

## CENTER FOR REGIONAL CHANGE

## The California Civic Engagement Project

## CALIFORNIA'S 2012 ELECTORATE: THE IMPACT OF YOUTH AND ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION

The November election results have left media and political analysts with key questions in an attempt to assess the current state and influence of California's changing electorate.

- How did the youth vote differ politically from the rest of the electorate?
- What impact did online voter registration have on the make-up of the state's registered electorate?
- What is the potential impact from the growth of the youth electorate on the *future* political landscape in California?

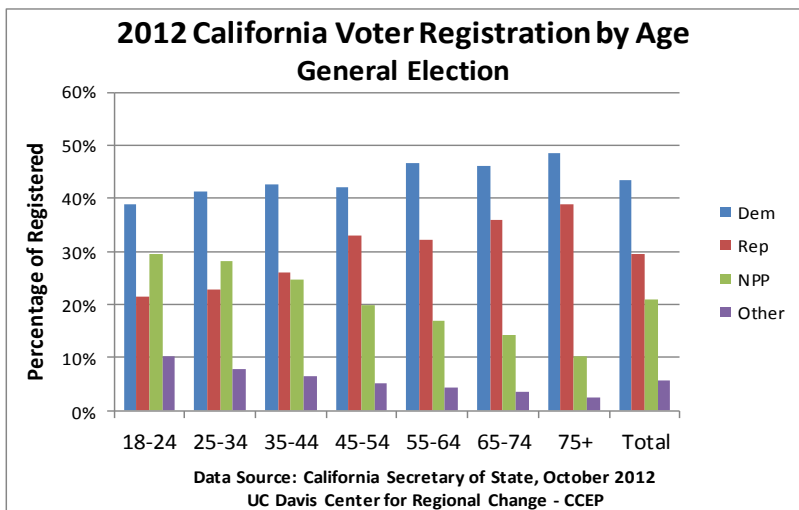
To address these questions, the **California Civic Engagement Project** examined the state's voter registration rates for the 2012 general election. Utilizing actual voter registration records, we identify final 2012 voter registration by age and party.<sup>1</sup>

**In This Brief:**

Boosted by online registration, the youth electorate in California grew significantly for the November 2012 election, dramatically outpacing growth in the state's general registration and driving the decline in major party registration.

Youth comprised 30% of all online registrants and variation in party affiliation was greater online than in other registration type.

The prevalence of youth in online registration may provide another pathway to increasing their influence on the political make-up of the electorate.

**How did the youth vote differ politically from the rest of the 2012 electorate?**

- Youth are driving the general electorate's decline in major party registration.
- Youth percent of the electorate grew to 11.1% over the 2008 November election.
- Youth registration increased 13.9% over the 2008 November election.

The 2012 statewide general registration rate for eligible voters reached 76.7%, an increase of 2.1% over 2008.<sup>2</sup> Voter registration for the 2012 November election was 43.5% Democratic and 29.6% Republican. This continues a decline in both Republican and Democratic party registration over the past two decades.<sup>3</sup>

There is significant variation in party affiliation by age. The age gap in party identification widens significantly for registrants below age 45. 35-44 year-olds hold a 16.6 percentage point registration gap between Democratic and Republican parties. There is an 18.6 percentage point gap for ages 25-34 and a 17.3 percentage point gap for 18-24 year-olds.

