

2024 Youth Poll: Young Californians in the Central Valley

Power California (PoCA) and partners seek to mobilize young voters in their political campaigns in 2024. This geographic profile outlines the attitudes of Young Californians in the Central Valley, focusing on their perceptions and experiences with the housing crisis, their identities, and outlook heading into an election year.

Young Californians living in the Central Valley region are civic minded and engaged. They perceive voting, running for office, and volunteering as crucial forms of participation that can improve their communities. Residents in the Central Valley reported turning out to vote at higher rates in the 2020 election than residents in other regions. They are also optimistic about their future and believe in the American dream - that by working hard, one can achieve their dreams. Young Californians in the Central Valley perceive education, family and support networks, and their own hard work as crucial to achieving their life goals. Relative to Bay Area and LA residents, they are more individualistic and less likely to perceive non-profits as helpful. The effects of the housing crisis are not experienced uniformly in the Central Valley, which is likely due to geographic differences and urban-rural differences between cities like Fresno and Bakersfield versus smaller rural towns. The evidence in this research suggests that mobilization campaigns around housing should emphasize how responsible, hardworking people should have access to affordable housing. Central Valley residents are less likely to be Hustlers and more likely to identify as Caretakers.

- **40% identify as Caretakers because they are the main money maker or caretaker in their household.**
- **26% identify as Hustlers because they are working multiple jobs or side gigs.**

TOP ISSUES AND THE HOUSING CRISIS

Young Californians living in the Central Valley want the government to address issues related to housing.

- **36% want the government to address homelessness.**
- **32% want the government to address affordable housing.**

Young Californians in the Central Valley attribute responsibility for the housing crisis to low wages (46%), elected officials (33%), corporate landlords (28%), and housing shortages (28%). When asked to choose the primary factor responsible, 27% blamed low wages and 19% blamed elected officials. Young Californians in the Central Valley were the most likely to blame low wages, especially compared to people in LA and residents who live outside the Central Valley, LA, and Bay Area.

The housing crisis has had severe consequences for Young Californians in the Central Valley, who are economically insecure and facing many barriers to finding housing.

- **45% reported that high rents were a housing barrier.**
- **36% reported that they are living paycheck-to-paycheck.**

- **34% do not have money for a down payment.**

Other economic barriers and insecurity are affecting the lives of Young Californians in the Central Valley in numerous ways, suggesting economic insecurity is widespread but not uniform in its effects on peoples' lives.

- **28% have taken a second job or side hustle.**
- **21% have moved back in with family.**
- **21% have postponed medical and/or dental care.**
- **20% have had to choose between paying rent and bills.**

Young Californians in the Central Valley are less likely to move for better work or job opportunities compared to residents in major metropolitan areas. 11% reported moving for better pay or work opportunities compared to 26% in LA. The 23% who moved closer to work or a new job is significantly lower than 54% of LA residents and slightly lower than residents in the Bay Area (29%).

- **26% could no longer afford their rent or lease cost.**
- **24% moved due to a conflict with a landlord or property management.**
- **6% moved due to an eviction, the highest rate among geographic regions in the state.**

SOLUTIONS TO THE HOUSING CRISIS

Central Valley residents' experiences with the housing crisis have influenced their policy attitudes.

- **86% support state and local laws making housing affordable and protecting those at risk.**
- **82% support rent control laws.**

In short, Young Californians in the Central Valley perceive government action as the solution to the crisis.

COMMUNITY, RACIAL, AND POLITICAL IDENTITIES

This research shows that young Californians are motivated by issues, not partisanship. Partisanship among Young Californians in the Central Valley varies more than in other regions. 29% of Central Valley residents in PoCA's research were registered with the Democratic Party, compared to 39% who were registered under the "decline to state/no party preference" (DTS) label. 24% are Republican. The Central Valley stands out as the region with the lowest rates of Democratic Party registration and the highest rate of Republican registration. We do not anticipate that this would undermine an issue-based campaign around the housing crisis, but advocacy campaigns should consider this variation when designing geographically targeted campaigns.

Many young Californians have role-based identities that are salient. Among Central Valley residents, 40% described themselves as Caretakers and 26% describe themselves as Hustlers. These identities are important to people's self-perceptions.

- **32% perceive their role identity as important to who they are.**
- **21% perceive their racial and ethnic identity as important to who they are.**
- **20% perceive their American identity as important to who they are.**

They are also politically important. 83% rated their identity as somewhat or very important to their politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research shows that Young Californians in the Central Valley are a mobilizable constituency around housing issues. Like most Californians, they have been impacted by the housing crisis and are experiencing economic insecurity. Central Valley residents were more likely to blame low wages and elected officials. Campaigns should use positive messaging that taps into people's optimism while also making salient their lived experiences. The importance of role-based, racial, and American identities among Young Californians in the Central Valley offers a promising set of themes to use for messaging. In addition, because Young Californians in the Central Valley are more individualistic, messaging should emphasize themes of personal responsibility and that "people who work hard should have access to affordable housing." The partisan variation in this region implores that advocacy efforts include message testing to identify how Young Californians in the Central Valley will respond to different frames around housing issues and how to mobilize them in this region.