

The Young Elected Leaders Project

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Aresty Research Center
for Undergraduates

Abstract

The original Young Elected Leaders Project (YELP) study was launched and conducted by Ruth B. Mandel and Kathy Kleeman to examine Young Elected Leaders (YELs) in 2002, who are considered part of Generation X. In 2017, a cohort study was launched for YELs who are members of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z. In 2019-2020, we employed a qualitative research style of research to form a grounded theory (built up from data rather than top-down) about YELs serving in office. We analyzed multiple interviews through an exhaustive coding methodology that required at least three extensive, line-by-line readings of each YEL's interview. We then cross-referenced these analyses to consolidate common themes across different Millennial and Generation Z YELs to compare and contrast individual representational experiences and styles. We also conducted interviews with local YELs, and will later code these interviews in order to examine their personal backgrounds and leadership qualities, and draw further conclusions about the Millennial Generation compared to previous generations. Ultimately, this is a continuing project, but we were able to begin to isolate certain themes across the interviews that can serve as a foundation for conclusive results that may be produced years down the line.

Background

- The original 2002 project was funded by Pew Charitable Trusts
- YELP hosted conference to study YELs with report released in 2003
- Most political studies on young people are focused on why they lack engagement (particularly voting engagement).
- In contrast, this study focuses intimately on young people on the other end of the spectrum - those that have run for office and won.
- In addition, while most current literature focuses on more quantitative data, this research is heavily qualitative based.

