

## INTRODUCTION

Despite **voter turnout** at an **all-time high** in 2020 with 66% of eligible voters voting, voting in elections is still not undertaken by a third of the population. (Hartig, 2023). This problem **negatively impacts Americans** because the local and national governments fail to represent the will of the people accurately, and not everyone votes. In elections with few votes such as local elections, every vote matters and results could end up changing with an additional 34% of the eligible population voting.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

The study employs a **quasi-experimental** research to assess the potential impact of **16- and 17-year-olds** voting in local elections. The general population includes all **Palo Alto residents** eligible to vote, with the sample focusing on high school students born between November 6, 2006, and November 5, 2008, selected through convenience sampling from local high schools. Data will be collected via an **online survey** distributed through Google Forms, containing quantitative questions about voting preferences and preparedness on a 1-5 scale, alongside qualitative questions about election education and information sources. This data will be analyzed using **coding** for qualitative responses and statistical methods, including correlation and regression analysis. This approach allows for both **numerical insights** and **thematic understanding** of young voter behaviors.

## CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

There is a **strong desire** among participants for the right to vote at 16, with 84.3% supporting the idea, but when it comes to lowering the voting age, the support drops to 56.9%. This suggests that while many young people want to vote, there's **skepticism** about whether 16-18-year-olds are **ready** or **prepared** for it.

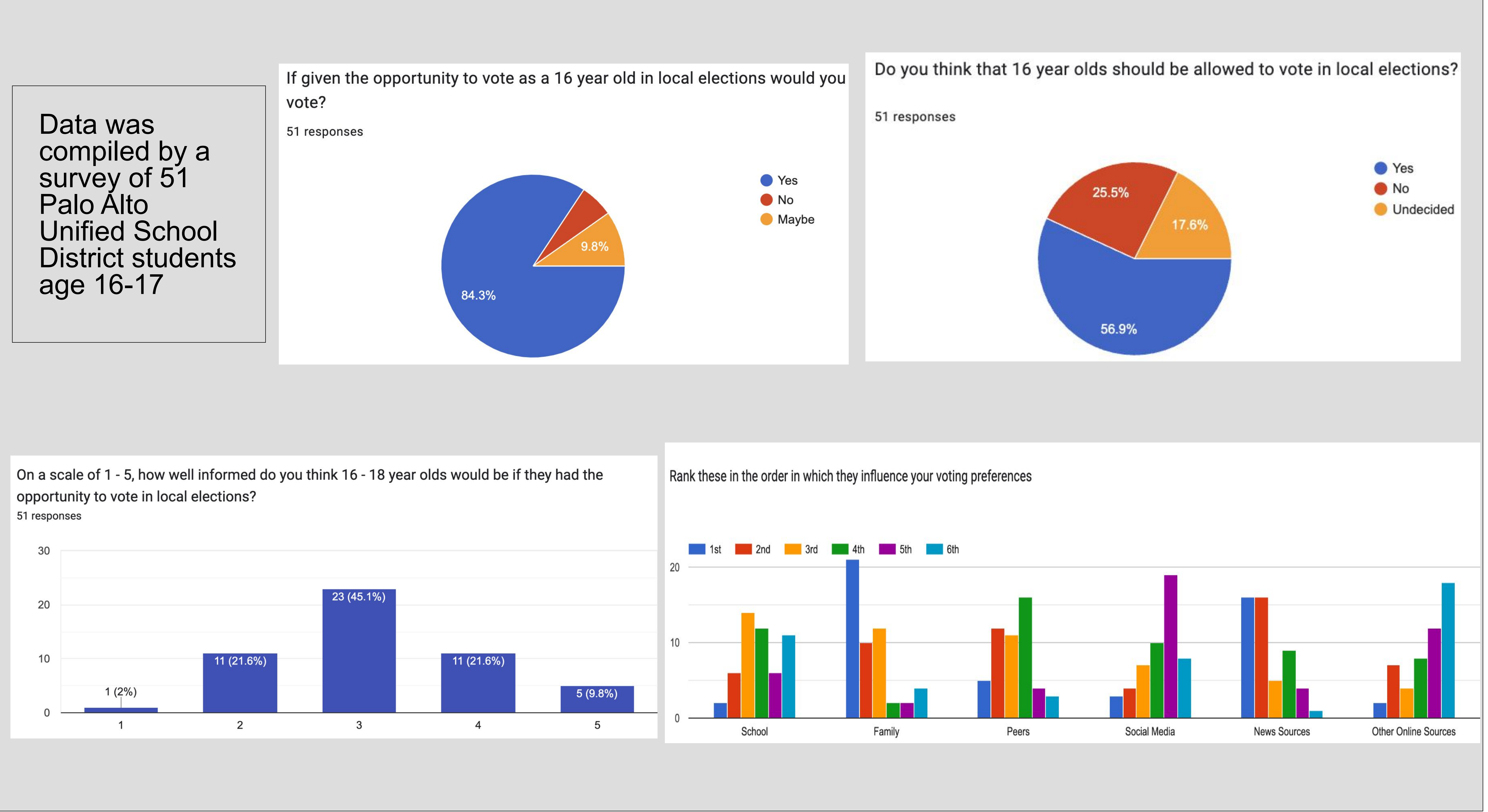
The **mixed views** on the readiness of 16-18-year-olds for voting are reflected in the fact that nearly half of the participants (45.1%) rated their preparedness as average (3/5). This indicates a **neutral perception**, possibly suggesting that participants believe their peers may not be fully equipped for the complexities of voting.

