

# YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS EMPOWER DIVERSE YOUNG LEADERS IN CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY

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Grassroots youth organizing groups, growing in number and influence over the last decade, have raised civic awareness and engagement among youth in California's agricultural Central Valley. These non-partisan groups are making an important contribution in a region where a young, racially diverse, and immigrant population faces significant challenges. The average age of residents is lower than in California overall, and 77% of those younger than 35 identify as non-White. They experience disproportionately high rates of poverty (25% of those under the age of 35 live below the poverty line compared to 18% in the entire state).[1] Youth organizing groups have stepped forward to offer young members a civics education, as well as practical information on the election process and government decision making. As a result, young Central Valley residents are learning how to shape social policies in ways that benefit their communities and engage others in having a voice. This research brief provides an overview of the campaign issues addressed by youth organizing groups and their impact on voter turnout.

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[1] These calculations are based on 2018 analysis of American Community Survey data for Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare Counties.



## CENTRAL VALLEY YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS ADDRESS LOCAL COMMUNITY CONCERNS

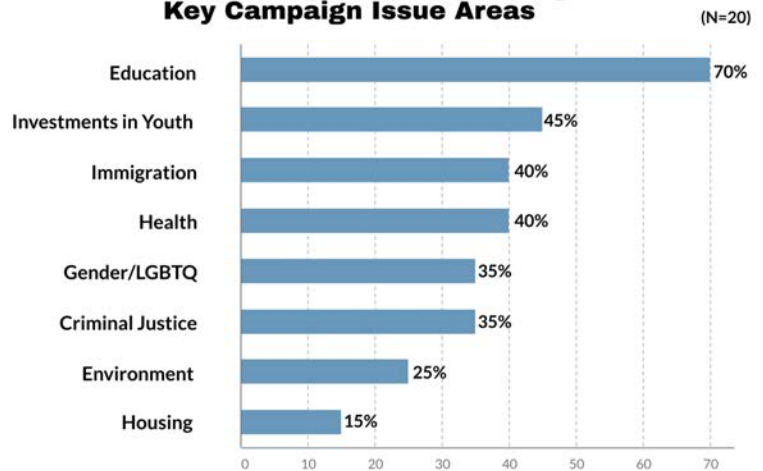
At least 20 groups in the Central Valley describe themselves as regularly engaging youth in grassroots organizing campaigns, according to a recent survey conducted in partnership with the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing. Their membership embraces the region’s diverse adolescent and young adult populations, including those of Latinx, African-American, European, Filipinx, Hmong, Punjabi, and other Asian-Pacific Islander and Arab/Middle-Eastern descent.

Addressing issues that impact the lives of members, who are often also students, the groups most commonly spearheaded campaigns focused on education, with 70% reporting some kind of youth-led K-12 or higher education-related effort. Many youth organizing groups – 45% – are also working to increase government investment in programs and services for youth. In a region that is home to many immigrant agricultural workers and their families, immigration issues are also a priority for 40% of groups. The same percentage lead campaigns seeking to increase access to school-based health services, reproductive health services, recreational facilities, and other resources that enhance physical and mental health. Meanwhile, 35% are seeking to advance gender equity and/or LGBTQ rights, and 35% are also leading criminal justice reform campaigns. In a region impacted by pesticide spraying, air pollution, and unequal access to clean drinking water, 25% of groups are focused on environmental justice issues. A smaller percentage—15%—have been leading affordable housing campaigns. These youth-led campaigns require their members to engage with leaders of school districts and city, county, state, congressional and other government systems, providing members with valuable exposure to the policymaking process.

### Central Valley Youth Organizing Groups

- 99Rootz
- Act for Women and Girls
- Boys and Girls Club of Kern County
- California Dream Network (CHIRLA)
- California Immigrant Youth Justice Alliance
- Californians for Justice
- Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
- Dolores Huerta Foundation
- Faith in the Valley Kern
- Fathers & Families of San Joaquin
- Fresno Barrios Unidos
- Hmong Innovating Politics
- Jakara Movement
- LOUD For Tomorrow
- Love Faith and Hope Inc
- Madera Coalition for Community Justice
- Mi Familia Vota Education Fund
- South Kern Sol
- The Source LGBT+ Center
- Youth Leadership Institute/ Fresno Boys and Men of Color

**Central Valley Youth Organizing Key Campaign Issue Areas**



Data source: Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing National Field Scan Survey

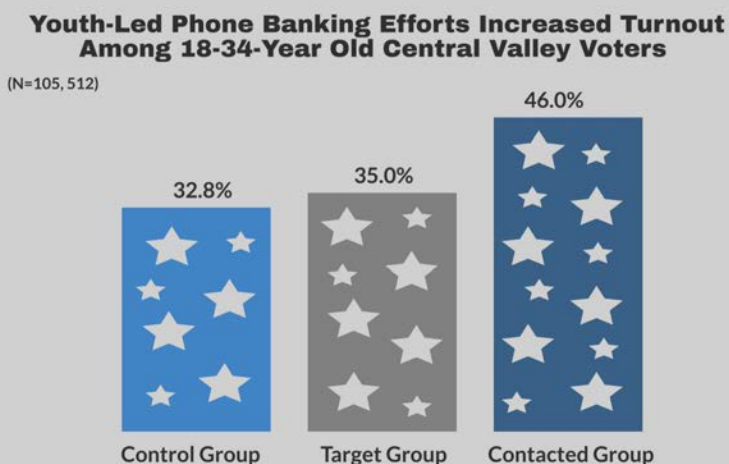


## YOUTH ORGANIZING GROUPS INCREASE VOTER TURNOUT

Outreach to educate and mobilize voters is a key activity of youth organizing groups in the Central Valley. Among the 20 groups surveyed, 85% either lead or support such efforts, some devoting more resources and time than others. Most commonly, members are engaged in voter registration and conduct voter education through in-person events and social media. Some also systematically work to contact individual voters through phone banking, door-to-door canvassing, and texting.

