

California Dreamers:

A public opinion portrait of
the most diverse generation
the nation has known

Executive Summary of Findings

EMBARGOED UNTIL
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NEW AMERICA
MEDIA



Bendixen &
Associates

Introduction & Methodology

New America Media, with support from several foundations as well as the University of California Office of the President (UCOP), commissioned Bendixen & Associates (B&A) of Coral Gables, Florida to conduct a survey of young people in California. The key objectives of the poll were to capture the opinions of California's new generation of 16-22 year olds on various issues affecting their lives, as well as to gain an understanding of their educational goals and their perceptions of the UC system. A new interviewing technology was utilized for this research in an attempt to connect with young people through a medium they are comfortable using. To this end, all interviews were conducted via cellular phone.

A total of 601 interviews were conducted between October 6th and November 15th, 2006. All interviews were conducted in English by professionally trained interviewers via cell phone. Respondents were screened to ensure that California was their main place of residence and that they were between the ages of 16 and 22. The margin of error for the total sample is 4 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that if the survey were replicated an infinite number of times, 95 percent of the time the results would fall within 4 percentage points of the results reported here.

Increasingly, young Americans rely on cell phones as their primary mode of communication. This study represents one of the first polls of young people conducted entirely via cell phone. The sample was collected using listed cell phone numbers in the state of California. Because there is currently no way to select cell phone numbers based on age of subscriber, respondents were immediately asked if they were within the ages of 16 to 22; interviews with those who were not in the specified age group were terminated. Next, respondents were screened to be sure they were not driving, in school or otherwise unable to complete the survey at that time. If a respondent was unavailable, an appointment was made for a call back time when the survey could be completed.

All respondents who passed through the screens were offered an incentive for their participation in the poll. Because most cell phone plans charge based on minutes of airtime, a "polling incentive" of \$10 was offered so that respondents did not feel they were wasting their minutes and money by taking part in the poll.

Major Findings

One in eight of the nation's young people lives in California. Three-fifths are youth of color, and nearly half are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Taken together, this poll paints a portrait of a generation coming of age in a society of unprecedented racial and ethnic diversity – the first global society this country has seen.

California's young people, as reflected in this poll, are strong believers in the American Dream, harbor deep concerns about family stability, cite marriage and parenthood as life goals, and are as apt to define their identity by music and fashion taste as by the color of their skin. Despite obstacles, they expect to create successful lives for themselves and imagine a more inclusive and tolerant society for one another. This collective optimism represents a unique source of social capital for California, and a mirror of what the U.S. is becoming as a global society.

I. California youth embrace the core concept of the American Dream: overwhelmingly, across race, ethnicity and gender, they believe strongly in their ability to determine their own futures, whatever the obstacles. Rapidly escalating housing costs, increasing numbers of single-parent households, high drop-out and unemployment rates, and crime and violence in neighborhoods are all realities for young Californians. One in ten of young people polled, for example, has served time in jail or juvenile hall. In spite of this, California young people remain overwhelmingly optimistic about their future prospects.

A. Though they view the breakdown of the family as the biggest challenge facing their generation (Fig.1), California young people hope and expect to raise children in lasting partnerships themselves (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

What do you consider the most pressing issue facing your generation in the world today?

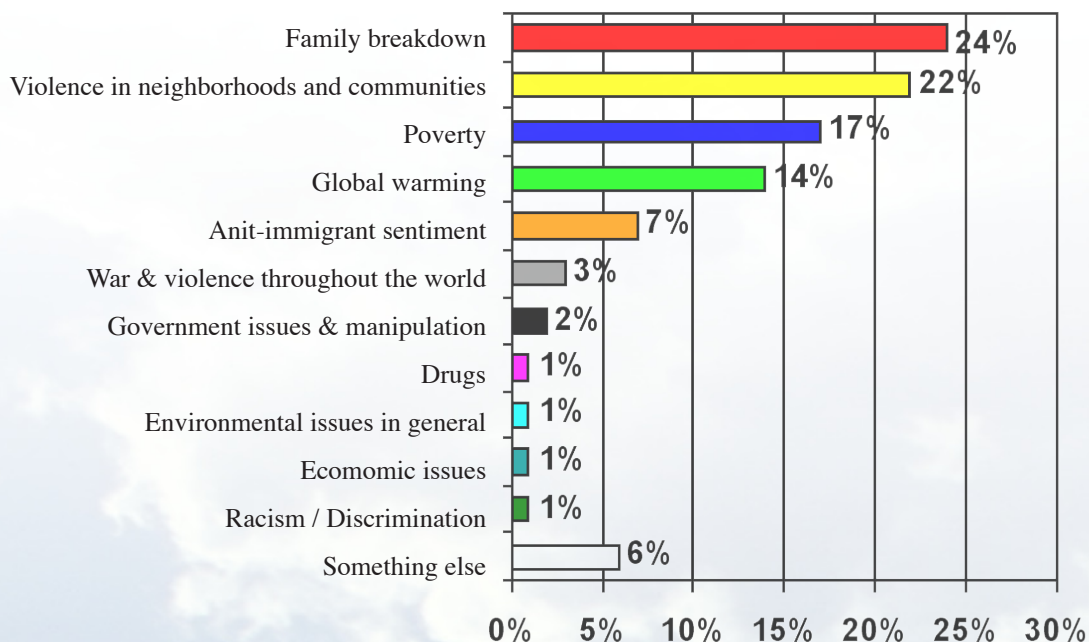


Figure 1

How likely do you think it is that you will have children in the future?

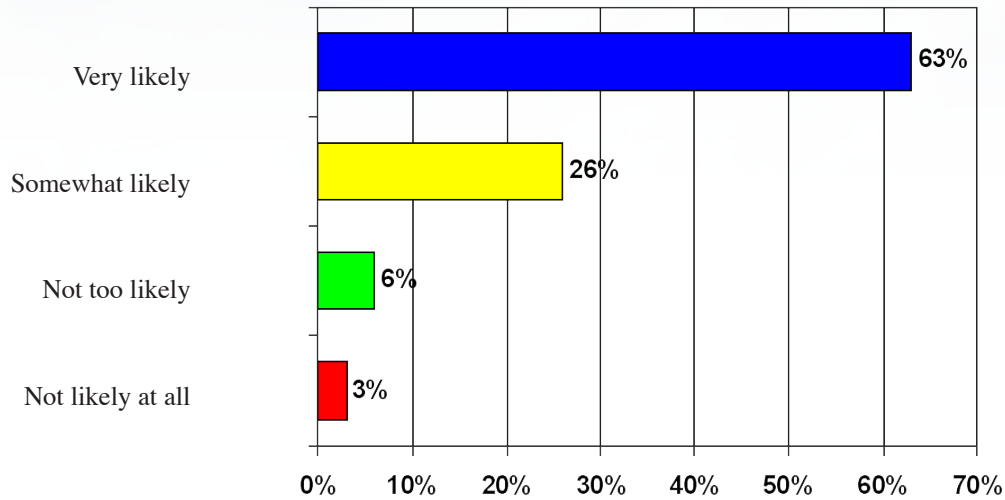


Figure 2

How likely do you think it is that you will be married or have a life partner at some point?

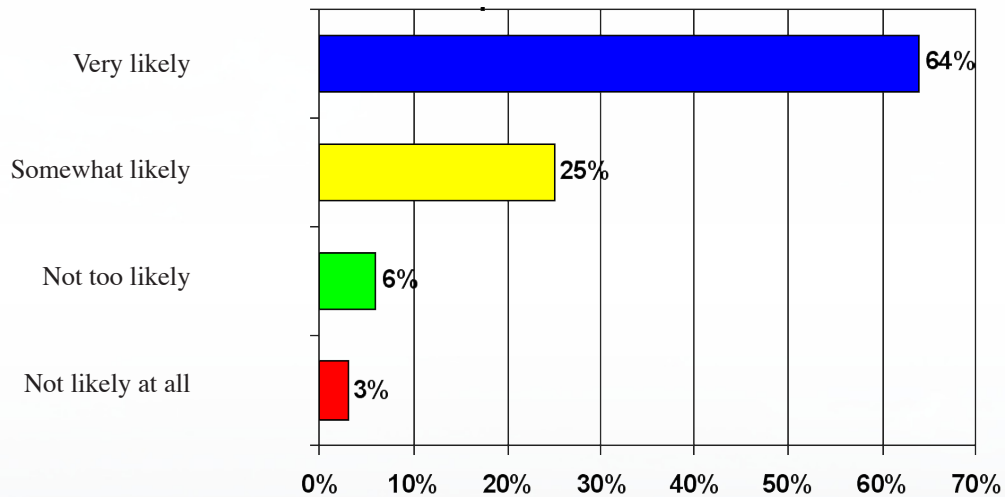


Figure 3

B. California's young men and women across the racial and ethnic spectrum expect to succeed academically and financially. More than three-quarters of California youth say their lives will be better in 10 years (Fig. 4). Most feel confident that they will be working in some capacity during the next 10 years and more than one-third name a specific career or job.

