



Roots Of Engaged Citizenship Project

Helping Youth Navigate Today's Times



Dear Administrators and Educators,

Hello from the Roots of Engaged Citizenship Project! We hope that your school year is off to a fantastic start. From February-March of 2017, we collected surveys from 1,147 high school students. It was a great year, as 91% of these students participated in prior years. Our longitudinal study has been ongoing for four years, and we have been gathering valuable information about how youth become civically engaged and experience life in schools and communities.

In this research brief, we focus on the important topic of students' reactions to Donald Trump's election and presidency. Current times have brought considerable change, controversy, and uncertainty, and it is essential that we listen to how youth are experiencing this historic moment. Adolescents are actively determining who they are and how they fit into the world. For these reasons, adolescents tend to experience current events differently than adults and may be shaped in more lasting ways by what is happening in the world.

To study how youth are experiencing the current political moment, we asked 737 high school students the questions below and gave them space to type out their responses:

- Describe your feelings about Donald Trump being President. Be as specific as you can. Positive and negative views are equally valued.
- What is it about Trump being elected President that made you feel this way?
- Describe any changes in your attitudes and/or behaviors that resulted from Trump being elected President.

We thoroughly read each answer and came up with a set of themes that capture the many different feelings and viewpoints of the students. Around 85% of the students we surveyed were Latinx (i.e., of Latin American or Hispanic descent), and immigration was a major theme among these youth. On pages 2-4, we highlight some of the most salient themes. Even though we asked these questions of high school students only, we believe these students' voices capture many sentiments that students of different ages are also feeling. On pages 5 and 6, we share some of our broader findings that showcase strategies that your schools are already doing to support youth and describe how these strategies can foster positive development in the current times. Please reach out with comments, questions, and feedback!



Laura Wray-Lake, Ph.D.
University of California, Los Angeles
wraylake@ucla.edu
310-825-9722



Aaron Metzger, Ph.D.
West Virginia University



Amy Syvertsen, Ph.D.
Search Institute, Minnesota

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Young People Weigh in on Trump

Youth's Reactions to Trump's Election

by the numbers

We asked 737 high school students to select one option that best represented their view:

45.5% strongly disapproved of Trump

15.4% disapproved of Trump

9.2% somewhat disapproved of Trump

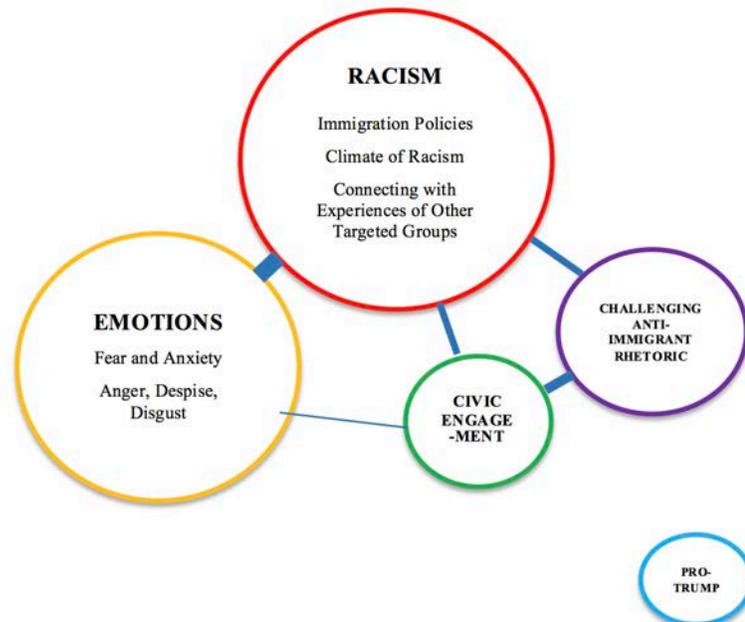
3.2% approved of Trump

2.4% strongly approved of Trump

12.3% had no opinion



A range of diverse themes emerged in youth's written reactions to Trump's election and presidency. We focus here on themes related to Trump's views and policies on immigration. This topic was very salient and personal for many students. Here is a map of the major themes pertaining to **immigration**. Below we elaborate on each theme.



The size of each circle roughly corresponds to how common it was. The closeness of the circles and the thickness of the lines correspond to how related these themes were in the data.

