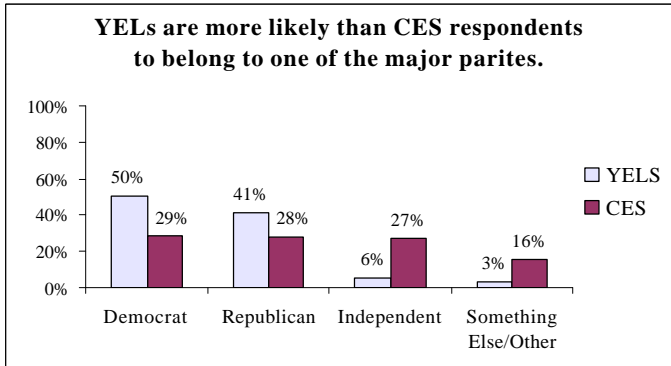


What Do Young Elected Leaders Think?

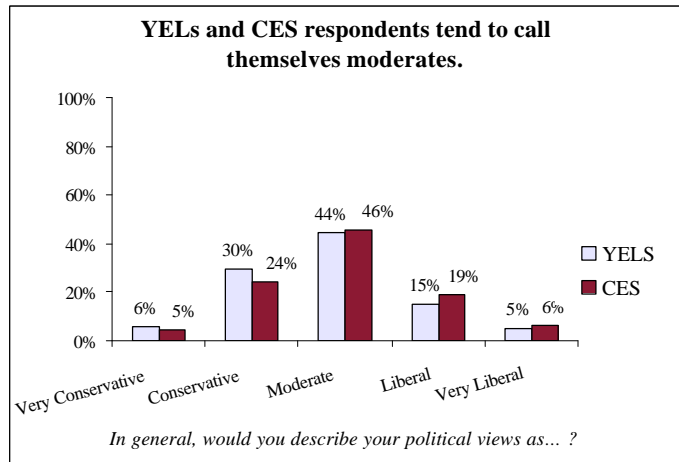
Political Party Identification

Naming their political party affiliations, fifty percent of YELs who responded to the survey said they were Democrats, 41 percent Republicans, 6 percent independents, and 3 percent other, with 1 percent not offering a party choice. Compared with the CES respondents, YELs were much more likely to call themselves Democrats and much less likely to choose the label “independent” or “something else/other.” This is not surprising, given that in most cases, candidates for elective office must run as members of parties.

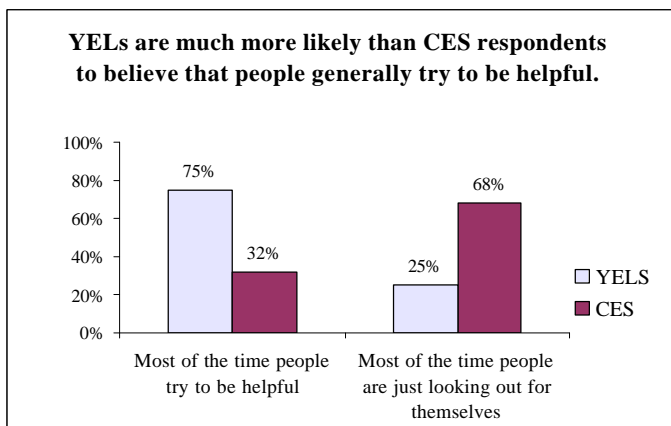


Ideology

YELs and CES respondents most commonly choose the label “moderate,” matching the most common preference of U.S. voters. Thirty-six percent of YELs call themselves either “very conservative” or “conservative,” compared with 29 percent of the CES group; in contrast, 20 percent of the YELs say they are “liberal” or “very liberal,” compared with 25 percent of the CES group.



YELs are more trusting of people’s motives than other young adults. Three-quarters of YELs think



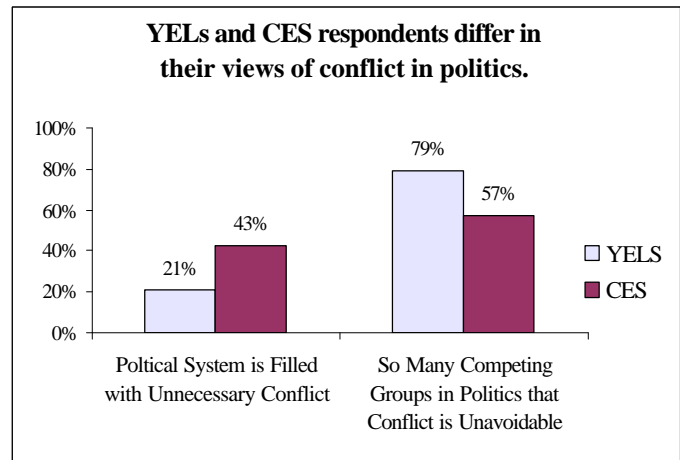
that “most of the time people try to be helpful,” while a quarter believe that “most of the time people are just looking out for themselves.” In contrast, CES respondents are more than twice as likely to answer “people are looking out for themselves” as to say “people try to be helpful”.