Despite rising tuitions, over two-thirds expect to attain at least a four-year college degree (Fig. 5). In contrast, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that only one-third of California residents currently have a college degree. Ninety-six percent of poll respondents believe that if they work hard they can achieve their goals (Fig. 6). Despite skyrocketing housing costs (the median price of a house in California nearly doubled between 2000 and 2004), 95 percent of those polled expect to own their own homes, and almost three-quarters say they will have a higher overall standard of living than their parents have (Fig. 7).

In the next 10 years, how do you think your life will be?

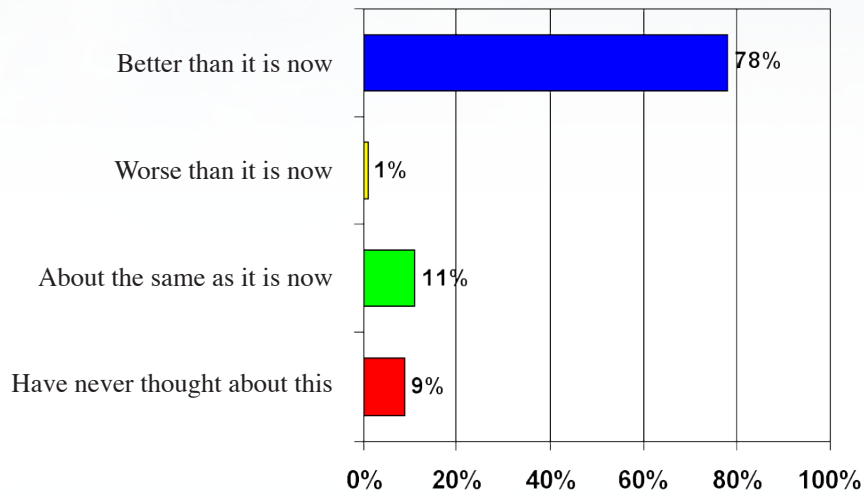


Figure 4

What is your current educational goal?

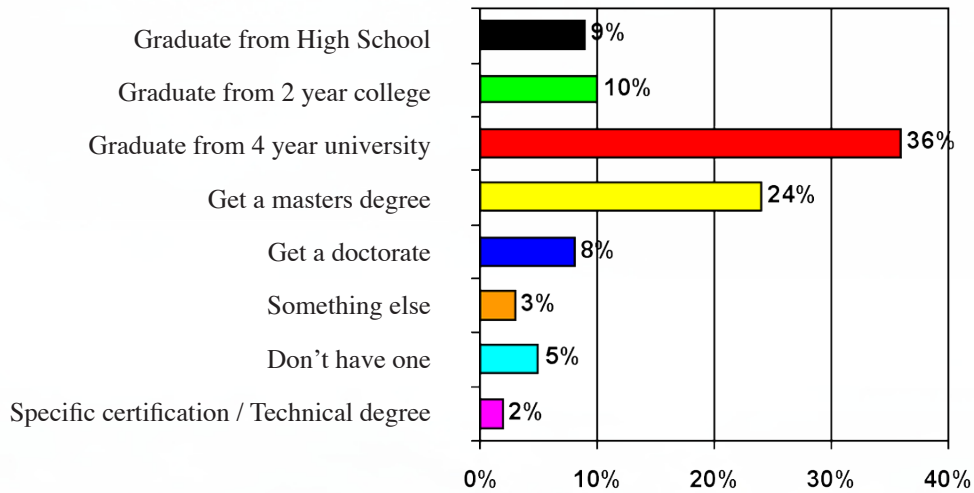


Figure 5

Which statement best describes your view of the future?

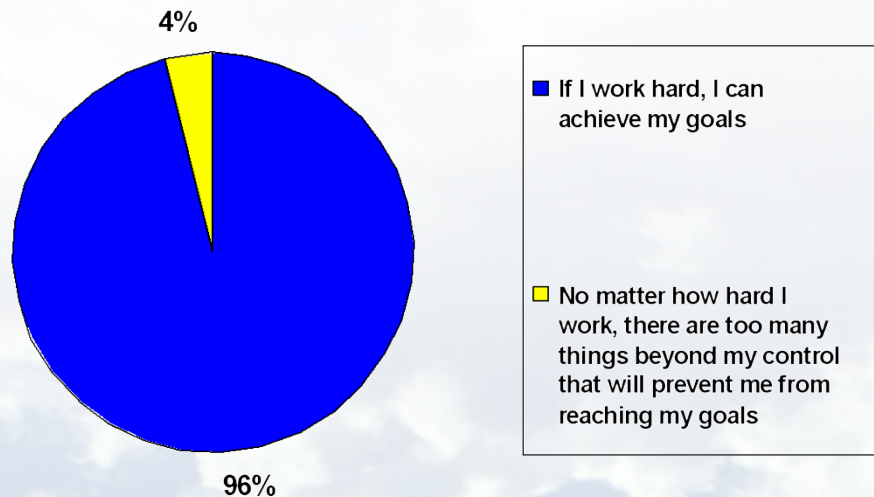


Figure 6

Do you expect to have a higher or lower standard of living than what your parents have?

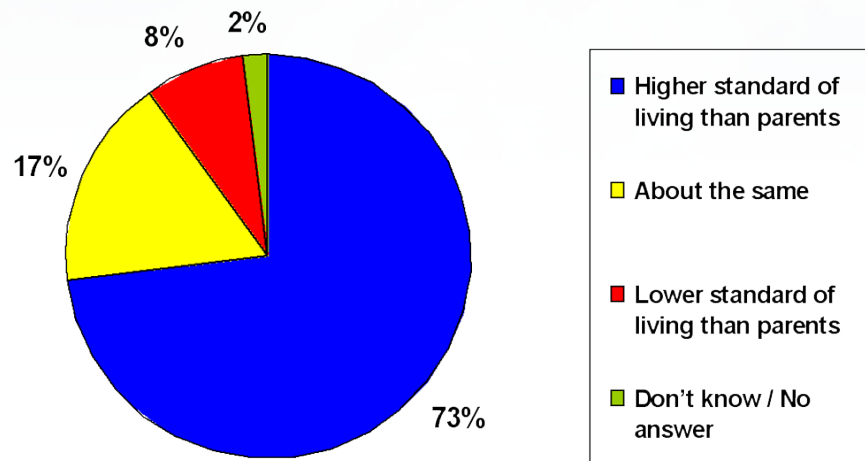


Figure 7

C. While the media and politicians are preoccupied with U.S. conflicts abroad, California young people are far more concerned with conflicts in their own homes and neighborhoods. Poll residents cite family breakdown and violence in the community as the most pressing issues facing their generation (Fig. 1). Poverty ranks third and global warming ranks fourth. Only three percent of California youth list wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and other international conflicts, as their top priority.

Several distinct differences emerge between racial and ethnic groups when it comes to identifying generational challenges. White Anglo young people name family breakdown as number one, followed by poverty and global warming. Family breakdown is also the top issue for Asian youth, but violence in their neighborhoods is nearly as important, while global warming and poverty are tied for third. African American and Latino young people say that violence in their neighborhoods or communities is the most pressing issue facing their generation – a finding underscored by the fact that approximately one-tenth of young Californians (Fig. 37) and almost one-fourth of young African Americans has spent time in jail or juvenile hall (Fig. 39). Both groups name family breakdown as the second most pressing issue and poverty as third.

With tuition rising at the state's major colleges and universities, it is not surprising that the majority of young people cite school or money as their top source of personal stress. One-third of all respondents say that school is what causes young people the most stress, while money is identified as the next most significant stressor (Fig. 8). Personal relationships and peer pressure to fit in rank third and fourth. Asian young people are significantly more likely than other groups to name school as their biggest source of personal stress, while African American young people are more likely to name money (Fig. 9).

Main Cause of Stress for Young People

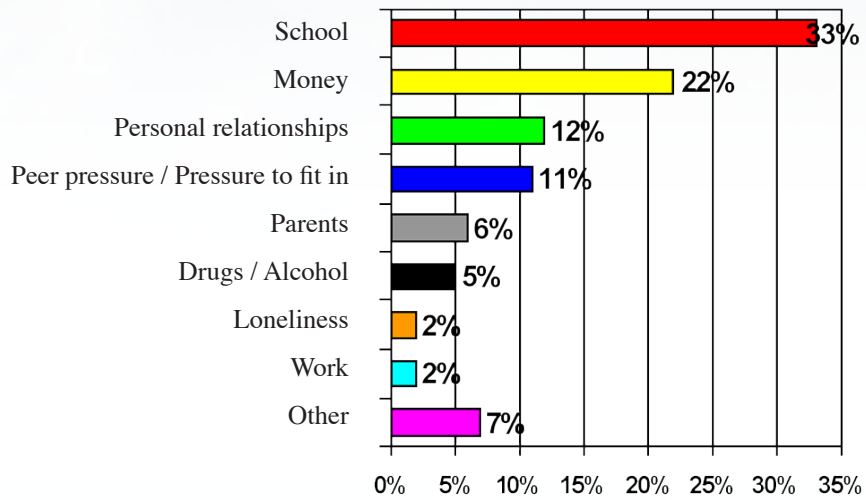


Figure 8

Main Cause of Stress for Young People By Race / Ethnicity

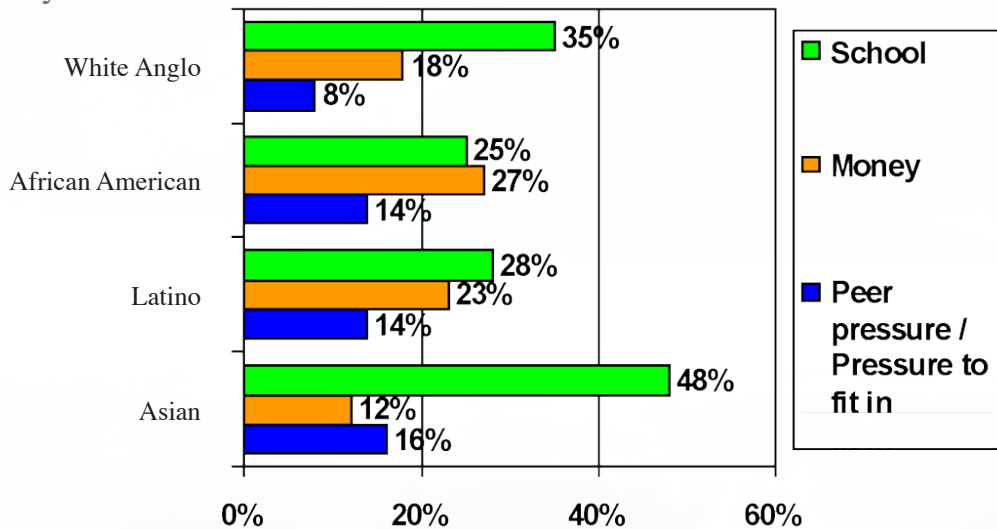


Figure 9

D. California youth consider religion or spirituality important in their lives (Fig. 10). A substantial majority of them express their religion or spirituality through traditional means: by going to church or by praying (Fig. 11). The importance given to religion by California's new generation contrasts with the high numbers of adults nationwide who describe themselves as "agnostic" – previous polls rank California as having the highest percentage of "agnostic" adults in the United States.

How important is religion or spirituality in your life?

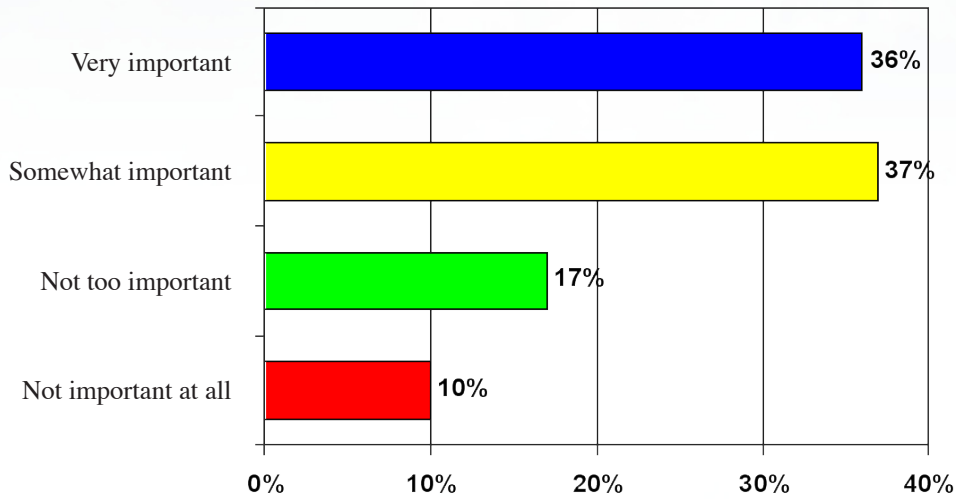


Figure 10

How do you express your religion or spirituality?*

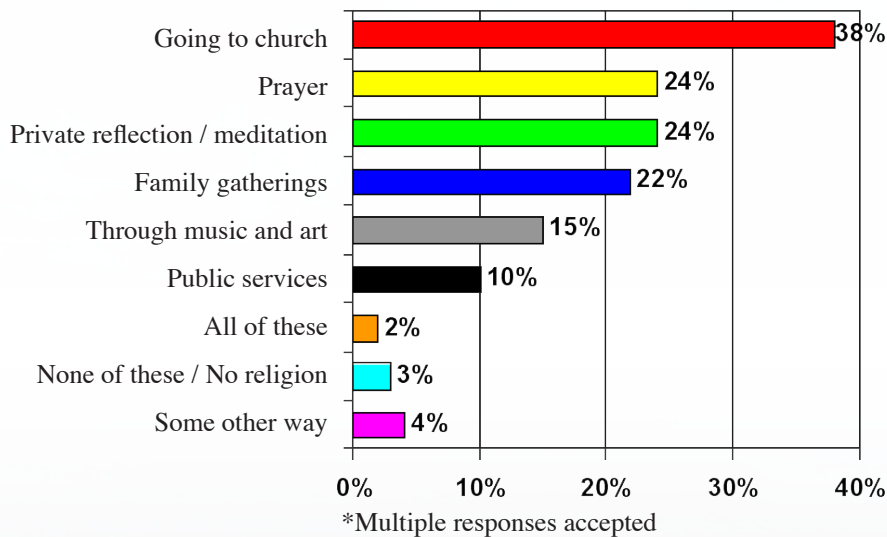


Figure 11

II. *Young Californians embrace the state's increasing diversity in concept and in practice.*

A. Already the largest state with no majority ethnic or racial group, California is growing more diverse each day. The overwhelming majority of young people view the state's diversity as a strength and maintain diversity among their immediate circle of friends. More than one-half of the White Anglo and Asian youths and two-fifths of Latino and African American youths say that most of their friends are of a different race or ethnicity (Fig. 12). This multi-racial, multi-ethnic inclusivity may also be reflected in the fact that only a tiny minority – one percent – name racism or discrimination as the most pressing issue facing their generation (Fig. 1). This impulse also helps shape California young people's attitudes towards immigration. Some 82 percent support giving illegal immigrants a chance to earn legal status and citizenship (Fig. 13). Young people – particularly Asian and Latino youth – consider anti-immigrant sentiment to be a more critical issue for their generation than racism or discrimination (Fig. 1).

Would you say that most of your friends are of the same race or ethnicity as you or most of your friends are of a different race or ethnicity as you?

By Race / Ethnicity

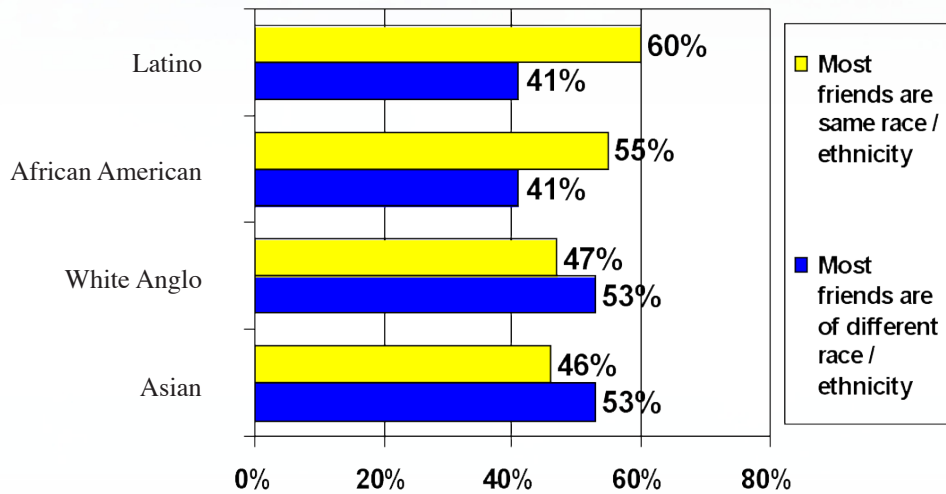


Figure 12

When it comes to illegal immigration, do you think that most of the 3 million illegal immigrants in California should be...?

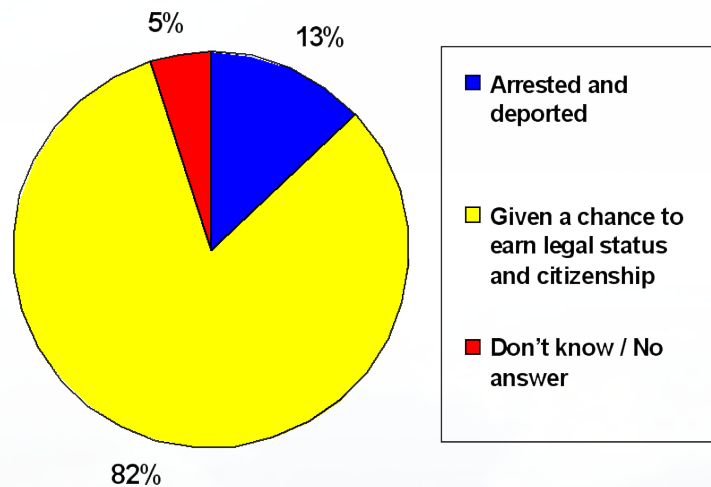


Figure 13

B. Indicative of what it means to come of age in a global culture, California young people are just as likely to identify themselves by personal tastes such as music and fashion as by traditional markers of identity such as race and ethnicity (Fig. 14). Correspondingly, their interpersonal relationships are more likely to be born out of common interests than shared racial or ethnic backgrounds (Fig. 12).

What is the most important characteristic that defines your identity?

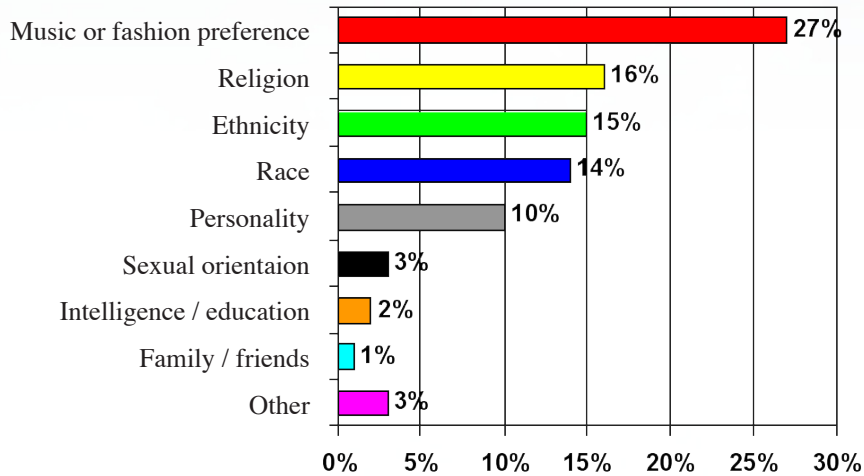


Figure 14

C. The demographic future of California is multi-racial and multi-ethnic. Two-thirds of those polled have dated someone of a different race (Fig. 15) and 87 percent indicate they would be open to marry or enter into a life partnership with someone of a different race (Fig. 16). Considering that nearly 90 percent of California young people expect to get married or enter into life partnerships (Fig. 3), and expect to have children (Fig. 2), the numbers of mixed-race households and children of mixed-race heritage may very well increase. In light of this phenomenon, the entire question of race relations – and the nature of “race” itself – may be forever altered.

Have you ever dated someone of different race?

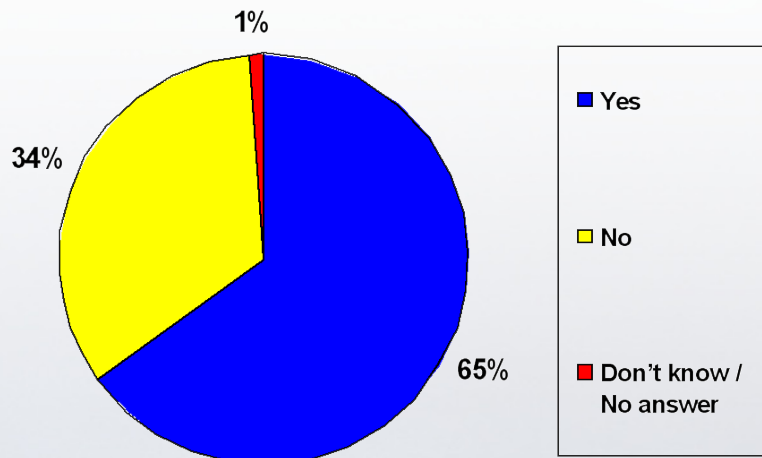


Figure 15

Would you marry or enter into a life partnership with someone of a different race?

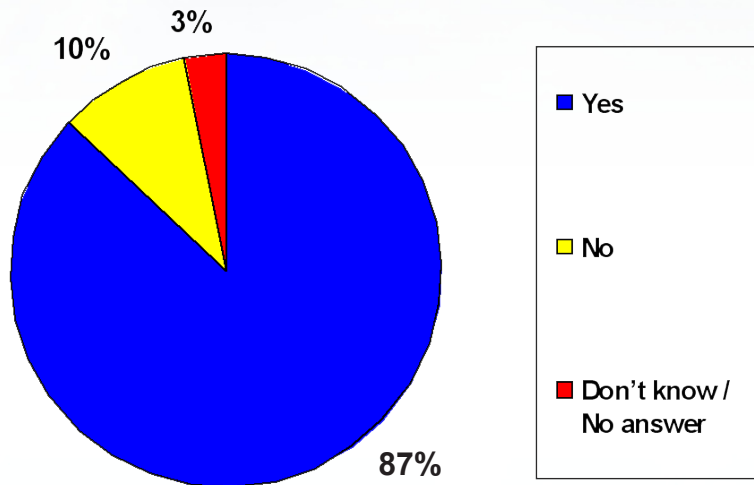


Figure 16

Other Findings

III. War in Iraq and Military Service

Even though an overwhelming majority of California young people oppose the current war in Iraq (Fig. 17), a significant minority consider it somewhat or very likely that they will join or volunteer for military service (Fig. 18). More than one-quarter of young males report that they are “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to volunteer to serve in the armed forces, while approximately one-seventh of young females express the same sentiment. It is also interesting to note that a small number of those interviewed offered that they are likely to pursue a career as “snipers” or “sharpshooters” in the military during the next ten years (Fig. 19). Are we beginning to see the impact of video games on the young people of America?

Do you favor or oppose the war in Iraq?

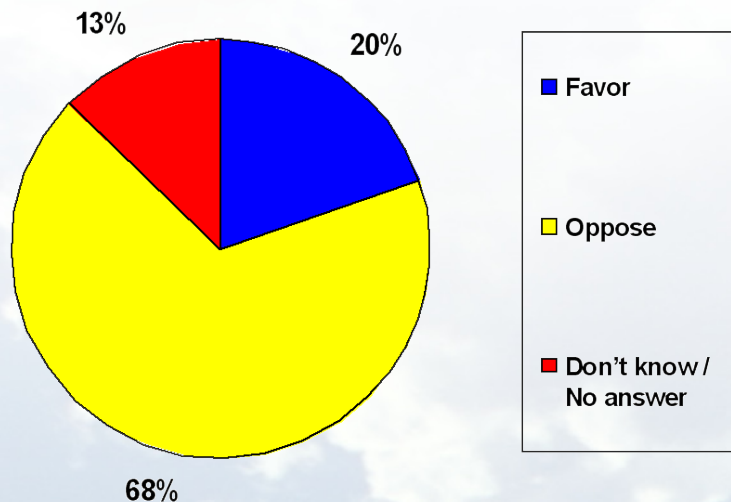


Figure 17

How likely is it that you will volunteer to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces?

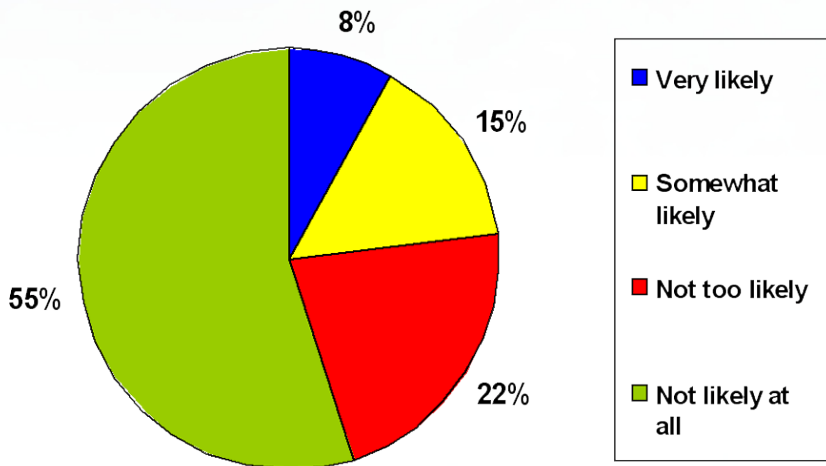


Figure 18

What do you think you will most likely be doing in 10 years?

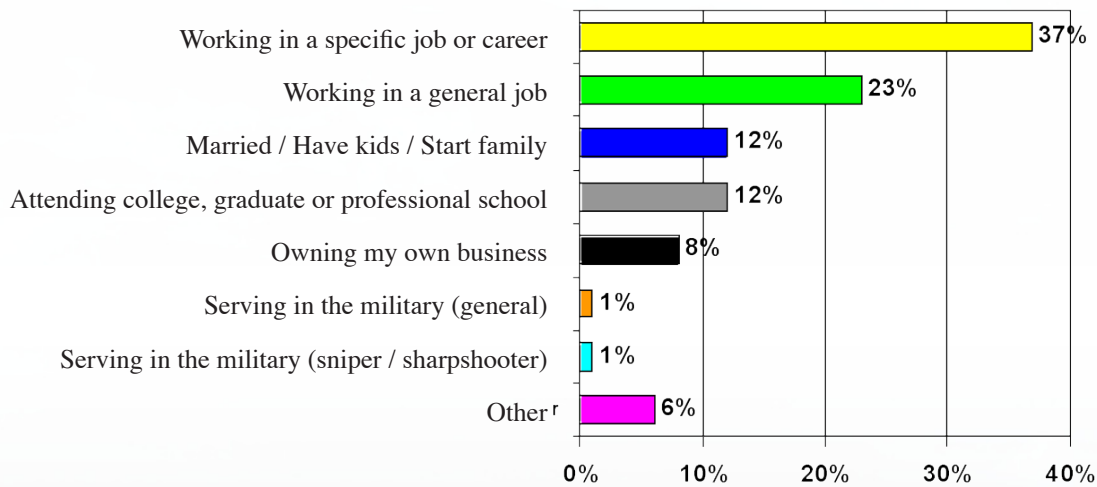


Figure 19

IV. The young people of California have a positive image of their “physical and mental health” but there are important differences in their responses when the results are analyzed by gender, race and ethnicity.

Respondents were asked to rate their state of physical and mental health on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means “very unhealthy” and 10 means “very healthy.” Eight in ten African American youth and almost three-quarters of White Anglo youth rate their overall physical health as excellent (scores of 8, 9, or 10). In contrast, only six in ten Latino and Asian youth rate their physical health as excellent (Fig. 20). And young men are more likely than young women to rate their physical health as excellent (Fig. 21). But when asked about their mental health, African American and Latino youth give themselves a higher “mental health rating” than their White Anglo and Asian counterparts (Fig. 22).

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “very unhealthy” and 10 means “very healthy” how would you rate your overall physical health?

By Race / Ethnicity

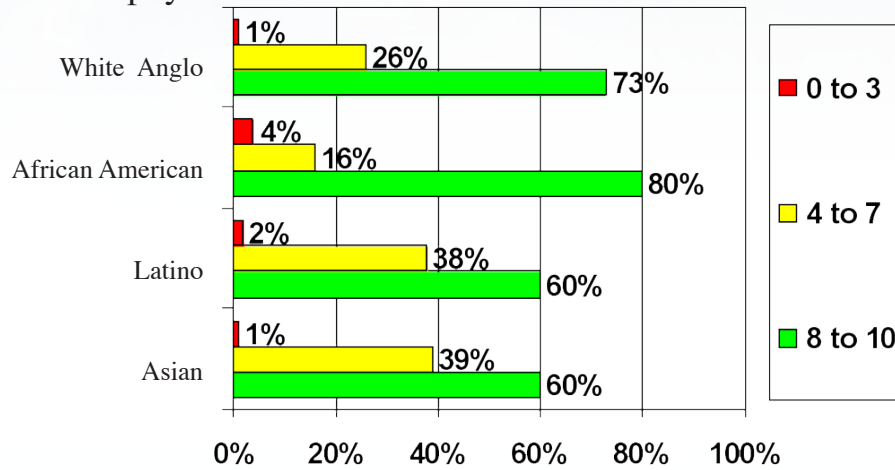


Figure 20

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “very unhealthy” and 10 means “very healthy” how would you rate your overall physical health?

By Gender

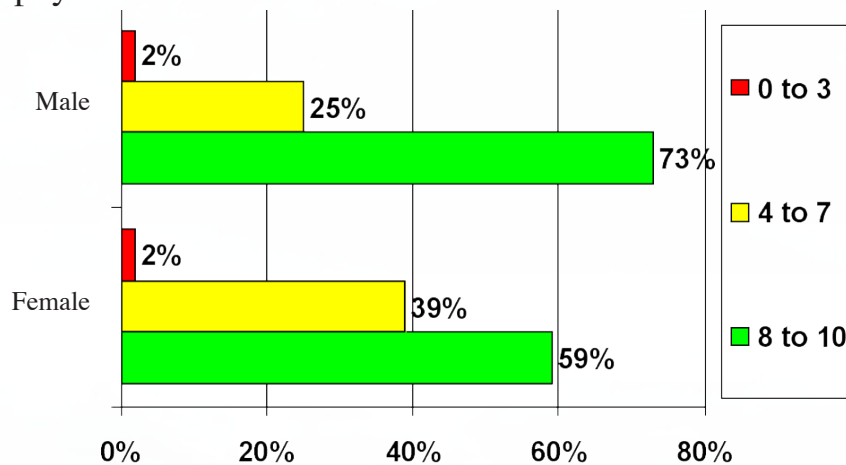


Figure 21

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “very unhealthy” and 10 means “very healthy” how would you rate your overall mental health?

By Race / Ethnicity

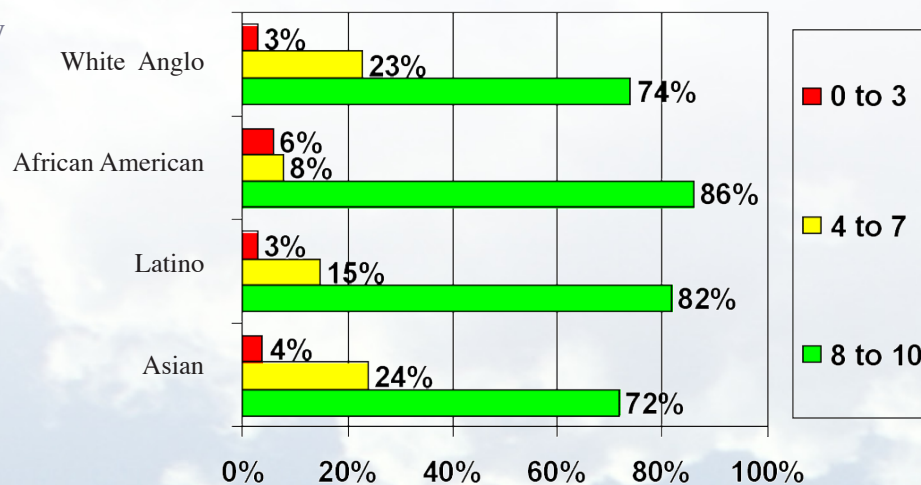


Figure 22

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “very unhealthy” and 10 means “very healthy” how would you rate your overall mental health?

