



THE CLEAR PATH

Public Opinion Research

TO: Interested Parties

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DATE: September 13, 2018

RE: Summary Findings – 2018 California Youth Priorities Survey

From June 25-July 23, 2018, EVITARUS completed a highly innovative, first-of-its-kind statewide survey of 2,043 California youth on behalf of Power California. This study provides a glimpse of California’s rising electorate, including patterns of civic engagement, attitudes toward voting, and state level public policy priorities.

The research was designed to illuminate the opinions, perspectives, and policy priorities of youth, particularly youth of color, a population that is not usually reached through traditional opinion research. The survey design included outreach to civically engaged youth as well as youth who are not currently engaged. The survey included oversamples of youth of color and young voters in the Central Valley. The research design also incorporated a convenience sample of incarcerated youth in the Bay Area. Youth played an advisory role in research design, questionnaire development, respondent outreach, and analysis of the survey results.

The results paint a portrait of a new generation of California youth who are highly engaged in civic life, with a remarkable level of solidarity across a range of high profile social movements. The results also provide important insights into how to engage youth who are not voting or currently registered to vote.

KEY FINDINGS

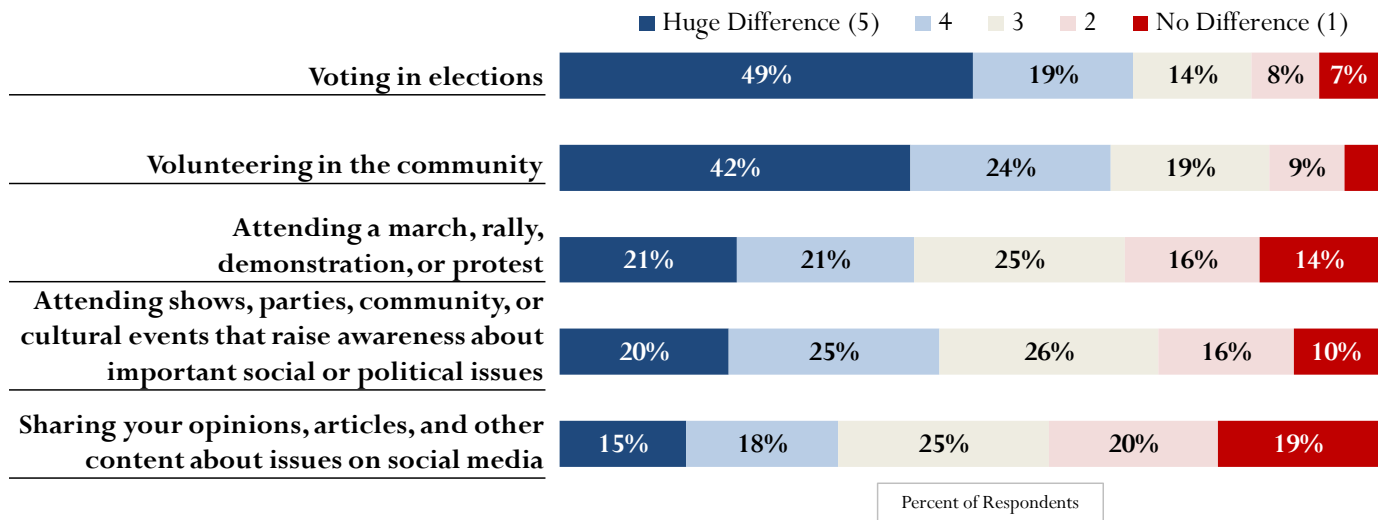
Commitment to Voting

Among all youth, voting ranks as one of the most effective ways to improve society—even among those with lower rates of participation and interest in politics.

More than two-thirds (68%) of youth surveyed identify voting as a highly effective means to improve the way things are in society today, including nearly half (49%) who say voting in elections makes a “huge difference,” as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Question: “In your opinion, how much of a difference do each of the following actions make when it comes to improving the way things are in society today? Please use a scale from 1 to 5, where a “1” means the action does not make a difference at all, and a “5” means the action will make a huge difference.”



Assessments of the difference voting can make are largest among Inland Empire and Central Valley Youth, Latinas, White women, the college educated and those over the age of 18. Assessments are lowest among African American (43%) and Asian American youth (43%), and 16 and 17 year-olds (38%).