I think the vast majority of people are good; but the ones that are out for themselves are the most vocal.

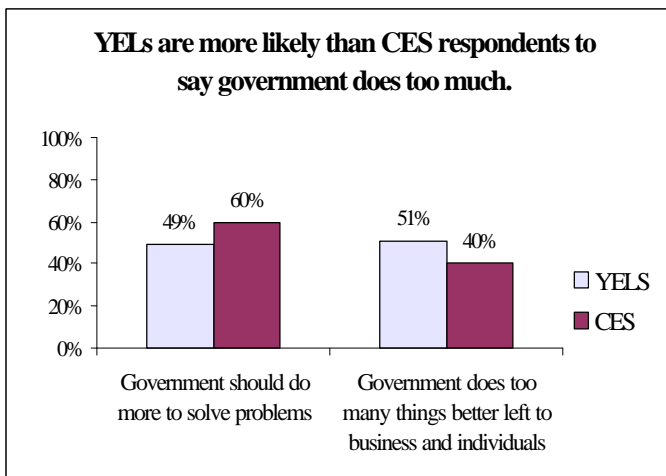
New England Republican Councilmember

Views on Politics and Government

YELs also view the contentiousness of politics somewhat differently from their peers. Almost four-fifths of YELs take the view that “there are so many competing groups in politics that conflict is unavoidable,” while about one fifth say that “the political system is filled with unnecessary conflict.” Among the young people in the national study, however, more than two-fifths see unnecessary conflict, compared with almost three-fifths who believe conflict is unavoidable.



Asked about the responsibilities of government, YELs are about evenly divided between those who feel that “Government should do more to solve problems” and those who say “Government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals.” Among the CES respondents, however, a majority want government to do more.



Regardless of whether they believe government should do more or less, it is not surprising that virtually all YELs believe government decisions matter. A large majority (81 %) say such decisions have “a great deal” of impact on the lives of citizens, and another 18 percent say “some” impact.

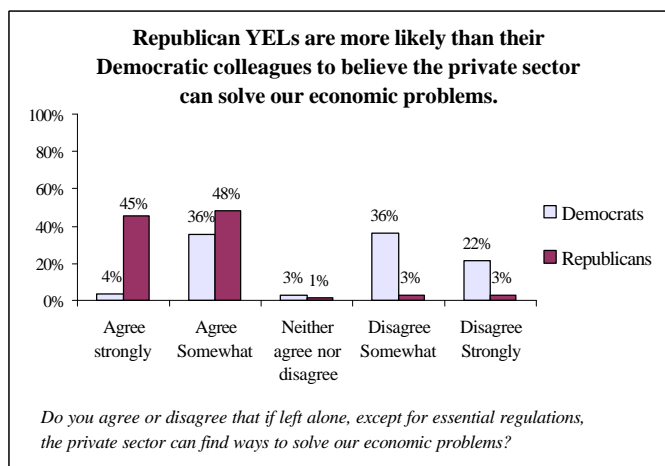
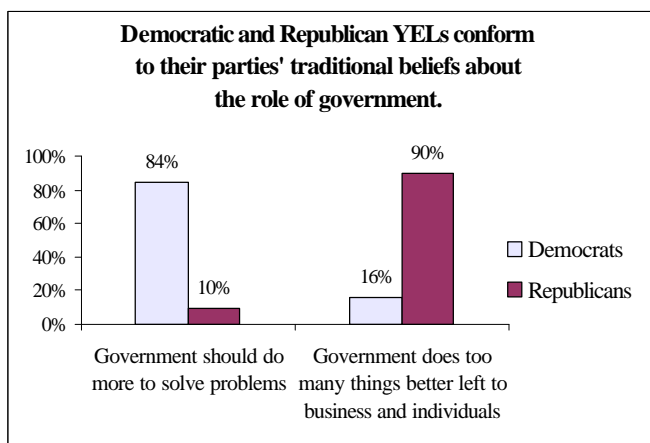
I just wish there were a way to get the constituents more involved – after all, the decisions that are made by their elected leaders will affect their lives as well as the lives of many others for years to come.