Additionally, younger registrants are identifying less with each of the state's two major parties, registering as No Party Preference (NPP) in large numbers.<sup>4</sup> At 38.5% Democratic, 18-24 year-olds are the only age cohort below 40% Democrat. 18-24 and 25-34 year-olds hold significantly higher NPP registration than Republican registration— at 29.6% and 28.1%, respectively. Youth hold nearly double the Other Party registrants compared to the general registered population.<sup>5</sup>

Growth in the youth registered electorate over the last decade continued for the 2012 general election.<sup>6</sup> Absolute numbers of registered youth have increased 60% (746,542 youth registrants) since the November 2002 general election. **The youth percent of the 2012 electorate grew to 11.1% (from 10.1% in the November 2008 general election). There are now two million youth registrants in the state, an increase of 13.9% over the 2008 November election (244,049 more youth registrants — a 27% increase over 2010).** These increases have also outpaced growth in the state's overall youth population. Absolute general registration numbers increased only 4% over 2008 - **meaning the state's registration gap (between youth and the general population) is narrowing.**

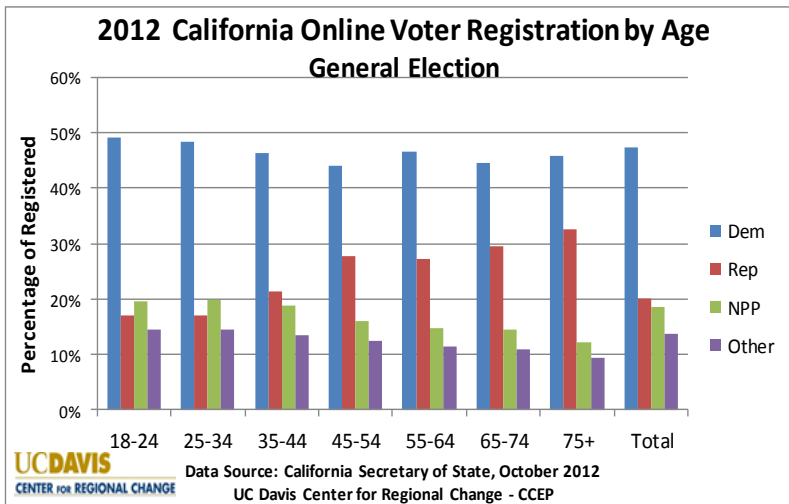
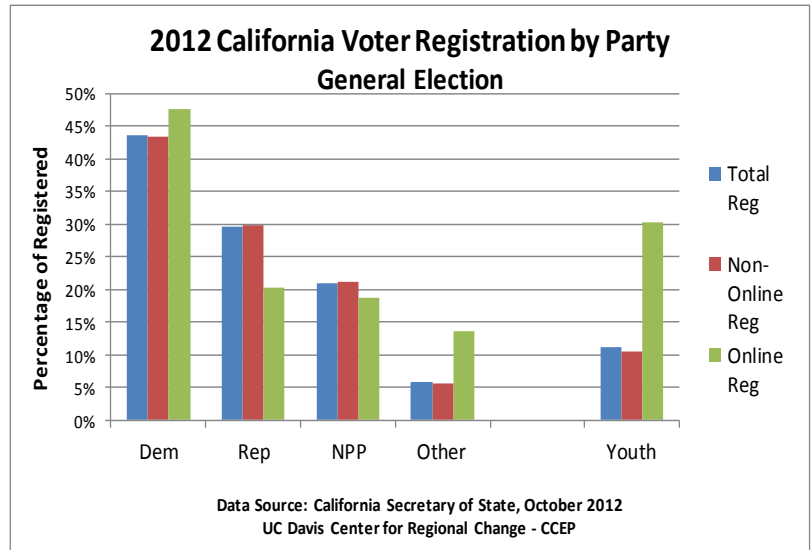
*The rising youth electorate in California may not mean future growth in Democratic party registration rolls. If current trends continue, a younger electorate will mean even smaller percentages of both registered Democrats and Republicans—an accelerated decline in identification with the state’s two major parties.*

**WHAT IMPACT DID ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION HAVE ON THE MAKE-UP OF THE STATE’S REGISTERED ELECTORATE?**

- Youth comprised 30% of online registrants.
- Online registration contributing significantly to an increase in 2012 youth registrants and modestly to overall increases in general registration rates.

