2016 Election

Youth Electoral Significance Index

Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Director

Noorya Hayat, Researcher

Abby Kiesa, Youth Coordinator and Researcher

Felicia Sullivan, Senior Researcher

Methodology

The Youth Electoral Significance Index (YESI) is designed to represent the *potential of youth voters to affect the outcomes* of the 2016 Presidential, Senate, and House races. We calculated this index for each type of race and profiled the top 10 states and districts in this report. The ranking and the demographic profiles can serve as useful tool for understanding youth demographics more deeply and developing outreach and mobilization strategies.

YESI's methodology consists of four steps, as described below:

1. Build a conceptual model of youth electoral significance based on research about youth voting patterns and trends, and our retrospective analysis of the youth vote's influence on the 2012 and 2014 statewide races. This model suggested that three types of indicators likely influence youth electoral significance; 1) the size and characteristics of youth and overall eligible population demographics, along with the context of voting in the state (such as electoral laws); 2) youth voter turnout in past presidential elections; 3) potential leverage of young voters, such as historical differences in the vote choice of youth and of voters over 30; and the expected competitiveness of the race in 2016.
2. Gather available data about the demographic composition of each community (states or Congressional districts), including those specifically about youth population, past voter turnout, youth vote choice, share of votes cast by youth, and predicted competitiveness of the upcoming race. For state YESIs, we collected information about statewide electoral laws. Components of YESI data, data sources, and calculation methods are described in detail below.
3. Create composite indices (i.e., a score made up of multiple, related indicators) for the demographic makeup of each district or state, and determine how the conceptual pieces of YESI fit together. We also decided, not only to credit states for having one or more laws that could ease voter registration, but also to give an extra point if that law is available for the first time in a presidential election cycle, because these laws are especially helpful for young people who may not participate in midterm elections.
4. Compute YESI by averaging standardized scores from each component of YESI data. This makes the "unweighted" YESI, which does not incorporate the competitiveness of the upcoming race. Because the possibility of youth influence on the outcome is highly dependent on the competitiveness or tightness of the race, we weighted that factor heavily. We computed the weighted YESI by adding a "competitiveness" score to the unweighted YESI. This step creates a cluster of top-ranking geographical locations that are all considered to have competitive races.

Data Elements of YESI

1. Demographic data and Context

With the youth demographics, we focus on the relative share of youth population in the eligible electorate and on the number of colleges and universities in the state or district. As part of the context of youth voting, we also include the extent to which each state has implemented laws that are designed to increase to registration and voting, especially for youth.

Indicator	Operational Definition	Source	Units of data availability
Size of youth population relative to the overall population	% of adult citizen population who are under 30	American Community Survey	State CD
Presence of sizable college student population	% of 18-29 citizen population who are enrolled in colleges and universities in the same geographic location	IPEDS (The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System)	State CD
Newcomer Index	The extent to which the population is made up of naturalized citizens and predominantly Spanish-speaking individuals. (Inverse score is used in the index, as a low % of newcomers predicts higher turnout)	American Community Survey	State CD
Economic Challenge Index	The degree to which the community faces economic challenges such as high unemployment rate and low income. (Inverse score is used in the index, as a low % of population with these characteristics predicts higher turnout.)	American Community Survey	State CD
High Turnout Demographic Index	The degree to which the community has a high proportion of individuals who share the backgrounds of high-turnout propensity individuals (higher level of educational attainment, % white in the community, % married)	American Community Survey	State CD
State election laws that can facilitate youth vote	We count pre-registration, online registration, and same-day-registration. We add one point if a state will have implemented the law in 2016 and add one more point (for each law) if the law is new since 2012.	National Conference of State Legislatures	State
% of youth who have a mid-range vote propensity score	% of 18-29s who fall into the "middle propensity score" category (propensity scores are calculated using demographic factors and voting history, and are highly correlated to voter turnout).	Catalist	State

2. Past Youth Voter Engagement

Indicator	Operational Definition	Source	Units of data availability
Baseline for youth voter engagement	State and congressional youth turnout in past few presidential election years	State: CPS 2004, 2008, 2012 (averaged) CD: Catalist (2012)	State CD