Methodology

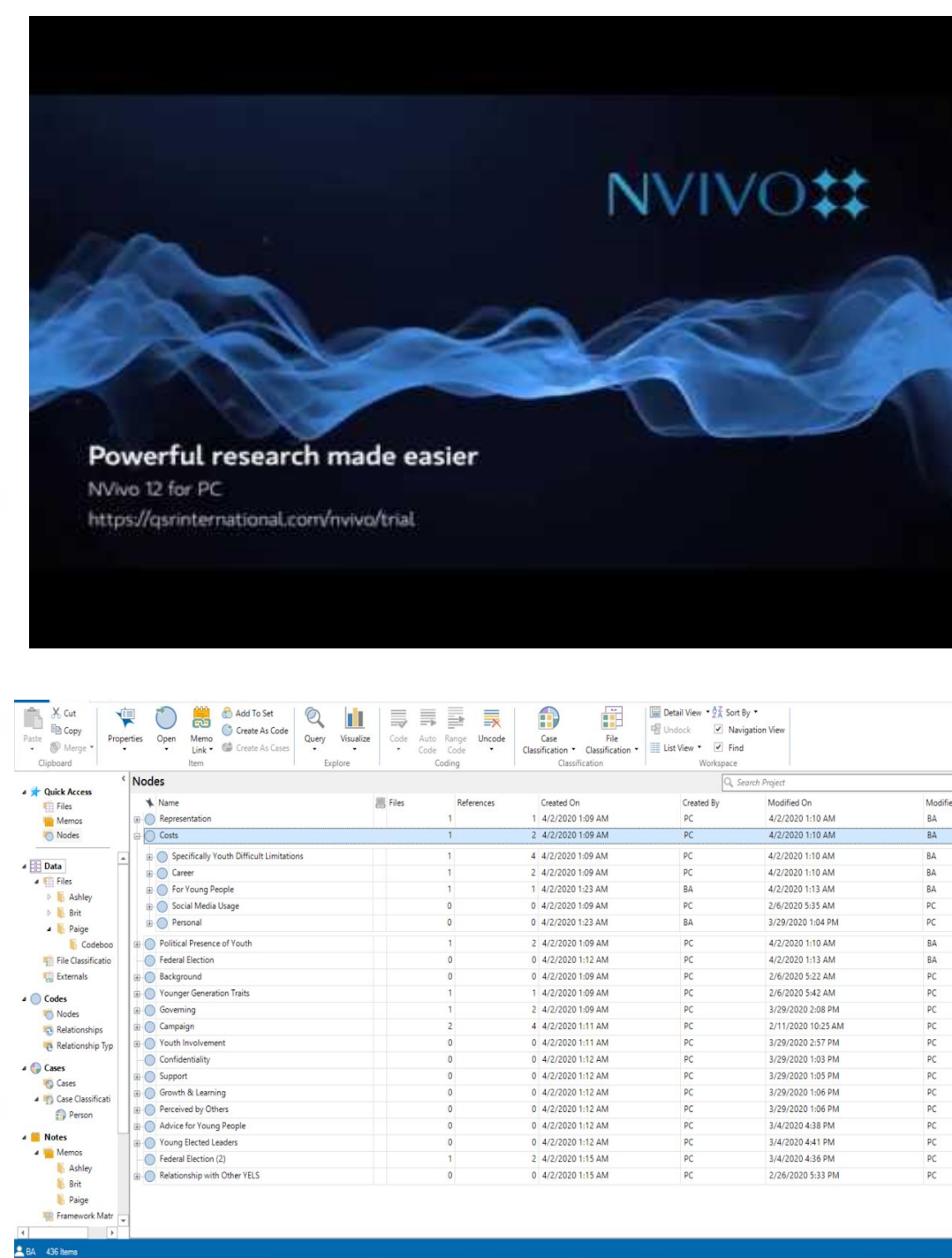
Initial read through material

Read and **bold**

Read and underline or **highlight**

Group markings into categories

Refine categories



The Young Elected Leaders

Pathways



Adam Taliaferro,
State Representative



Brandon Pugh, Board
of Education

"I kind of thought of it on my own [...] I emailed [...] I said [...] I want to run, what should I do?"

"There are very few instances of people that I've met who have run either successfully or unsuccessfully that have said anything other than I was recruited. Recruiting is huge in New Jersey, at least in the Republican Party."

"My passion started...when I was in high school and like 2008 when Obama was first running...that's when the media really started drumming up political issues and it became a lot more accessible...through Facebook and everything."

Governing

"This is a spot from which social change I think is easiest."

"I feel more comfortable talking to someone across the aisle that's my age because I feel like hey, you know, we understand each other better, you know, we're similar in age, we've probably had similar life experiences."

"Young people don't approach the problems with well this is the way we've always done it [...] because we're new to the problem and I think that is really important to bring just a fresh head [...] that is why we need more young people"

"Having that [social media] incorporated into your life prior to public service, it makes it easier for public officials that are of the millennial generation to be more responsive and reply to a tweet [...] somebody who reached out to me on Facebook for assistance or even just an idea. And we were able to make it happen."

Representation of Youth

"I felt like there was[...] a part of me that wanted to represent young people in the sense that there were no people of my age that were kind of involved"

"[I do not feel any obligations as someone who is of a younger or off the millennial generation or younger age cohort; I do not find any obligation to focus on issues that represent young adults]."

"I think too many times we separate young people as in they have to have their own set of issues [...] I care about the same issues that someone who is 30 would, or 40 would, or 50 would. But [...] I think environment is a big one for a lot of younger people"



