



Growing Youth Power in the Central Valley

Veronica Terriquez, Randy Villegas, Angelina Santiago,
Valeria Mena, and Jared Semana

UC Santa Cruz
Summer 2021





After some years, we're at a point where we, young people, are building this collective, unapologetic, and beautiful youth movement. It is an inclusive movement that creates safe and supportive spaces to be courageous, heal, and organize. We are reclaiming our power and reimagining what our community and schools should and can look like. We meet with our elected officials and we show up to speak our truth at board meetings to let them know that we want housing for all, health for all, wellness centers, and that we demand clean water and air across the region. As young people of color, we shout out loudly that "Black Trans Lives Matter" and proclaim "Care For Us" because we know that we need to protect our Black, Indigenous, Brown siblings and our undocumented farmworkers and essential workers who are the most vulnerable, most marginalized, and most impacted. My generation has risen up, marched in the streets, mobilized during this pandemic, and voted in a historic turnout and it is now time that our elected officials and decision-makers show that they too will stand with us and care for us.

**-Eugene Vang, Age 20,
Merced County youth leader since 2017**



Young people are now stepping into their power, and we are doing the work to shift power in ways that move beyond their nonprofit and grants deliverables. We are authentically sharing and owning our stories, and it's not just about a photo-op or performative activism. Young people are getting involved in greater numbers. We are more civically engaged, and we are starting to see ourselves in leadership roles. Our organizations have become less territorial. Now we realize that we have to lift each other up and do this work together, not just in our own town, or in our own county, but across the Central Valley.

**-Marinarde Soto, Age 22,
Fresno County youth leader since 2015**



When we first started out, it was mostly high school students from South Kern--Weedpatch, Lamont, Arvin, and Greenfield. But now, we have youth who are involved from across Kern County, and it's not just high school students. Older youth who have gone to college have come back to the community because they know the necessities. We have also had the opportunities to connect with youth across the Valley to hear about our similarities, learn from each other, and lift each other up. For me, it's been important that adult allies have taken a step back. They have given us the space so we can build our own skills and have a say in how our county and other government systems invest in us.

**-Jose Pinto Gonzales, Age 25,
Kern County youth leader since 2012**

Growing Youth Power in the Central Valley: Introduction

Over the last decade, a growing network of youth organizing groups in California's Central Valley has developed a cohort of young, low-income people of color who are informed about current political issues and prepared to take action to change policies affecting their high poverty communities. As the young leaders quoted here suggest, finding an inclusive and safe place to gather has encouraged Central Valley youth to step into their collective power and engage political leaders. While this movement is still emerging, it has great potential, giving young people in the region an increasing voice in shaping the direction of their communities.

Although the Central Valley has a history of grassroots organizing among people of color, most prominently by the United Farm Workers, outreach specifically to youth has been limited. Groups like ACT for Women and Girls, Californians for Justice, Barrios Unidos, and the Youth Leadership Institute involved youth of color in addressing local concerns, yet little infrastructure existed to support their efforts. Additionally, youth organizing introduces a source of optimism in the region's political and social environment, as it helps address age and racial gaps in civic and political representation. While people of color form a demographic majority—especially among those under the age of 35—power is largely concentrated among older White residents who are not always attuned to (and sometimes vehemently oppose addressing) the needs of low-income communities.

Youth organizing is part of a youth-serving ecosystem in the Central Valley, supported by The California Endowment, the Irvine Foundation, the Sierra Health Foundation, and other philanthropic agencies. Since 2010, these groups have stepped forward to engage low-income youth. Under this umbrella, youth leadership groups focus mostly on personal development, their services overlapping to some degree with youth organizing groups, which are distinguished by engaging youth in political activism. Their combined efforts have created a network within the Central Valley to facilitate youth voice and leadership, stimulating the courage of young people and the vision and commitment of local leaders.

The impact of youth engagement extends beyond an age cohort. Youth organizing and leadership groups focused on the highest need communities transform not only young people, but also their families and the region as a whole. Moreover, interventions that support youths' civic and political engagement at a formative age tend to facilitate positive educational outcomes (Terriquez and Rogers 2017), foster high levels of community engagement later in life (Hart et al. 2007), and motivate young people to politicize their families (Terriquez and Kwon 2014). Such efforts can also lead to concrete policy change and increased voter turnout among young people.

This report takes stock of youth voice and power in the Central Valley. Drawing on surveys, 70 in-depth interviews with youth leaders, participant observations, and voting records, this report seeks to contextualize and provide an account of this important youth-serving community. It begins with a historical overview of the region, especially an overview of migration into the region, its exclusionary political history, and prior efforts to address social justice. After assessing the shared contributions of youth leadership and youth organizing groups, we then feature grassroots and civic engagement campaign efforts. We discuss youths' involvement in these campaigns, showing how these efforts build young people's ability to lead civic action. Here we include documentation of key youth-led successes in recent years.

Our report goes on to discuss the surge in voter turnout between the 2014 and 2018 elections, and we mention some of the activities that groups have engaged in to grow the young electorate. We also highlight the efforts of groups who were affiliated with the Power California network, demonstrating how youth-led efforts increased turnout among young adult voters. At the same time, our research demonstrates the need for ongoing efforts to reach emerging and young voters.



A flyer for the inaugural Central Valley Rising conference, kicking off the Central Valley Freedom Summer effort to register and engage young people in the Central Valley.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- While residing in a racially diverse region, youth of color in the Central Valley struggle against a legacy of White supremacy as they seek to exercise their voice and help shape policy decisions that impact their communities. At the same time, they can gain inspiration and learn from a rich local history of labor, environmental justice, and other movements led by people of color.
- Youth of color comprise the majority of the young population of the Central Valley, but they also encounter disproportionate levels of poverty.
- The Central Valley is home to a growing and increasingly interconnected infrastructure of youth organizing and youth leadership groups.
- To varying degrees, young people in youth organizing and youth leadership groups are receiving developmental supports that help them thrive. Youth in these groups also vary in the extent to which they gain exposure to critical civics education that deepens their understanding of their diverse communities and the social issues they face.
- Youth organizing groups are engaging young people in campaigns that develop members' abilities to lead civic action, and in some cases, these have resulted in at least 25 concrete policy changes between 2017-2020.
- While youth-led voter outreach efforts have contributed to recent significant increases in turnout among young voters in the region, large proportions of the young electorate remain disengaged from government elections.

The Central Valley Context: History and Demographics

In a broad basin between the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the east and the Coast Ranges to the west, the Central Valley extends south from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta to the Tehachapi Mountains. Most notable for its agricultural production, this fertile valley is home to a racially diverse population. Industry and demography are intertwined as the activities of the powerful agricultural community have contributed to a history of displacement and migration that have profound effects on today's young people as they seek to build on past social movements in order to advance social justice. Political conservatism has tended to suppress social activism among low-income people of color, and it sustains economic inequities rooted in demographics.

A History of Native Displacement and Migration

Long before the arrival of Europeans, the Central Valley was home to many Native American tribes, including the Maidu, Miwok, and the Yokuts tribes, who survived off of the Valley's natural resources. Like Native Americans across the state, these indigenous groups experienced genocide and were displaced by Spanish-speaking colonizers from Spain and then Mexico, followed by Americans migrating west.

Chinese seasonal laborers established long-standing communities following the completion of the transcontinental railroad in the late 1800s. As they settled, many sought work in local fields and packing houses (Buckley and Littman 2010). Later, Japanese immigrants, immigrating from Hawaiian sugar plantations (Walker 2004:68-69), constituted a large portion of farm labor at the beginning of the 20th century. Racial antagonisms and restrictions on Chinese and Japanese migration limited the growth of these two populations in the region. Succeeding waves of immigration were engendered by the agriculture industry's continuing drive to recruit workers who would toil in the fields for low wages. Growers actively recruited Sikh immigrants from the Punjab region around 1910 (Gibson 1988). Additionally, Filipinx immigrants began joining the agricultural workforce in the 1920s. The U.S. occupation of the Philippines in 1899-1902 contributed to an exodus from the islands and the eventual development of an expansive migration network to the Central Valley (Mabalon 2013).

By the 1920s, Mexicans began arriving as well and numbered almost 60,000 in the region (Jelinek 1982:68-70). Their population growth stagnated in the 1930s as some Mexicans were forcibly repatriated. However, during and after World War II, the Mexican-origin population grew tremendously as a result of the exponential expansion of the agricultural industry and related demands for low-wage labor. The Bracero Program (1942-1965), which actively recruited Mexican men to work in the fields, initially filled much of this demand (Walker 2004). It also contributed to the eventual settlement of some Mexican workers in the Central Valley's growing cities and rural towns, where they were joined by their families or formed new ones. The Mexican-origin population now comprises the largest ethnic minority group in the region, and the population includes indigenous Mexicans from Oaxaca and other regions of Mexico.

African Americans also have a deep history and legacy in the region, having settled in the Stockton area as early as the 1860s. Some found work in the agricultural industries, and others opened small businesses. Greater numbers of African Americans began arriving in the region during the Southern Exodus, which began in the 1910s and 1920s and continued in successive waves through the 1960s (Gregory 2005; Kirby 1983). Notably, some sought to establish independent townships where they could avoid racist treatment by local Whites (the most famous of which may be the township of Allensworth).

Lacking resources like water rights and regular railroad service, and besieged by racist exclusion, these new communities found it difficult to develop and thrive (Gregory 2005). While the Black population in the region remains comparatively small today, it is important to recognize that African Americans have a long history in the region and have helped shape its trajectory.

Meanwhile, some groups have arrived more recently, including refugees who began making the Central Valley their home in the final decades of the 20th century. These include Central Americans who fled wars or natural disasters, as well as Vietnamese and Hmong immigrants (from Laos) who were displaced in connection to U.S. military interventions in their home countries.

After the Secret War in Laos, the Laotian government declared genocide on the Hmong people for aiding the CIA in fending off communist forces. The Hmong people fled their homes and villages and crossed mountains, jungles, and the Mekong River to seek refuge in Thailand and then in other countries such as the U.S. The Central Valley, Fresno, and Merced provided the Hmong people with an abundance of farming and agricultural opportunities as well as opportunities to reunite with family, practice their culture, and access social services and education. The Central Valley today has the state's largest Hmong population and according to 2010 Census data, California has the largest Hmong population in the U.S. Today, Hmong Americans continue to face disparities in healthcare, education, and employment, among other socioeconomic challenges. However, Hmong youth are organizing in the Central Valley and leading the way for more equity and accessibility within the community.

Despite this diverse population, the power base of the Central Valley remains with White residents descended from people who migrated to the region in the 20th century, many to work in agricultural and related industries. Among those who settled in the Central Valley a century or more ago are Portuguese, Swedes, Yugoslavs, Dutch, Germans, Basques, Italians, and Armenians (Parsons 1986). These groups found relative success in the region, and some of their descendants maintain influential positions in the economy and government.

Political Conservatism and White Supremacy

The conservative political culture of the Central Valley was born early in the 20th century, as the Ku Klux Klan consolidated White political power. The KKK was well-represented in the police department, city governments, and the board of supervisors (Humes 1999). The influx of poor Whites from the Midwest in the 1930s further enhanced the legacy of conservative politics, racism, and White supremacy (Lytle-Hernandez 2010). Economically, their arrival was timely. Refusing to include Mexican workers within the country's New Deal programs, the federal government deported both documented and undocumented Mexicans. The resulting labor shortages were filled by immigrating White "Okies" and "Arkies" fleeing the Dust Bowl (Walker 2004).

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Ku Klux Klan chapters in Tulare, Fresno, Kings, and Kern counties actively terrorized communities of color. In Tulare County, Klan members regularly organized marches and public meetings, made recruitment announcements in local newspapers, and attempted to run candidates for local elected office (Bringhurst 2000). The Tulare chapter was supposedly less violent than the KKK chapter in Kern, which was known for violent acts including kidnappings, beatings, and tarring-and-featherings. Instead, the Tulare chapter of the Klan "confined its activities to public lectures, picnics, barbecues, and an occasional 'cross burning'" (Bringhurst 2000:390). In fact, in 1931, Visalia was home to the annual California State Klan Convention, where hundreds of robed Klan members marched through downtown Visalia.

This legacy of White political domination continued via the segregation and redlining of minority communities after World War II, as well as the exclusion of people of color from lucrative jobs in the



Ku Klux Klan parade through downtown Porterville in 1923. Note that the Klansmen are unmasked whereas the three Klan horses at beginning of the procession have their faces masked. Taken by Hammond Studio, Porterville.
 Courtesy of Jeff Edwards, Porterville, California.

Source: Bringhurst 2000, Page 374

growing oil industry (Schwaller 2018). A 1970s documentary titled *The California Reich* captured the Neo-Nazi movement in Tracy, CA, just west of Modesto.

