

ANNUAL REPORT | 2023



About Us

Young people coming of age in the 21st Century are facing new and complex social, political, economic, and environmental risks. These risks could have serious repercussions for their health and quality of life as well as their long-term well-being and success. The Berkeley Institute for Young Americans aims to bring together scholars, policy advocates, and youth leaders to better understand the numerous challenges that young adults are facing, and to devise the policy solutions needed to address them. The Institute is located at the Goldman School of Public Policy at UC Berkeley.

Vision

We envision a new paradigm in public policy that advances an equitable, sustainable, and prosperous society for current and future generations.

Mission

Young people coming of age in the 21st Century are facing new and complex social, political, economic, and environmental risks. We undertake path-breaking research to better understand these challenges and to develop the public policy interventions needed to solve them. The next generation holds the ideas needed to reimagine public policy for a better future, and we provide the research and policy design to empower them to lead this transformation.



Letter from the Director

As we approach the end of 2023, I am proud to share with you the accomplishments of the Berkeley Institute for Young Americans over the last year. The year has been transformative, marked by moments that will shape the lives of the next generation in the coming years. Here in the US there have been ongoing concerns over inflation and the Federal Reserve's response, the rise of artificial intelligence, and state legislatures picking up the issue of abortion following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. We also saw escalating culture wars across the country as identity, including race, sexual orientation, and gender, became the lightning rod subject of hundreds of bills in state legislatures. And on the global front, the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia and the terrorist attacks in Israel and the ensuing war in Gaza have had a profound impact on the lives of young people around the world.

In 2023, the surge of youth activism reached new heights as young people once again emerged as vocal advocates for climate action, social justice, and civic engagement. Grassroots movements led by young Americans continued to demonstrate the power of youth voices in driving policy change. In January, activists from the youth-led [Students Demand Action](#) took on the gun lobby in a series of protests in Las Vegas demanding that industry leaders prioritize the safety of young people. In April, students in Florida organized a [mass walkout of public schools](#) in protest of the GOP-led legislature and Governor Ron Desantis' actions to censor LGBTQ history and other discriminatory policies in schools. And in August, in a [landmark court case](#), young environmental activists in Montana successfully sued the state for failing to take into account the effects of climate change when permitting fossil fuel development.

Here at the Berkeley Institute for Young Americans, it was a productive year as we continued our work to provide valuable research insights about the challenges young people are facing in California and across the country. In this annual report, I'm pleased to share highlights from our research efforts, including research evaluating the idea of lowering the voting age in California, research analyzing the complex property tax regime in California and who most benefits from the system, and research looking at what happens to at-risk school districts in California during recessions.

As we reflect on the transformative events of the last year and as we consider how to navigate the complex landscape of issues facing young Americans, we remain committed to fostering positive change for young people and working with youth leaders and advocates to create a future where every young person can thrive.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to our supporters, partners, and the dedicated team at the Berkeley Institute for Young Americans. Your commitment has been instrumental in our success, and together we have laid the groundwork for a more equitable and sustainable future. I look forward to continuing our work in 2024 and beyond to make public policy sustainable and fair across generations.

With gratitude and optimism for the road ahead,



Sarah Swanbeck

Executive Director

Berkeley Institute for Young Americans

Research Highlights

A Reexamination of Proposition 13 Using Parcel Level Data

Proposition 13 plays an outsized role in the history of public finance in California and is a central feature of property ownership in the state. Despite its importance, the initiative's effects remain understudied, due in part to the logistical difficulties and costs of obtaining the accurate and comprehensive property data needed to illuminate the Proposition's effects. In this report, we examined the effects of the Proposition 13 status quo and specifically how the law's benefits vary by property type. [Our key findings](#) include: all property types benefit from Proposition 13; relative property tax discounts are similar for residential and commercial parcels; and vacant land in the state receives relatively higher Proposition 13 discounts than other property types.

CA Unified School Districts At-Risk of Financial Insolvency During the Great Recession

In [this report](#), BIFYA researchers provided a descriptive analysis of California unified districts that became at-risk of financial insolvency during the Great Recession and its immediate aftermath. The project described the key demographic and enrollment trends, budgets, and operational decision-making of a cohort of 86 unified school districts that transitioned from good financial standing to at-risk of insolvency between 2008-09 and 2012-13. This paper offered insights for policymakers and practitioners about why the last major fiscal crisis may have pushed some unified districts into at-risk status, what happened to their budgets and funding priorities, and how they recovered. It also gave important insights into the types of districts that may be likely to become at-risk of financial insolvency during any future fiscal crisis.