Key Themes in Youth's Reactions to Trump's Immigration Views

Anxieties Surrounding Immigration

Students demonstrated fears, worries, and anxieties for themselves and/or family members about possible deportation. For some, these emotions have been consuming and affect their daily lives. For example, students reported extra vigilance of their surroundings or constantly looking over their shoulder for Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE). Students also reported fear about coming home to find parents or close family members deported.

"I have also become scared of cars that slowly roll by from where I live or cars going slowly where ever I'm at because I think it may be the immigration police... I would say these changes are negative because at some point I just won't be able to step outside of my house [because] of how bad my fears have gotten."

"[My fears] don't let me concentrate in school I'm always thinking if my parents are still with me if they haven't been deported."

Concerns at School

Some students are being consumed by anxiety and fear, so much that it's impacting their academic success and confidence to achieve goals.

Unfairness and Racism

Many students mentioned racism when discussing Trump and immigration. Students felt threatened or discriminated against by Trump's words and his policies on immigration. Others noted that racism felt more common in their everyday lives.

"I am very upset about Trump becoming president. I feel scared. He has made so many threats about immigrants and he is just really racist. I have heard students tell one another 'Trump is going to send you back'."

"Mexicans work hard and come to this country to live a better life and so their children can have in future. He can't say Mexicans take our jobs, no, Mexicans do all the jobs nobody wants to do."

Challenging Stereotypes

Some students challenged Trump's ant-immigration messages and stereotypes with personal examples. Young people defended immigrants by describing their work ethic and justifying their right to be here as contributors to American society.

Supporting Trump While Against Immigration Views

A small number of students expressed some support for the current administration, despite being against his views on immigration. Some of these students felt hopeful; others mentioned support for other policies such as economic plans. These examples of students who were both hopeful and critical demonstrate the complexity of students' views.

"The way I feel about Donald Trump becoming president is hopeful. I hope he completes everything he has been saying to make America great again. The only thing that bothers me is about him wanting to build a wall and send people back."

"I have become more attentive to what is going on in our government. I will definitely be using my voice in most elections, not just the presidential elections."

Increased Desire to Participate in Elections

For some students, this election appeared to be pivotal in their development as engaged citizens. We saw students thinking more about their role in the democratic process and wanting to use their voices. Students shared that this election has made them realize the value of being informed.

Taking a Stand Against Injustice

For some students, disagreement with Trump's views on immigration and recognition of unfairness have contributed to higher motivation to fight injustice. Students have participated in protests and made other efforts to stand up for what they believe in.

In general, youth's negative reactions to Trump's immigration policies or rhetoric led to two different behavior pathways, either increased vigilance and fear or increased civic engagement.

"I have to prepare myself and fight through the injustices I'm facing along with many others."

Listening to Youth

Our work shows that youth are actively paying attention to the news, and are developing views that are articulate, passionate, and multifaceted. **We want to emphasize that these findings are not meant to communicate any particular political view.** Indeed, students themselves expressed a range of political views. For example, some youth held negative feelings about Trump's immigration views while also expressing positive feelings about other aspects of Trump's platform (e.g., economic issues).

Regardless of any of our own political orientations, it is important for us to spend time listening to youth's views and trying to really understand their experiences. As you already know, educators are in a unique position to support youth in managing their fears and anxieties as well as in developing their worldview and becoming more actively engaged in society. We now turn to strategies we have identified through our research that can support you in these efforts.

What You Can Do as an Educator

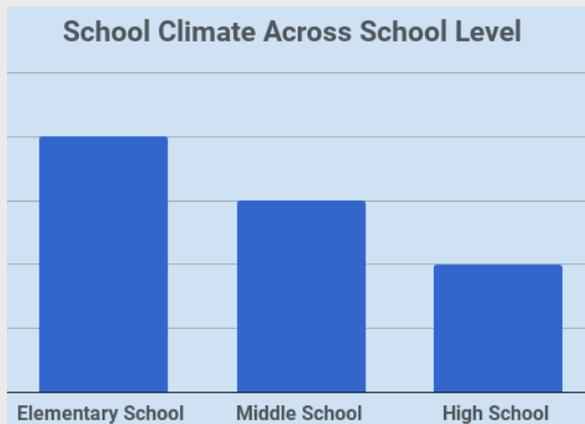
Youth's reactions to Trump showed that in these uncertain times, some students are becoming actively engaged in civic life. Our research has identified strategies that educators can use to encourage more youth civic engagement. Importantly, other research shows that these same factors - school climate, classroom discussions, and teacher support - can also help youth navigate difficult situations and process emotions.