The Central Valley is a political landscape dominated by this legacy of racism, and today the region's Latinx individuals are incarcerated and killed by law enforcement officials at a higher rate than anywhere in the United States (Schwaller 2018). In Kern County, one high school serving predominantly low-income students of color had its previous mascot as an infamous "Johnny Rebel," originally a rebel soldier with Confederate symbols until it was replaced with a more tame cartoon version without confederate symbols. Just as student movements led a campaign to get rid of the confederate symbols, students and community members advocated for change in the wake of racial justice protests in 2020. In the spring of 2021 that public criticism and advocacy led to a change in mascot from the "Rebels" to the "Spartans". Further down the street is "Plantation" Elementary School, right off of Plantation Avenue in Bakersfield, whose name is set to be changed sometime between the 2021-2022 school year. The school is still surrounded by streets named after Civil War ships and groups, including Sumter, Merrimac, Monitor, Rebel, and Raider (Belardes 2020). Further down the street is "Plantation" Elementary School, right off of Plantation Avenue in Bakersfield.

Today older White residents, who dominate the active electorate, tend to lean to the right and overwhelmingly supported Trump in the 2016 election. Confederate and "Don't Tread on Me" flags associated with the Tea Party movement fly freely on trucks and in the front yards of some White residents' homes. And in recent years, White youth have brought confederate flags to high school campuses, suggesting their support for White supremacist ideas. Within this context, it is perhaps not surprising that a conservative-leaning electorate, along with powerful interests like agri-business and oil, dominate political debates (Pastor 2018). Given its history as a stronghold of White political power in contrast to the racial diversity of its residents, scholars have referred to the Central Valley as California's "Deep South," reflecting the racial attitudes of the White-dominated political structure (Eissinger 2011; Schwaller 2018).

Anti-immigrant sentiments and opposition to the Black Lives Matter movement echo not only through talk radio airwaves, but in the statements of local, statewide, and federal officials. Young people thus face open, and sometimes hostile, opposition to efforts that advance the rights and needs of people of color, immigrants, women, and LGBTQ groups.

Within this context, people of color have sought to assert their rights and demand fair and equitable treatment. Prior efforts to advance social justice help young people understand that resistance is possible.

A History of Resistance

The Central Valley often stands in contrast with the vibrant social movements found in Los Angeles and the Bay Area. Collective memories of prior efforts still linger, however, and may still inform contemporary youth organizing efforts. Most notable is a history of labor organizing. The Central Valley was the epicenter of the farmworkers' movement, which drew national attention in the 1960s. Sparked by Filipino farmworkers and labor leaders like Philip Vera Cruz and Larry Itliong, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) merged with the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in what would eventually become the United Farm Workers (UFW). Under the leadership of Vera Cruz, Itliong, Cesar Chavez, and Dolores Huerta, the UFW made great progress toward farmworker unionization, rights, wages, and dignity. Notably, the Delano Grape Strike of 1965 gained national attention as a result of grassroots efforts to organize national boycotts, marches, and nonviolent civil disobedience. College students and other young people were part of this effort, giving them formative experience in organizing. The five-year grape strike eventually resulted in increased wages and improved working conditions for farmworkers. However, it is also important to recognize the complex history of the UFW, as Cesar Chavez for example also called on Immigration and Naturalization Services to deport undocumented immigrants who they considered "strikebreakers" once they crossed the picket lines in the fields.

Since the 1980s, the union's membership and prominence have declined. During that decade, then-Governor George Deukmejian shut down enforcement of farm labor law, and internal conflicts within the UFW led to splintering. Additionally, powerful agricultural interests and coalitions of growers continued to lobby and oppose the union's efforts. Nonetheless, the UFW continues to organize and has supported the passage of successful legislation in California, including paid overtime for farmworkers and pesticide reform.

Pesticide spraying is one of the environmental issues organizing efforts have addressed, as the region suffers from contamination of local drinking water sources (Real 2019) and some of the worst air pollution levels in the nation (Borrell 2018). The Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN); Community Water Center (CWC); and the Center on Race, Poverty, and the Environment (CRPE) have worked directly with low-income communities and communities of color in the Valley, often those most impacted. An important victory, spearheaded by El Pueblo Para El Aire y Agua Limpio (People for Clean Air and Water), was the blocking of a toxic waste incinerator at the Kettleman Hills Hazardous Waste Facility (Cole and Foster 2001).

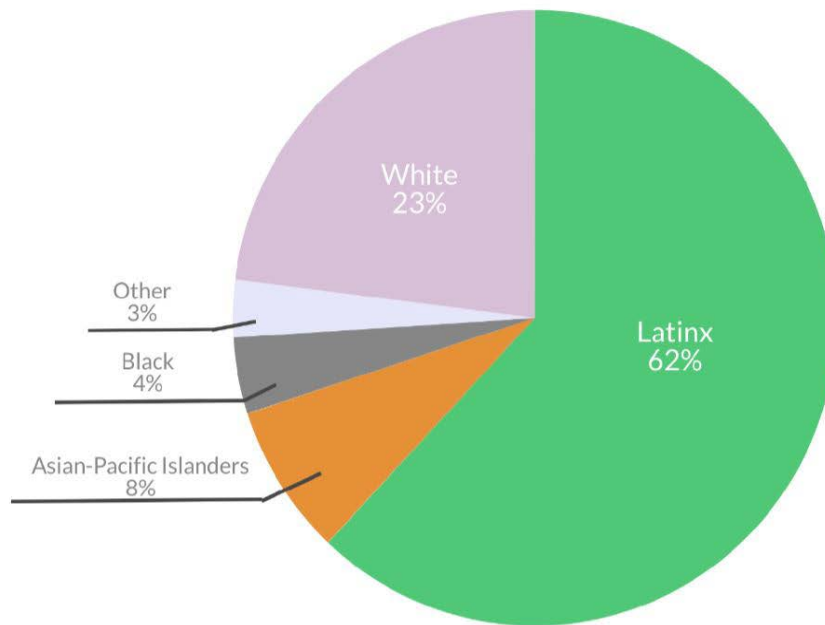
Notably, some environmental justice and labor leaders have connected with other social justice efforts. For example, a local abolitionist movement was sparked by the building of 13 new prisons in the Central Valley since 1984, earning the region the nickname of "prison alley" (Gilmore 2007:129). Activists drew links among the disinvestment in the region, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation in ways that inform organizing in recent decades. For example, in the mid-2000s, with support from Youth in Focus (an intermediary that provides training in youth participatory action research), an important coalition formed ESPINO (¡Escuelas Si! ¡Pintas No!) which raised awareness of the school-to-prison pipeline and began organizing around education and juvenile justice (Wright 2007)—work that continues today.

Demographic Diversity and Economic Inequality

Young people of color become civically engaged in a social and economic context. Compared to the entire state, the population in the Central Valley is younger and contains a greater concentration of young people of color. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, 53% of the population is under age 35, compared to 47% for the whole state. Additionally, people of color dominate the population:

Nearly two-thirds of these young people are Latinx, and there are substantial communities of Asian-Pacific Islanders and African Americans. In the Central Valley, 23% of residents under the age of 35 identify as White, compared to 28% in California.

Figure 1. Racial Composition of Central Valley Residents Under Age 35



Data Source: American Community Survey 2018

Children and young adults in the Central Valley disproportionately encounter socioeconomic challenges. A comparatively high percentage, 25% of those under age 35, live under the poverty line compared to 18% for the entire state. Young adults in the region disproportionately work in low-wage jobs, with those of immigrant origin concentrating in farm labor. Notably, Central Valley residents aged 25-34 are about half as likely as their same-age peers to have a bachelor’s degree; only 18% have a bachelor’s degree, compared to 37% in the entire state. High poverty rates, limited employment options and conditions, and often restricted opportunities to attend higher education shape the civic and political concerns of low-income people of color, including those from immigrant and refugee backgrounds.

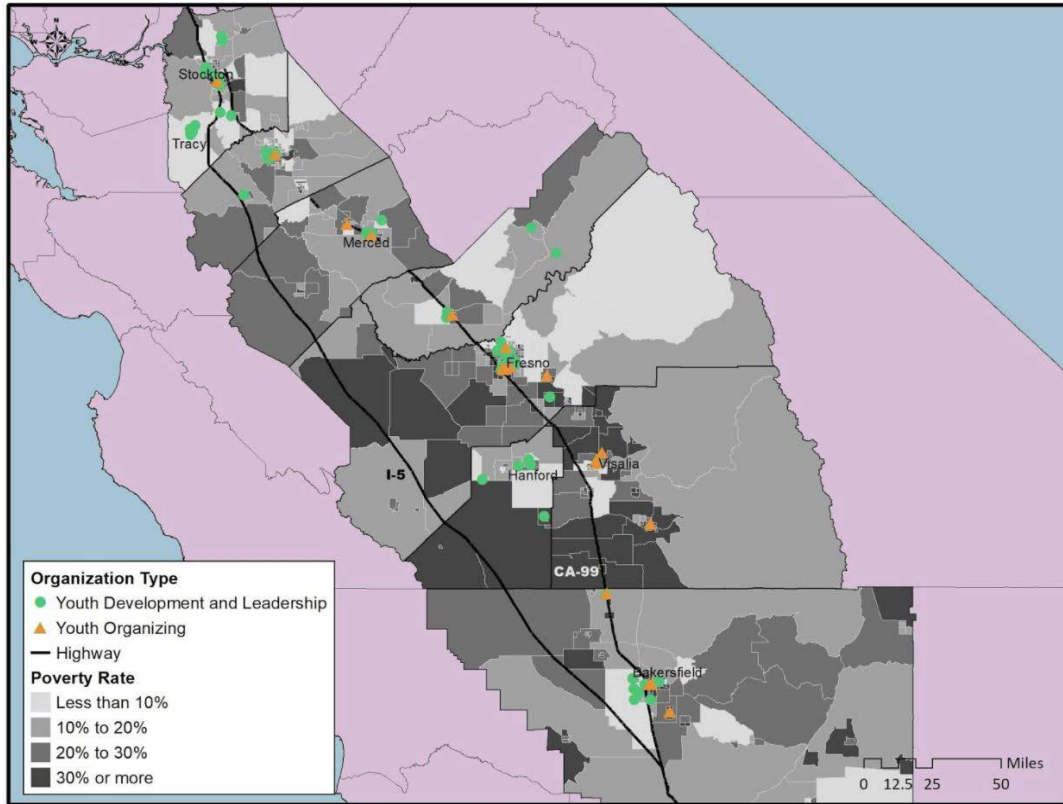
Youth Development, Leadership, and Organizing in the Central Valley

Caring, supportive environments stimulate positive neurological adaptations that help young people not only recover from setbacks, but also thrive in the present (Fuhrmann, Knoll and Blakemore 2015; Guyer, Silk and Nelson 2016). Adolescents and young adults can experience intensified learning and overcome environmental challenges from childhood, as noted in a report by the National Academy of Science (2019).

Such opportunities are offered in the growing youth-serving community of non-profit organizations in the Central Valley, which helps young people develop leadership skills and the confidence to employ them. These are capacities that will help them thrive as they become adults. The below map shows the location of 501(c)3 non-profit youth programs, all of which address personal development and civic education. It distinguishes youth leadership groups, which primarily focus on education and the arts, from grassroots organizing groups, which address policy and systems change. (Religious programs and government services are excluded.) The poverty levels of these communities are indicated, showing that groups focused on youth organizing are particularly concentrated in higher-poverty communities, whereas youth

development groups can be found more generally. The number of youth organizing groups in the region has doubled from about 10 in 2010 to around 20 by 2020, representing a significant growth.

Youth Serving Organizations in the Central Valley




Supported by intermediaries, Central Valley youth-serving organizations have become increasingly networked, expanding their capacity to engage young people to effect policy and narrative change. These include youth organizing groups, which involve their members in changing policies and systems that affect the everyday lives of their communities. In a focus group conducted with youth participants, youth emphasized that regional and statewide gatherings were crucial to increasing personal and organizational networks. As one participant of the Sisterhood Rising camp stated, “It was a great experience, loved it. Everyone there was amazing. And I learned how to network with other youth that were near me in South Kern, which I didn’t even know existed.” Adding on to this they stated that unfortunately there was not sustained support to continue these relationships. “After I came home, it was just, like, okay, that’s it; like, there wasn’t really a source to talk to them, or there wasn’t anything to go off of or any way I could meet with them.”

Youth organizing groups typically also support their members as individuals. There is also another range of youth development groups that primarily focus on enhancing their members’ individual growth and are less focused on civic and political change. These other youth development groups include those that target members’ leadership development, educational achievement, career development, or artistic growth. But unlike youth organizing groups, these youth development programs do not necessarily devote significant resources to engaging young people in grassroots campaigns or voter outreach efforts.

Youth Organizing and Youth Leadership Groups in the Central Valley

To describe the overall youth-serving ecosystem that engages low-income young people of color, we draw on surveys collected from 20 self-identified youth organizing groups that engage Central Valley youth in policy change and/or getting out the vote. These groups participated in the 2019 Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing National Field Scan Survey. We also share findings for 17 youth development groups, which develop members’ leadership skills and support the developmental needs of youth in high-poverty communities. Funded by The California Endowment (TCE), these leadership groups sometimes work in collaboration with youth organizing groups, many of which also receive funding from TCE and other private foundations. While this analysis does not represent an exhaustive list of organizations, it provides an insight into the non-profit, youth-serving infrastructure that bolsters youth empowerment in the region. Some youth utilize skills they acquire in these organizations to lead and participate in independent community and political work.

