

Young Elected Leaders Don't Bowl Alone

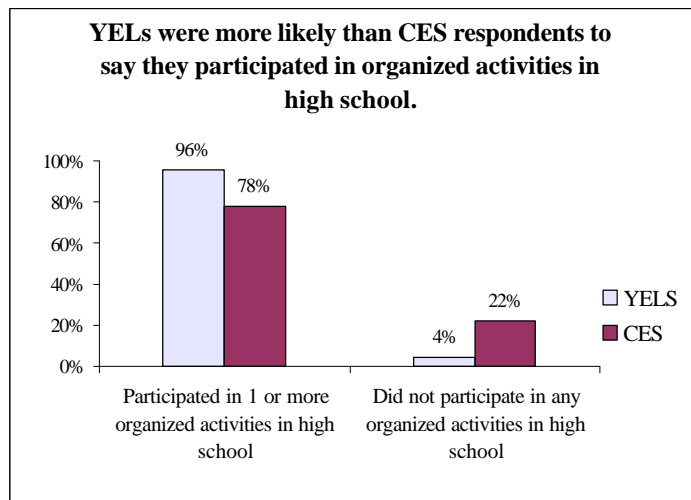
Young Elected Leaders (YELs) tend to be active citizens. Similar to U.S. political elites of any age, young political officials are joiners and doers, tuned in to the world around them. They are also more trusting of people's motives than are young people in general.

High School Activities

As high school students, survey respondents were involved in many extracurricular activities, whether within or outside school. Ninety-six percent said they participated in organized activities, and 56 percent of those said they had participated in five or more. Organized sports, student council or student government, community service, and religious youth groups were most frequently mentioned. Among those YELs who took part in community service, 90 percent did so voluntarily, while 7 percent said it was required. Among those whose schools had student governments, 45 percent had served in that government, while 39 percent were not involved in any way. Most of the remainder had participated in other ways, such as running for a student government office or working on a school campaign.

I have been interested in elected office since I was young. Student government was very important in getting me interested.

Midwestern Republican Councilmember



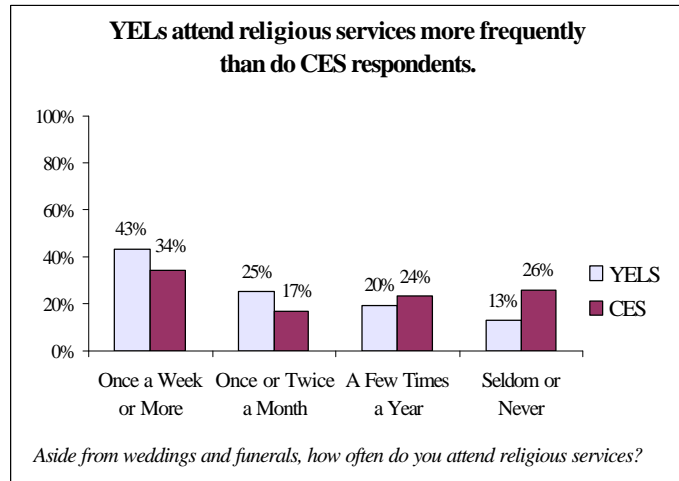
While high school activities attracted many CES respondents, YELs outpaced them as joiners. On this measure, the gap (18 points) between YELs and CES respondents is large.

College Activities

In college, where students' schedules might be fuller, most YELs continued to be active, with 82.4 percent participating in at least one activity. A quarter of the YELs reported participating in three or more activities while in college. The most frequently mentioned type of activity was community or volunteer work (56 %) followed by student government (38 %) and organized sports (30 %). A far higher proportion of male than female YELs participated in college student government.

Attendance at Religious Services

YELs attend religious services more frequently than CES respondents, as shown on the graph. While nearly half of YELs go once a week or more, half of CES respondents attend services no more than a few times a year.

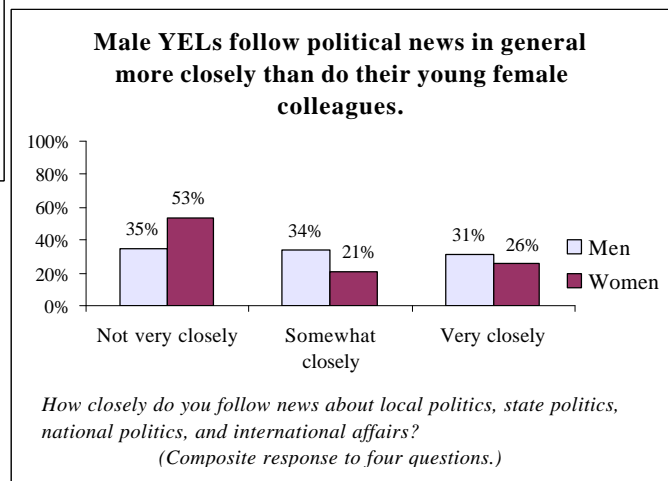
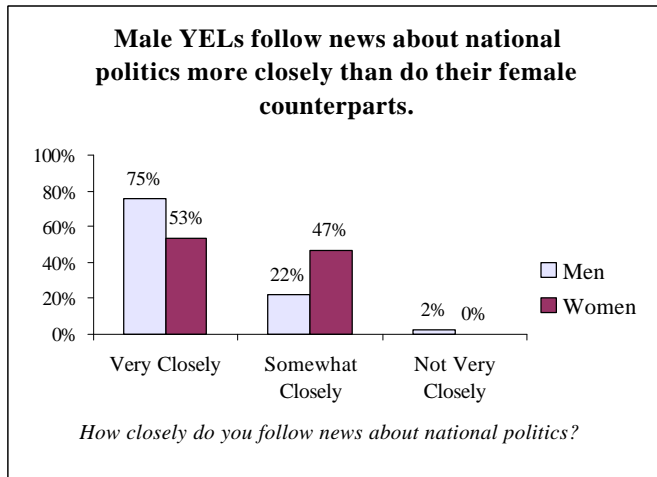


News Consumption

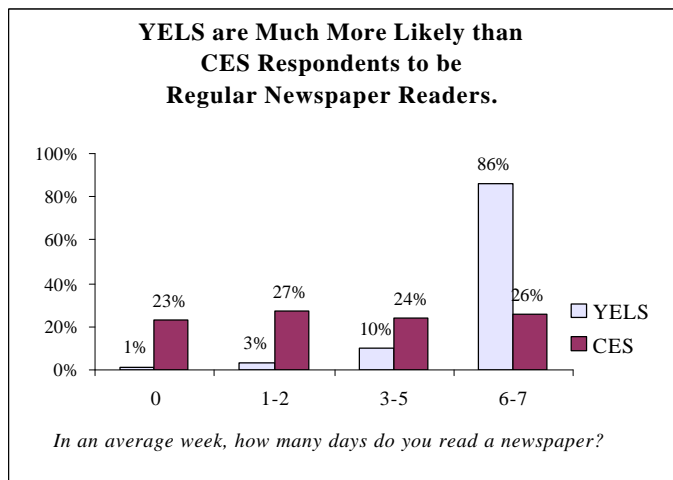
As might be expected, YELs are dedicated consumers of news media, particularly political news. Seventy-nine percent report following news about state politics “very closely,” and 72 percent say they follow news about national politics “very closely.” An even greater number follow local political news, with 89 saying they follow it “very closely.”

There are, however, significant gender differences in levels of attention to news, as shown in the two accompanying graphs. The male respondents are considerably more likely than their female counterparts to follow the news of national politics “very closely”.

In combined responses to three questions showing how closely respondents followed local, state and national political news, the women report following political news at a somewhat lower level than the men. There are no gender differences in how closely respondents follow news about local politics.



The news consumption patterns of YELs are consistent with high levels of engagement and differ strikingly from those found among the general population of young people. Compared with CES respondents, for example, YELs are far more regular newspaper readers. A whopping 86 percent of young elected officials read newspapers almost daily, while only 26 percent of young people in general turn as frequently to newspapers. YELs also spend more time reading news on-line; 32 percent of YELs read news on-line every day, as compared with 14 percent of CES respondents. Levels of television news viewing between the two groups are more comparable.

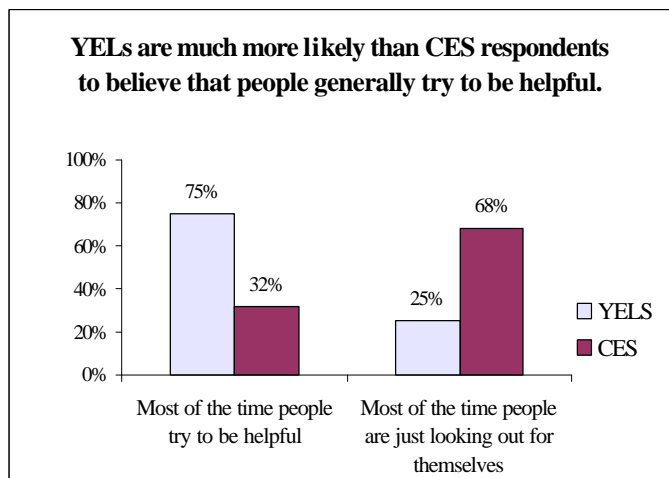


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...I have been able to bring to my state’s governing body a focus on how issues affect the members of my generation. Particularly, my arriving in the legislature as an Internet friendly member was helpful and helped bridge a natural gap that existed between older members and myself.
Southern Republican Legislator

Social Trust

YELs are more trusting of people’s motives than other young adults. Three quarters of YELs think that “most of the time people try to be helpful,” while a quarter believe that “most of the time people are just looking out for themselves.” In contrast, CES respondents are more than twice as likely to answer “people are looking out for themselves” as to say “people try to be helpful.”



A Methodological Note

These findings are drawn from research about young elected officials conducted in 2002 by the Eagleton Institute of Politics as part of the Young Elected Leaders Project.

Between May 31 and September 30, 2002, the Institute conducted a national survey of elected officials who were age 35 and younger at that time. The survey included municipal officials who serve in cities with a population of 30,000 or greater, state legislators, state-wide elected officials, and officials who serve in the federal government. Eight hundred fourteen members of the target population were contacted by mail and asked to complete the survey either by mail or on-line. Three hundred ninety young elected leaders responded to the survey. Two hundred six respondents completed the survey by mail, and 184 completed the survey on-line. After the initial contact, four additional contacts were made with members of the population who had not responded to the survey to request that they do so. Respondents and non-respondents did not differ significantly on gender or party, two variables for which we had comparable data. The firm Schulman, Ronca, and Bucavalas, Inc. hosted and distributed the survey.

Comparisons between young elected leaders (YELs) and their peers who do not serve in elective office are based on data from a large, multi-phase study of civic engagement in America (.Keeter, Scott, Zukin, Cliff, Andolina, Molly, and Jenkins, Krista. (2002). *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. CIRCLE, The Center for Information and Research in Civic Learning and Engagement.) That study, referred to here as CES (civic engagement study) was designed to document civic attitudes and behavior and the distinct ways in which each generation approaches politics and public life. We compared the YELs with CES respondents aged 18 - 35.

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