Increase Positive School Climate

School Climate refers to how much students feel they belong at school.

Positive school climates are essential for youth's positive development. When students feel like they belong at school, they are more likely to enjoy school, perform better academically, and develop more social responsibility (commitments to help others and contribute to society).

In today's climate, Latinx students are perceiving heightened racism in their lives and undocumented students are increasingly anxious about their futures. Schools with positive climates have the potential to be much needed safe havens for these youth.



Unfortunately, our data show that student reports of positive school climate are lower in middle and high schools compared to elementary schools. Finding ways to enhance positive climate at school may have valuable pay-offs for students in today's times.



Build Relationships with Students

Teacher support is evident when students feel close connections with teachers, feel heard and respected by teachers, and feel like teachers help them achieve goals.

We know how impactful teachers can be. When students feel supported by teachers, they tend to develop more social responsibility and a stronger sense of purpose. Supportive teachers will be attuned to what students are going through in today's times and can help them navigate their views and experiences.



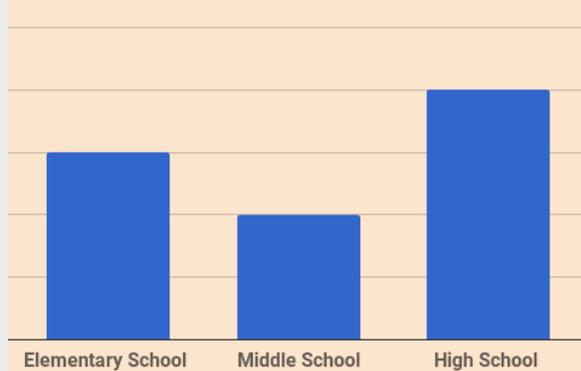
Increase Classroom Political Discussions

Classroom Discussions are conversations about social issues and current events during class time.

Classroom discussions are a powerful strategy for supporting youth civic engagement. Youth who report having more social and political discussions in the classroom also reported more volunteering, greater intentions to engage in political actions, and higher social responsibility one year later.

These discussions can be especially useful now, as some youth are having strong reactions to the political climate. Youth need to process their views in supportive spaces that help youth understand multiple perspectives and teach youth how to offer evidence to support their views.

Classroom Discussion Across School Level

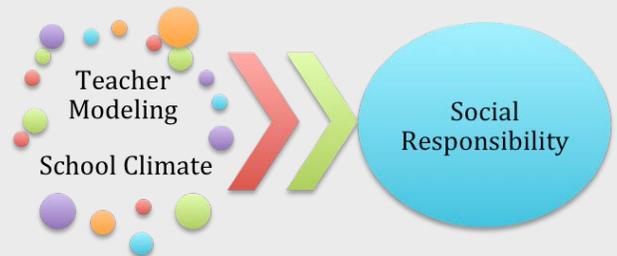


Classroom political discussions are lowest in middle school and highest in high school. These discussions could be incorporated at any school level and into many different kinds of courses. We encourage all schools - and especially middle schools - to consider increasing opportunities for these discussions. We also know that authentic classroom political discussions can be very hard. One useful book is "The Political Classroom" by Hess and McAvoy that offers examples of effective teaching practices.

Model Civic Behavior

Teacher civic modeling refers to how often a teacher volunteers and how politically involved he or she is in the eyes of students.

When students are aware that their teachers volunteer or participate in politics, they become more likely to develop a belief that it's important to contribute to society. Youth need models that demonstrate how to engage in addressing community issues and take a stand on issues that matter to them.



We Want to Hear from You

We have heard a lot from students about how they are experiencing today's political climate, but we would love to hear more about your experience as educators:

Has the election of Trump changed anything about how you see your job or how you interact with students or parents?

What strategies has your school already adopted to support students who may be anxious or afraid due to the immigration policy climate?

PLEASE WRITE LAURA, wraylake@ucla.edu, TO LET US KNOW!