Central Valley Youth Organizations	
Grassroots Organizing Groups*	Leadership Groups
99Rootz	Bike Arvin
ACT for Women and Girls	Bike Bakersfield
Boys and Girls Club of Kern County	Building Healthy Communities
CAIR Sacramento/ Central CA	California Rural Legal Assistance
CHIRLA	California Walks
California Dream Network	Cultiva La Salud
CA Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance	Fresno BHC
Californians for Justice	Fresno EOC Local Conservation Corps
Dolores Huerta Foundation	Garden Pathways
Faith in the Valley Kern	Greenfield Walking Group
Fathers & Families of San Joaquin	Helping Others Pursue Excellence
Fresno Barrios Unidos	Le Grand IMPACT for Success/RJ League
Youth Leadership Institute/Fresno BMOC	Radio Bilingue
Hmong Innovating Politics	Rise & Lift
Jakara Movement	Symple Equazion
LOUD For Tomorrow	We 'Ced Youth Media
Madera Coalition for Community Justice	kNOW Youth Media
Mi Familia Vota	
South Kern Sol	
The Source LGBT+ Center	
Love Faith and Hope Inc.	



*Self-identified grassroots youth organizing groups (Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2019)

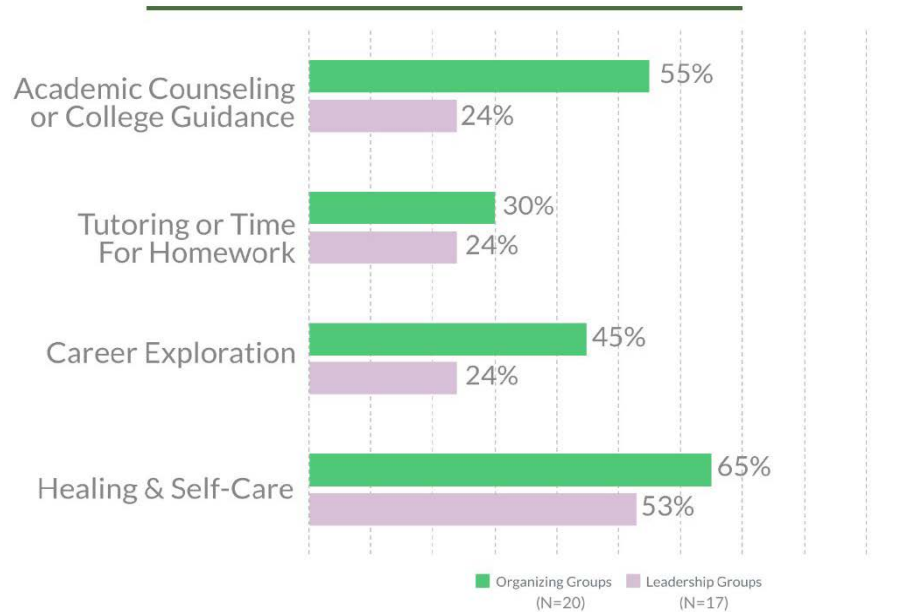
Given our observations and 2016 surveys of many of the groups featured here, we know that Latinx youth comprise the overall majority of members in all groups with varying representations of Asian-American, Black, and White youth. Some groups target API youth—such as Hmong Innovating Politics and the Jakara Movement. Meanwhile, CAIR (Council on American-Islamic Relations) involves racially diverse Muslim youth. Out of the 37 groups we surveyed, 7 involve only high-school aged adolescents, 29 work with adolescents and young adults, and 1 group reported an exclusively young adult leadership.

Youth Development Supports

Working in under-resourced and high-poverty communities, the youth organizing and leadership groups we surveyed try to address young people’s developmental needs and fill gaps in services and programming provided by educational, health, and other government services. Figure 2 shows the percentage of youth organizing and leadership groups offering academic and other developmental supports on a regular basis, that is, at least once a month.

Among youth organizing groups, more than half offer academic counseling or college guidance, just under half provide some kind of career exploration, and almost a third set aside time for tutoring or homework. In contrast, just under a quarter of leadership groups offer such activities.

Figure 2. Youth Development Activities Regularly Offered by Central Valley Groups



Data Sources: HCOM, HCAL & Enterprise Youth Program Staff Inventory 2018-2019
FCYO National Survey Scan, 2019

A majority of youth organizing and leadership groups offer healing and self-care activities, sometimes incorporating ethnic cultural traditions, aiming to alleviate some of the emotional trauma, stress, and other challenges that contribute to poor mental health among young people of color. These activities can include healing circles where members share personal experiences in a safe space, receive affirmation from their peers, and build relationships and bonds within their organizations. Some groups offer mindfulness exercises, such as meditation, breathing exercises, yoga, and aromatherapy. Healing activities can also include support groups or writing circles that incorporate creative writing, poetry, lyric writing, and journaling as tools to process emotions through a creative outlet. A small number of groups incorporate forward stance, a form of tai chi that links mind and body and seeks to help practitioners embody positive social change.

Central Valley youth we interviewed typically reported that these healing and self-care practices contributed to their personal growth. For example, a 17-year-old from 99Rootz said learning about his culture had included learning about histories of healing:

I learned that my ethnicity and racial group, we believe in a lot of healing and different sacred practices. I learned about meditation. It was really cool when we did a meditation activity and aromatherapy at our summer academy last year. It was cool to know that our ancestors did that.

Similarly, a 22-year-old man from the Youth Leadership Institute described how he has now taken these healing practices into his own routine:

Within the past year, I've started to meditate, but that's just something that's in the past year. Early on it's just been healing circles and learning about, for example, copal and sweetgrass and sage. Stuff like that has even empowered me

in a way, because I'm just like "Man, we made medicine out of these plants!"

A fellow 17-year-old Youth Leadership Institute participant shared similar feelings around healing and how transformative it had become, as well as how it challenged ideas around masculinity. As he explained "We had a workshop on masculinity, and we were talking about healing and stuff and how it's okay for a man to cry when he needs to because it's part of healing."

A 19-year-old from ACT for Women and Girls said her family taught that you should keep emotions to yourself. Learning about healing practices in her organization actually helped her destigmatize mental health in her own family, she said, explaining:

Before people would be like, "You're Mexican, you don't need to go to therapy." And now my mom's like, "You're feeling sad, . . . We can schedule a meeting." Or she's like, "It's okay to cry." Because I think that I was the first person . . . I deal a lot with anxiety. I think that my family has learned how to cope with all of that, which is something that I learned to cope with myself from ACT.

Critical Civics Education

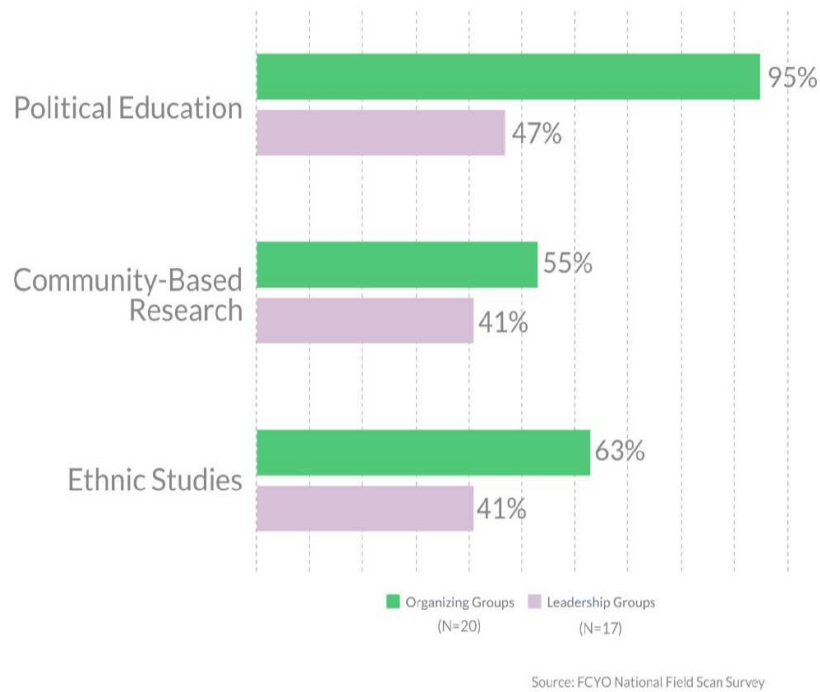
To varying degrees, both youth organizing and leadership groups offer their core members a critical civics education that enables them to make sense of social issues affecting them, allows them to explore topics more deeply, and provides insights into the diversity of communities around them. As documented in other accounts of youth organizing (Christens and Dolan 2011; Kirshner 2015; Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah 2012; Watts and Flanagan 2007) and corroborated by our observations, these workshops use popular education techniques that require participants to interact and share their own lived experience. Importantly, this civics education can develop pride in youths' diverse communities, and helps inspire young people to fight for social justice and inclusion.

Our survey results indicate that youth organizing groups are more likely than leadership groups to offer such training. As shown in Figure 3, almost all youth organizing groups—but less than half of leadership groups—regularly provide members political education workshops that inform their members about political, economic, or social issues. Meanwhile, 55% of youth organizing groups and 41% of leadership groups involve their members in some sort of community-based research: surveying community members about their perspectives, interviewing stakeholders, analyzing existing data, and studying relevant campaigns and initiatives. Many groups regularly expose their members to ethnic studies training. Such training can empower young people around their identities, teach them about the histories of other groups, and provide them with a racial (and sometimes intersectional) analysis of issues facing their communities.

In our observations and interviews, we learned that peers often played an important role in offering a critical civics education. Young staff (the same age or a little older than members) as well as experienced members shared their understanding of community problems. As one 18-year-old male from 99Rootz explained: "I learned about more real-life issues here than I did in school," pointing to his growing understanding of immigrant rights, affordable housing, and the voting process. Because groups often employ peer-to-peer education, members acquire expertise and grow in their capacity as peer educators. As explained by a 19-year-old Fresno Barrios Unidos member:

Even though I'm doing this curriculum multiple times a year, I'm always gaining something new, learning something new. It's never like I'm sitting in class and I'm giving the same lecture again, it's actually like there's more to myself, that I'm constantly growing as a person by doing it.

Figure 3. Critical Civics Education Regularly Offered by Central Valley Groups



For some youth, conducting original research was an important element of their civic development. For example, an 18-year-old member of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin recalled gaining a firsthand understanding of local environmental and health issues through participatory action research. “I was one of the people who was writing the interview questions, interviewing system leaders, interviewing people who were impacted,” he said. Such original research allows young people to examine local concerns, and it can generate valuable data for campaigns.

Youth reported being empowered and learning about their diverse communities through ethnic studies and other workshops that centered their identities. For example, a 20-year-old Californians for Justice member stated, “I learned that I don’t have to be a certain way in order to identify with being Af-ro-Latinx. It helped me learn, like I am who I am.”

For many youth participants, an intersectional education about identity leads to self-awareness and empowerment. As an 18-year-old man from the Greenfield Walking Group explained:

I learned more stuff about myself than anyone would have probably learned about them selves in years. It’s made a difference. I feel I’m more self-aware about my community, my race, and sexual orientation. I feel I could own up to any part of my profile because I know who I am at this point. It’s just time for me to probably show it and let other people learn from it, too.

Similarly, a 14-year-old participant from 99Rootz said:

As a Hmong American, it hurts to see my history be mistaken, or misconceptions. Even the way that we came here to America, many of the things that we know are lies, are just basically rumors, and we don’t exactly know the full truth. I believe that’s really important to me because I really just want my history to stay alive here.

She also learned more about other groups, for example, the Latinx community, and began to empathize with issues of immigration, as her own parents were refugees. Other youth who had been previously bullied or stigmatized for their ethnic identities found empowerment in safe spaces through their organizing groups.

For some, an understanding of identity was linked to social issues that their groups sought to address. As one young woman from the Dolores Huerta Foundation noted, intersectionality was key to understanding issues in her community:

I had no idea about things like the school-to-prison pipeline and police brutality since I don't know anyone that's ever been to jail, like in my head, it's not something that really concerned me. But now that I look into it I see how so many families are affected by it. Before I was more focused on immigration and LGBT rights because just I had a lot of close friends that were LGBT and my family is undocumented. But with this organization, it really teaches you to look at every perspective and a lot of different issues and how to address them.

Youths' civic development most often occurred within the context of their organizations. However, it is important to note that Central Valley youth also acquire important civic knowledge through regional and statewide gatherings, as well as through information shared through social media. One participant stressed how going beyond just posting was necessary. "Because that's how you're going to get people in, bringing social media campaigns on different platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, or now TikTok, getting people to interact with it such as asking questions on their stories, or doing polls that help them interact with the campaign." Young journalists who were a part of the youth media hub network also emphasized how social media granted people opportunities to connect in new ways via "live" Instagram sessions and panels. Many of the youth leaders we spoke to reported expanded social networks and access to information as a result of joining their youth organizing group.