General registration had already been trending an increase of more than 2 percent throughout 2012 (comparing Cal SOS reports of registration throughout 2008). While the addition of online registration added 510,285 new registrants, it appears to have only modestly boosted total voter registration for the general electorate in the November (in a month of existence).<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the general electorate, **online registration made up 7.7% of all youth registration and significantly contributed to the growth in the youth electorate.** Without online registration, the youth percent of the electorate would have been 10.5% (only .4 percentage points higher than 2008). Of the 244,049 new youth registrants (net over 2008) for the November 2012 election, 154,054 registered online—63%. Looking only at those registrants that registered after online registration was made available (Sept 19th), 49.8% of general registrants and 49.5% of youth registrants registered via this method—**meaning that online became the dominant method of registration (versus all non-online methods) for Californians, once implemented.**



**YOUTH DRIVING ONLINE REGISTRATION RATES**

- Youth are driving differences in party affiliation for online registration.

At 47.5%, general online registrants were more Democratic and significantly less Republican, producing a 27.5 percentage point gap. There also were slightly fewer NPP and higher Other Party registrations.

For youth, the gap between Democratic and Republican party online registration is significantly larger than for youth that didn’t register online, 49.1% and 17.11%, respectively — a 32 percentage point gap. Youth NPP registration was much lower than non-online youth registration.

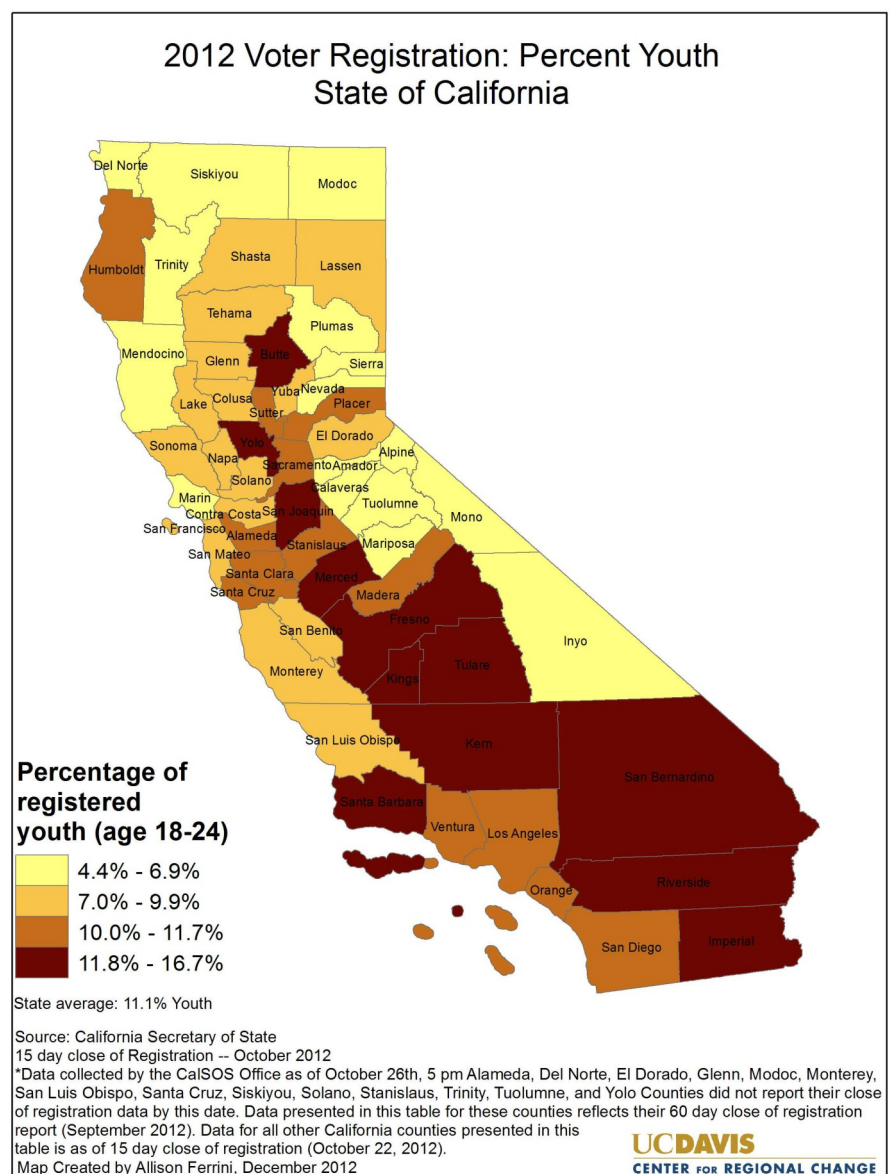
**California Counties: Impact of Youth Registration**