3. Potential Leverage of Youth Vote

Indicator	Operational Definition	Source	Units of data availability
Predicted competitiveness of the race in 2016	Average competitiveness rating from various expert sources and reports	Cook Political Report (12/4/2015), Rothenberg & Gonzales (12/4/15), Sabato Crystal Ball (12/9/2015)	State CD
Decisiveness of youth support in most recent races for a party	% Voted for Democratic candidate vs. % Voted for Republican candidate (among youth)	Exit polls (for youth by state) Purchased aggregate data (for all 18+)	State (2004 AND 2012) CD (2012)
Contrast between youth party support and older adults	(% voting Democrat among 18-29 year olds) - (% voting Democrat among those 30+)	Exit polls	State (2004 and 2012)
Indicators to consider once YESI is computed			
Size of youth vote relative to margin of victory	Estimated youth vote count in 2004 and 2012 compared to margin of victory (2008 is excluded because it was an atypical year)	FEC and CPS	State and CD

Calculation of YESI

YESI is calculated so that a higher score means higher potential for youth electoral influence. We standardized the unit of measurement for this index by converting all continuous indicators (i.e., not categories or Yes/No) into Z-score. Z-score allowed us to compare states and congressional districts to one another on a relative scale, ranging from 1st percentile (lowest) to 100th percentile (highest), making it easier to understand where each state/CD is compared to average. On the microsite, we display the percentile rank for ease of interpretation. "50" is 50th percentile or median.

We chose to calculate YESI by averaging standardized scores of all indicators and demographic indices, and then adding 3 points if a state or district is considered a battleground by at least one expert.

Presidential YESI

YESI_P_W=mean (Z_*difference in democratic support by age_2012, Z_difference in democratic support by age_2004,* Average youth Turnout, Z_YouthPopShare_15, Z_% of 18-29 year olds in college, Z_Number of institute of higher ed per 10,000 youth, Election Law index, Z_Newcomerindex_inversed, Z_Unemployment_pov_inversed, Z_HighTurnOutDemographic, Z_% youth rated with mid-range vote propensity score) + Presidential Battleground (+3 if yes)

*for the Senate YESI, formulae are the same except we have different data point for the Senate race competitiveness and we have fewer states (34) to rank because some states will not have Senate races in
2016.

YESI – Congressional Districts

The methodology for calculating the Congressional District YESI (YESI-CD) is similar to that for the state YESI, except that there are fewer data points available for congressional districts than for states. As we did in the state index, we calculated Congressional YESI scores that account for the predicted competitiveness in 2016, past turnout data, and the number of higher education institutions in the district. For predicted competitiveness, we incorporated the latest information on the House races that are predicted to be competitive by three sources (Cook, Rothenberg and Sabato), and we added 3 points for the districts that are at least considered "leaning" by at least one source. We do not have specific direction and magnitude of youth support for a Democratic candidate or how that support differed from that of older voters. Thus, we omitted these elements from the index calculation. We did include youth turnout in 2012 and 2014 (data were available for the districts located in 44 out of 50 states), youth share of population, and the number of colleges as well as the number of students enrolled in colleges whose addresses are in each district. For the number of enrolled students, we did delete a data point for a district where the University of Phoenix is based because of an unusually large number of students, most of whom are off-site.

One exception to the Congressional YESI calculation applies to Florida's newly redrawn districts. Most of its 27 district boundaries have changed, along with the population characteristics of each district. Florida's redistricting recently became approved by the court but the geographical shape file was not available at the time of this publication for us to be able to estimate the vote counts from the past elections in those new districts. We calculated the population and demographic estimates, as well as college campus density and enrollment, using the new district boundaries. However, we are unable to estimate how the votes would have been split among presidential candidates in 2012 or how many youth voted in each of the new districts. As such, we calculated the Congressional YESI for Florida's congressional districts using the information that is available so far. The most recent ratings of competitiveness by the experts were based on the new district boundaries, and we were able to incorporate this information. Although the YESI calculation for Florida's districts is conceptually similar to that of the other districts, the YESI scores for Florida were calculated just for that state, and the FL YESI congressional scores cannot be directly compared to YESI scores from other states' congressional districts.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement) is a nonpartisan, independent, academic research center that studies young people in politics and presents detailed data on young voters in all 50 states. CIRCLE is part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University.

Learn more at www.civicyouth.org

CIRⓒLE