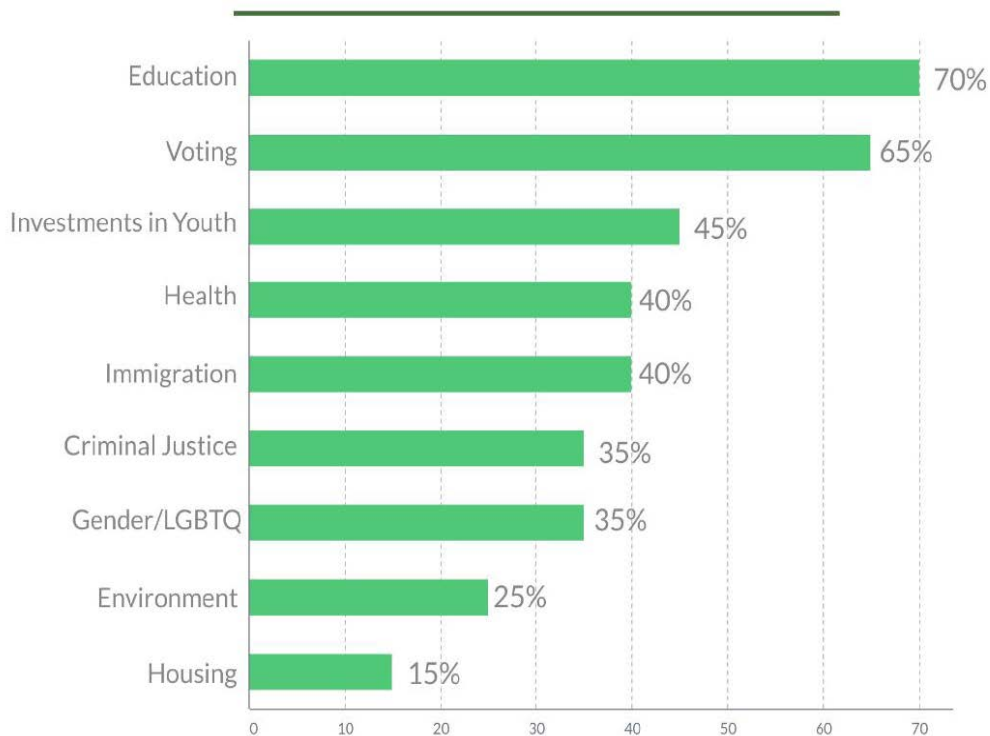
Youth Organizing in the Central Valley

We turn now to the youth organizing subset of youth-serving groups. Supporting the increase in their Central Valley presence is Youth Organize! California (YO! Cali), a statewide network of youth organizing groups that supports these efforts. Some of these groups devoted time, energy, and resources to getting out the vote, often with coordination and training offered by Power California, a network that specifically seeks to build an active electorate of young voters of color.

As part of the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing's Field Scan Survey in 2019, we asked groups about their main campaign areas, with results shown in Figure 4. As members are often still students, these groups most commonly spearheaded campaigns focused on education, mostly involving youth-led K-12 issues of school funding, with some also focusing on college access and affordability. Youth organizing groups were among the education justice proponents of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), a 2013 policy signed by then-Governor Jerry Brown, which provides additional funds for high-needs students and requires community input into budget priorities. About two in five groups have involved their members in this K-12 budgetary process, at times coming to meetings with a specified set of demands. For example, Fresno Barrios Unidos is among advocates of greater spending on restorative justice—seeking to repair the harm of unwanted behaviors—as an alternative to punitive school discipline policies (such as suspension and expulsion).

Nearly half of youth organizing groups were also working to increase government investment in programs and services for youth. For example, a coalition of groups across Kern County is seeking deeper investments in youth programs and services rather than funds for policing and incarcerating young people. In a region that is home to many immigrant agricultural workers and their families, immigration issues were also a priority for 40% of groups. The same percentage led campaigns to increase access to school-based health services, reproductive health services, recreational facilities, and other resources that enhance physical and mental health. In 2019, the next priorities groups reported advancing were gender equity and/or LGBTQ rights and leading criminal justice reform campaigns. However, in light of the racial unrest in the summer of 2020, the latter percentage has likely grown. About a quarter of groups focus on environmental justice issues to address pesticide spraying, air pollution, unequal access to clean drinking water, and ever-increasing concerns around climate change. Only 15% were leading affordable housing campaigns. However, as a result of coordinated efforts across the Central Valley to demand that governments cancel rent in 2020, this percentage also likely increased.

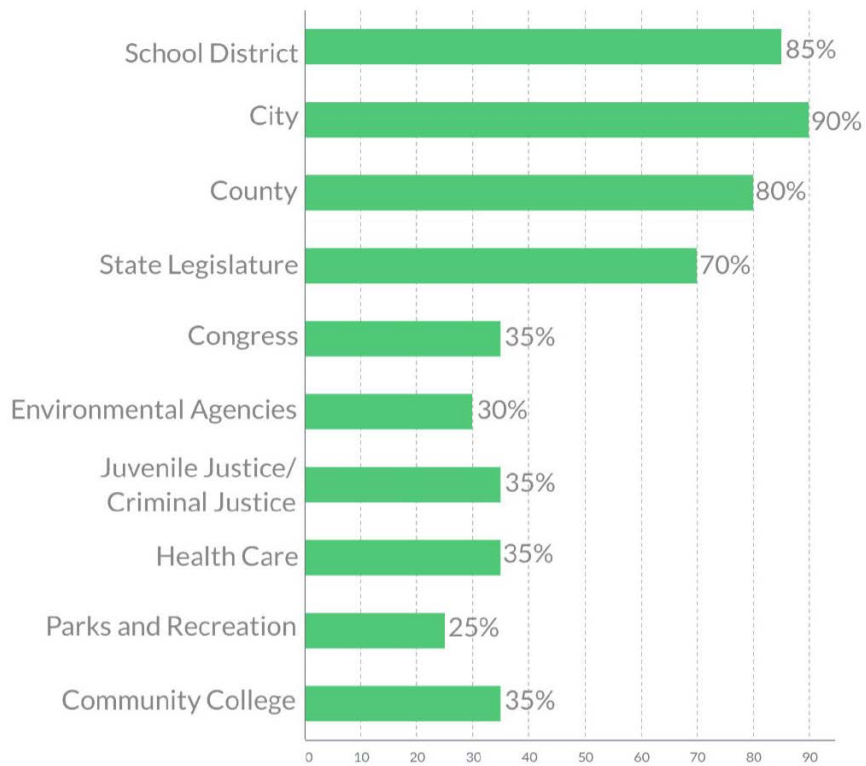
Figure 4. Central Valley Youth Organizing Key Campaign Issue Areas (N=20)



Data Source: FCYO National Field Scan Survey

These youth-led campaigns require their members to engage with various government systems. In the process, youth learn about the roles of different levels of government and their decisionmaking processes. As shown in Figure 5, youth campaigns mostly require young people to take their demands to city governments, their school districts, and the county, as well as the state legislature. A minority target Congress and other government systems. Youth organizing groups sometimes target other municipal government agencies in their campaign efforts, including environmental agencies, water districts, juvenile justice systems, and community college systems.

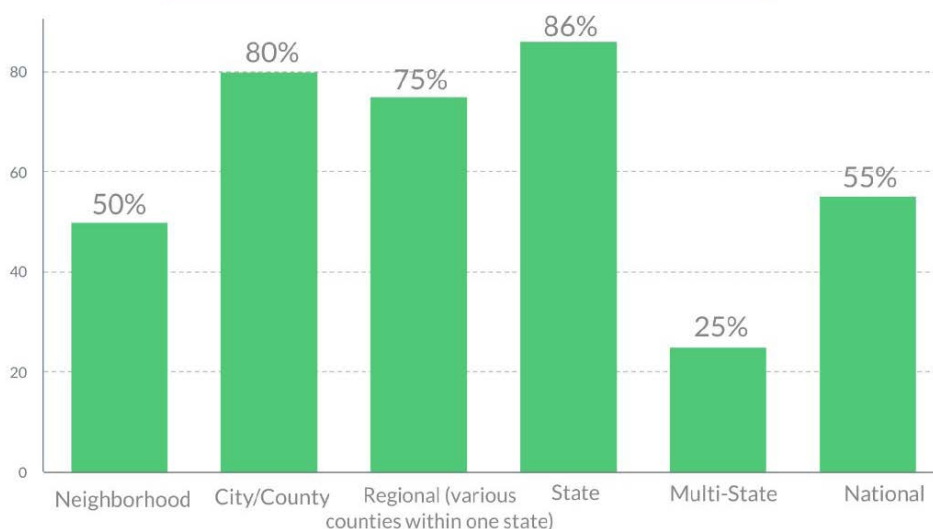
Figure 5. Government Systems Targeted by Central Valley Youth Organizing Campaigns (N=20)



Source: FCYO National Field Scan Survey

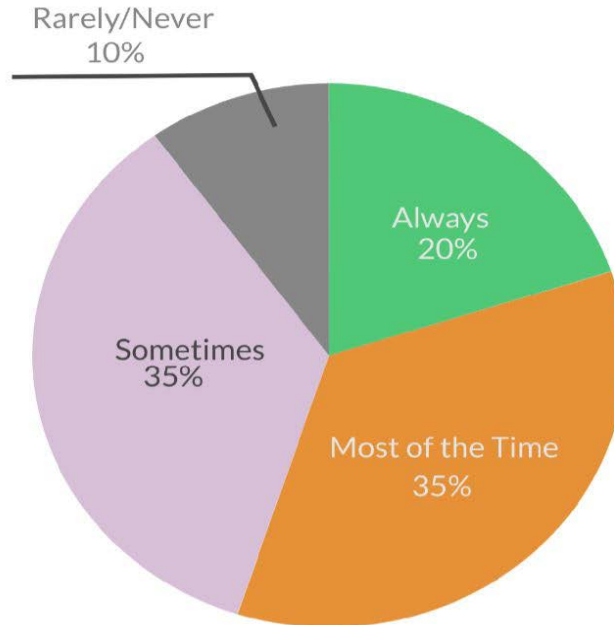
Youth organizing groups in the Central Valley are well-networked, and these ties allow them to facilitate learning across organizations as well as coordinate campaigns. All twenty surveyed groups participate in networks and alliances. As illustrated in Figure 6, groups are overwhelmingly connected at the state, city/county, and regional levels, and more than half also maintain some national ties. None, however, are involved in international networks. In addition to working with networks, youth organizing groups tend to engage in intergenerational alliances while implementing campaigns. As shown in Figure 7, more than half rely on intergenerational alliances all or most of the time. Only 10% (two groups) reported that they rarely or never work with elders.

Figure 6. Geographic Scope of Central Valley Youth Organizing Groups' Networks and Alliances (N=20)



Source: FCYO National Field Scan Survey

Figure 7. Frequency of Intergenerational Alliances in Youth Organizing Campaigns (N=20)



Source: FCYO National Field Scan Survey

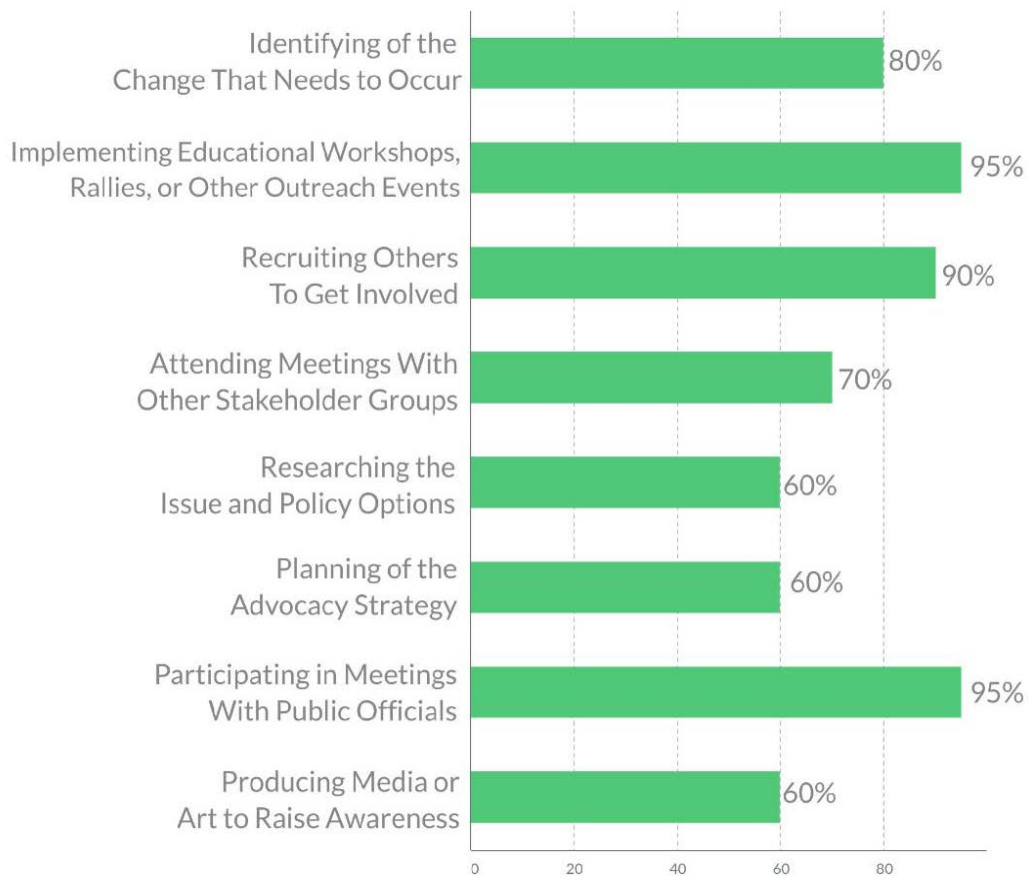
Youth Roles in Campaigns

While often working with older adults in campaigns, youth leaders take on a variety of roles. Survey results provide some insights into how campaign efforts develop skills that enhance youths' capacity to take political action.