Southern Democratic Councilmember

I had been involved with a grassroots lobbying organization for about 10 years. That experience led to a belief that it really matters who is in office.

Western Republican Legislator

Young elected officials differ predictably along partisan lines about the roles of government and business relative to one another. As we would expect, a large majority of Democrats think that “government should do more to solve problems,” while an even larger majority of Republicans assert that “government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals.”

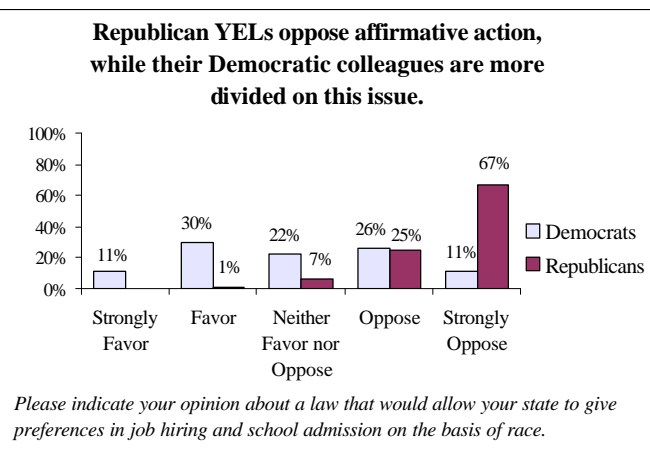
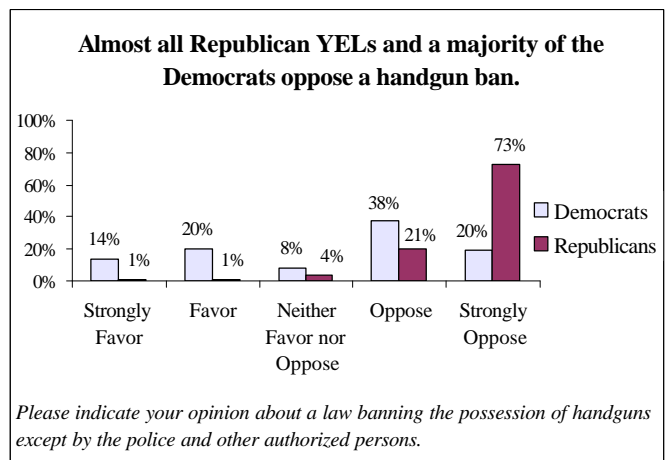


When asked whether the private sector, if left alone except for essential regulations, can find ways to solve our economic problems, Republican YELs express overwhelming agreement while Democratic YELs are more ambivalent. In other words, the attitudes of young elected officials essentially reflect the traditional differences between the parties when it comes to views about the scope and size of government.

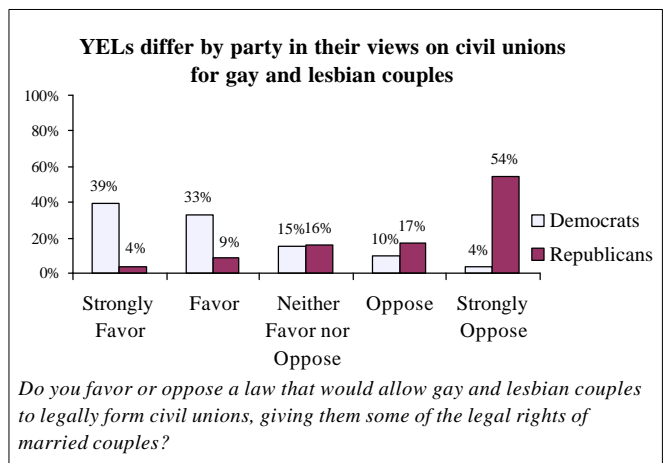
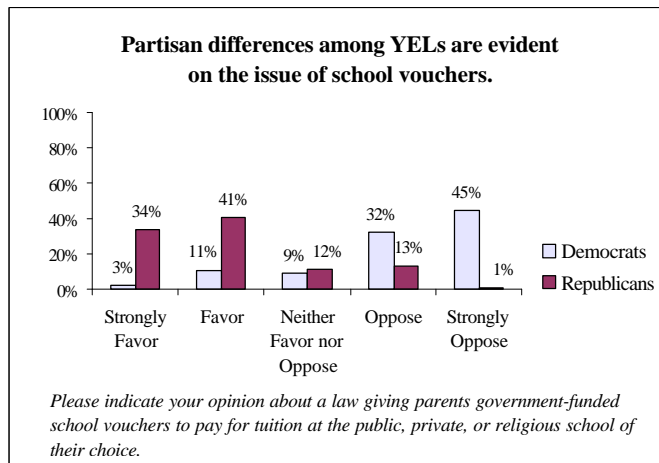
Attitudes About Public Policy Issues

On domestic policy issues, young elected officials generally conform to partisan or gender patterns.

