

Highlights:

- Only 8.2% of eligible California youth turned out to vote in the November 2014 general election.
- Youth were only 3.9% of all voters in this election.
- A total of 36% of California youth registered No Party Preference (NPP) – nearly the same percentage as those who registered Democratic.
- For the first time in a statewide election, the percentage of California youth who registered Republican fell below 20%.
- Over the next 20 years, the youth share of the California vote is projected to steadily decrease.
- Increasing low youth voter turnout is a key step to increasing future turnout for California, as a whole.

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California's New Political Realities: The Impact of the Youth Vote on Our Electoral Landscape

In the November 2014 general elections, voter turnout was abysmal across the nation, producing the lowest U.S. turnout rates in decades.

California's previous record for low turnout was broken by nearly a half dozen percentage points. Voter turnout is typically lower in mid-term elections, but fall 2014 marked a major falloff from the state's general election turnout in 2012, resulting in even less representation of voters.¹

In California, participation of youth (age 18-24) was dramatically lower in 2014, starting with a nearly non-existent showing in the June 2014 primary, followed by a poor showing in November. Typically, mid-term elections bring out an electorate that is older, more educated, higher-income, and less racially and ethnically diverse than the electorate in presidential elections. Low voter turnout also usually means an even less

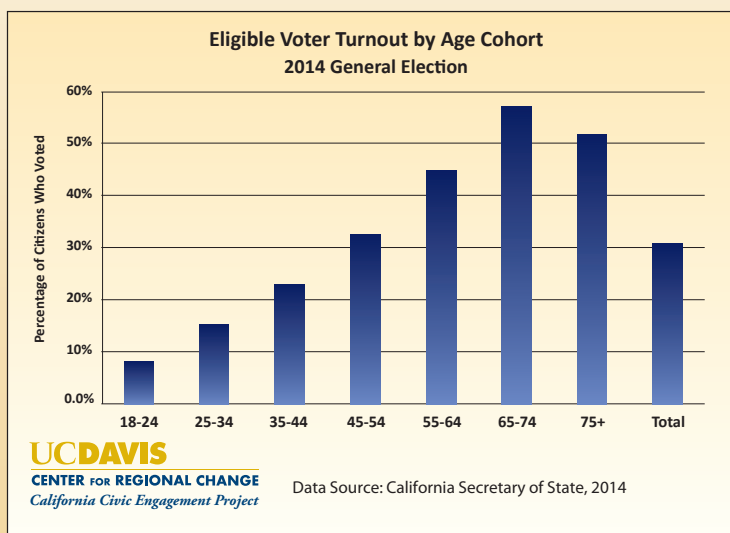
diverse electorate, which usually means fewer young voters.²

In this brief, we examine youth electoral participation in the November 2014 general election and explore the impact of the youth vote on the current and future electoral landscape of California.

Using the California Civic Engagement Project's analysis of the California Secretary of State's voter records, we address the following research questions:³

1. How did the November 2014 youth vote differ from that of the rest of the electorate?
2. How will youth voting impact the state's electoral landscape in the future?
3. What can be done to improve youth voter turnout in California and elsewhere?

1. How did the November 2014 youth vote differ from that of the rest of the electorate?



Only 30.9% of California's eligible voters (citizens over age 18) turned out to vote in the November 2014 election. The previous record low for eligible voter turnout in a general election, 36.1%, was set in 2002.

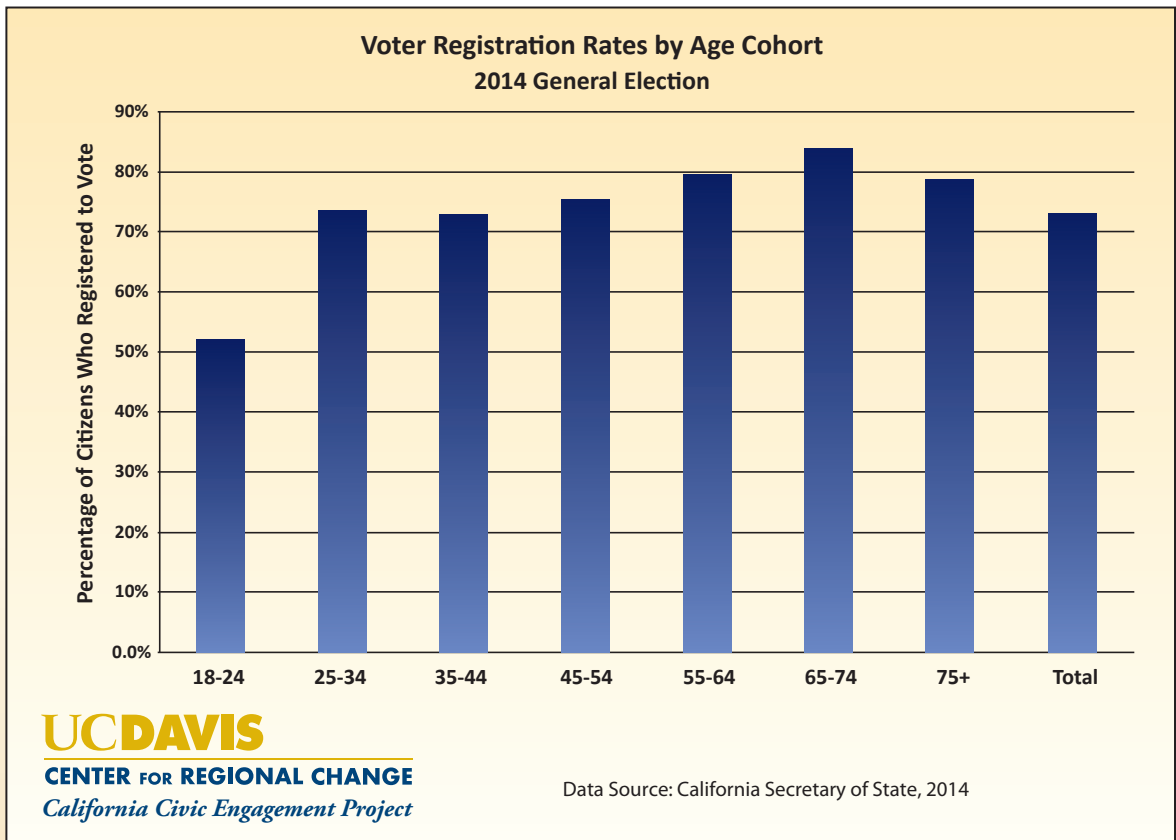
This record-low eligible voter turnout followed a relatively strong showing in 2010. That year's general election saw 43.7% of eligible voters cast a ballot, the highest eligible voter turnout since 1994.