In most groups, youth are responsible for collectively deciding the group's campaign issues, a process that typically involves some debate and analysis. Most groups also conduct member outreach through educational workshops, rallies, and events, and they require members to recruit peers and others in the community—activities that develop young people's public speaking skills, sharpen communication skills, and often take young people outside their immediate social circles to discuss a community concern and/or solutions. Members often learn how to negotiate with adult stakeholders and assert their interests at meetings with other stakeholders and public officials.

Figure 8 shows that 60% of groups involve members in researching policy options and/or developing advocacy strategies, deepening their understanding of community problems and how to address them. Almost all groups provide opportunities for members to meet with elected officials and other decision makers so that young people can share their perspectives with those who have the power to legislate or implement change. Finally, 60% of youth organizing groups also encourage members to produce different forms of media or art to advance their efforts. Activities can include producing and disseminating content shared on digital and social media.

Figure 8. Youths' Roles in Central Valley Campaign Efforts (N=20)



Data Source: HCOM, HCAL & Enterprise Youth Program Staff Inventory 2018-2019

Interviews with youth in some organizations reflect their growing ownership over campaigns. “We’re actually finding out what the issues are and developing and building these campaigns. We can talk to people who are in charge that can actually make something happen, that can actually pass law,” said a 22-year-old Californians for Justice member.

Quite notably, young people learn how to participate in campaigns, often from young organizers not much older than themselves or from peers. This peer-to-peer learning was essential in preparing young people to make public presentations, speak to elected officials, or talk to voters.

For example, a young woman from the Dolores Huerta Foundation, a notable leader in a campaign to expand health care access for undocumented youth, recalled getting hands-on training from a peer three years her senior. “Gabby taught me a lot,” she said. “My first day, I thought I was just going to walk around with her and she was going to do the knocking and everything” in a door-to-door campaign. After observing Gabby speaking to a few residents, this young woman said, “Gabby was like—go out and do it. I’m glad she was the one to tell me, ‘go out and try it yourself.’” She soon found herself taking the lead and training other youth to communicate with local residents about their campaign.

Most study participants said they obtained peer-to-peer coaching on how to speak in front of large crowds, discuss issues with school administrators or public officials, talk to voters on the phone, recruit peers to events and activities, or publicize information on social media. One 18-year-old from Merced said he has been able to develop a public voice:

Being a youth leader has definitely helped me get out of my comfort zone, going up in front of all these people talking about something I stand for. If I think about it, back then, I would never imagine myself going up to those people, but 99Rootz has prepared me to speak my mind and speak from my heart.

Reflecting on how he prepared for testimony before the school board, this 99Rootz youth said, “I definitely remember going over the speech. I remember going over it multiple times and then said it to my peers.” In some instances, role-playing was an important exercise in preparing young people to engage in civic campaigns. As an 18-year-old female youth from ACT explained, it was helpful for her “to practice what we were going to say with peers” before talking to local residents about the impact of pesticides on children’s asthma in her community. She added, “And [you] had to be prepared for people to be mean and some people to be nice.” Indeed, it is common practice among youth organizing groups to engage in role-playing exercises in order to prepare for public outreach and testimony.

By participating in grassroots organizing and civic engagement campaigns, young people not only get exposed to the processes required to educate broader publics, increase voter turnout, and have a voice in policy decisions, but they also learn about the possibilities for collectively impacting change. As one 18-year-old South Kern Sol member reflected:

I don’t think they realize the power in their own voice when it’s united, because you have to realize it’s not just you. There are like-minded individuals elsewhere that are voting the same way for the exact same things. I think we can make the biggest difference.

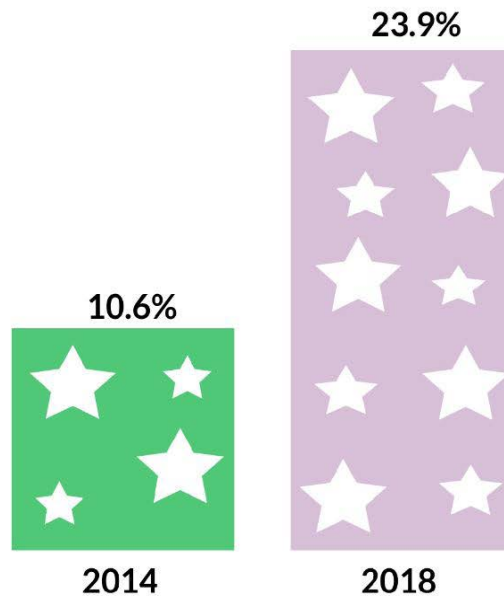
Campaign Wins and Milestones

Youth organizing efforts have resulted in some notable campaign successes across a broad range of issues in recent years. Several of these initiatives involve immigration, as youth have fought to close immigrant detention centers, free individuals from detention centers, and ensure their schools provide sanctuary from ICE officials. Youth groups have worked with their school districts to pass resolutions enabling voter registration and pre-registration on school grounds. Many groups throughout the Central Valley have successfully fought for their education rights, with youth securing student representation in school decision-making, language and ethnic studies courses, and funding for youth development in schools. Young people have also worked towards racial, ethnic, language, and LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their schools. Finally, youth have won improvements for their communities, such as increased transportation access, clean water, improved streets, removing pesticides, and access to critical health services. To date, we have documented at least 25 wins between 2017-2020. Details of campaigns are provided in the Appendix.

Increasing Youth Participation in Elections

Young people demonstrated an increased investment in government elections between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections. As shown in Figure 9, turnout among young voters aged 18-34 more than doubled (from 10.6% to 23.9%) between these two elections. This improvement in turnout can be attributed to several factors, including youths’ concerns about the contentious national political climate and competitive congressional races in the region. However, youth organizing groups must be given credit for contributing to the surge.

**Figure 9. Turnout Among 18-34-Year-Old Central Valley Residents
2014 and 2018 Midterm Elections**



Sources: California Civic Engagement Project (2014)
Political Data, Inc. (2018)

In the FCYO survey, thirteen youth organizing groups indicated that voter outreach is a primary focus of activist campaigns, while another four said they had played a supportive role in such providing a critical mass of groups seeking to ensure that eligible youth exercise their right to vote. Figure 10 lists some of the strategies groups used to foster young people’s informed involvement in elections. Most groups host or co-host voter education outreach events and also conduct social media outreach, broadening the reach of relevant information or reminders about voting. Groups also commonly engage in knocking on doors, a traditional voter outreach method. Meanwhile, almost two-thirds involve members in phone-banking, which can be a highly effective way to increase turnout among large numbers of young voters (as discussed below). A smaller percentage of groups text voters regarding the elections. Half of Central Valley youth organizing groups belong to regional, statewide, and/or national networks that focus on voter outreach; these networks support information sharing and coordinate civic engagement efforts.

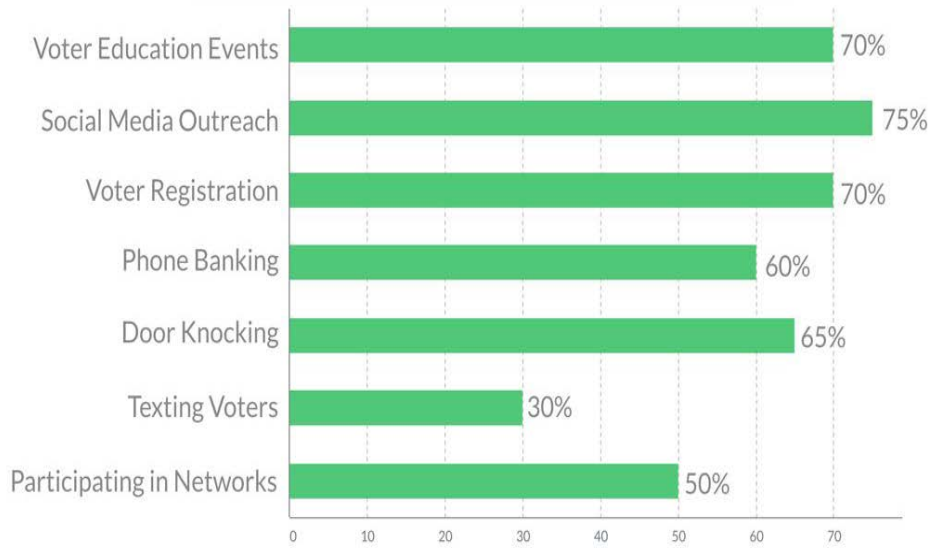
In 2018, youth civic engagement efforts were bolstered by the Central Valley Freedom Summer Participatory Action research project, which engaged UC Santa Cruz and UC Merced students from the Central Valley in supporting youth organizing efforts in the region. Students conducted extensive voter registration in their communities and hosted one regional conference at UC Merced and six local conferences (in Stockton, Ceres, Atwater, Sanger, Avenal, and Delano) to train local youth to register their peers and engage them in discussions around electoral and other issues affecting their communities (Terriquez, Villegas, and Villalobos 2020). Arguably, these 2018 efforts (involving all the authors of this report) helped strengthen ties among youth in the region and contributed to a growing pride in the Central Valley.

Voter Outreach

In the Central Valley, opportunities to learn about electoral processes remain fairly limited, and young people of color are not always encouraged by educators and other adult stakeholders to exercise their voice (Terriquez, Villegas, Villalobos, and Xu 2020). In this context, peer-to-peer outreach can make a difference. In Figure 11, we display evidence gathered from four groups that took part in a 2018 effort coordinated by Power California, a statewide intermediary focused on increasing the representation of young voters of color in low-income communities. These groups included 99Rootz, ACT for Women and Girls, Californians for Justice, and Mi Familia Vota. Our research

demonstrates that young people’s efforts to mobilize peers from their own communities can have a notable impact on voter turnout. From late September to Election Day on November 8, youth leaders from these four organizations reminded voters of the upcoming election, asked them about their plans to mail in their ballot or vote in person, clarified any questions about the process, and reminded those voting in person of their polling location.

Figure 10. Central Valley Youth Organizing Groups' Voter Outreach Activities (N=20)

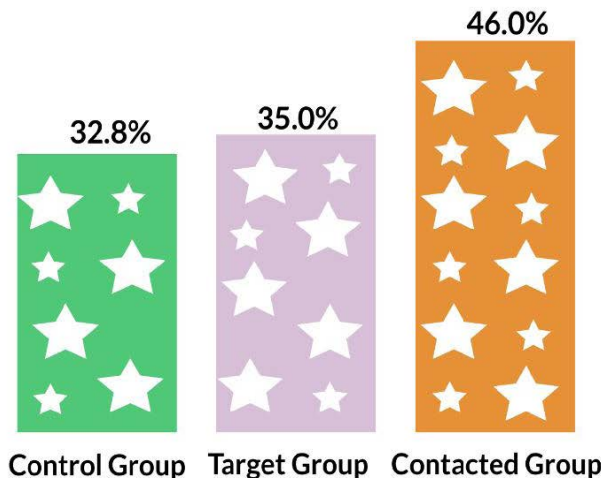


Source: FCYO National Field Scan Survey

Figure 11 illustrates how these efforts helped bolster voter turnout among young people in the Valley. Here we compared predicted voter turnout between a randomly selected “control group” of voters aged 18-34 who were not targeted for outreach and those of the same age who received a phone call. Compared to the control group’s 32.8% predicted turnout, those who were targeted for outreach (regardless of whether they answered the phone) averaged a predicted turnout of 35.0%. Those who were successfully contacted by phone averaged a predicted turnout of 46.0%. This means that peer-initiated phone conversations resulted in an estimated 13 percentage point increase in turnout. These findings evidence the importance of youth leadership in bolstering civic engagement among young voters in the region.