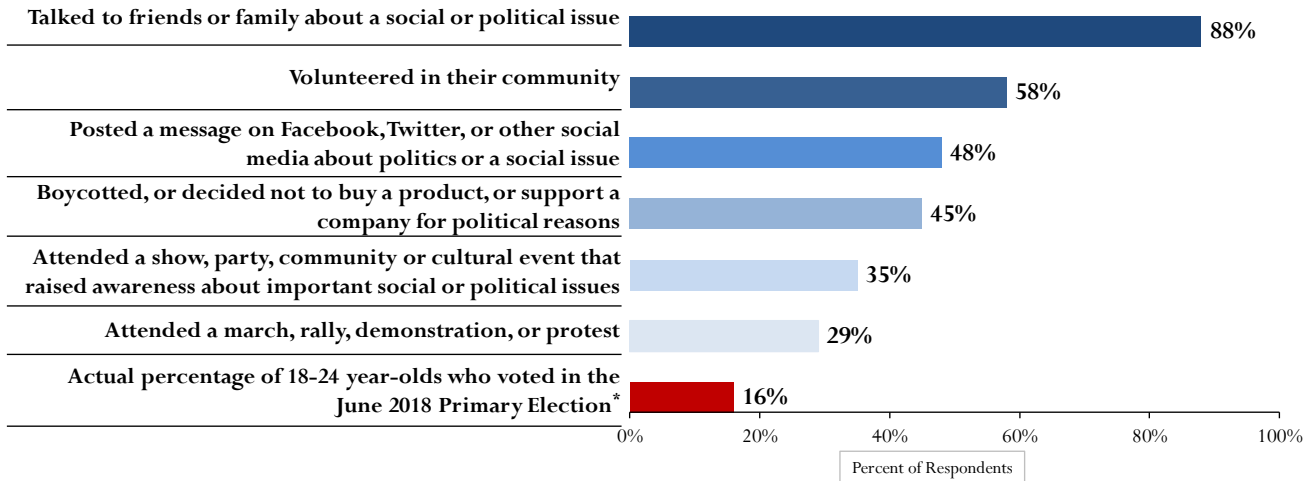
California Youth Are Highly Engaged Civically

California youth are invested in civic life and report engaging in a diverse range of civic activities. Conversations about social issues and politics are often gateways to voting and other forms of political participation. Notably, 88% of youth report talking to friends or family about politics. Rates of volunteerism and social media engagement also rank high.

In addition, **the survey shows that youth civic participation in California includes a commitment to political values that guides purchasing decisions —45% of youth report “boycotting, or deciding not to buy a product or support a company for political reasons”** (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Question: “So far this year, have you done any of the following?”



* Based on voter turnout data from Political Data, Inc. The results of the survey have been weighted to reflect the actual turnout among 18-24 year-olds, (not self-reported turnout) to help ensure that the results reflected a greater balance between the most highly engaged voters (mid-term voters) and less engaged voters (those who do not participate in mid-term elections).

Most Important Issues for Young Californians

Young Californians cite immigration (24%) and housing (21%) as the top problems facing California. This differs slightly from statewide polling of all voters, who are most likely to name jobs and the economy (18% adults, 15% likely voters) as the most important issue facing people in California today, and among whom immigration (15% adults, 19% likely voters) is only the second most cited top issue (Baldassare 2018)..

- Immigration 24%
- Affordable Housing/Cost of Living 21%
- Environment 19%
- Education 15%
- Homelessness 15%
- Racial Profiling/Policing/Criminal Justice 14%

Relatedly, when asked to grade California state government for the job it is doing to create a good quality of life for all Californians, young voters give California a failing grade, a 1.94 GPA. Central Valley youth give the state its lowest rating, a 1.63 GPA.