Should California lower the voting age to 17? A review of the research evidence, California's historical context, and predicted turnout rates for 17-year-olds

In recent years, researchers, policymakers, and youth advocates across the U.S. and around the world have questioned whether the voting age should be lowered to engage more youth in the democratic process. In [this policy report](#), BIFYA researchers aimed to inform the debate over whether to lower the voting age in California to 17 for all elections. The brief reviewed key arguments and evidence from the research-base to lower the voting age below 18, reviewed the California context and the state's own history of pushing forward reforms at the state and local level, and provided estimates of how many 17-year-olds in California would be affected by this policy change and how many 17-year-olds would have likely turned out to vote during recent presidential and midterm election years if the voting age were lowered.

The policy brief concluded that lawmakers in California should seriously consider extending voting rights to the roughly half million 17-year-olds residing in California. The best available research from developmental science provides strong evidence for the cognitive capacity of 17-year-olds to engage in the act of voting. Moreover, research from other countries that have successfully lowered the voting age shows that young people have higher turnout rates and are more likely to express greater levels of political maturity than those voting for the first-time at 18, and lowering the voting age may encourage lifelong voting habits that improve overall democratic participation.

Events and Engagement

2023 Data-Intensive Research Conference

The BIFYA team had a busy year engaging with the research and advocacy communities at Berkeley and beyond. In August, Associate Director James Hawkins presented at the [2023 Data-Intensive Research Conference](#) hosted by IPUMS and the University of Minnesota Life Course Center. His presentation, [Same as it Ever Was? Examining the Distribution of Opportunity Across Generations](#), highlighted how homeownership rates have changed across time for various age groups. The preliminary results show that the differences across age groups cannot be fully explained by fluctuations in the business cycle over time or demographic trends.



Berkeley Public Policy Annual Conference

In September, the Institute for Young Americans moderated a panel discussion at the [Berkeley Public Policy Annual Conference and Alumni Gathering](#) to discuss [lowering the voting age in California](#). Panelists included Emily Nguyen, former Chair of the San Francisco Youth Commission, Miller Saltzman, Policy Manager at Power California, and Bella Santos, the Director of Policy at GenUp. The conversation explored past efforts to lower the voting at the local level in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Oakland, and also discussed the current effort to lower the voting age to 17 for all elections with [SCA 2](#), a bill that is making its way through the state legislature.

Intergenerational Fairness Day 2023

Finally, in November BIFYA joined an international coalition of like-minded organizations to participate in the first ever Intergenerational Fairness Day. Along with BIFYA, organizations from Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Nigeria, Australia, as well as members of the United Nations NextGen Fellows participated in the day of action. The goal for the day was to bring greater awareness to the issue of intergenerational fairness – a global crisis that transcends borders – and to call on policymakers to act to protect the rights of younger and future generations. As part of this day, BIFYA called on governments worldwide to consider how they can be better stewards for future generations by accounting for the long-term impacts of their budgeting and policy decisions.





In the News



Jan

In January, [commentary](#) from BIFYA Policy Director and Senior Researcher Erin Heys and the Opportunity Institute’s Patrick Murphy was published in EdSource. Their opinion piece articulated why, when it comes to the state of K-12 funding in California, it is important to keep talking about the fiscal elephant in the room - Proposition 13.



May

In a May Senate Elections and Constitutional Amendments Committee hearing, BIFYA’s [research](#) on lowering the voting age in California was cited extensively during testimony for SCA 2, a bill that would lower the voting age to 17 in California, if approved by voters.

Sept

In September, BIFYA’s [research on what influences voter turnout](#) across age groups, was back [in the news](#) in an article discussing how organizers in California are combatting lower voter registration rates among young people.



Nov

Lastly, in preparation for [Intergenerational Fairness Day](#) in November, BIFYA was interviewed for the [Intergenerational Fairness Day podcast](#). Policy Director and Senior Researcher Erin Heys was interviewed and touched on how BIFYA is thinking about the future for younger generations and how the concept of “intergenerational fairness” ties into our work.





Goldman School of Public Policy
2607 Hearst Ave.
Berkeley, CA 94720

youngamericans.berkeley.edu