Figure 11. Youth-Led Phone Banking Efforts Increased Turnout Among 18-34-Year-Old Central Valley Voters

(N= 105, 512)



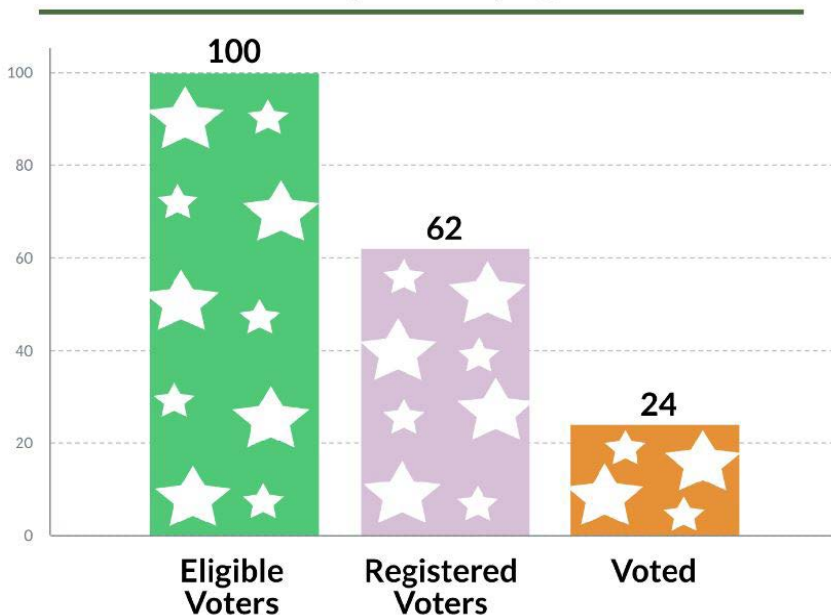
Data Sources: Political Data Inc. and Power California

Opportunities for Growing the Electorate

Although turnout increased among young voters during the 2018 election, many young adults were not registered or mobilized. To demonstrate the potential for growing the electorate, we share the **Civic Engagement Gap Ratio** for Central Valley counties, which shows the proportion of voters who registered and voted as a share of U.S. citizens in this age group. Specifically in Figure 12, this ratio shows that for every 100 eligible voters aged 18-34 in the Central Valley, 62 were registered, and only 24 turned out to vote. In other words, over one-third of U.S. citizens were not registered, and over three-fourths did not exercise their right to vote.

The Civic Engagement Gap Ratio for the Central Valley suggests that plenty of work remains to ensure that eligible young voters fill out and submit their voter registration forms. Additionally, this highly mobile population needs to be reminded to update their registration if they have changed residential addresses. Once registered, they will need reminders to vote via social media, phone calls, text, and community events. Communication with young voters is essential, given that voting processes have changed and may continue to change as a result of the pandemic or other emergencies. Some of the youth organizing groups in this study have demonstrated track records in registering and mobilizing young voters. They can build on this record and expand the number of grassroots youth organizing groups and partner institutions in efforts to expand an informed and engaged young electorate.¹

**Figure 12. The 2018 Civic Engagement Gap Ratio
Central Valley Voters, Aged 18-34**



Data Sources: American Community Survey, 2018 and Political Data, Inc.

¹ Results are based on the results of OLS and two-stage least squares regression analyses that control for age, gender, prior voting history, Democratic Party registration, number of registered voters per household, voting method (poll vs. mail), and zip code characteristics. These findings are based on data from Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, and Tulare counties. For more information on the methodology used in this analysis, see Terriquez and Xu 2020.

The Central Valley Is the Heart of Cali: Sustaining and Building the Movement



The Know Youth Media covers the 2017 Fresno Women's March
Photo credit: Jarrett Ramones, 2020

The voices of youth have increased in volume and effectiveness over the last decade as they speak out on the direction of Central Valley affairs—political, educational, and cultural. Their power will likely grow as alumni members of youth organizing and youth leadership groups take the lead in helping future cohorts of young people to develop civic knowledge and activist skills. However, youth groups face several key challenges. While the civic infrastructure to support youth organizing has strengthened, it still pales in comparison to that found in the Bay Area or Los Angeles. Additionally, young people and their allies face conservative and sometimes hostile opposition to their civic and political engagement, which adds a level of risk to young people's safety and well-being, especially for youth from undocumented and mixed-status families. This unreceptive context can constrain the types of demands young people are able to make on decision-makers and systems leaders. Young people must be prepared to anticipate backlash when they try to alter power dynamics within the region.

Young people also encounter logistical challenges and economic constraints. The geographic span of the region and poor transportation infrastructure have created significant challenges for in-person gatherings and the relationships they foster. Given the high poverty rates among people of color in the region and the ready availability of agricultural employment, many young people must work to help support their families. After all, youth involved in leadership development and organizing rarely receive a stipend. In addition, there is the general sense of a “brain drain” that takes educated young leaders to places like Los Angeles or the Bay Area. Prospects for economic stability and professional growth are often greater outside of the Central Valley for those who go to college, especially given local histories of racial exclusion in industries and occupations that offer better pay.

A hopeful sign in this regard is our observation over the years that racially diverse young leaders in the region are developing a shared collective identity as Central Valley residents. This becomes a source of pride that motivates them to continue fighting to bring more and better opportunities to vulnerable and marginalized members of their communities. Thus, it appears that more and more young people want to stay in the region, or return there after going to college, hoping to improve their childhood communities rather than permanently relocate for better economic opportunities elsewhere. The collective leadership capacity of young people in the region is thus being bolstered by a growing network of young leaders who are willing to put in the work to advance their communities.

The growth of youth power and its regional solidarity demonstrates what is possible. To continue building on the success of the 2010s, older adults must continue to open doors for this younger generation and provide resources and guidance. At the same time, older civic leaders and elders should support autonomous spaces where young people can celebrate their diverse identities and learn from their peers about how to insert their perspectives into decision-making processes.



Youth leaders from Fresno and Merced present their plans to organize a youth conference in their community

Foundation investments in the Central Valley have contributed to the incubation and growth of youth power in the region. Ongoing investments are necessary. Moreover, there are additional ways to continue growing youth power in the region. Based on input from youth leaders, our current recommendations include:

- Creating a more intentional youth leadership pipeline:** Though youth overwhelmingly discussed positive experiences in their organizations, there were multiple youth who expressed concerns around “aging out” of their respective programs without support to transition into new roles. Youth suggested the creation of paid internship positions which would also help alleviate some of the disparities, as unpaid internships privilege more affluent youth.

Additionally, youth emphasized the need for a more intentional pipeline towards paid staff positions at other organizations once they “age out” as youth, while staff members who participated in focus groups also emphasized the need for more intentional inclusive hiring practices in senior staff positions with livable wages for organizers.

- Utilizing social media more effectively:** As mentioned earlier in the report, social media is an increasingly important tool for youth participants and organizations. In addition to regularly posting and being active on social media, youth are encouraged to use social media in ways that increase personal engagement among people who “follow” organization pages. Whether that means utilizing the Instagram Live features, creating polls, or soliciting community feedback on campaigns, youth emphasized that individuals who engaged with posts were more likely to have a deeper sense of connection to the organization/campaign they were following. Additionally, it is important to fund social media trainings and workshops not only for paid staff members but for all youth participants.

- Creating a Central Valley regional gathering:** Though youth expressed great appreciation for regional gatherings and statewide camps during focus groups, they also emphasized the need for a Central Valley-based regional gathering. With such a large geographical landscape that is physically and politically

distinct from other areas of California, Central Valley participants argued it was sometimes difficult to connect or meet others involved in similar campaign efforts. As one participant stated, “Really, just being able to see people that do live in your community and your neighborhoods that do have the same interests (is important), so you don’t feel so alone. Because it’s one thing to be statewide, but if I only know someone who lives in Sacramento doing the same work as me, it’s not as big as a push to keep going locally.”

•**Centering youth-driven coalition spaces and support for emerging organizations:** Youth expressed that coalitions typically emerged from staff or organizers coming together, and then youth are later brought into the fold. Instead, youth argued that organizations should create multi-generation coalitions at the inception of campaigns, to allow young people to lead efforts. Some youth reflected that in their experiences, campaigns or movements are sometimes co-opted by adults and youth-led goals are ignored. Additionally, some youth felt that it is sometimes difficult to say “no” to adult allies. Youth also emphasized that with new organizations emerging in the Valley, it is crucial to invest in growing youth-led organizations. Staff members and youth recognized that it may be necessary to go beyond the non-profit world, as many emerging organizations operate without having a 501(c)3 status.

•**Self-care and healing workshops and spaces:** In light of the common experiences of burnout and feeling overwhelmed, youth participants emphasized the need for additional self-care and healing workshops and spaces. As one youth participant explained in a focus group, there are sometimes expectations and pressure from staff to always be at their best. “Sometimes they forget we’re youth. We have social lives, we have school, and there are so many other things we could focus on. We have our own problems. And I think it’s important to, like, step back for a while and let them think about that and heal.” For groups that involve youth in direct actions or hostile contexts, participants should always understand the risks of involvement, while still being given the agency to decide what’s best for them. Following a campaign or action, post-care can be used to help youth heal and self-regulate.



Kicking off a series of youth-led conferences across the Valley, youth leaders gathered at the first conference in Atwater, CA

References

- Bohulano Mabalon, Dawn. 2013. *Little Manila Is in the Heart: The Making of the Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Borrell, Brendan. 2018. "California's Fertile Valley Is Awash in Air Pollution." Mother Jones (blog). December 10, 2018. <https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2018/12/californias-fertile-valley-is-awash-in-air-pollution/>.
- Bringhurst, Newell G. 2000. "The Ku Klux Klan in a Central California Community: Tulare County During the 1920s and 1930s." *Southern California Quarterly* 82(4):365-96.
- Buckley, James Michael and William Littmann. 2010. "Viewpoint: A Contemporary Vernacular: Latino Landscapes in California's Central Valley." *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 17(2):1-12.
- Christens, Brian D., and Tom Dolan. 2011. "Interweaving Youth Development, Community Development, and Social Change Through Youth Organizing." *Youth & Society* 43 (2): 528-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10383647>.
- Cole, Luke W. and Sheila R. Foster. 2001. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: New York University Press.
- Eissinger, Michael A. 2011. "Kern County: California's Deep South." Paper presented at the Critical Ethnic Studies conference and the Future of Genocide: Settler Colonialism/Heteropatriarchy/White Supremacy, University of California, Riverside.
- Gibson, Margaret A. 1988. *Accommodation without Assimilation: Sikh Immigrants in an American High School*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2007. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. American Crossroads 21. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gregory, James N. 2005. *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press.
- Hart, Daniel, Thomas M. Donnelly, James Youniss and Robert Atkins. 2007. "High School Community Service as a Predictor of Adult Voting and Volunteering." *American Educational Research Journal* 44(1):197-219.
- Humes, Edward. 1999. *Mean Justice: A Town's Terror, a Prosecutor's Power, a Betrayal of Innocence*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Kirshner, Ben. 2015. *Youth Activism in an Era of Education Inequality*. New York: NYU Press.
- Lytle-Hernández, Kelly. 2010. *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McAdam, Doug. 1989. "The Biographical Consequences of Activism." *American Sociological Review* 54:744-60.
- McAdam, Doug. 1989. "The Biographical Consequences of Activism." *American Sociological Review* 54:744-60.
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2019. *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.
- Parsons, James J. 1986. "A Geographer Looks at the San Joaquin Valley." *Geographical Review* 76(4):371-89.
- Real, Jose A. Del. 2019. "They Grow the Nation's Food, but They Can't Drink the Water." *The New York Times*, May 21, 2019, sec. U.S. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/21/us/california-central-valley-tainted-water.html>.
- Rogers, John, Kavitha Mediratta, and Seema Shah. 2012. "Building Power, Learning Democracy: Youth Organizing as a Site of Civic Development." *Review of Research in Education* 36 (1): 43-66. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X11422328>.

- Schwaller, Shawn. 2018. "Greetings from Bakersfield! Law Enforcement Corruption, White Supremacy, and Latinx Lives in California's Deep Red South." in *Boom California*: Berkeley, University of California Press. Available at: <https://BoomCalifornia.com/2018/10/16/greetings-from-bakersfield/>.
- Temple Kirby, Jack. 1983. "The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians." *The Journal of Southern History* 49(4):585-600.
- Terriquez, Veronica. 2015. "Training Young Activists: Grassroots Organizing and Youths' Civic and Political Trajectories." *Sociological Perspectives* 58 (2): 223-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121414556473>.
- Terriquez, Veronica, and Hyeyoung Kwon. 2014. "Intergenerational Family Relations, Civic Organisations, and the Political Socialisation of Second-Generation Immigrant Youth." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (3): 425-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2014.921567>.
- Terriquez, Veronica and John Rogers. 2017. "Time for Social Change: Youth Development and the Educational Outcomes of Youth Organizing." Pgs. 161-178. In *Learning Time: In Pursuit of Educational Equity*, edited by Jeannie Oakes, Marisa Saunders, and Jorge Ruiz. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Walker, Richard. 2004. *The Conquest of Bread: 150 Years of Agribusiness in California*. New York: The New Press.
- Wright, Dana. 2007. "Escuelas Si! ;Pintas No! (Schools Yes! Prisons, No!) Connecting Youth Action Research and Youth Organizing in California." *Children, Youth and Environments* 17(2):50316.

