The Political Views of Young Californians

April 16, 2024

Eric McGhee, Jennifer Paluch, and Dean Bonner
California’s political path has changed in the past 50 years

- Mid-20th Century: Competitive to Republican-leaning
- Now: Strongly Democratic with liberal reputation
- Where is the state headed?
California’s younger residents may see their future differently than older residents

- Age gap on issues, ideology, and partisanship
- Are gaps larger or smaller than in other states?
- How fast and how much will California’s politics change?

- PPIC Statewide Survey 2004–2023
- Cooperative Election Study 2006–2023
The demographic generation gap
The demographics of young Californians are different from older Californians

Opinions on policy issues
The largest age gaps occur around issues related to race and ethnicity

Justice system is racially biased
Immigrants are a benefit
Prefer larger government with more services
Taxes are fair

Race and ethnicity account for little of the differences in opinions

- Regardless of race/ethnicity, younger Californians are more liberal than their older counterparts
- Age gaps are often larger for white Californians than for POC
- Age gaps by race:
  - Black: smaller overall
  - Latino: smaller on immigration, larger on social issues
  - Asian American: similar to whites
Party polarization is lower among young Californians

Broader political views
Age gaps around party and ideology can be significant

- Similar age gaps around vote choice
- No age gaps around satisfaction with candidates
Young people are less polarized about US presidents

Young people are less polarized about California’s governor

The national context
California mostly has smaller age gaps than other states

Abortion should always be available

Oppose closing the border

Prefer taxes to spending cuts

Gaps are more comparable for broader political views

How much change and how fast?
How much change and how fast?

- How fast: are Californians over 54 more conservative than 35-54?
  - Not really
  - Exception: race and immigration

- How much change: do Californians become more conservative as they age?
  - Not really
  - Nationally, most generations have become more Republican (though not always more conservative)
Conclusions and recommendations
Change to politics and elections is likely

- Young people are more liberal and less polarized on issues and on political questions like party choice and ideology

- Candidates and parties will need to adapt
  - Taking new positions?
  - Communicating existing positions more effectively?
More should be done to promote turnout among young people

- Look for ways to promote more new registrations
  - Expand California New Motor Voter to more agencies where unregistered populations may be higher
    - e.g., Covered California, Medi-Cal, CalWORKs, Cal EITC
- Targeted outreach to California New Motor Voter registrants
- Leverage “pre-registration” to mesh civics education and California New Motor Voter outreach
Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

Eric McGhee (mcghee@ppic.org)
Jennifer Paluch (paluch@ppic.org)
Dean Bonner (bonner@ppic.org)

Thank you for your interest in this work.