Raj Mukherji,
State Representative



Michael Schlossberg,
State Representative



Vlad Goldfarb,
Board of Education



Victoria Napolitano,
Mayor



Connor Montferrat,
City Council



William (Bill) Moen,
State Representative

Demographic Information about Young Elected Leaders

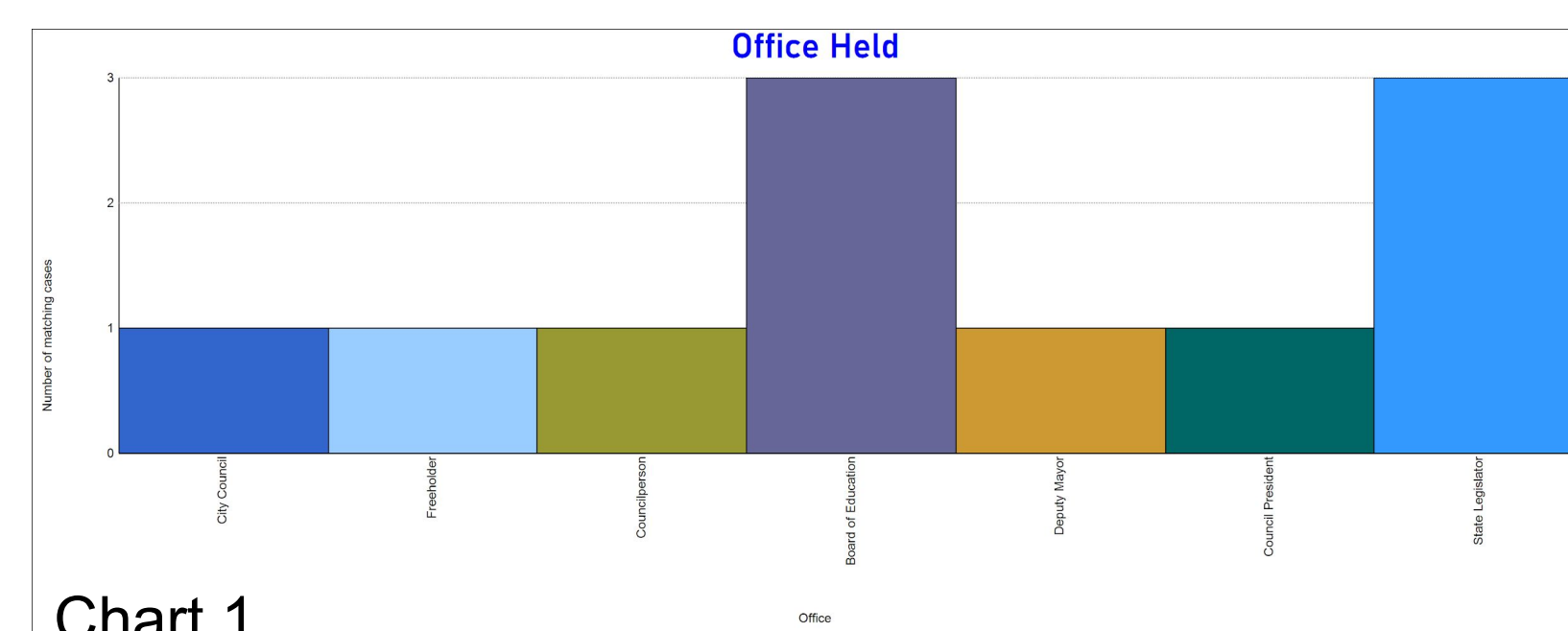


Chart 1 displays the offices held by those whose interviews we analyzed. They ranged from being a member of their local Board of Education to being a State Representative (both having a value of 3). None were at the federal level.