Appendix: Central Valley Campaign Victories and Milestones

Youth leadership and organizing groups offer a range of activities and events that develop members' skills, broaden their social networks, and enable them to make a difference in their communities. Some groups have various ongoing campaigns. Rather than provide a comprehensive accounting of programming, here we offer information on several youth organizing campaigns that have to date resulted in concrete policy and programmatic changes.

- **99Rootz: Graduation Cap Decorations.** The Merced School District barred young people from wearing decorated caps during high school graduation. Youth leaders hoped to reverse that policy, since they saw decorated caps as a form of cultural and artistic expression. In March 2019, 99Rootz members collaborated with Girls and Womyn of Color (GWoC) youth organizers and met with the Merced Union High School District (MUHSD) school board and superintendent to gain permission for decorated graduation caps. They also collected about 700 online and in-person signatures from Merced County students. The district superintendent had told students that the school board would review and release an Administration Regulation for decorating graduation caps on April 29, 2019. Instead, in May 2019, the Merced school board released an Administration Regulation regarding California State Assembly Bill No. 1248, which allows students to wear cultural adornments on graduation day but did not include the decoration of graduation caps. Youth organizers addressed this concern to the school board members, as they were expecting an Administration Regulation in April regarding decorating graduation caps. The Merced school board agreed that each high school's principal could choose to allow youth to wear decorated caps. In June 2019, Atwater High School students became the first in the Merced Union High School District to decorate their graduation caps.

- **99Rootz: Expanding Opportunities for Voter Pre-Registration and Registration at Merced High Schools.** Beginning in 2016, U.S. citizens aged 16 and 17 in California became eligible to preregister to vote in U.S. government elections. Many high school students were unaware of this change, however, so the founding members of 99Rootz met with Merced Union High School District board members and administrators to craft a district-wide resolution that would facilitate voter pre-registration and registration in the district's high schools. Youths' efforts were successful. The resolution, passed on March 14, 2018, required schools to work with community groups to implement nonpartisan voter registration on school grounds, and it encouraged school leadership to distribute voter registration cards to students. Following the resolution's adoption, 99Rootz trained members to conduct voter registration and pre-registration at local high schools. Youth also partnered with school administrators and teachers on classroom presentations that informed students about the importance of voting in local and statewide elections. Additionally, during the 2018-2019 academic school year, voting rights workshops were held in classrooms, sometimes in partnership with UC Merced and UC Santa Cruz students who were part of the Central Valley Freedom Summer and other initiatives. In 2018, 99Rootz met their goal of pre-registering and registering over 2,000 people, and in the spring of 2019, reached their voter registration goal of 1,500 young people.

• **ACT for Women and Girls: Sanctuary School at Woodlake Unified.** In 2017, ACT youth leaders began campaigning for a resolution to the Woodlake Unified School District to make it a “sanctuary” district that does not allow ICE on campuses and to instate LGBTQ+ sensitivity training for teachers. In early February 2018, students went door-to-door throughout the entire city of Woodlake to register people to vote, raise awareness, and solicit signatures to show their support for making Woodlake Unified a sanctuary district. In March 2018, the Woodlake youth went to the school board to make public comment that they intended to bring this resolution to the board in April. In April, after a year of organizing and campaigning, youth presented a resolution and a petition of support with 996 signatures to the school board. The historically conservative school board and other district officials worked with the students over the next two months to finalize the language of the resolution. In May 2018, the school board voted to pass it unanimously, instating the second resolution of its kind in the country, and the first presented by a youth-led campaign.

• **ACT for Women and Girls: Glyphosate Removal.** Glyphosate, often marketed under the name “Roundup,” is a general-use pesticide introduced in the U.S. by the Monsanto company in 1974. Since then, it has become the most applied pesticide in the United States, despite decades of research and legal disputes indicating the health risks of human exposure, including cancer risk. However, the EPA has deemed glyphosate safe for humans, leaving agriculturally embedded laborers and communities across the nation at risk of exposure to the dangerous chemical. In 2017, Angel Garcia of the Tulare County Coalition Advocating for Pesticide Safety (TC-CAPS) was inspired to develop a campaign against glyphosate use. Garcia’s background as an environmental justice advocate contributed to the group’s motivation to help establish Organizing and Redefining Action for Long-Term Environmental Justice (ORALE), an environmental justice organization backed by the infrastructure of CAPS and developed primarily by an ACTION team from ACT for Women and Girls. ORALE offers intergenerational political and environmental education for youth participants, who also canvassed, phone-banked, spoke at board meetings, and met with city and county officials. These campaign efforts aimed to persuade local governments to ban the use of glyphosate or prevent exposure to community members, especially on school campuses. After meeting with the school board and janitorial directors of Visalia Unified School District, ORALE’s campaign achieved its first major victory when the school district banned glyphosate use on school property in 2018. ORALE followed this victory by launching two additional glyphosate ban campaigns in the spring of 2019, in the rural Tulare County school districts of Culter-Orosi and Lindsay.

• **ACT for Women and Girls: Educate to End the Hate.** In 2017, fears of racial tension and violence rose at Redwood High School in Visalia when officials did not respond to a student wearing clothing with a Confederate flag on it. Students and youth organizers recognized how this event actually pointed to a more systemic endorsement of racism within the school, community, and local government, which required an organized and concentrated response. A member of ACT for Women and Girls’ Feminist Leadership Academy (FLA) who also attended the Visalia high school brought the issue to attention at an organizational meeting. In response, ACT set out on a campaign to revise Visalia Unified School District’s dress code to prohibit hate symbols. Organizers brought in student and community support by circulating t-shirts, buttons, and social media posts with the “Educate to End the Hate” tagline. They successfully built a coalition totaling over 30 students, whose campaign tasks included phone banking with voting-age adults and speaking at school board meetings. Despite collecting over 1,000 parent signatures, however, the Educate to End the Hate campaign was thwarted at this stage. The school district, citing the freedom of expression guaranteed by the First Amendment, did not approve the resolution. In response, the ACLU conducted an investigation on the events of the Educate to End the Hate campaign and brought in two campaign organizers as temporary staff to assist their attorney in interviewing other students of the school. The campaign is far from over, as the ACLU and Visalia Unified School District remain in litigation against each other today.

• **ACT for Women and Girls: LGBTQ+ Inclusive Training at Orosi High School.** In 2018, student organizers at Orosi High School in Orosi, California, felt that their school could be doing more to foster inclusivity and solidarity for LGBTQ+ students, and recognized this inaction was a critical issue to the safety and accessibility of students' learning. Some of these youth leaders were part of an ACT for Women and Girls' ACTION team. With the endorsement of the school's principal and administration, Orosi students organized an LGBTQ+ inclusivity training for all of the school's teachers, which was held during August 2018. They also created and handed out buttons depicting the school's mascot with a rainbow design to raise awareness for the campaign, and for teachers to show their solidarity with LGBTQ+ students. Student organizers were supported in their campaign efforts by The Source LGBT+ Center. This ACTION team campaign led to the creation of ACT for Women and Girls' second Student Health Awareness Peer Empowerment (S.H.A.P.E.) program at Orosi High School in the fall of 2018. Based on the original and successful S.H.A.P.E. program in Woodlake, this youth empowerment club creates networks and resources for students to access their rights to health and stand up for those of others.

• **ACT for Women and Girls: Pharmacy Access 2019.** Emergency contraceptives (ECs) have had a tumultuous history of controversy and regulation in the United States. Today, some pharmacists continue to enforce outdated rules or beliefs and prevent youth or people without prescriptions from purchasing ECs, which is a violation of legal and reproductive rights. To assess and combat this trend, ACT for Women and Girls established a Pharmacy Access program, beginning in Kings and Tulare counties in 2018. This campaign involved the work of 12 youth organizers who canvassed 64 pharmacies across three counties. In each pharmacy, they acted as "secret shoppers" and graded each based on whether they properly gave access to ECs. The grades were made publicly available for youth in these counties to access, and in the 2018 program year, only eight out of the sixty-four pharmacies graded received an "A." The Pharmacy Access campaign was redeveloped and improved for its 2019 iteration. Youth participants from ACT's Feminist Leadership Academy surveyed Fresno, Tulare, and Kings counties using a similar "secret shopper" strategy. In addition to direct EC access, pharmacies were graded on the ability of their staff to answer questions about insurance coverage and relevant laws. These report cards were sent individually with commentary to each pharmacy, as well as once again published for anyone to access. From the success of this campaign, ACT was also able to publish Pharmacy Access: Advocacy Guide for Increasing Community Access to Emergency Contraception, which outlines how other organizations can implement similar programs in their communities.



Central Valley youth leaders share space with one another as they strategize for the summer

•**Californians for Justice – Fresno: Equitable School Funding.** Fresno youth have won Fresno Unified School District board and district leaders’ commitment to prioritize and identify Relationship Centered Schools as a solution in their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). In May 2017, students testified at the school board meeting and won an allocation of \$68,000 to create and implement a district-wide plan for Relationship Centered Schools, starting with three early-adopter high schools. For the past several years, youth have also collaborated with the district to engage hundreds of students in the LCAP process. CFJ leaders also launched and continue to support the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) Student Advisory Committee, as well as helped to facilitate campus-advisories. Students have ensured that marginalized students are represented in these advisory committees and that a majority are composed of students most impacted by educational inequity. Committees meet at least six times a year and develop recommendations to bring back to the district. In July 2017, Fresno youth leaders spoke at a press conference in Sacramento to defend and press for improvements in the Local Control Funding Formula. Youth uplifted Fresno Unified as an example of how LCFF is working by highlighting investments in design teams to pilot Relationship Centered Schools and the role of caring teachers in educational success.

•**Californians for Justice – Fresno: Relationship Centered Schools.** CFJ youth leaders have built on their Relationship Centered Schools (RCS) campaign, initially launched in 2015. The campaign centers around building relationships within schools to address systemic racism and foster student success. One aspect of the campaign includes advocating for safe spaces. In March 2017, Fresno youth leaders mobilized along with other community-based organizations, students, teachers, parents, and community members to testify at board of trustee meetings in support of sanctuary schools. A CFJ student leader also penned an op-ed advocating for sanctuary schools in the Fresno Bee. As a result, the Fresno Unified School District Board of Trustees unanimously passed a resolution declaring district schools safe havens for undocumented students—the first such resolution in the Central Valley. Youth leaders have also regularly met with the superintendent of Fresno Unified and school board trustees to bolster their support for Relationship Centered Schools.

•**California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance: Stopping McFarland’s Immigrant Detention Center Expansion.** In the Central Valley town of McFarland, the GEO Group, a private prison corporation, wanted to convert two local prisons into immigrant detention centers. The GEO Group and ICE had finalized their agreement in December 2019, just two weeks before Governor Newsom’s new law banning new or renewed private prison contracts went into effect. CIYJA youth and other local organizations, including Faith in the Valley and the United Farm Workers Foundation, began organizing in January 2020 to fight against the proposed detention centers in order to protect their community. McFarland is composed of predominantly Latinx farmworkers, and it is estimated that almost half of its residents are undocumented. Youth-led efforts to stop the GEO Group’s expansion included distributing petitions, canvassing door-to-door to encourage residents to attend planning commission meetings, and collecting over 1,000 petition signatures from community members. CIYJA youth and community members continued to voice opposition to the new detention centers throughout contentious planning commission meetings, multiple votes on the issue, and the mayor’s resignation in the face of public outcry. After youth focused their advocacy efforts specifically at Governor Gavin Newsom and Attorney General Xavier Becerra, U.S. District Judge Troy Nunley issued a temporary restraining order on July 14, 2020, barring the city of McFarland from modifying the permits for the two prison facilities. Youth are continuing to voice their opposition to the detention centers as the case proceeds in court.

•**California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance: Shut Down Mesa Verde.** Since its foundation in 2015, CIYJA youth organizers have been leading campaigns to shut down the Mesa Verde immigrant detention center established by the GEO Group in Bakersfield, CA. Youth leaders have actively organized petitions, demonstrations (including protests and vigils), and phone-banking efforts to encourage commu-

nity members to call for the release of detainees. Youth also created a bond fund to help pay for the bonds of detainees inside, as well as a commissary fund to provide food for detainees when conducting visits. As a result of their efforts and a successful campaign, Abuelita Sofía, a grandmother and farmworker detained by ICE since October 2019, was freed in March 2020.

• **California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance: Free Them All.** In a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CIYJA youth organizers called for the release of all detainees in the Mesa Verde immigrant detention center in order to reduce their risk for COVID-19. Youth also sought proper personal protective equipment (PPE) for all detainees and staff at the center. CIYJA youth, along with allies like the Kern Youth Abolitionists (KYA), held car demonstrations and socially distanced protests outside of the detention center to support detainees, many of whom went on hunger strike. Youth also launched a social media campaign called #FreeThemAll to share stories, photos, and testimonies of detainees. In May 2020, youth organizers won a huge victory when a federal judge ordered ICE to identify people for release from Mesa Verde and another detention facility, the Yuba County Jail in Marysville, to allow for appropriate social distancing during the pandemic. Mesa Verde subsequently released all women detainees. Youth advocates continue to demand that every individual be released from the detention center.