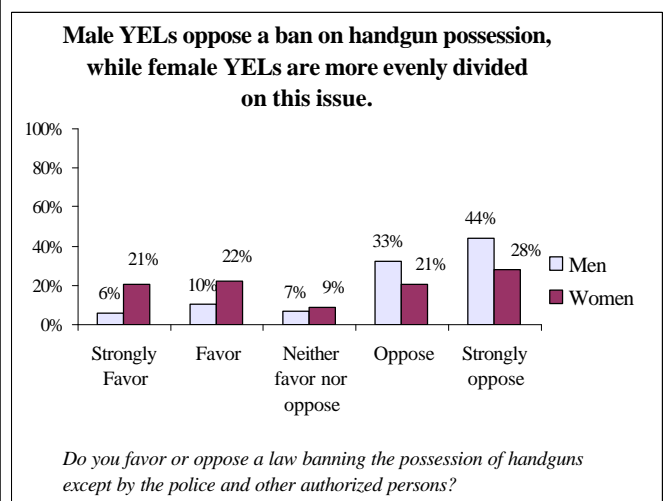
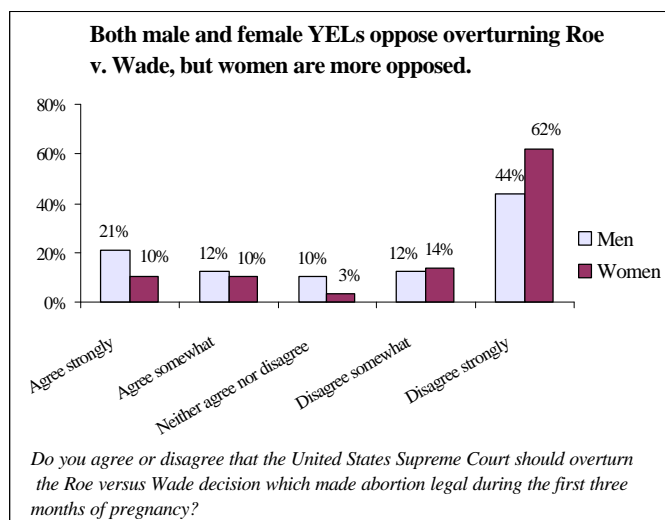
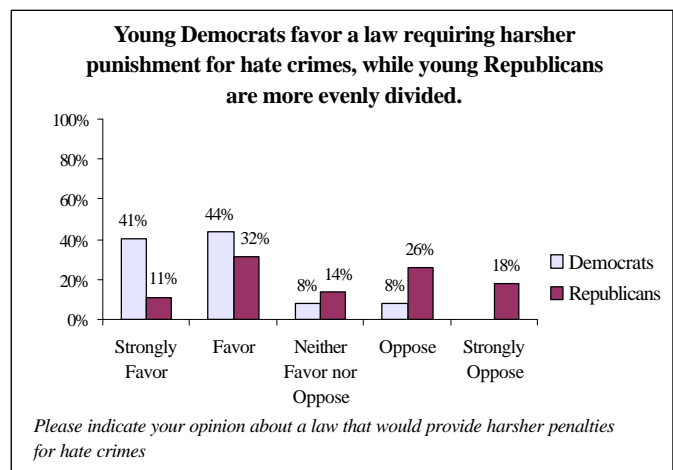
On race-based preferential school admissions and hiring, Republican opposition is all but unanimous and Democrats are markedly ambivalent. Asked about a law largely banning the possession of handguns, Republicans voice almost total opposition and are joined in that stance by a majority of Democrats, although a sizeable partisan gap remains, with one-third of Democrats favoring such a ban.



Strong and traditional partisan differences emerge among the young officeholders on three issues: school vouchers, hate crimes legislation, and civil unions for gay and lesbian couples.



On two issues, the divide among young officeholders falls along gender lines. Women and men differ by twenty points on whether the Supreme Court should overturn its Roe versus Wade decision making abortion legal during the first three months of pregnancy, with majorities of both (76 % of women, 56 % of men) opposed to reversing Roe. Young male and female officeholders also disagree about a ban on handgun possession; the men oppose such a ban, while the women are about evenly divided between those who favor and those who oppose it.



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.

The Young Elected Leaders Project is sponsored by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts.