

America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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Features

New Poll Shows America Is Ready for Equity



Click on image for full poll results.

The nation is ready to get all in.

According to a [nationwide poll](#) released today by the Rockefeller Foundation, in partnership with PolicyLink and the Center for American Progress, most Americans believe rising diversity will lead to more economic growth, spur innovation, and increase global competitiveness. And they support investments in education, job training, and infrastructure to create pathways to opportunity for all and reduce racial and ethnic inequality. The findings give fuel – and guidance – to

In Brief

Declining Cities Bounce Back by Welcoming Immigrants

Once thriving industrial cities in the Midwest are finding new economic growth by inviting immigrants to move in, buy up vacant properties, and start new businesses. Dayton, Ohio, began a campaign three years ago to create a more welcoming environment by training city staff and educators in additional languages and ending immigration background checks on crime victims and witnesses – and has already seen [promising results](#). Learn more about how welcoming immigrants can drive equitable growth [here](#).

Taxpayers Subsidize Low-Road, Fast-Food Employers

More than half of all fast-food workers rely on programs like food stamps and Medicaid, according to a new [report](#) by the Labor Center at the University of California at Berkeley, costing American taxpayers more than \$7 billion a year in public assistance. The report states that collective bargaining and increased wages

community leaders making the case that equity is essential to the nation's economic future.

"This poll validates what many of us have been saying for a long time: that America's demographic shift is an asset in the global economy," said Angela Glover Blackwell, founder and CEO of PolicyLink. "Our nation's economic fate is tied to the success of the communities of color that are contributing nearly all of our growth. People all over the country are clearly clamoring for an equity agenda to invest in our future; it's time our politicians listened."

Revealing far more public optimism about America's changing demographics than portrayed in the media and by politics, the poll shows that Americans support policies to advance an equitable economy. The findings also point to the positive framing that is most likely to win hearts and minds to the cause – that an equity agenda will prepare the fastest-growing populations for the jobs of tomorrow, and it will lift millions of people out of poverty.

The poll provides the clearest picture to date on how Americans of all stripes view changing demographics and what they see as the implications for the future:

- Americans across all racial and ethnic groups see more opportunities than challenges in rising diversity. And the greatest opportunities they see are economic. This favorable view crosses ideological and partisan lines. The majority of Republicans and conservatives surveyed agreed on the economic benefits, though not as strongly as other groups.
- Younger generations have fewer concerns than older Americans about changing demographics. And relatively few people express identity concerns – for example, that there will be no common American culture or that discrimination against whites will increase. The biggest concerns: the prospect of more demand on government services and not enough jobs.
- Americans are concerned about rising inequality. More than eight in 10 are concerned about racial gaps in reading and math scores, the growth of low-wage jobs, child poverty rates of 25 percent nationally, and 40 percent in communities of color. But whites are less concerned than African Americans and Latinos about the wealth gap and limited economic mobility.

and health benefits would improve workers' living standards. It would also [help grow the economy](#).

People of Color Hurt Worst by Trade Deficit

A million workers of color lost their jobs in the last decade due to our growing trade deficit, according to the [Economic Policy Institute](#). When workers found new work, they were paid an average of \$10,000 less.

- Seventy-one percent support "new steps to reduce racial and ethnic inequality in America through investments in areas like education, job training, and infrastructure improvement." Sixty-one percent say they are willing to invest significantly more public funds to help close the gap in college graduation rates between black and Latino students, and white students. The support is stronger among people of color than whites; nevertheless, the majority of whites endorse such investments.

Conducted by Latino Decisions as a follow up to the new book [All-In Nation](#), the poll surveyed 2,943 adults. It was designed to be nationally representative while producing more definitive results than previous research has provided on the attitudes of Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Telephone interviews – mobile and landline – were conducted in five languages. The overall margin of error is plus or minus 1.8 percent.

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Building a Movement for Boys and Men of Color in the Golden State



Young leaders at the August hearing.

While Washington was shut down, California's legislature and governor were leading the way with legislation to improve life chances for boys and men of color. By reducing barriers to employment, creating alternatives to the school-to-prison pipeline, and increasing funding for workforce development in green energy, the recent state legislative victories reflect an

emerging consensus that investing in communities of color is critical to the state's prosperity.

The effort is led by [the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color](#), a coalition of more than two dozen local and statewide organizations that are changing the conversation and the perception of boys and men of color – and not a moment too soon. Seventy-three percent of Californians under 18 are youth of color. Young men of color have taken a prominent and inspiring role in the state campaign and in organizing and advocacy in their communities.