Youth turnout in California was the lowest for all age groups in the November 2014 election. Only 8.2% of California's eligible youth voted, as compared to 18.5% in the 2010 general election. This translated into only 285,000 of 3.5 million eligible youth who cast a ballot.

Due to low voter turnout, youth were once again underrepresented among general election voters in 2014. Youth made up only 3.9% of those who voted in November, but were 14.5% of the eligible voting population. In the same election, voters aged 55 and older were overrepresented compared to their proportion of eligible voters. Voters aged 65-74 (the age group most overrepresented among voters) constituted 19.4% of all voters in the November general election, but only 10.4% of all those eligible to vote.

County Variation

Every county in California experienced lower turnout in the 2014 midterm general election than in the 2010 general election, although some counties did not set new records. Disparities in eligible voter turnout by age were present across all counties. Youth had the lowest turnout in the San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles and North State regions. These are areas where youth also experience some of the poorest outcomes in their economic and social well-being anywhere in the state (as measured by high school drop-out rates, unemployment, family income levels).⁴



For the 2014 midterm general election, youth were registered to vote at the lowest rate of any age group, at 52%, compared to above 70% for all other age groups. The number of youth registered to vote in 2010 and 2014 was about the same. The big difference lay in who went to the polls. The absolute number of youth who actually voted dropped an astonishing 50% in four years.

Youth registered voter turnout in the 2014 general election was 15.8% compared with 34.1% in 2010's general election - a decline of 18 percentage points. In the general election of 2010, registered voter turnout for all ages was 59.6%, declining to 42% in 2014. This is a record low for registered voter turnout in a statewide California general election.

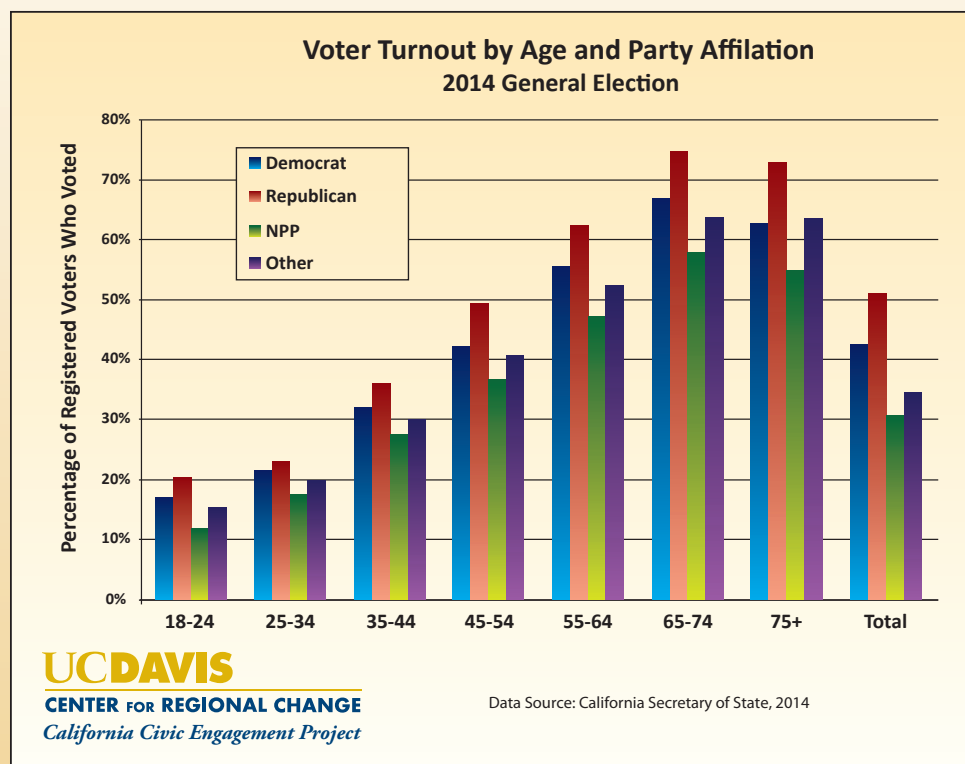
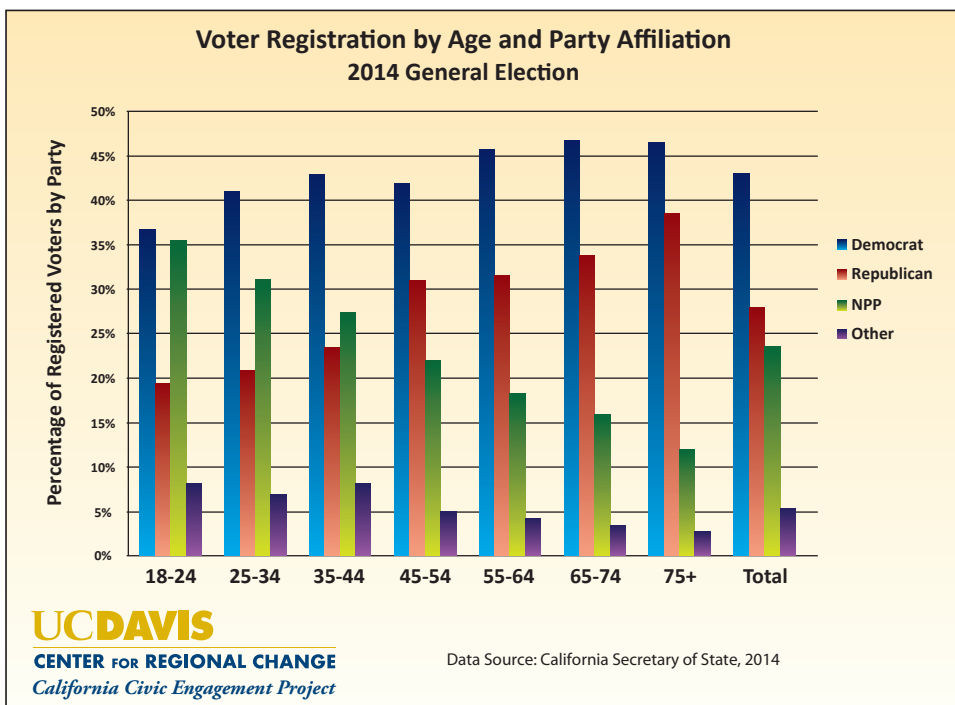
Estimating voter turnout based on the number of registered voters can conceal the degree of underrepresentation of youth among voters. To get a clear picture of youth electoral participation, it is important to look at how many people voted of all those eligible, and not just of how many registered.