Well-trained young volunteers can be effective in getting out the vote among their peers, as evidenced by experiments conducted in partnership with youth organizing groups linked to Power California, a statewide intermediary focused on increasing the representation of young voters of color in low-income communities.[2] Experiments conducted during the 2018 general election compared voter turnout between a randomly selected “control group” of voters aged 18-34 who were not targeted for outreach and those the same age who received a phone call. Statistically significant research findings demonstrated that peer-to-peer phone calls increased turnout among young voters. Compared to the control group’s 33% turnout, those who were targeted for outreach (regardless of whether they answered the phone) averaged a turnout of 35%, and those successfully contacted by phone averaged a turnout of 46%.[3]

Thus, youth-initiated phone conversations resulted in an estimated 13 percentage point increase in turnout. Findings from a second experiment also revealed that outreach via Facebook and Instagram produced modest increases in turnout. This research shows that youth organizing groups can empower young people to reach broad constituencies and help expand the active electorate.



Data sources: Political Data Inc. and Power California

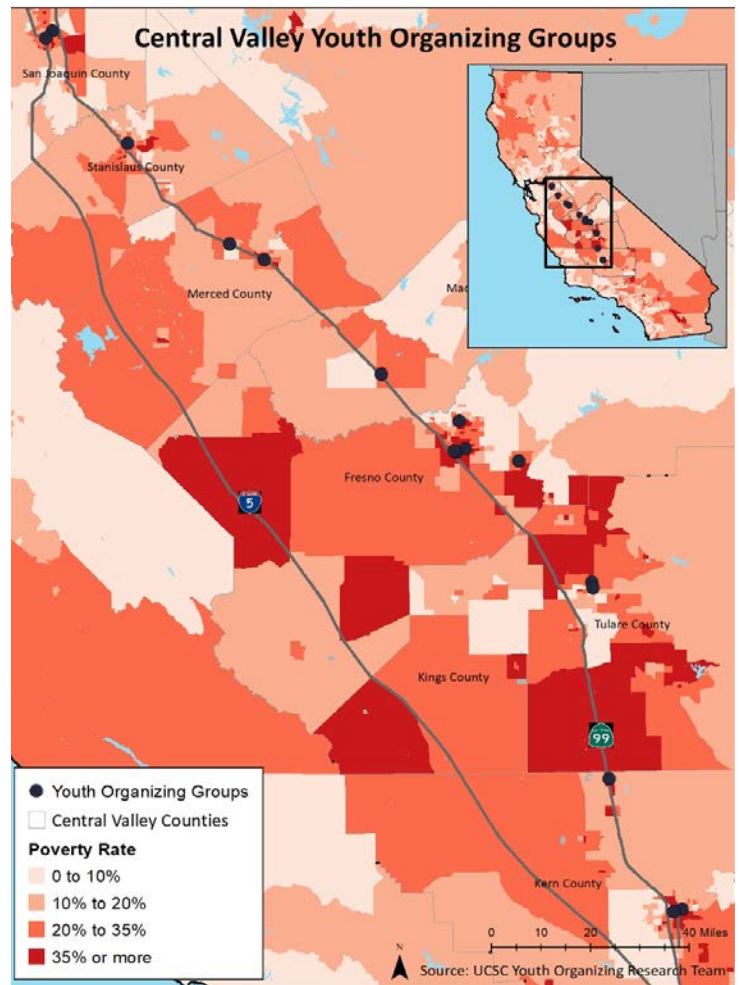
[2] Central Valley youth organizing groups who were part of Power California’s 2018 general election phone banking and social media campaign include 99Rootz, Act for Women and Girls, Mi Familia Vota, and Californians for Justice.

[3] These percentages are based on the results of OLS and two-staged least squares regression analyses that control for age, gender, prior voting history, Democratic Party registration, age, number of registered voters per household, voting method (poll vs. mail), and zip code characteristics.

# TRANSFORMING CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY

While growing up in the wealthiest U.S. state, young residents of the Central Valley disproportionately confront poverty-related challenges, attend under-resourced schools, and suffer from exposure to hazardous environmental conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges experienced by young people in the region. Many fall into the vulnerable category due to high youth asthma rates in the region; additionally, they also risk exposure as they or their family members are essential workers in agricultural or other industries.

Youth organizing groups provide a platform to prepare young people who are most affected by social disparities to become part of the solution. In doing so, they provide young members the tools and skills to voice their concerns and exercise agency in shaping government decisions and electoral outcomes. In sum, youth organizing groups create opportunities for their members to play a role in transforming the Central Valley in ways that make government institutions accountable to diverse Central Valley residents, both in the short term and for years to come.



Youth organizing groups are located in or near high poverty Central Valley communities.



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