- Registered youth differ substantially across counties from the general electorate in their party identification.
- In 15 counties more youth register as NPP than for either of the two leading parties.

Despite fewer registrants statewide, Republicans maintained their county by county edge over Democrats, holding the most general registered voters (all ages) in 30 counties (remaining 28 counties are Democratic dominated). In contrast, registered youth differ substantially in party identification across counties versus the general registered population. In 19 counties, the highest percentage of youth registrants is in a party identification that is different from that county’s general registered population — **NPP is the largest registration designation for youth in 15 of these counties (including Orange and San Diego).** NPP is also the second most common party identification for youth in another 34 counties (including Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Ventura). See CCEP website for county data.

## What is the potential impact from the growth of the youth electorate on the future political landscape in California?

- The youth electorate continued to increase its influence in 2012. As youth grow as a share of the state’s resident population we would expect their registration gains to continue beyond 2012.
- However, the rising youth electorate in California may not mean future growth in Democratic party registration rolls, as some analysis have predicted. Instead, if current trends continue, **a younger electorate will mean even smaller percentages of both registered Democrats and Republicans— an accelerated decline in identification with the state’s two major parties** and the continued rise of registrants identifying as NPP or with small parties.
- The youth percent of California’s electorate varies greatly across the state’s counties. Counties of the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California (San Bernardino and Riverside counties) all have percentages of youth in their general electorate above the statewide rate of 11.1%.
- As on-line registration grows to a likely consistent lead registration method, **youth preference in this method may provide another avenue to further increase youth representation in the electorate.**
- Going forward, tracking online variation by age and party will be important to identifying future changes in the party composition of the overall registered population and, thus, the political evolution of the state’s electorate.<sup>8</sup>
- **A key component of future analyses will be to identify the variation in registration within the state’s diverse youth electorate** — particularly for youth of color whose party registration has skewed more Democratic (and less frequent) than white non-Hispanic youth.<sup>9</sup>
- Despite significant increases in youth registration, **youth still remain underrepresented compared to their share of the state’s population.** In 2010, youth made up 14.2% of the general eligible citizen population, with youth of color further underrepresented in the electorate.<sup>10</sup>
- Notwithstanding the addition of on-line voter registration, **the structure of California’s current voter registration system continues to be a challenge to access for our state’s youth, as well as other groups not as familiar with the registration and voting process.** Removing remaining barriers to youth registration that are present within California’s voter registration system is a critical step to further increasing the inclusion of all youth in the state’s political landscape.<sup>11</sup>



### NEXT BRIEF

## 2012 California Youth Voter Turnout: Geographic and Age Breakdown

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> California Secretary of State, October 22, 2012—15-Day Close of Registration Report.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed registration records (15 day close of registration, October 22, 2012) 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. Because of this, the level of confidence in the data is not susceptible to estimates as are survey or exit poll results. Data collected by the Cal SOS office as of October 26th, 5PM. Alameda, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Siskiyou, Solano, Stanislaus, Trinity, Tuolumne, and Yolo Counties did not report their close of registration data by this date. Data presented in this brief for these counties reflects their 60 day close of registration report (September 2012). Data for these counties do not include online voter registrants.