Declining Youth Party Registration

For the November 2014 election, 43.1% of registered voters registered Democratic, 28% Republican and 23.6% as No Party Preference (NPP).⁵ There was significant variation in party affiliation by age. Younger registrants' identification with the state's two major parties declined, with large numbers registering as NPP. A total of 36.7% of youth registered as Democrats, closely followed by 35.6% who registered NPP. This made 18-24 year-olds the only age group with less than a 40% Democratic affiliation. The figure was even lower for Republicans, with 19.4% youth registering for the GOP, the lowest percentage for all age groups.

This has potentially sweeping implications for the future of the California political landscape.

Youth comprise a large percentage of new registrants. Twenty-five percent of the people who registered to vote since the 2012 general election are youth.⁶ If current trends continue, more newly registered young voters will spell declining percentages of both registered Democrats and Republicans. In short, youth registrants are a key factor in the decline in identification with the state's two major parties, and the growth of NPP registration in the state.



Lower Turnout Rates of Voters Registered as NPP

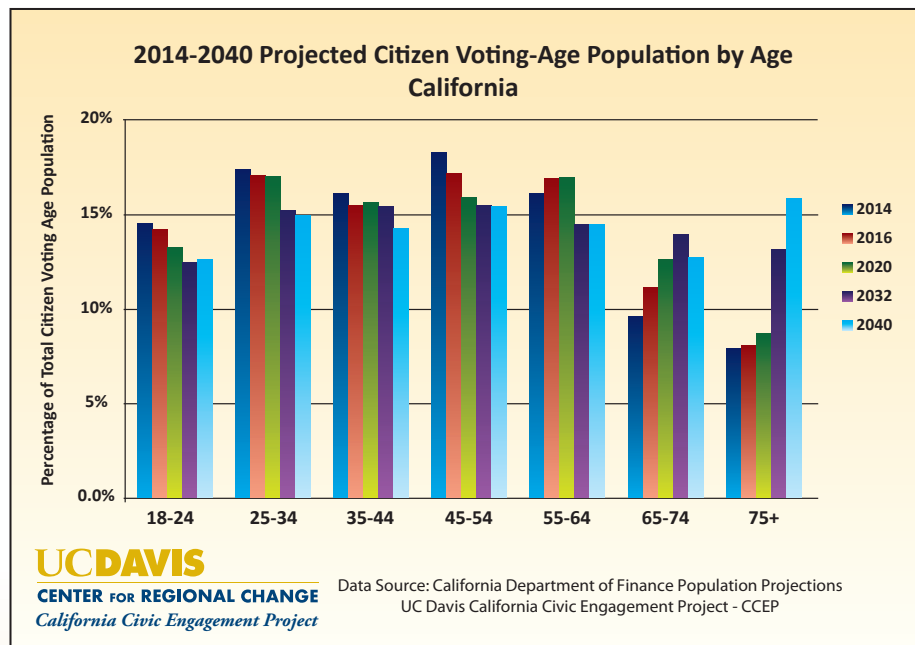
In the November 2014 general election, the turnout of registered Republicans was 51.2%, while Democratic turnout was 42.8%. Those registered as No Party Preference (NPP) turned out at only 30.8%, and turnout for those registered as Other (i.e., those registered with other, smaller parties) was 34.7%. Voters registered as Republican had the highest turnout in every age group.

Youth turnout rates, by party affiliation, were far lower than the party turnout of the general electorate. Youth Republican turnout was 20.4%, Democratic was 17.1% and NPP was 11.9%. Combined youth turnout for Other parties was 15.3%. This lower turnout for youth NPP registrants of concern considering the high percentage of youth (35.6%) who registered as NPP in the 2014 general election.

Considering the high percentage of youth (35.6%) who registered as NPP in the 2014 general election, further research needs to be conducted to identify the impact of increased NPP registration on overall youth turnout rates.

Note: For a complete discussion of youth registration and voter turnout in the 2012 General Election, see CCEP Policy Brief Issue Five, California's 2012 Youth Voter Turnout: Disparate Growth and Remaining Challenges.

2. What can be done to improve youth voter turnout in California and elsewhere?



Potential Youth Impact on 2016 Elections

Future population shifts will be a factor in the strength of California's youth vote. The youth proportion of the state's citizen voting-age population (as well as the state's total population) is projected to decline steadily over the next 18 years – from 14.5% in 2014 to 12.5% by 2032. The youth proportion of the state's citizen voting-age population is not projected to increase again until after 2032.

The youth population will also experience a decline in absolute numbers until about 2020. Despite this decline, from 2014 till about 2020, youth are projected to continue to constitute a larger share of the eligible voter population than that of 65-74 year-olds.

Decline in the youth citizen voting-age population will occur for each of the largest racial and ethnic groups in California. However, Latinos will experience the greatest decline in the youth proportion of their citizen voting-age population, from 24% in 2014 to 15.8% by 2040.⁷

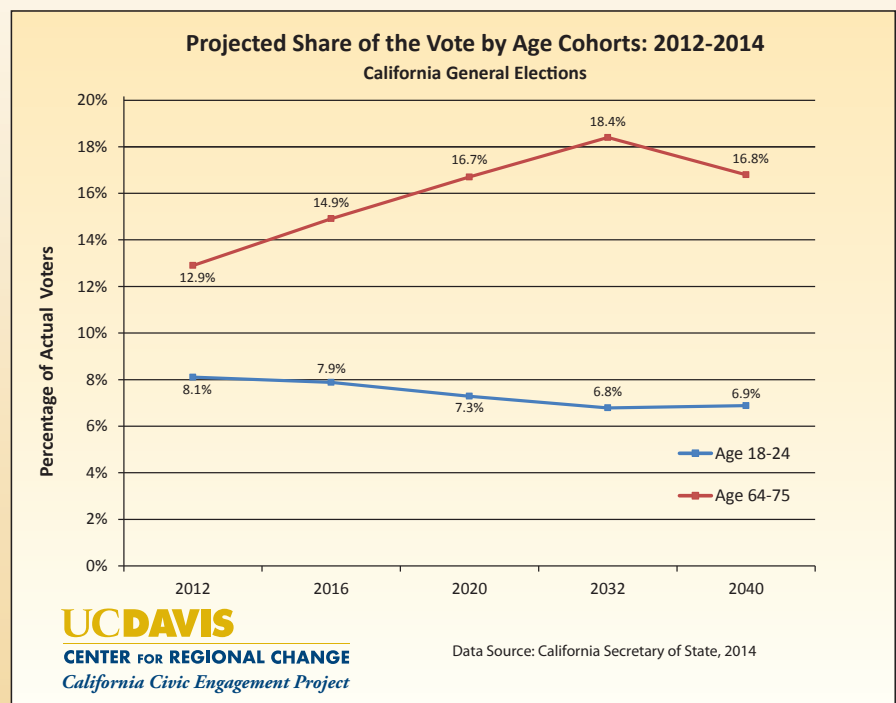
A decline in the youth share of the eligible voting population in California will bring changes in the composition of the state's youth vote.

To assess the impact of declining population proportions on California's youth vote, the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) projects the change in the composition of California's youth voters through the presidential election of 2040. For ease of discussion, the CCEP projects the youth vote utilizing the 2012 general election eligible turnout rate for youth (a general election to general election comparison).⁸

Assuming youth maintain their 2012 eligible turnout rate (30.2%) constant through the 2040 general election, we project a steady decrease in the youth share of California's vote, from 8.1% in 2012 to 6.9% in 2040. In contrast, 65-74 year-olds are projected to increase their share of the state's vote, from 12.9% in 2012 to 16.8% in 2040, assuming their 2012 turnout rate (73%) holds constant. Until 2032, these two age groups will be moving in opposite directions with regard to vote share.

Due to their much lower eligible voter turnout rates compared to those of older age groups, youth are projected to continue to be underrepresented in the state's vote share through 2040. If youth eligible turnout rates are lower in future elections, then youth will experience even greater underrepresentation.