By Gender

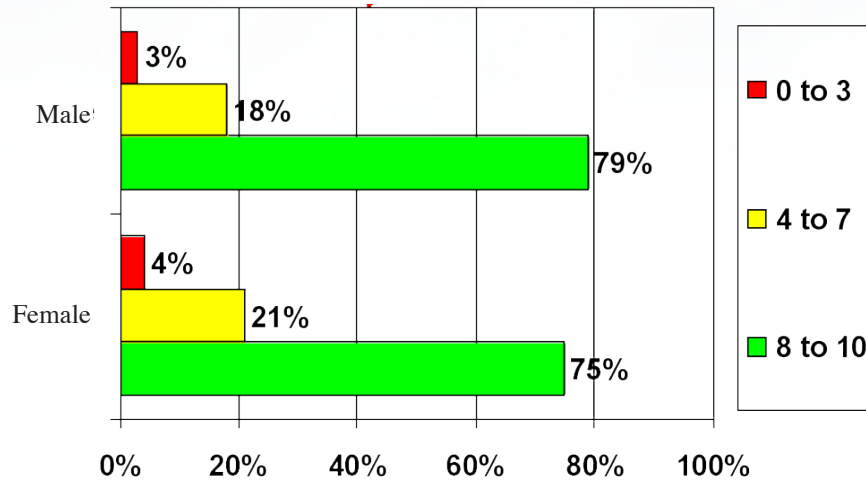


Figure 23

V. Attitudes Towards University of California

The vast majority of young people in California have a positive opinion of the University of California and most would consider attending a school in the UC system.

The University of California or UC system is viewed in a favorable light by the majority of California young people between the ages of 16 and 22 because of its positive image and reputation. Three-quarters of respondents say they would consider attending a UC school (Fig. 24). White Anglo and Asian young people are more likely to consider attending a UC school than their African American and Hispanic counterparts (Fig. 25). About one-quarter of California youth say they consider UC “too expensive” or want to go to a school in another state.

Have you ever considered attending the University of California or UC system?

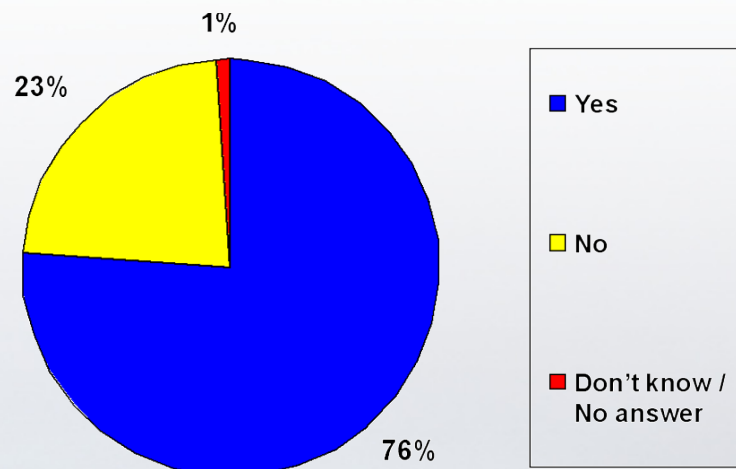


Figure 24

Have you ever considered attending the University of California or UC system?

By Race / Ethnicity

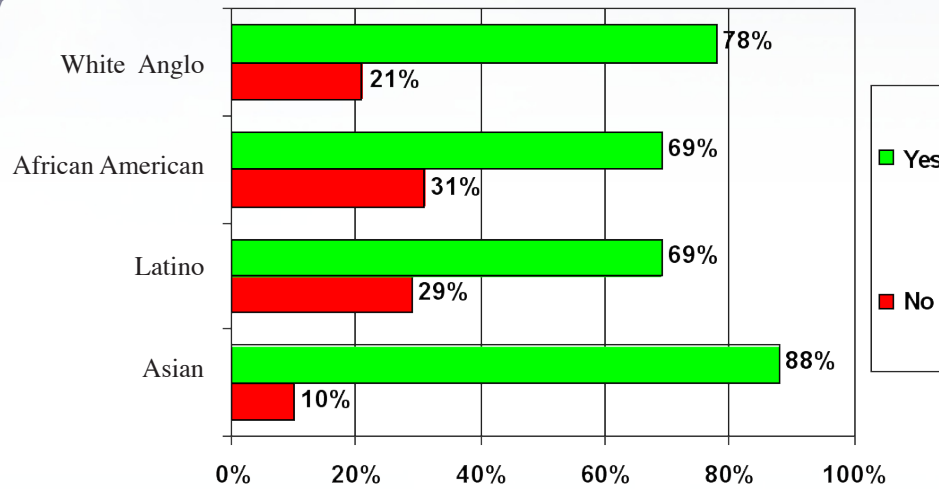


Figure 25

About three-fifths of respondents say that the UC system does an excellent or very good job with its responsibility as a research institution, although few are aware of UC programs at work in their communities. Their priorities for UC as a research institution are consistent with their top concerns about their own lives. California young people want UC researchers to improve K-12 education and discover advances that will create new jobs in the state – findings that align with their top sources of personal stress as schools and money (Fig. 26). A third priority for the university is helping to clean up the environment. Although the majority of young people polled rank their own health as very good to excellent, they also list developing medical breakthroughs as among the top four priorities for UC research.

In which of the following areas do you think the University of California or UC system could be doing more to help solve the problems facing society?

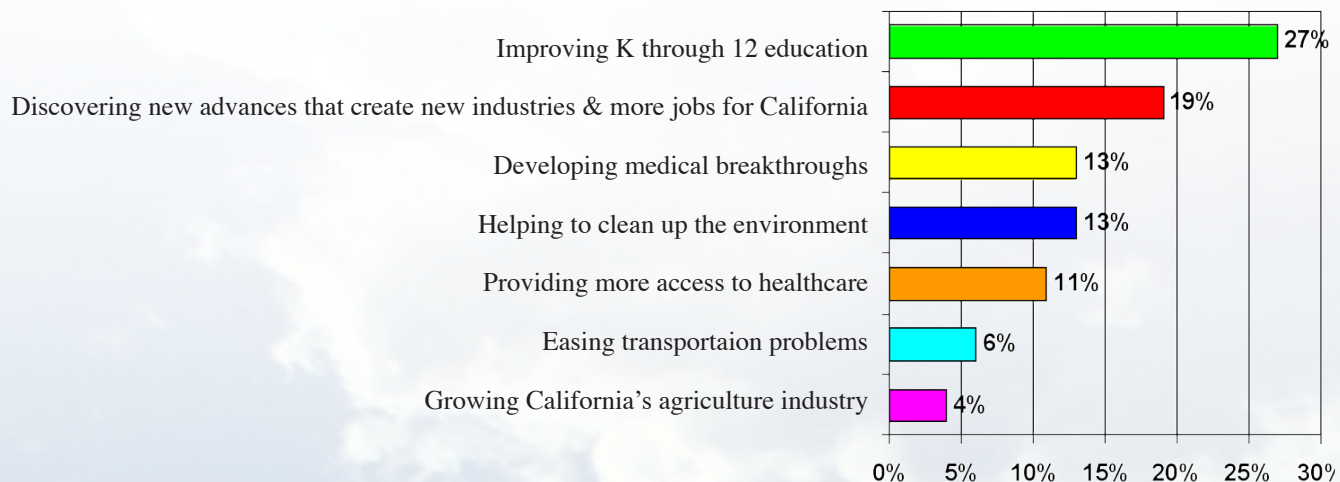


Figure 26

VI. *Demographics and Lifestyle*

Age

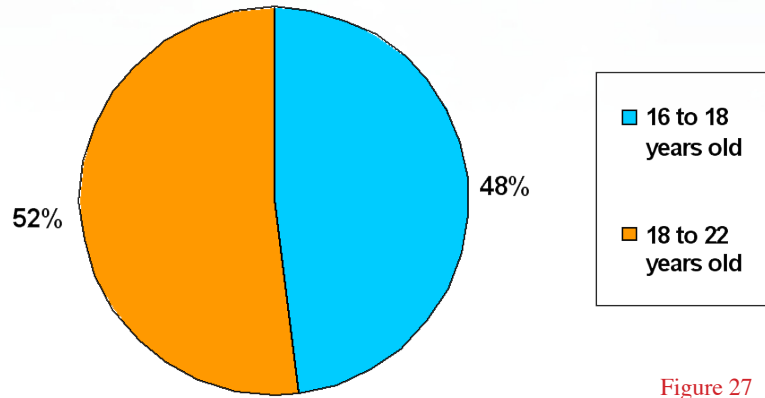


Figure 27

Region of California

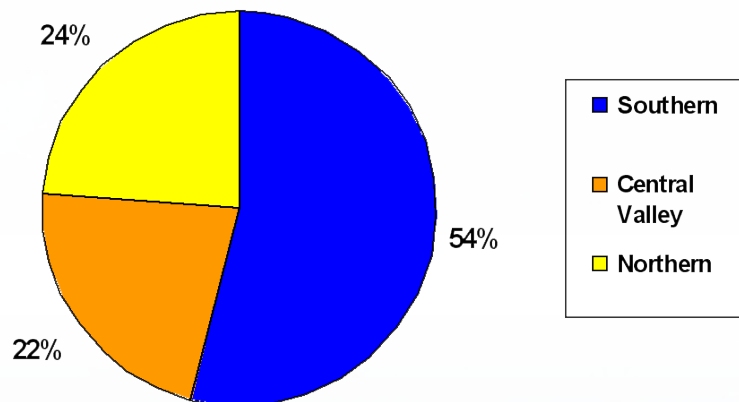


Figure 28

Are you currently single, married or in a life partnership?