"These new policies will play an important role in providing increased opportunities to boys and men of color and will change the paradigm that has been in place for a long time," said Miguel Bibanco, an activist and student at Fresno City College.

Among the new laws receiving national attention is one to [ban the box](#) that asks about prior criminal convictions on state and local agency job applications. AB 218 (Dickinson) allows applicants to present their qualifications first and gives them a fairer shot at employment and successful re-entry. Another groundbreaking law gives undocumented workers [access to driver's licenses](#), which will bring more people in need into the economic mainstream while making the roads safer for everyone.

But even policies that have garnered less publicity offer models for a nation whose greatest challenge is to build an economy that works for all and especially its fastest-growing populations – young people of color:

- The Alliance for Boys and Men of Color mobilized support for a Local Control Funding Formula which [changed the state's school funding formula](#) to distribute dollars more equitably. More resources will go to millions of low-income students, English learners, and foster youth – young people who need support to succeed in school and beyond.
- A number of the laws undo elements of [the school-to-prison pipeline](#). With greater attention and action to the need for security on school campuses in the wake of several high-profile incidents, AB 549 (Jones-Sawyer) encourages school districts to incorporate conflict resolution, youth-led violence prevention, and other non-police alternatives into campus safety procedures.

Suspensions and expulsions, which disproportionately affect students of color and especially boys, raise the risk of contact with the juvenile justice system three-fold, and the risk of dropping out of high school by five-fold, according to a [study](#) by the Public Policy Research Institute.

- In an important win for youth, the state committed [\\$3 million](#) a year for the next five years for workforce training that will prepare disadvantaged youth and veterans for jobs in the energy-efficient building field and other green sectors.
- Several laws, in addition to "Ban the Box," improve job and life prospects for people convicted of crimes. One creates an [unprecedented process for sentencing review](#) for prisoners serving 10 years or more for crimes committed when they were 18 or younger. Another law gives former inmates [greater access to the mental health and substance abuse services](#) that can make the difference between successful re-entry and recidivism.

To win passage of these and other bills to advance equity in schools, justice systems, and workforce development, hundreds of Alliance members and partners met with dozens of legislators and aides throughout the year. In August, a hearing convened by the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color drew 400 people. In addition, Alliance youth and partners met with 62 legislative offices during the two days of education that complemented the hearing.

These victories come after [last year's successful campaign](#) which led to the enactment of several laws to reduce the numbers of boys and young men of color who are suspended and expelled from school.

Local campaigns are also gaining strength. Advocates secured major wins in the Fresno and Los Angeles unified school districts, which adopted restorative justice as an alternative to punitive, futile, and ultimately expensive disciplinary policies. An analysis of Fresno's class of 2011 showed that the 827 students who were pushed out of high school will cost society \$324 million in lost tax revenue, make greater use of safety net programs, and incur costs associated with crime and incarceration.

New voices for change

These successes reflect the growing strength and number of young leaders who are changing policies and perceptions not only in the capital, but also in their communities. Meet three young men who are making a difference:

Christopher Covington, 22, is an organizer for Khmer Girls in Action, in Long Beach, and a longtime advocate for violence prevention strategies. He briefed California lawmakers last summer on the need for policies that keep students in school rather than kicking them out, often for minor infractions. "If our students are getting educated to have a career, whether it be in a trade or a profession, it benefits everyone," he said. "Communities will be safer. I always say, 'Jobs can stop a bullet.'"

Sokha "Kaz" Lek, 30, a youth mentor and organizer with Fathers and Families of San Joaquin, knows that with the right supports, formerly incarcerated men can have a positive impact on the economic and social life of their communities. When he returned from the California Youth Authority, a mentor inspired him to follow the same path and advocate for others like him. "My main mission was to be a voice for my neighborhood." He recently made his voice heard in the capitol, testifying on re-entry and school discipline bills.

Miguel Bibanco, 18, a college freshman, nonprofit intern, and tireless advocate, has helped push the Fresno Unified School District to implement restorative justice. "That's a huge step," he said, because it keeps more young men of color in school and holds school officials accountable for making sure they are prepared for college and employment. "Encourage success," he said. "That in and of itself will do a lot for boys and men of color."

The Alliance is staffed by PolicyLink and works with the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color. Learn more about the local and state campaigns and get involved [here](#).

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America's Tomorrow highlights campaigns, leaders, policies, reports, and local models that are advancing equity as an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the *America's Tomorrow* [webpage](#).

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