Note: For a discussion of projected youth eligible voter turnout in midterm elections through 2038, see CCEP Policy Brief Issue Eight, California's 2014 Youth Voter Turnout: Decline and Future Opportunities

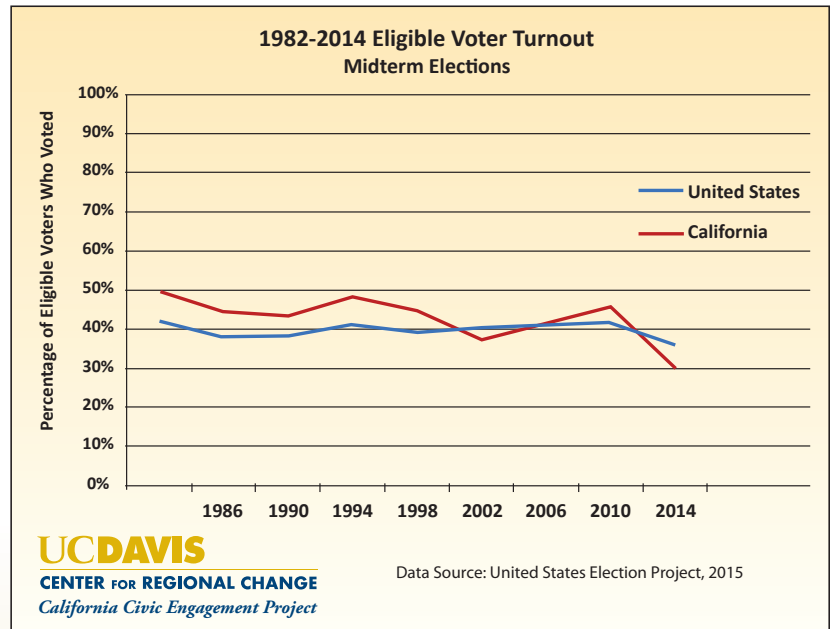


3. What can be done to increase California's youth voter turnout?

Understanding the historical context of today's voter turnout in California can aid us when considering how to address low youth turnout in the state.

Historical Context: California Turnout Lower than U.S. Turnout

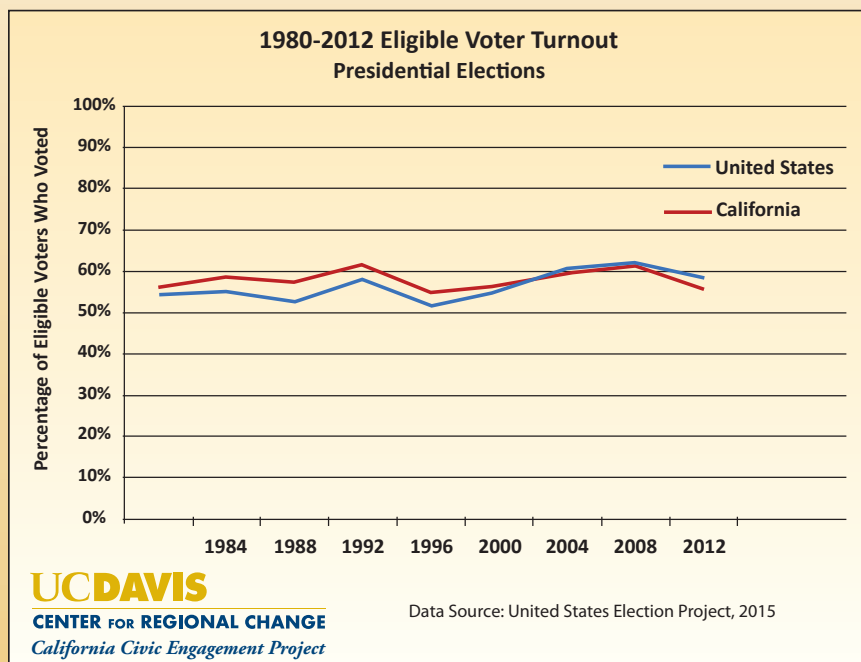
Historically, California eligible voter turnout was higher than that of the U.S. as a whole in both midterm and presidential elections. When examining historical data from the United States Elections Project, we can see that, beginning in 2002, California fell below the U.S. in turnout of eligible voters (with the exception of the 2010 midterm election). By 2014, California ranked in the bottom 20% of U.S. states with regard to eligible voter turnout, with the state's youth voter turnout likely among the lowest in the nation. This electoral underperformance of California has been occurring, at varying levels, throughout most of the last decade.⁹



The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University has found that turnout of 18-29 year-olds has declined in midterms since 1982 for both California and the U.S. Turnout in presidential elections for this group has also declined in the U.S. while fluctuating greatly in California during the same time period.¹⁰

The Challenge of Midterm Elections for Youth

Midterm election turnout in California and the U.S. as a whole has remained lower than presidential election turnout. Non-presidential elections typically invite less media attention and voter outreach, contributing to low turnout. Low turnout in midterm elections disadvantages underrepresented groups in the electorate, i.e., those groups that are ordinarily less likely to vote. Youth in particular experience even lower turnout in midterm elections than in presidential elections, and an even larger gap between their turnout and the turnout of older age groups. In other words, youth are even less represented in their share of voters in midterm elections compared to presidential elections.



Since 2000, turnout in presidential elections has been on the rise for both California and the U.S., while California midterm election turnout has seen a steady decline over the last three decades. It appears the difference in turnout in presidential versus midterm elections may be widening more in California than in the rest of the nation. If this trend continues, then the state will see election cycles that will mobilize differing sets of voter interests from one election cycle to the next. This may also produce greater partisan swings (in elected representatives) than might be expected, given the large proportion of registered Democrats in the state. This also means that youth would see an even greater variation in the extent of their electoral participation from election cycle to election cycle, with youth voting becoming extremely low in midterm cycles, as seen in the 2014 election.