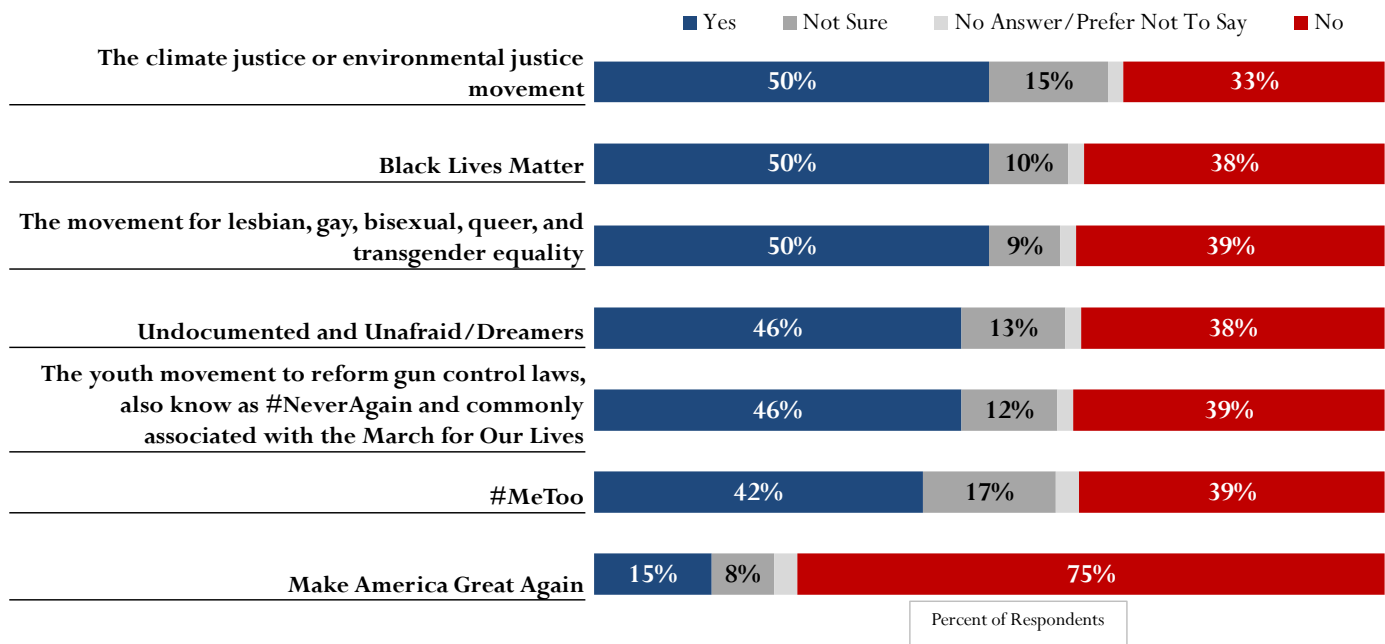
Robust Identification with Social Movements

California youth are highly engaged with efforts to bring about social change, exhibiting a remarkable level of solidarity across social movements that extends beyond typical markers of social identity.

Eighty percent of youth say they consider themselves a part of one or more high profile social movements, including 50% of youth who identify with the climate/environmental justice movement, Black Lives Matter, or the movement for lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning/queer, and transgender equality, respectively (see Figure 3). By comparison, only one in five (20%) say that they do not consider themselves a part of any of the social movements presented in the survey.

Figure 3

Question: “Do you consider yourself a part of any of the following social movements.”



Notably, participation in social movements extends beyond typical markers of social identity, such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. For example, while Black respondents make up only 6% of youth ages 16-24, half identify with the Movement for Black Lives, including 49% of non-Black youth. Likewise, although only 21% of respondents identify as LGBTQ, 50% identify with the movement for LGBTQ equality, including 41% of heterosexual, cis-gender youth.

Other notable measures of solidarity across markers of social identity are present within the Undocumented and Unafraid Movement and #MeToo. While the Latino and Asian American communities have been disproportionately impacted by deportations and the separation of families due to documentation status, 29% of non-Latino and non-Asian American youth who have not “worried that they or a family member might be deported” consider themselves a part of the Undocumented and Unafraid/Dreamers movement. Similarly, 29% of men consider themselves a part of the #MeToo movement.

Unbalanced Voter Engagement

Youth of color report lower rates of contact by political campaigns and other groups focused on outreaching to voters. Sixteen percent of 18-24-year-olds participated in the June 2018 Primary Election, however only 11 percent of Latino and African American youth voted.¹ Decades of scholarship have shown that contact by voter mobilization campaigns, particularly in-person canvassing, significantly impacts participation in elections (*Bedolla and Michelson 2012, Green and Gerber 2015*).

Consistent with established scholarship, the survey results indicate that, among verified registered voters, youth who report being contacted by a candidate, political campaign, or other group voted in the June primary at strikingly higher rates than those who report that they were not contacted—73% of youth who voted in the June 2018 primary report that they were contacted compared to only 52% of youth who did not vote—a 21-point difference.