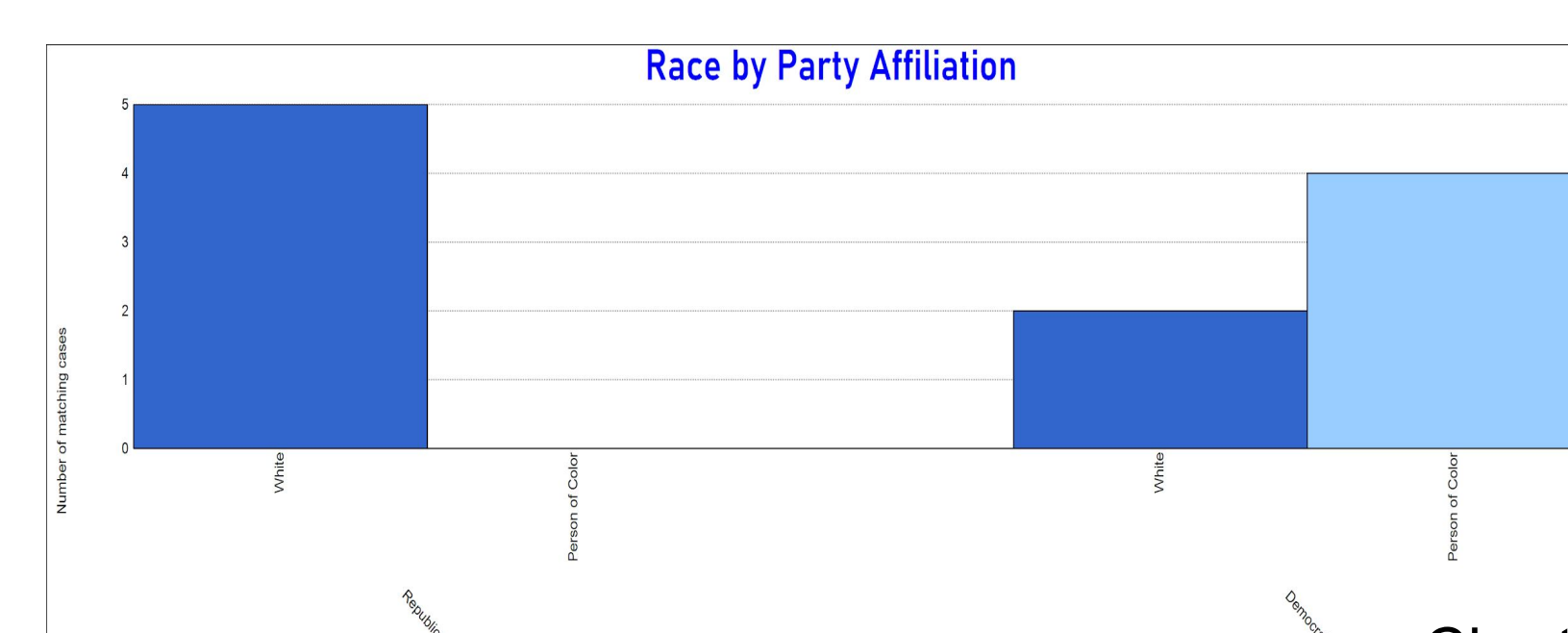


Chart 2 displays race by party affiliation. Of the eleven Young Elected Leaders, seven are white. The four people of color are all affiliated with the Democratic party.

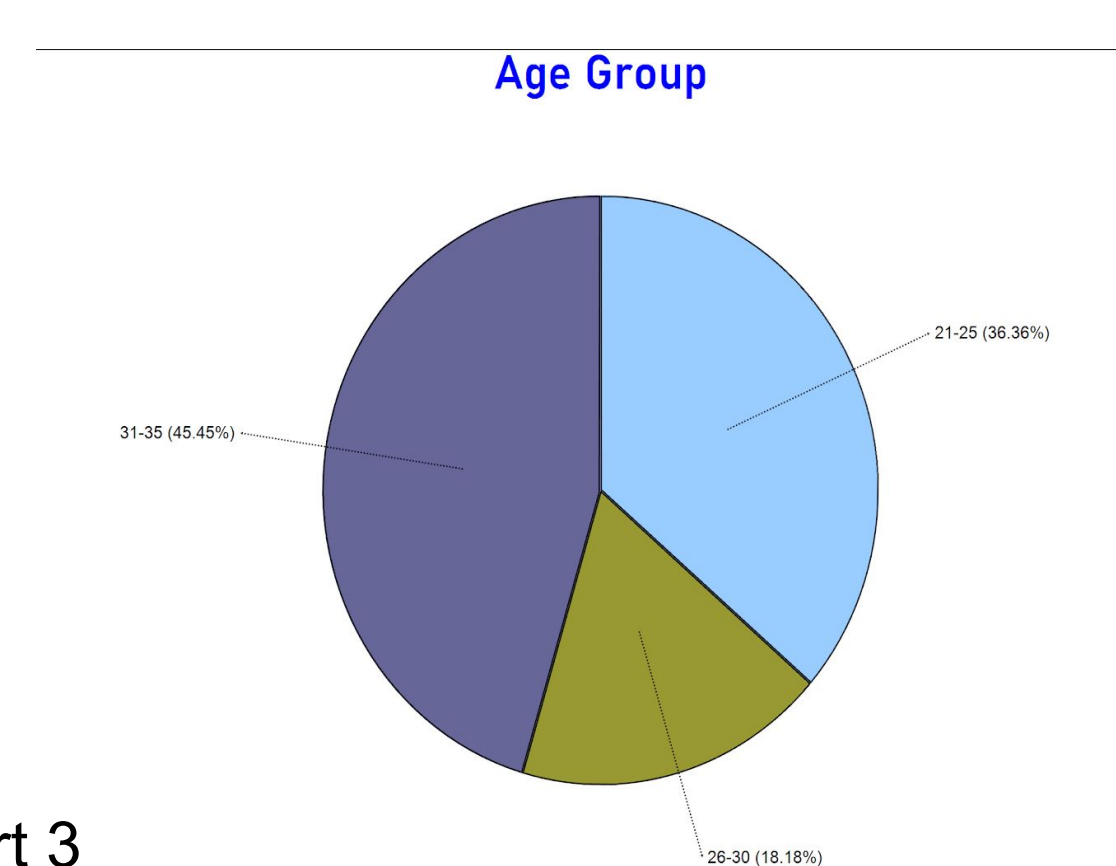


Chart 3

Chart 3 displays the breakdown of age groups among the Young Elected Leaders at the time of their interview. The majority were on the older side, in the age range of 31-35. The least common age group was 26-30.