Why is Turnout so Low for Youth?

U.S. youth are reporting high levels of dissatisfaction and distrust in our political system. The Harvard Institute for Politics recently reported that 18-29 year-olds are experiencing a five-year low in their trust in public institutions, while their cynicism about the political process has never been higher. Perhaps not surprisingly, the same study reports, young people's enthusiasm for voting continues to decline.¹¹

However, negative attitudes toward the political process are not the only or even the main reason why young people don't vote. According to The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, in the 2014 general election, a third of young registered voters reported that they did not vote because schedule conflicts prevented them from going to the polls, a problem reported by 25.2% of voters above the age of 30. Today, young people are increasingly mobile and/or work in jobs that provide less flexibility for voting. Another 17.2 % did not vote because they were not interested and/or felt that their vote would not count. Finally, 10.2%, said they were out of town/ away from home at election time, or forgot to vote.¹²

Mobilization is critical to generating voter participation. This is particularly true for youth. Outreach and contact can help overcome feelings of dissatisfaction and alienation, and encourage young people to set aside time to vote. Youth who are contacted by an organization or a campaign are more likely to vote.¹³ Despite this fact, many youth, including even registered youth voters, are often left off contact lists. Because of their historically low voter turnout, youth are often ignored or given only token attention by campaigns and political parties, who often see them as an ineffective investment. This lack of contact then helps ensure youth turnout in low numbers.

It is important to note that many young people are not apathetic about the issues of the day, especially issues that directly impact their communities. Many youth are more likely to volunteer than older Americans. Yet this civic awareness and interest is not being translated into an interest in the ballot box. Fewer youth than in the past see voting as a way to have a voice and make an impact.¹⁴

What Can Be Done About Low Youth Turnout?

Electoral System

Restrictive registration and voting requirements make it harder for youth to vote. Young people need to receive accurate and clear information on when and how to register. The structure of California's current voter registration system continues to be a challenge for our state's youth, as well as other groups unfamiliar with the registration and voting process. Registration calls on young registrants to navigate the system using deadlines and ID requirements. Removing barriers to youth registration in California's voter registration system is a critical step to increasing youth involvement in the state's political arena.¹⁵ If these barriers remain, the system will likely continue to generate a low percentage of youth voters, who do not fully represent the actual number of youth in the state's citizen population.

Preregistration of youth can increase turnout among young voters, particularly those who are non-white and low-income. California is already one of a handful of states that does allow pre-registration for 17 year-olds, though this remains a little-known and under-utilized option.¹⁶ Furthermore, research shows that school involvement in preregistration can be quite effective. Nationally, existing preregistration programs have been most successful when voter registration was included in school activities, providing students with welcome guidance on the voting process.¹⁷

Outreach

Increasing youth electoral participation requires more than just voter registration. Follow up outreach is often critically needed to ensure that young, registered voters will actually cast ballots. Contact by peers can be particularly powerful in getting youth interested and mobilized, especially for those who experience greater barriers to participation, such as youth of color and youth from low-income families. California's county election offices also play a key role in mobilizing youth. California's county election offices also play a key role in mobilizing youth. Offices conduct outreach directly to high schools and college campuses, but the frequency and reach of these efforts is limited due to resources. Additional funding to expand these efforts would help connect more youth to the electoral process.

The Impact of Schools

High schools can be key partners in educating youth about the civic process and helping them become active participants in our electoral system. High school youth who learn why voting is relevant to their lives, and learn how to actually register and vote, are more likely to cast ballots when they turn 18.¹⁸ Connecting with youth at high schools also means reaching a wide demographic representation of youth.

Voter registration outreach programs for high school students were established by California Elections Code §2131 and the Help America Vote Act of 2002. However, the resources dedicated to registration outreach vary greatly by county, and many county election offices can offer only limited assistance.

Two bills recently signed into law provide avenues through which communities and advocates can work with schools to increase youth voter participation:

- Assembly Bill 700 (2013) requires the Instructional Quality Commission to ensure that voter education information is included in the American Government and Civics curriculum in all California high schools. This bill was developed to increase civic participation and education among our youth.
- Assembly Bill 1817 (2014) encourages voter participation among high school students, allowing students to register or preregister qualified classmates on high school campuses to vote in upcoming elections. This bill amends current Education Code §49040, which established “High School Voter Education Weeks” during the last two weeks in April and September of a school year.

Other forms of high school civic education are also linked to voter participation and political awareness. Young people who recall high-quality civic education experiences in school are more likely to vote, form political opinions, grasp campaign issues, and know general facts about the U.S. political system.¹⁹

Such civic education opportunities range from social studies classes, to student elections, to project-based learning, to developing media literacy, and discussing current events. Unfortunately, many youth do not have these civic education opportunities. Research has shown that students in schools in high-income communities and with few youth of color are more likely to have these opportunities. Youth who are less likely to vote (including low-income youth and youth of color) tend to have fewer civic opportunities in their schools and communities.²⁰

There is an opportunity now in California to revitalize civic education. Currently, California is undergoing significant reforms in curriculum standards and school funding formulas (Common Core Standards and Local Control Funding Formula). A recent report by the California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning put forth recommendations on how to improve the civic learning of all children and youth in the state. Recommended actions include:

