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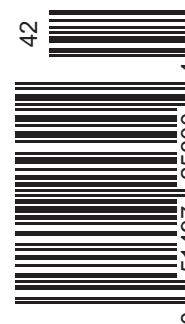
Dr. Marcy, The Gold Standard

Dr. Marcia Faustin, UC Davis physician and co-head team physician for the USA Gymnastics Women's National Team, is rebuilding trust and empowering young athletes. Urban Living 1

NEW CIVIC PULSE

How Sacramento's Young Black Voters Are Grappling
With The 2024 Presidential Election

By Sterling Davies, Page 16



Election 2024

A WEDGE ISSUE

How The 2024 Presidential Election Has Created Two Groups Of Young Black Voters

By Sterling Davies
OBSERVER Staff Writer

It's no surprise that voting and politics tend to create division. With the 2024 presidential election looming, a new wedge seems to be dividing young Black potential voters.

As first- and second-time Black voters in Sacramento are faced with new experiences and responsibilities, many find themselves in one of two situations: either heavily politically active and invigorated to cast their vote, or hesitant on whether their vote will make a difference.

Kalise Cox, 21, grew up in an environment that fostered an early introduction to political discussion. Cox, a senior at Sacramento State studying political science, remembers that she was exposed to the importance of voting, which sparked her drive to remain politically active and vote in the 2020 presidential election. "I felt encouraged to use my voice and really take action on what I can do," she says.

As she prepares to vote in the upcoming November election, she feels there is a big difference now. "We have a lot more at stake," Cox shares, "Certain policies that have been discussed are causing chaos. It's talk of eliminating the Social Security Act, abortion rights, and the Department of Education. ... For people of color specifically, we need to participate more in voting." Unfortunately, Black voter turnout is still a struggle within Sacramento, especially younger people.

As of July, based on a report by California's secretary of state, Sacramento's registered voters between the ages of 17-25 made up roughly 12% of all registered voters at 101,936, making it the least represented age demographic by more than 30,000 registrations. While youth registered voters increased by nearly 2,000 from the 2020 presidential election, other age demographics increased significantly. For instance, registered Sacramento voters ages 66 and over increased by 24,000 between 2020 and 2024, highlighting the hesitation many young adults experience.



Kalise Cox, 21, influenced by her politically engaged upbringing, always felt encouraged to voice her concerns and beliefs. Cox is a political science student at Sacramento State. Madelaine Church, OBSERVER



Alexis Mcconico, 18, is a rising senior at Fortune High School, and shares how she and other young Black adults have felt more excitement with Kamala Harris joining the presidential race. **Madelaine Church, OBSERVER**

These numbers are more severe within the Black community, as only 11% of California’s likely Black voters in 2020 were ages 18-34, according to the Public Policy Institute of California. Cox also has noticed this hesitancy among friends and peers. “I feel like many people of color get a little scared when the word politics comes up,” Cox says. “They have the mindset that [their vote] won’t matter or it’s not going to make a difference.” She adds that such attitudes eventually lead to many removing themselves from politics entirely, blocking their voices from being heard and creating change.

Justin Freeman, 19, also has seen this reluctance among the Black community. While Freeman, a sophomore at Sacramento State, plans on voting to keep Donald Trump out of office, his friends and peers remain unsure whether they will vote. “They think that their vote doesn’t matter, even though it does,” he says.

The deciding factor between young adults who are and aren’t politically vocal and active seems to be the people who surround them. Like Cox, Freeman’s political engagement stems from a community that introduced the topic at a young age.

Freeman went to Early College Academy of Natomas Charter School and felt the school gave him a solid understanding of voting and elections.

Like Cox and Freeman, Mariah Starks, 24, also grew up in a home that encouraged political discussion. “For as long as I can remember, politics has been a topic of conversation in my household,” Starks recalls. “It has always reached the forefront of our conversations, even when discussing perceived ‘apolitical’ topics such as movies, sports, or music.”

Early exposure seems to be a catalyst for sparking young adults to be politically active, a theory recognized by the California secretary of state. The state’s Department of Education has multiple voter outreach efforts at high schools and colleges.

The California Students Vote Project hopes to elevate civic engagement among college students, as does the California University and College Ballot Bowl, a friendly competition to see which California higher education system can register the most voters. The department introduced High School Voter Education Weeks, which dedicates the last two weeks of April and September to increased educational events and voter registration drives. The secretary also will host student mock elections Tuesday, Oct. 8, so that middle and high school students can improve their understanding of the electoral process.

Even with these programs, many students feel their education leaves them unprepared to vote. Alexis Mcconico, an 18-year-old rising senior at Fortune High School, said her school offers limited voting and political education. “I feel like I’m kind of left on my own,” Mcconico says. “I gather information from social media and the internet. ... It’s never something that’s talked about without me asking.”

ON POLITICS

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Mariah Starks

Election 2024

> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

While Mcconico still plans to vote, student voter registration has decreased over time. The secretary of state's 2023 report showed a decrease of roughly 30,000 online student voter registration forms between 2022 and 2023 statewide, and a decreasing trend of preregistrations from 2018-2023.

Youth voting interest has diminished, but many still are heavily active and vocal about the need to vote, which has grown since Kamala Harris stepped in as the prospective Democratic nominee. Starks says the vice president seems like someone who "with enough pressure, will push the Democratic Party into advocating for progressive policies like canceling student loan debt, enacting policies from the Green New Deal, and advocating for universal child care and health care."

Before Joe Biden decided not to run for re-election, 48% of voters under 30 nationally supported him for president, as reported by the Pew Research Center. So far, Harris has surpassed Biden with support from 57% of this demographic.

Black voter support for the Democratic ticket also has risen since Harris' candidacy was put forth, from 64% when Biden was the candidate to 77% now. This increase seems to come from a want to support people of color, especially women of color.

"Kamala Harris being a Black woman, that made me more eager to vote," Mcconico says. "When we heard that Biden dropped out [and Harris entered], me and my aunt were both excited. I told my partner [and] they were excited. ... It's a monumental experience."

Harris' shift to presidential candidate has created unity, but also new tensions. Cox, who plans to vote for Harris, has felt this shift among Sacramento's Black population. "Just being outside with the elections coming up, there's a lot of hostility," she says. "But there's a good chunk of [Black people] that are supportive of the opposition. I'm not necessarily sure if it's because they just don't want a Black woman in power, or other factors come into play ... but a lot of us are kind of, like, looking the other way."

Some feel such closed-mindedness is rooted in generational beliefs and a reluctance to change perspective. Still, there are hopes that unity strengthens as election day nears. Many young adults expressed that youth voter turnout can be strengthened by increased education and exposure to how and why elections are important.

"We want more policies that are for us, by us, so that we can live comfortably," Cox says.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of two stories about young, Black voters. Please look for the second story in next week's OBSERVER.



Kalise Cox, left, a 21-year-old senior at Sacramento State University, and Alexis McConico, right, an 18-year-old senior at Fortune High School, pose together near the Golden 1 Center in downtown Sacramento on Aug. 15, 2024. **Madelaine Church, OBSERVER**