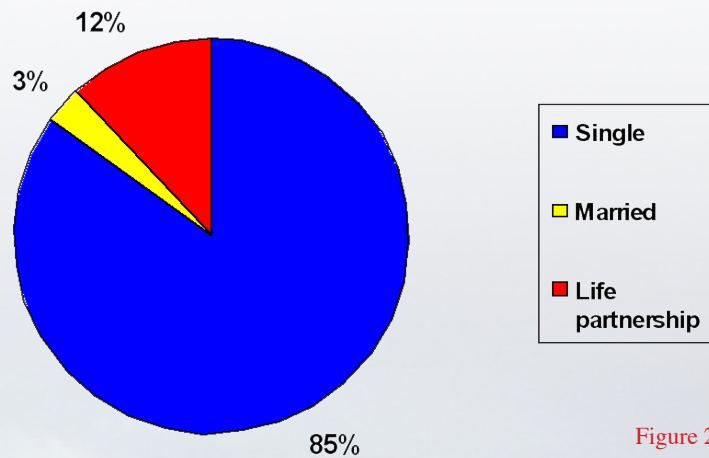


Figure 29

Do you have any children?

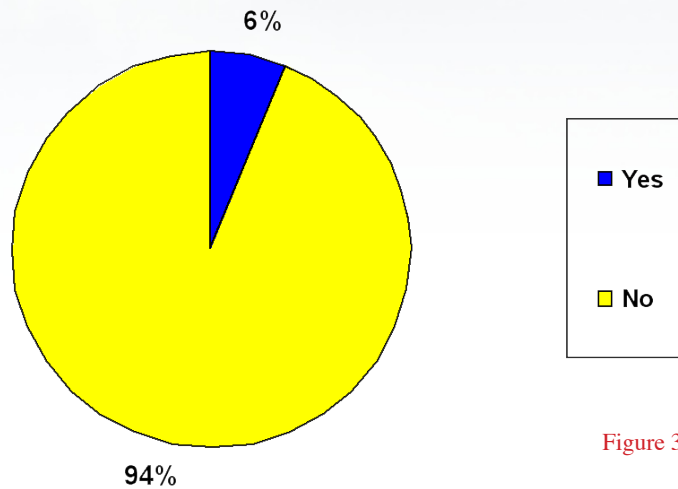


Figure 30

What kind of school do you currently attend in California?

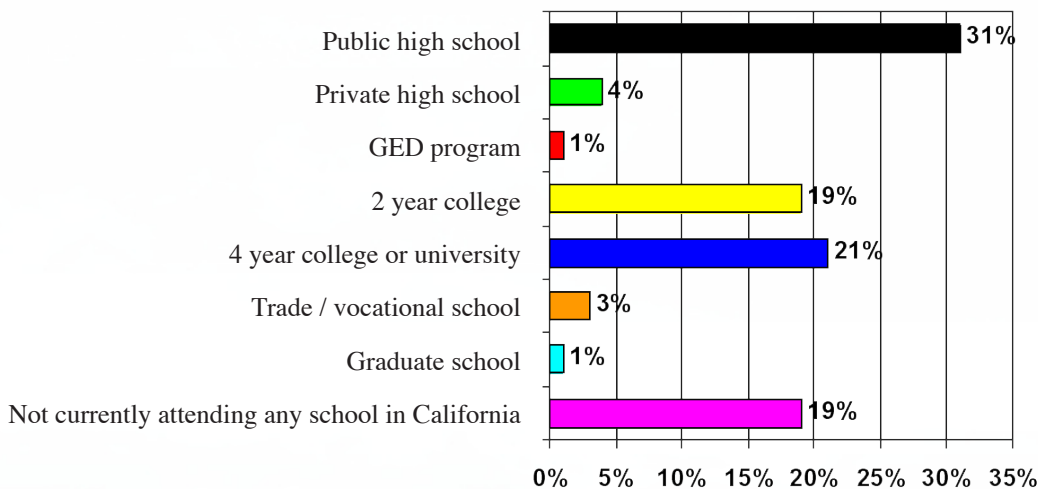


Figure 31

Can you tell me if you were born in California, in another state or were you born in another country?

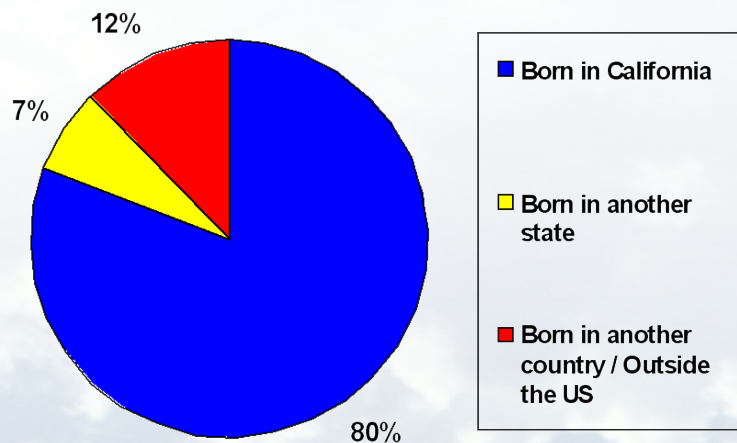


Figure 32

What about your parents - were they born in California, in another state or were they born in another country?

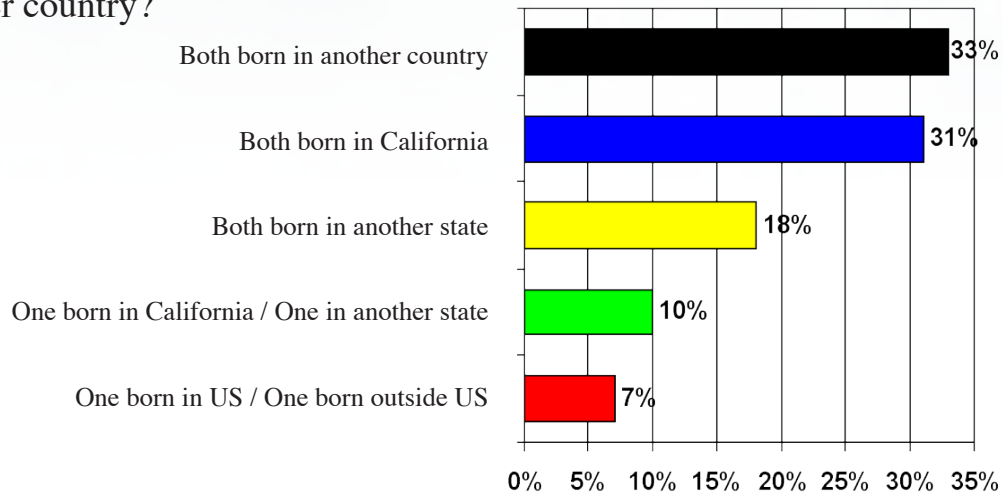


Figure 33

Race / Ethnicity

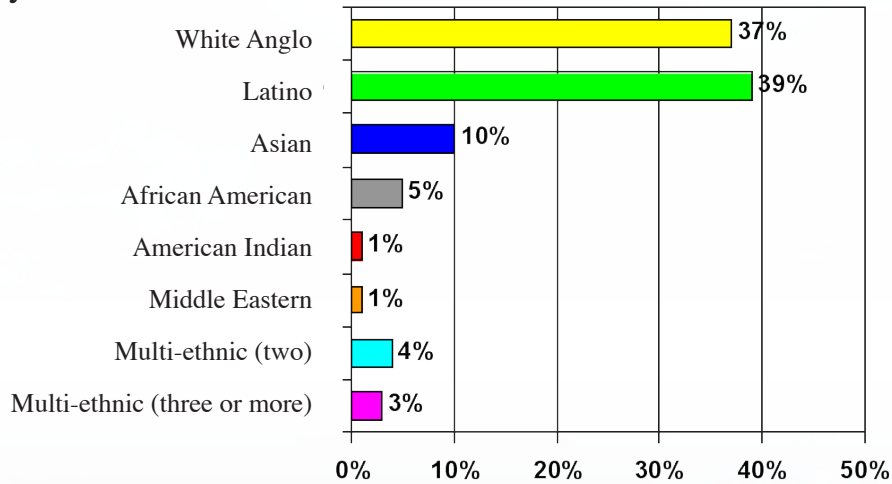


Figure 34

Where do you live most of the year?