- Revise the California History-Social Science Content Standards and accompanying curriculum frameworks to incorporate an emphasis on civic learning, starting in kindergarten.
- Integrate civic learning into state assessment and accountability standards for students, schools and districts.
- Improve professional learning experiences for teachers and administrators to help them implement civic learning in schools.
- Provide incentives for local school districts to fund civic learning in Local Control Accountability Plans under the new LCFF.²¹

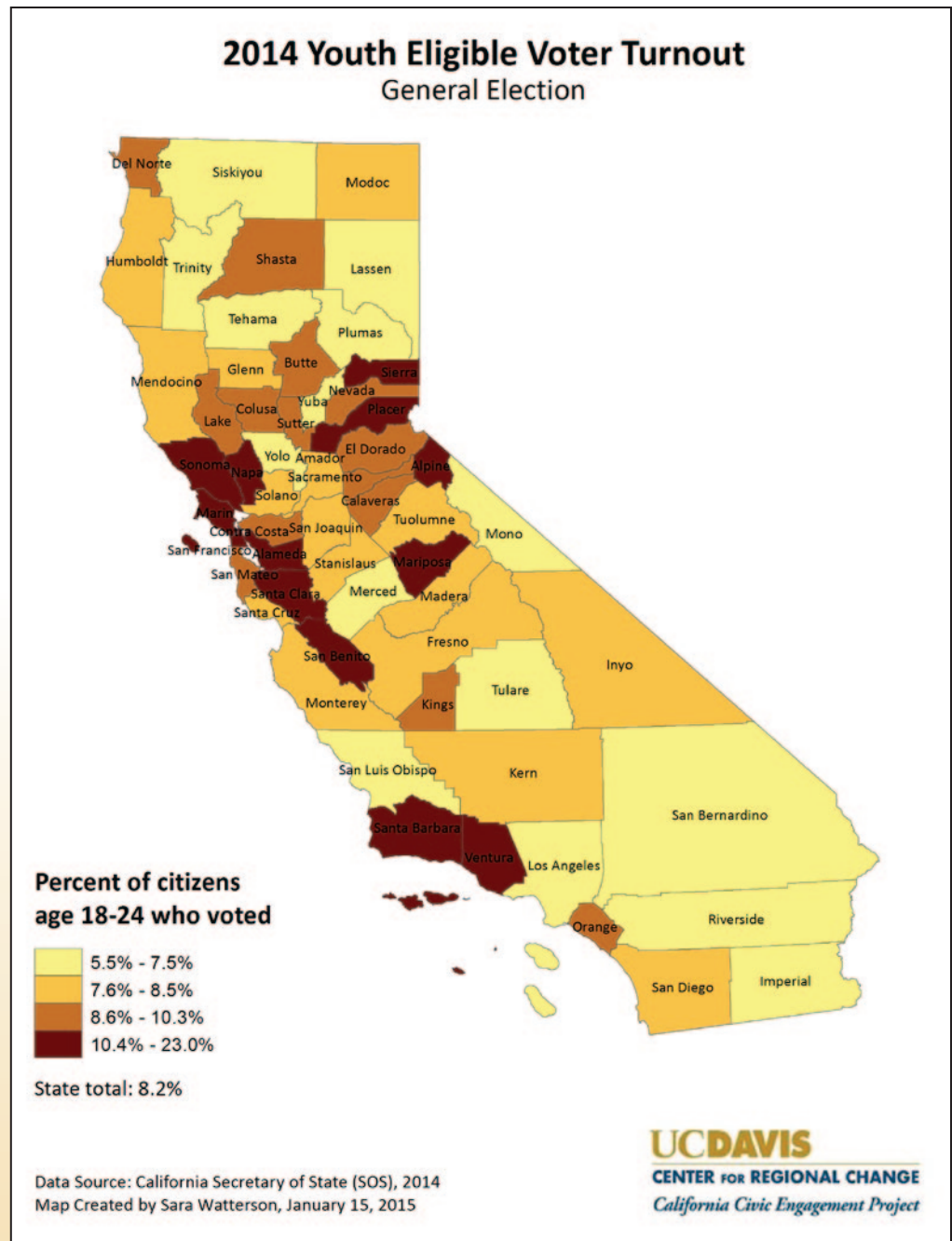
New Approaches

The state of voter turnout in California and the nation suggests that additional approaches to engaging voters need to be explored if we are to significantly improve participation. Individuals and communities need to be connected to civic and political structures and see them as relevant to their daily lives. This is particularly important for youth. As the way we communicate and share information changes, we should examine how our civic institutions should themselves be modified to better connect with the young people they are charged with serving. The implementation of online voter registration in California has already made registration more accessible for youth and other age groups. More reforms and creative pathways are needed. Low turnout rates tell us that our electoral system, in its current form, is not serving our democracy well.

Why Does Youth Voting Matter?

Young people are a major subset of the electorate and their voices matter. In California, 3.5 million youth (age 18-24) are eligible to vote, but the overwhelming majority do not do so. Youth currently make up 14.5% of California's eligible voting population and, in many communities in the state, they make up an even higher proportion of the eligible population. This is a huge number of non-voters who could play a significant role in our democratic system. This role could be greater than the role currently played by voters over 65.