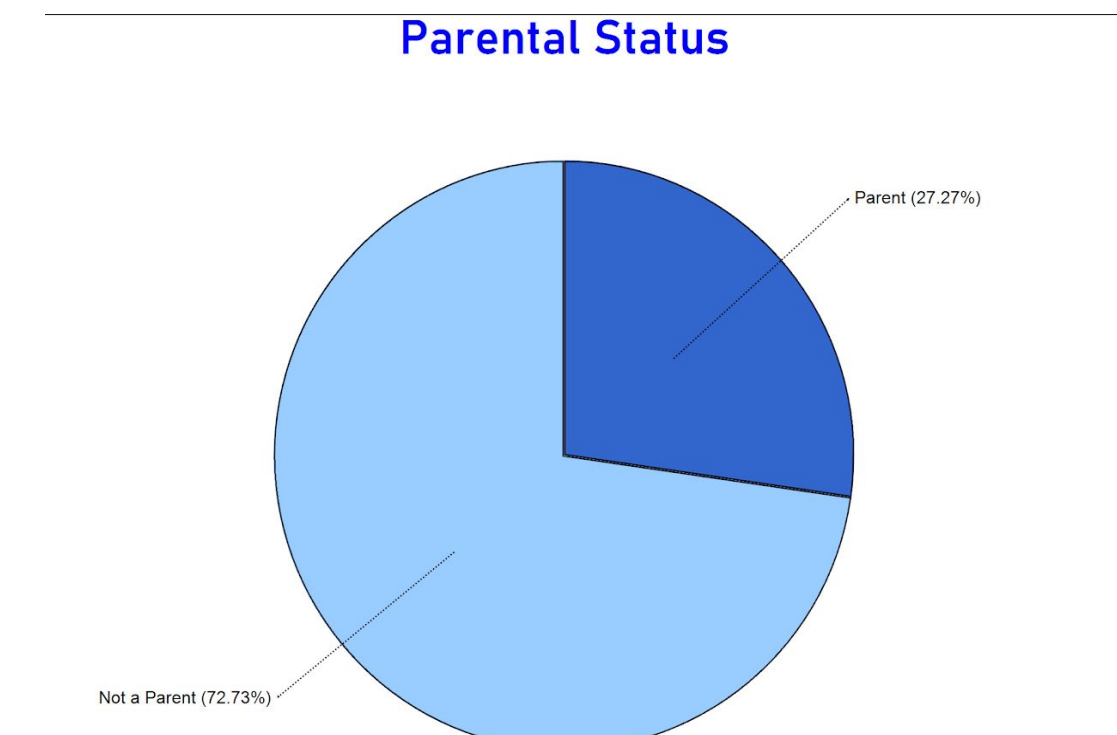


Chart 4

Chart 4 displays parental status of the interviewees. An overwhelming majority were not parents but there were three that were.

Coding: What We Have Learned

Paths to Politics:

- **Parents / Familial Socialization**
- **Education as Socializing**
- **National Political Environment**
- **Mentoring / Recruitment**

Campaigning:

- **Perception**
 - Lookism
 - Personal Perception
- **Learning Curve**
- **Strategies**
 - Message
 - Door-Knocking
 - Social Media
 - General Over-preparedness

Life Balance:

- **Trade-offs**
 - Single v. Married
 - Living with Parents/Alone
- **Support**
 - Educational
 - Professional
 - Familial

Governing:

- **Solving Problems**
- **Showing Capabilities**
 - To Colleagues
 - To Self
- **Over-preparedness**
- **Technology**
 - Use for Constituents
 - To recruit other young people
 - To communicate with other young elected leaders
- **Desire to give to Community**

Relationships with Colleagues:

- **Position Matters**
- **Perceptions**
 - Ageism
 - Personal Perceptions

Representation:

- **Party Differences**
- **Substantive**
 - Obligation to youth
 - Obligation to other identities
- **Symbolic**
 - Token

Implications for Future Research: Comparisons with Gen X

This year's work lays the foundation of future comparisons between the Young Elected Leaders of the Millennial Generation with the results of those of Generation X from the 2002 study. In particular, the comparison of philosophies about governing, services, and the role of youth in politics and political office. Moving forward, researchers should analyze new data with a similarly rigorous methodology and revise and refine the main themes presented from this year's work with their findings from new data. Ultimately, the goal is to create a cohesive theory that accurately and precisely captures the differences between Generation X and Millennial young leaders.

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