Education about elections is strong, particularly in terms of **historical trends and political parties**, with most participants learning about these topics both in and out of school. However, there is a noticeable gap in education regarding local elections, with fewer participants receiving relevant information in school.

External sources like **family** and **news outlets** are the **most significant** sources of political information for participants, indicating that young people rely heavily on their immediate surroundings and media consumption for political education. In contrast, sources like school, peers, and social media play secondary roles.

When it comes to what issues matter most to potential voters, concerns about the **environment**, **women's health**, the **economy**, and **candidates' identities** are driving the desire to participate. These issues resonate with current political discourse and reflect the influence of ongoing political debates and policies.

## DATA AND FINDINGS



## IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

**Discrepancy in Voting Desire vs. Age Lowering:** More participants expressed a **desire to vote** at 16, but fewer **supported** lowering the voting age. This suggests that participants have more confidence in their **own readiness** than in the readiness of others in their age group.

**Perception of Preparedness:** The average rating for how prepared 16-18 year olds are to vote was **neutral** (middle of the road). This aligns with prior research suggesting minimal developmental differences between 16 and 18-year-olds but highlights significant social and cultural differences that may influence perceptions of preparedness.

**Political Views Shaped by Family:** A significant portion of participants (21/51) reported that their primary source of political information is their **parents**. This indicates that political education and viewpoints are **strongly influenced** by family dynamics.

**Impact on Political Preparation:** If political views are primarily shaped by family rather than formal education, there is likely a **wide variation** in political preparedness based on family discussions. This could affect **both** 16-year-olds and 18-year-olds if the voting age were lowered.

**Potential Change in Education:** If the voting age were lowered to 16, it's likely that parents would take a **more active role** in educating their children about politics prior to their first vote. This could help **mitigate concerns** about preparedness.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS /

Hartig, H., Daniller, A., Keeter, S., & Van Green, T. (2023). 1. Voter turnout, 2018-2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/07/12/voter-turnout-2018-2022/>

Wagner, M., Johann, D., Kritzinger, S. (2012). Voting at 16: Turn out and the quality of vote choice. 10.1016/j.electstud.2012.01.007

Silbaugh, K. (2019). Developmental Justice and the Voting Age. <https://heinonline.org/HOI/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/frdurb47&div=14&id=&page=>

Willoughby, E. A., Giannelis, A., Ludeke, S., Klemmensen, R., Nørgaard, A. S., Iacono, W. G., Lee, J. J., McGue, M. (2021). Parent Contributions to the Development of Political

Walsh, J. (2024). Historic First for California: 16- and 17-Year-Olds in Berkeley and Oakland Able to Vote for School Board in November 2024.

Icenogle, G., Steinberg, L., Duell, N., Chein, J., Chang, L., Chaudhary, N., Di Giunta, L., Dodge, K. A., Fanti, K. A., Lansford, J. E., Oburu, P., Pastorelli, C., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Tapanya, S., Uribe Tirado, L. M., Alampay, L. P., Al-Hassan, S. M., Takash, H. M. S., Bacchini, D. (2019). Adolescents' cognitive capacity reaches adult levels prior to their psychosocial maturity: Evidence for a "maturity gap" in a multinational, cross-sectional sample. Law and Human Behavior. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000315>

Bauman, A., Heys, E., Hawkins, J., Swanbeck, S. (2023). Should California lower the voting age to 17?.

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum. (n.d.). *Constitutional Amendments – Amendment 26 – “Voting at the Age of Eighteen”*. Michael Lupoli