Bringing youth into the electorate does not merely benefit youth. Voting is habit-forming. When young people learn about the voting process and cast their ballots, they are more likely to participate in the electoral process as they grow older. If individuals are mobilized to cast a ballot when they are young, they are more likely to keep heading there later in life. Getting young people to vote early is key to creating a new generation of voters that will later populate older voting age groups. As seen in the November 2014 election, low turnout is a problem for all ages. Higher turnout among California's youth means higher turnout among the entire electorate down the road. Increasing youth turnout is therefore critical to boosting California's low turnout overall.



Upcoming Brief:
Examining civic opportunities for youth in our communities

NOTES

- ¹ See the California Secretary of State's Office website for previous election data: <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/prior-elections/>
- ² See CCEP Policy Brief Issue Eight, California's 2014 Youth Voter Turnout: Decline and Future Opportunities. <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/ccep/ucdavisyouthvotebrief8>
- ³ Voter records were acquired from the California Secretary of State's Office and aggregated to the county and state level. These data are the actual registration records and not representative samples.
- ⁴ Regions are defined as follows, and include the following counties. 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.
- ⁵ No Party Preference (NPP) includes all registrants identified in the California Secretary of State's registration records as having declined to state a party preference, or having no party preference. Other includes all registrants identified in the California Secretary of State's registration records as having any of the following party affiliations: American Independent Party, American Elect Party, Green Party, Libertarian Party, Peace and Freedom Party and Other.
- ⁶ See CCEP Policy Brief Issue Eight, California's 2014 Youth Voter Turnout: Decline and Future Opportunities. <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ourwork/projects/ccep/ucdavisyouthvotebrief8>
- ⁷ The CVAP analysis is based on straight line citizen voting age population (CVAP) projections developed by the California Department of Finance for the California Civic Engagement Project. If immigration rates change beyond what is currently expected, these assumptions may over or understate population growth. If there are any significant changes in immigration, birth, or death rates, projections will need to be adjusted accordingly. For more information on the CVAP projections, see the CCEP website: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ccep>. For more information on the base population projections, please consult: http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/reports/projections/P-1/documents/Projections_Methodology_2013.pdf.
- ⁸ CCEP youth voter projections utilized straight line CVAP projections developed by the California Department of Finance for the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP). Baseline eligible voter turnout rates were generated by CCEP analysis of California county voter registration data. These projections differ somewhat from the presidential election projections we published in January 2014. This is due to the different data source we use in this study.
- ⁹ Michael P. McDonald. 2015. United States Elections Project. Voter Turnout: National Rates, date accessed January 10, 2014. <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/voter-turnout-data>
- ¹⁰ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Quick Facts about Young Voters in California See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/maps/elections/PDF/CA.pdf>
- ¹¹ Institute of Politics, Harvard University: Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes toward Politics and Public Service: 25th Edition. 2014. See: http://www.iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files_new/Harvard_ExecSummarySpring2014.pdf
- ¹² Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Why (Some) Registered Youth Don't Vote. See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/2014-midterms-why-some-registered-youth-dont-vote/> 12 Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Youth Voting.
- ¹³ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Youth Voting See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/> See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/>
- ¹⁴ The Associated Press Poll: Young Generation No Slouches at Volunteering. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2014/12/29/us/politics/ap-us-ap-poll-young-volunteers.html>
- ¹⁵ For a discussion of barriers to voter registration within California's voter registration system, see: "Future of California Elections," James Irvine Foundation (2012). http://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/ccrec_policy_brief_1_final_apr2012_color_0.pdf
- ¹⁶ Project Vote Legislative Brief: Expanding the Youth Electorate through Preregistration, March 2010. See: http://www.whatkidscando.org/youth_on_the_trail_2012/pdf/2010%20Legislative%20Brief%20-%20Preregistration.pdf.
- ¹⁸ Kahne, J. and Sporte, S. (2008). Developing Citizens: The Impact of Civic Learning Opportunities on Students' Commitment to Civic Participation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(3), 738-766.
- ¹⁹ Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: High School Civic Education Linked to Voting Participation and Political Knowledge, No Effect on Partisanship or Candidate Selection. See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/high-school-civic-educationlinked-to-voting-participation-and-political-knowledge-no-effect-on-partisanship-or-candidate-selection/>
- ²⁰ Joseph Kahne and Ellen Middaugh. 2008. Democracy for Some: The Civic Opportunity Gap in High School, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement Working Paper 59. See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP59Kahne.pdf>
- ²¹ The California Task Force on K-12 Civic Learning: Revitalizing K-12 Civic Learning in California: A Blueprint For Action, 2014, See: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/documents/cltfinalreport.pdf> 11. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Voter Registration among Young People in 2008, November. See: <http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2012-Exit-Poll-by-Education-Final.pdf>

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UC DAVIS

CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE
California Civic Engagement Project

About the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP):

In 2011, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change established the California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP) to inform the public dialogue on representative governance in California. The CCEP is working to improve the quality and quantity of publicly available civic engagement data by collecting and curating data from a broad range of sources for public access and use. The CCEP is engaging in pioneering research to identify disparities in civic participation across place and population. It is well positioned to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in California to reduce disparities in state and regional patterns of well-being and opportunity. Key audiences include public officials, advocacy groups, political researchers and communities themselves. To learn about the CCEP's national and state advisory committee, or review the extensive coverage of the CCEP's work in California's media, visit our website at: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ccep>

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For more information about this research study and the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, CCEP Director, at 530-665-3010 or msromero@ucdavis.edu. Visit our website at: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/ccep>