• **Faith in the Valley: School Spending and Educational Justice.** Kern High School District was known for having a zero-tolerance policy, which often unfairly penalizes students and contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline for youth of color. In 2014, the Kern Education Justice Collaborative (Faith in the Valley Kern, the Dolores Huerta Foundation, and California Rural Legal Assistance) and its partners Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance and the National Brotherhood Association decided to take legal action and sue the Kern High School District for its harms to young people of color. The lawsuit resulted in several wins for youth. In 2017, there was a final settlement, in which KHSD agreed to fire four Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) counselors, invest fewer resources in campus police, hire diverse teachers, host two community forums every school year to provide progress reports and transparency, allow students to celebrate Black History and Hispanic Heritage months, and lower the rates of suspensions and expulsions.

• **Fathers and Families of San Joaquin: Youth Voter Registration.** In 2018, FFSJ youth participated in the Central Valley Freedom Summer project to learn how to register young people to vote. During the summer of 2018, youth from FFSJ registered over 200 youth to vote in high schools and successfully lobbied for a resolution from the Stockton Unified School District (SUSD) that mandated the district provide voting materials to high school juniors and seniors. This was done in partnership with the Central Valley Freedom Summer Team and Trustee Lange Luntao. The resolution was passed in September 2018.

• **Fresno Barrios Unidos and Youth Leadership Institute: What the FAX.** Youth in Fresno Barrios Unidos (FBU) recognized that the public transportation system in Fresno, Fresno Area Express (FAX), was inadequate for minors and other people restricted from different methods of transportation to safely and reliably get where they needed to go. In collaboration with the Youth Leadership Institute Boys and Men of Color (YLI BMOC), Fresno Barrios Unidos developed a campaign to improve the conditions of public transportation for Fresno's youth. Youth organizers began work on this campaign in September 2017 by circulating a survey to Fresno youth bus riders, who overwhelmingly indicated that their most desired change to Fresno buses was the addition of free Wi-Fi. In an effort to implement this change, as well as address transportation deserts, youth from YLI BMOC and FBU recorded their bus experiences, surveyed other youth, met with city council and FAX officials, and submitted resolutions to the Fresno City Council. Youth leaders can claim a partial victory, as FAX officials jointly agreed to experiment with providing Wi-Fi on buses. As of September 2020, young leaders were still waiting for FAX officials to follow through on their commitment.



Youth at a summer conference in Stockton receive training on how to canvas and register other members of their community to vote

• **Jakara Movement: Punjabi Translation in the 2020 Census.** The Jakara Movement recognized the importance of including all communities in the 2020 Census, which includes the Punjabi community in California and beyond. Many Punjabi speakers have not been represented in the Census due to language barriers. In May 2017, the Jakara Movement urged the U.S. Congress to include the Punjabi language in the 2020 Census. Jakara Movement organizers and staff in Kern, Fresno, Madera, Merced, Los Angeles, Sutter, Alameda, and Sacramento met with elected officials in Congress and obtained signatures of support for their cause. In December 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau recognized Punjabi as an independent language. As a result of these changes, Punjabi speakers have access to language services (such as a phone number they can call for assistance in filling out the survey) and translated census forms.

• **Jakara Movement: Removing Gandhi Statue.** In June 2020, the Jakara Movement’s university chapter at California State University Fresno made efforts to remove the Gandhi statue on campus, due to Gandhi’s history of anti-blackness and racism. Fresno State students wrote letters of support to professors and the university’s president. Students also created a petition to remove the statue, which obtained over 2,000 signatures. The Jakara Movement has worked with students, the Fresno State Sikh Student Association, the Fresno State Jakara Movement chapter, local community organizations, and others to remove the statue. As a compromise, the administration agreed to remove the quote on the statue, “My life is my message,” which Jakara Movement organizers feel is hypocritical given Gandhi’s past anti-black and racist statements. Organizers plan to continue the conversation with the university surrounding the complete removal of the Gandhi statue.

• **Jakara Movement: Incorporating Punjabi in High Schools.** Bakersfield is home to a substantial Punjabi-speaking community. Although Punjabi is the third-most spoken language in the city, Punjabi language courses were not offered in the city’s high schools. In April 2017, Jakarta Movement staff and organizers met with the Kern High School District school board and the Ridgeview High School principal to propose incorporating Punjabi language courses into the curriculum at Ridge View High School, so that Bakersfield youth would have the opportunity to learn to communicate with their Punjabi community members and learn about the Punjabi culture. The Jakara Movement’s youth organizers from the Sikh Honors and Service Society of Bakersfield branch collected nearly 1,500 signatures from supporters. Due to these efforts, Ridgeview offered the first Punjabi language course in Kern County in the 2018-19 school year. Ridgeview was soon followed by six other cities offering Punjabi courses at high schools throughout the state.

•**Jakara Movement: Save Punjabi at Livingston High.** The Jakara Movement’s successful organizing work helped implement Punjabi language courses at a total of 10 high schools throughout California by 2018. In May 2019, the Merced school board voted to cancel the Punjabi course, which students could take for college credit, at Livingston High School. The board made this decision because they did not have a certified instructor for the course and because of perceived low enrollment, although 25 students had signed up for the course. Jakarta Movement youth, Livingston High School students, and the Punjabi Sikh community urged the Merced Unified School District to save the Punjabi course. Youth organizers held meetings with community members to inform them about the situation and collected around 2,000 signatures in support of saving the Punjabi course. Youth organizers met with officials at a school board meeting where Punjabi Sikh community members filled up the entire space. Youth addressed the cultural and economic importance of the course, citing the need for students to be able to communicate with Punjabi community members, who make up around 20% of the population in Livingston. On June 4, 2019, the Livingston City Council passed a resolution to save the course. The school board hired a temporary teacher to continue having the Punjabi language course offered at Livingston High School for the 2020-21 school year.

•**Jakara Movement: Sikh Awareness Month.** In October 2018, Jakara Movement staff and students met with the Elk Grove Unified School District to encourage them to pass a resolution creating a Sikh Awareness Month Resolution. Sikh Awareness Month would educate students on Punjabi and Sikh history, religion, and culture. Jakara Movement youth collaborated with the Sikh Council of California and Sikh Coalition as well as other Punjabi and Sikh organizations to promote the resolution and push for more inclusive ethnic studies in the district’s schools and statewide. The Elk Grove Unified School District acknowledged the Punjabi and Sikh community by passing the Sikh Awareness Month Resolution on November 26, 2019. Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month is designated for the month of November. Furthermore, California passed resolution No. 133 designating the month of November as Sikh American Awareness and Appreciation Month statewide.

•**Jakara Movement: AB-3179.** In March 2018, the Jakara Movement joined statewide efforts to pass AB-3179, a bill focused on expanding Punjabi bilingual language and translation services throughout California to increase access to government services. Punjabi is the third-most spoken language in the Central Valley, and many cities in California have a high density of Punjabi speakers, including Union City, Live Oak, Yuba City, Livingston, Selma, Fresno, and Clovis. The Jakara Movement advocated for AB-3179 to the community and elected officials alongside around 50 gurdwaras and 50 community organizations, including Advancing Justice ALC, the Center at the Sierra Health Foundation, and Hmong Innovating Politics. In August 2017, AB-3179 passed unanimously in the California Senate, and the bill also passed in the State Assembly. The Jakara Movement collected signatures to encourage Governor Brown to sign the bill, but unfortunately, in September 2018, Governor Brown vetoed the bill, stating that the bill should be considered a part of the budget process. The Jakara Movement plans to revisit the budget after the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the Jakara Movement continues to make efforts to implement AB-3179 by working with different California departments rather than focusing on legislation.

• **Jakara Movement: Punjabi Translation on Ballots.** In April 2017, the Jakara Movement began efforts to include the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script on ballots. Without these services, Punjabi speakers continue to face barriers in voting. Jakara Movement staff and organizers, in collaboration with Hmong Innovating Politics, Advancing Justice ALC, and other organizations, met with elected officials in Bakersfield to gain their support and communicated with the Secretary of State Alex Padilla about the importance of translation services for election ballots. Organizers saw a partial success on October 16, 2017, with the passage of AB-918, the Voters Choice Act, which ensured translated ballots for voters and training for election workers on how to handle translated ballots. However, the Punjabi language was not included on the list of languages to provide translation for. After additional organizing, including communications with the Secretary of State, and after Gurmukhi script was officially recognized by the U.S. Census Bureau in December 2017, Secretary of State Alex Padilla added Punjabi and five other languages to the state’s Election Language Assistance Requirement under Elections Code Section 14201(b)(1) on January 2, 2018. Sutter County became the first county in California to have a ballot written in Punjabi Gurmukhi script during the 2018 primary elections, and eight other counties soon followed suit.



Hmong Innovating Politics promoting through social media to staying at home helps protect you and your family from COVID-19 infection

• **LOUD for Tomorrow: Voter Registration Efforts.** As a fledgling organization in 2018, LOUD for Tomorrow fought to pass a resolution in the Delano Joint Union High School District to support youth voter registration. The school board passed the resolution entitled “Empowering & Preparing Youth for a Stronger Democracy,” which declared September Voter Registration Month, established a Youth Voters Committee to implement the resolution, and declared that the superintendent and district leadership must allow trained students and graduates to register high school students on campus during school hours. Through that victory, the youth of LOUD for Tomorrow were able to register their peers to vote in Cesar E. Chavez High School, Delano High School, and Robert F. Kennedy High School. Through their efforts, over 200 youth were registered or pre-registered to vote. In the face of another national election in 2020, these youth continue to organize and mobilize their peers to participate in the shaping of their community.

•**LOUD for Tomorrow: Advocacy for Public Investment.** Due to a lack of public infrastructure in their cities, LOUD for Tomorrow successfully advocated to the Kern County Board of Supervisors for reinvestment in public utilities in 2019. Most Delano side streets lack sidewalks and streetlights that allow for youth to transit safely in between school and home. The students and youth of LOUD for Tomorrow advocated for investment in their local community. In early 2019, LOUD for Tomorrow went to multiple Kern County Board of Supervisor meetings to present their case and argue for public investment. As a result of their advocacy, the board of supervisors chose to invest \$2.65 million in repairing roads that have previously had no sidewalks or street lights.



Youth leaders engaging in Artivism to get out the vote among their peers

•**Madera Youth Leaders: Clean Water Initiative.** Students in Madera lack access to clean water in their schools, as rusty and outdated water fountains impair the quality and taste of the water. In November 2019, Madera Youth Leaders met with the superintendent of the Madera Union School District to advocate for repairing and replacing old water fountains and ensuring that students have access to fresh water. Youth shared their personal experiences with dirty water in high school and even recalled similar issues from when they were in Madera elementary schools. Madera Youth Leaders were successful in securing a commitment that the new high school in Madera, Martha Torres High School, will have a refillable hydration station, new fountains that are 100% filtered, and with new pipes that will provide clean and fresh water to students. The superintendent also committed to ensuring that water fountains at all Madera schools are regularly tested and will be replaced and/or cleaned when necessary.

•**Mi Familia Vota: Safe Place Campaign.** After the election of Donald Trump as President in 2016 and his expansion of ICE, fear of racial hate crimes, detainment, deportation, and police brutality gripped the students and families of the Fresno Unified School District (FUSD), which is one of the largest in California and has a high proportion of Latinx students. In response, local Latinx advocacy group Mi Familia Vota launched a campaign in January 2017 to establish a “safe place” status in the FUSD to protect immigrant students from the threat of violence and detainment. With support from Californians for Justice, The California Endowment, and the Fresno Immigration Coalition, youth went door-to-door to collect petition signatures, spoke at board meetings, and held interviews with officials. Mi Familia Vota’s efforts were initially opposed by one board member, but despite this obstacle, the “safe place” resolution Mi Familia Vota proposed was unanimously passed by the FUSD board on March 8, 2017, ensuring Fresno’s immigrant students their full legal rights and protections on school property.

•**Valley Natives for Change: Replace Fresno High’s Mascot Image.** Fresno High’s mascot of the “warrior” depicted an offensive Native American caricature. Youth and adult allies led the charge to change this image, while keeping the name of the mascot. Utilizing a social media campaign, as well as a petition, letters to the editors of local newspapers, and participation at local school board meetings, they advocated to remove this offensive imagery. In a 6-1 vote on December 9, 2020, the Fresno Unified School District voted to remove the native imagery. A new image for the mascot will be created by Fresno High students.



Youth have raised awareness about LGBTQ issues in the Central Valley

Source: We’Ced 2020

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted with generous support from The California Endowment, The Irvine Foundation, The Sierra Foundation, the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing, and UC CARE. This report is published by the USC Equity Institute.

USCDornsife
Equity Research Institute