<sup>3</sup> California Secretary of State, October 22, 2012—15-Day Close of Registration, Historical Close-of-Registration Statistics for Presidential Elections.

<sup>4</sup> No Party Preference (NPP) includes all registrants identified in California Secretary of State's registration records as decline to state or no party preference.

<sup>5</sup> Other Party include all registrants identified in California Secretary of State's registration records as any of the following party affiliations: American Independent Party, American Elect Party, Green Party, Libertarian Party, Peace and Freedom Party and Other.

<sup>6</sup> See California Civic Engagement Project, Policy Brief: Issue Two - California's Youth Vote: Strength and Potential for an analysis of California's youth voter registration in the 2002-2010 November elections. [http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/ccep-policy-briefs/UCDavis\\_CCEP\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_2\\_Youth\\_For\\_Release.pdf](http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/ccep-policy-briefs/UCDavis_CCEP_Policy_Brief_2_Youth_For_Release.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> California Senate Bill 397, effective Jan. 1, authorized creation of an online registration system which was implemented on September 19, 2012. The system allows the entire registration process to occur electronically and be verified against CA Department of Motor Vehicle records.

<sup>8</sup> California has a modified closed system in which voters registered with a party can only vote in that party's primary, but voters who decline to state a party affiliation may vote in a party's primary if the party allows it. Democratic and Republican parties have allowed voters who decline to state a party affiliation to vote in all of their primary elections up until the 2008 presidential primary election. In 2008, the Republican party no longer allowed the practice. In 2012, only the Democratic Party and American Independent Party permitted No Party Preference voters to request their party's presidential ballot for the June 5, 2012 primary (California Elections Code §2151). *In California, decline to state and no party preference voters have historically been more likely to vote for Democratic candidates.*

<sup>9</sup> Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement: Voter Registration Among Young People in 2008, November. Please see: 2010[http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/FS\\_10\\_Registration.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/FS_10_Registration.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Percent youth of the state's eligible general population is measured using general population and 18-24 Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2006-2010).

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of barriers to voter registration that are present within California's voter registration system, see: "Future of California Elections", James Irvine Foundation (2012). Please also see CIRCLE Fact Sheet State Election Law Reform and Youth Voter Turnout, 2009 at [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State\\_law\\_and\\_youth\\_turnout\\_Final.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/State_law_and_youth_turnout_Final.pdf). See also CCREC Policy Brief Number 1, April 2012. at: [http://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/ccrec\\_policy\\_brief\\_1\\_final\\_apr2012\\_color\\_0.pdf](http://ccrec.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/ccrec_policy_brief_1_final_apr2012_color_0.pdf).

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**The California Civic Engagement Project (CCEP)** is a new nonpartisan data repository and research initiative for the state of California housed at the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. The CCEP seeks to address the limited quality and quantity of publicly available civic engagement data. Its mission is to collect and curate civic engagement data from a broad range of sources, making them a publicly available resource to all interested audiences, including political researchers, public officials, advocacy groups and communities themselves. A key focus of data analysis is identifying disparities in participation across place and population. The CCEP's research is intended to inform and empower a wide range of policy and organizing efforts in California and across its metropolitan and rural regions. The CCEP invites research and outreach partnerships from interested audiences.

For more information about the California Civic Engagement Project, contact Mindy Romero, Project Director, at 530-665-3010 or [msromero@ucdavis.edu](mailto:msromero@ucdavis.edu). Visit our website at: <http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/projects/california-civic-engagement-project-ccep>.

Launched in 2007, the UC Davis Center for Regional Change is dedicated to producing research that informs the building of healthy, equitable, prosperous, and sustainable regions in California. To accomplish this, the CRC builds two kinds of bridges. One set is on campus between faculty and students from different disciplines and departments; the other between the campus and regions throughout the state. These bridges allow us to bring together faculty, students and communities to collaborate on innovative action research that identifies and directs resources to communities struggling with the most challenging environmental and social conditions.