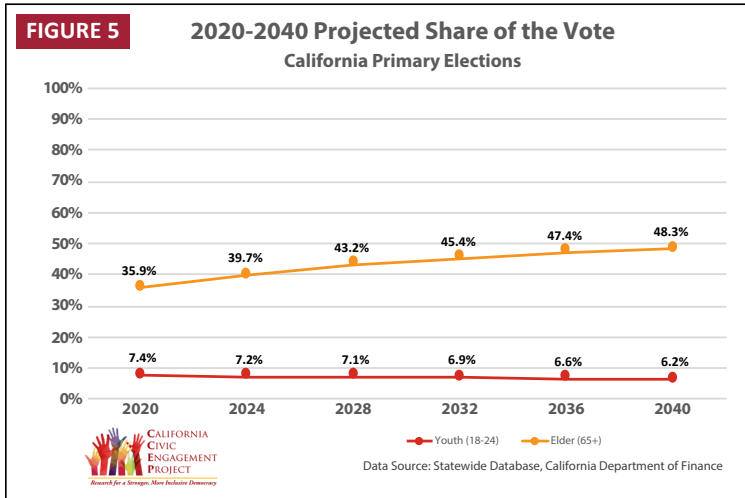
FIGURE 4

2020-2040 Projected Citizen Voting-Age Population
California



- The youth proportion of the California population is projected to decline steadily over the next 20 years, this decline will occur for the youth of each major race and ethnic group.¹
- The youth proportion of the population will decline to 9.3% in 2040, down from 10.7% in 2020.
- California’s eligible voter population (adult citizens) will be steadily aging, as well.
- The youth proportion of the eligible voter population will decline to 12.2% in 2040, down from 14.5% in 2020.

Projecting Fewer Youth Voters



- Declines in the eligible voter share for youth will bring changes in the future make-up of the California voting electorate and implications for the size of their political voice.
- If we hold constant the 2016 Primary youth eligible turnout rate (17.1%) through the 2040 Primary Election, we see a decrease in the youth share of California’s Primary vote – to 7.4% (638,752) in 2020 and to 6.2% (634,458) in 2040.
- In contrast, those 65 and older (the age group with the highest voter turnout) are projected to increase their share of the state’s vote to 48.3% in 2040, from 35.9% in 2020 when keeping their 2016 Primary eligible turnout rate (59.4%) constant.
- Youth are projected to continue to be underrepresented in the state’s Primary vote share.
- If youth increased their 2020 Primary eligible turnout rate by 5 percentage points over their 2016 Primary turnout, their percent of the 2020 Primary vote would be 8.3% (825,707).

California’s Competitive Congressional Districts

CD #	2016 Primary Youth Registered Voter Turnout	# of Youth Registered in 2016 Primary	# of Youth Who Voted in 2016 Primary	Youth % of 2016 Primary Voters	# of Registered Youth Who Did Not Vote in 2016 Primary	Incumbent
10	29.0%	33,227	9,631	7.1%	23,596	Harder (D)
21	22.6%	27,991	6,318	8.9%	21,673	Cox (D)
25	34.9%	34,732	12,115	8.0%	22,617	Vacant (D)
39	30.1%	38,633	11,633	8.0%	27,000	Cisneros (D)
45	37.5%	35,169	13,180	7.2%	21,989	Porter (D)
48	36.8%	30,538	11,246	6.1%	19,292	Rouda (D)

Letters in parentheses denote party affiliation of the incumbent. D=Democratic and R=Republican.

Data Source: Statewide Database, American Community Survey

- In the 2016 Primary, youth made up from 6% to 9% of the voters in each of the state’s six congressional districts (CDs) expected to be competitive in 2020 (CA-10, CA 21, CA-25, CA-39, CA-45, and CA-48).
- Youth play a critical role in each of these highly competitive CDs, but their registered turnout (data for eligible turnout in CDs is not available for youth) has been consistently lower than older age groups. In four out of six of these CDs, youth registered turnout in 2016’s Primary ranked in the bottom half of turnout for all California’s CDs. CDs 45 and 48 ranked 17th and 19th for youth turnout, while CD 21 saw the lowest youth registered turnout of all 53 of the state’s CDs.
- Table A shows the number of youth registered to vote who did not vote in each CD in 2016’s Primary. Mobilizing these potential voters (as well as those eligible but not registered) would mean that youth residents would have a much greater voice in their district’s choice of elected representatives.
- Given the declining youth population in California going forward, mobilizing more youth to vote could help transform a number of non-competitive districts into competitive ones in the 2020 elections.

About the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP)

The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) is part of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy in Sacramento. The CCEP conducts research to inform policy and on-the-ground efforts for a more engaged and representative democracy, improving the social and economic quality of life in communities. The CCEP is engaging in pioneering research to identify disparities in civic participation across place and population. Its research informs and empowers a wide range of policy and organizing efforts aimed at reducing disparities in state and regional patterns of well-being and opportunity. To learn about the CCEP, visit our website at <https://ccep.usc.edu>

1. Straight line CVAP projections developed by the California Department of Finance for the CCEP. These projections are based on assumptions that straight line birth rates, death rates, and immigration rates follow current trends under current laws. If immigration rates change beyond what is currently expected, these assumptions may over or understate population growth. Future adjustments to these projections will be made.

Data sources: Statewide Database, California Department of Finance.

For more information about this research study, contact Mindy Romero, CCEP Director, at msromero@usc.edu.