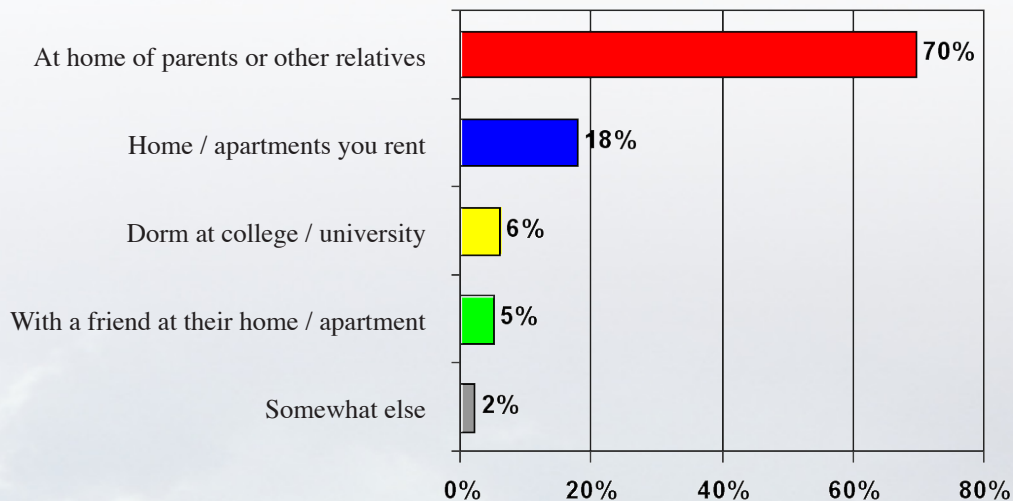


Figure 35

On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means “very unhealthy” and 10 means “very healthy” how would you rate your overall health?

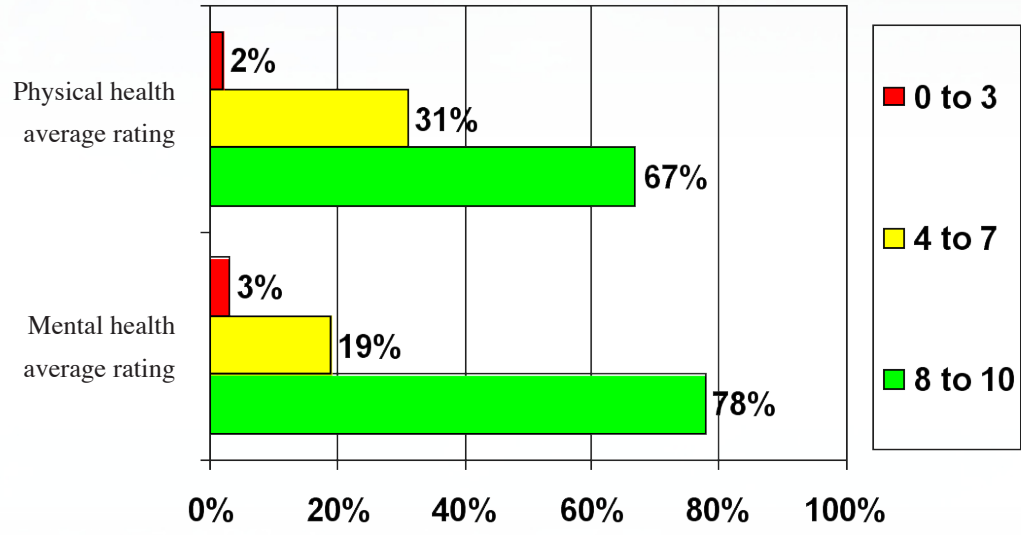


Figure 36

Have you ever been in jail or juvenile hall?

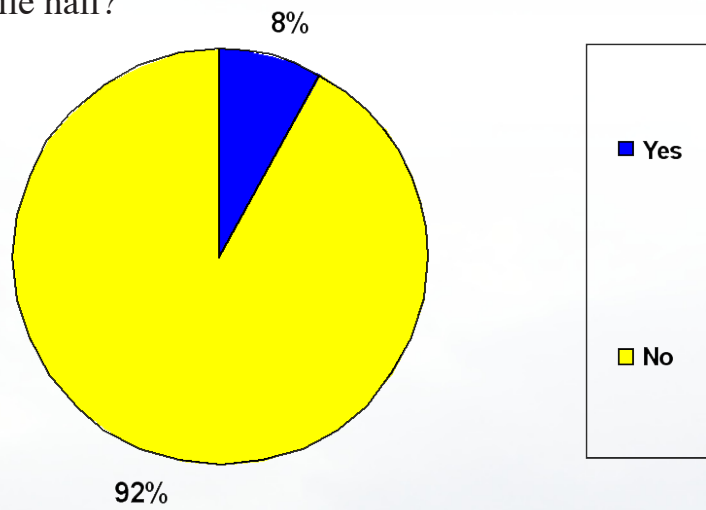


Figure 37

Have you ever been in jail or juvenile hall By Gender

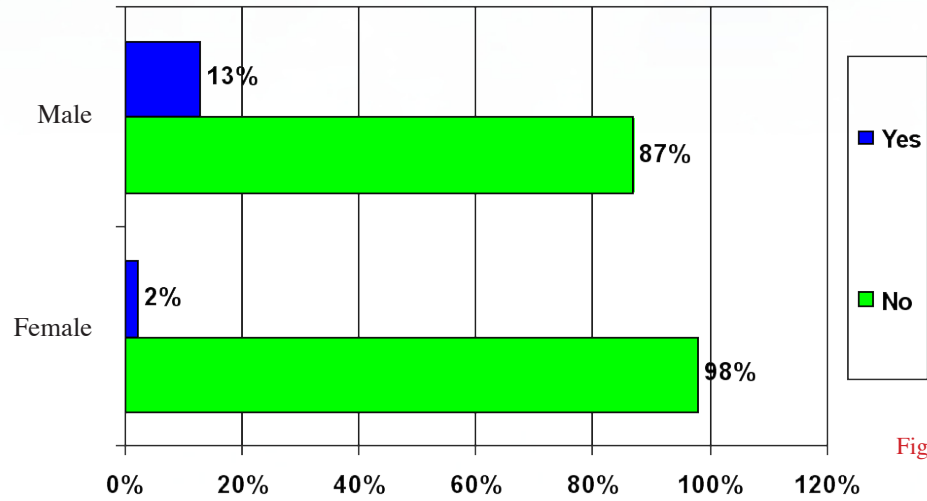


Figure 38

Have you ever been in jail or juvenile hall By Race / Ethnicity

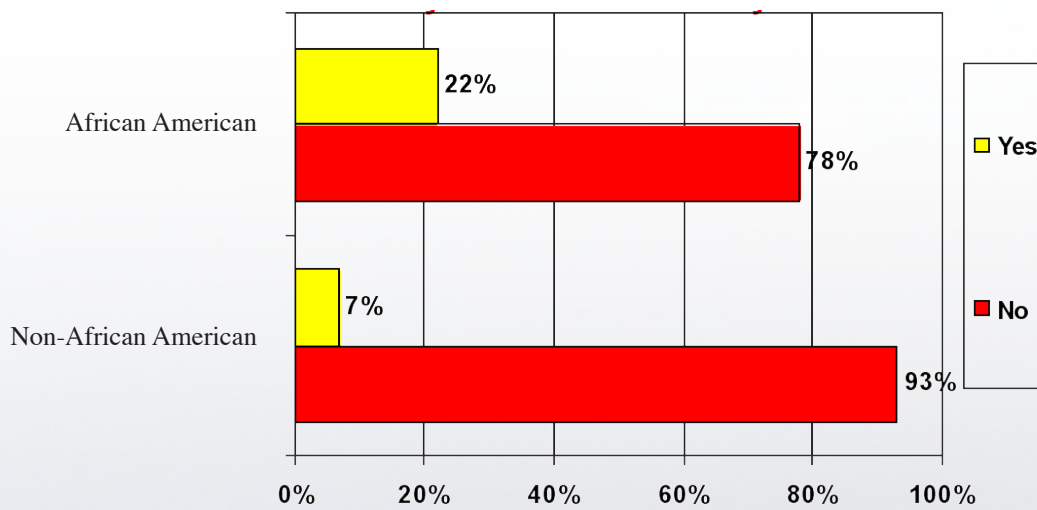


Figure 39