Reported rates of contact are highest among White voters (61%), and rates are lowest among Black voters (44%). A majority of Latino (54%) and Asian American (57%) voters report being contacted. Those who voted in the Primary also report higher rates of in-person contact (17% vs. 7%)—which research shows is typically the most effective means of mobilizing voter turnout (*Bedolla and Michelson 2012, Green and Gerber 2015*).

Incarcerated Youth Remain Engaged with the Political System

The survey results provide rare insight into the civic engagement and policy priorities of incarcerated youth and youth who have had contact with the criminal justice system, alongside other understudied population segments. While incarcerated youth report lower levels of civic engagement than do youth who have never had contact with the criminal justice system, contrary to dominant narratives, they participate in civic life in a number of ways. They are also attentive to the impact of public policy on their lives and communities.

Forty-six (46%) of youth who report that they have been arrested, held, or detained by police at any point in their lives (“system affiliated” youth)² say that they have volunteered in their community at some point this year, including thirty percent (30%) of youth who took the survey while in county jail or juvenile hall. Among system affiliated youth, nearly two in five (38%) report posting on social media about politics or a social issue, and more than one-third (36%) say they have boycotted or decided not to buy a product or support a company for political reasons.

System affiliated youth who are currently incarcerated show dramatically lower levels of engagement, however they are not without political agency or knowledge about the impact of politics and public policy on their lives and communities. When asked, in an open-ended question, their opinion about the most important problem that they would like state government to address, incarcerated youth identify racism in government, resistance to President Trump, ending police

¹ Based on voter turnout data from Political Data, Inc.

² Fifteen percent of the sample self-report that they have been “arrested, held, or detained by policy,” which includes the 6 % of the overall sample who completed the questionnaire while incarcerated.

violence, and criminal justice reform as their top priorities. Their responses suggest an attentiveness to the political context of the world around them and a clear demand for policy change. These are important markers of political agency. However, incarcerated youth express low levels of confidence that civic engagement will change the orientation of government.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

From June 25-July 23, 2018, EVITARUS completed a survey of 2,043 California youth ages 16-24. The survey was conducted among a random sample of 1,447 registered voters and a non-probability sample of 596 youth of color who make up of segments of the population that are not often captured by statewide public opinion surveys, including:

- Youth between the ages of 18-24 who are not registered to vote;
- Youth who are 16 and 17 years old;
- Incarcerated youth;
- Foreign-born youth; and
- LGBTQ youth.

The sampling plan was designed to capture both politically engaged youth and youth who are not currently engaged. The distribution of respondents by levels of engagement fell into several categories, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Subgroup	Number of Responses
Engaged	
Participant in Youth Civic Organization	70
Registered and Voted in June 2018 Primary	709
Registered but Did Not Vote in June 2018 Primary	737
Not Currently Engaged	
Younger than 18	201
18-24 Years Old, Not Registered	199
Incarcerated Youth	127

The sample of voters was drawn at random from the California Secretary of State’s file of registered voters (1,447 respondents), and included an oversample of Latino, African American, and Asian American voters, as well as voters from the Central Valley. Voters within the sample were invited by email to take the survey online. The Margin of Sampling Error (MOE) for the voter sample is $\pm 2.58\%$ at the 95% confidence level. To adjust for the higher rates of voter turnout among young registered voters with known email addresses, the overall results have been weighted

to actual rates of voter participation in the June 2018 primary election based on the vote history information available on the voter file.

The non-probability sample of youth of color was administered through several distribution channels. Unregistered youth of color, including the sample of 16 and 17-year-olds, were drawn from the MFour mobile-application panel, and were provided a monetary incentive to participate in the survey. In order to qualify to take the survey, respondents had to be either 16 or 17 years old (201 respondents) or between the ages of 18 and 24 and self-identify as not being registered to vote (199 respondents).

Incarcerated youth were drawn from participants in workshops conducted by The Beat Within, a youth advocacy organization focused on youth incarcerated in county jails and juvenile halls throughout the nine-county Bay Area. These respondents completed hard-copy questionnaires. In order to gather responses from youth within the networks of youth-focused civic engagement organizations, Power California distributed survey links to survey research partner organizations within their network. Participating organizations sent links to the online survey by email or posted a link to the survey on their organization's social media page.

Overall, 74% of survey respondents completed the survey online, 20% via mobile application, and 6% via hard-copy questionnaires. The full sample of 2,043 respondents was weighted based on data from the 2017 American Community Survey and California Department of Finance data to reflect the demographic and geographic distribution of youth between the ages of 16-24 by ethno-racial identity and region.

References

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