



Overcoming Obstacles, NextGen America Energized the 2020 Youth Vote and Built Progressive Power in Key Battleground States

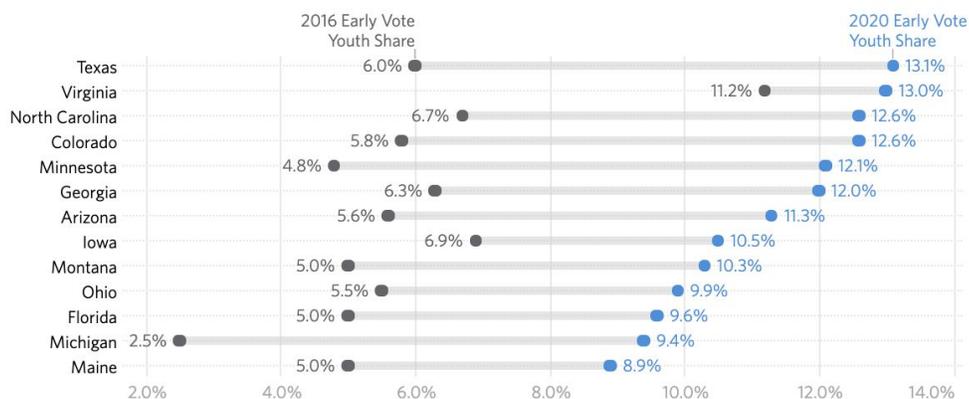
NEXTGEN AMERICA 2020: BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL SPEND: **\$59,024,882.99**
 TOTAL STAFF ON THE GROUND: **487**
 TOTAL VOLUNTEERS: **22,174**
 TOTAL CAMPUSES WITH PROGRAM: **227**
 TOTAL YOUNG VOTERS REGISTERED: **122,185**
 TOTAL PLEDGES TO VOTE COLLECTED: **441,630**
 TOTAL YOUNG VOTERS REACHED WITH DIGITAL ADS: **6,318,568**
 TOTAL PHONE CALLS MADE: **8,942,734**
 TOTAL TEXTS SENT: **25,884,385**
 TOTAL PIECES OF DIRECT MAIL SENT: **6,476,726**
 INITIAL TARGET STATES: **AZ, FL, IA, ME, MI, NV, NH, NC, PA, VA, & WI**
 EXPANSION STATES: **AK, KS, NE, SC, & TX**

Early vote numbers from young people show what NextGen America has known all along — when millennials and Generation Z are activated, they are a force in American politics. Nationally, [roughly 11 million people](#) between the ages of 18 and 29 voted early, vastly outpacing the 2016 turnout of 4.7 million. Youth vote share of the overall early electorate also grew, with [data from CIRCLE](#) showing especially pronounced change in battleground states.

In Key States, the Youth Share of the Early and Absentee Vote Is Higher in 2020 Than It Was in 2016

The share of all absentee and early votes in a state that were cast by youth (ages 18-29), in 2016 and 2020, as of 7 days before Election Day (October 27 in 2020, November 1 in 2016)



CIRCLE Tufts University Tisch College - CIRCLE
 Source: CIRCLE analysis of Catalyst voter file data captured October 29, 2020.
[Get the data](#)



Young people ages 18 to 35 represent the largest, most diverse, and most progressive voting bloc in America. Millennials and Gen Z [make up nearly 40% of the eligible electorate](#), and NextGen America exists to ensure these young Americans turn out to vote in record numbers and elect progressives up and down the ballot.

NextGen is the largest organization in the country dedicated specifically to young voter turnout, spending over \$59 million during this election cycle. Focusing its efforts on [11 key states](#), NextGen set out to remove Donald Trump from the White House, flip the Senate, and build progressive power all the way down the ballot by targeting millions of progressives under the age of 35 who are less than likely to vote. When energized, this critical voting bloc could be the margin of victory across America's most competitive races. NextGen's hard work is already paying off — 2,853,017 of the 10,364,513 young people (27.5%) targeted by NextGen with calls, texts, digital ads or mail already voted early before Election Day.

NextGen has focused on the diversity of young voters, from age to race, gender, geography, socioeconomic standing, and more. NextGen paid particular attention to 2.2 million young Black voters and 1.7 million young Latinx voters, including spending roughly \$5 million apiece on digital advertising targeted to these communities. The organization also conducted virtual organizing at over a dozen Historically Black Colleges & Universities, developed sponsored content partnerships with key outlets like *Complex*, and collaborated with trusted micro-and-macro influencers on social media.

[BUILDING UP BIDEN](#)

Starting in April, NextGen faced the challenge of building youth support for Joe Biden, who only received support from [one in five voters under 45](#) in the primaries. As soon as Biden became the nominee in April, NextGen [signed onto a letter](#) with youth vote allies, including the Sunrise Movement and March for Our Lives, calling on the former vice president to shift his platform in a more progressive direction. [Biden moved based on the pressure](#), speeding up the timeline on his climate platform, pledging to lower the Medicare eligibility age, and promising free college tuition and student debt forgiveness for working and middle class families. [NextGen endorsed Biden](#) shortly thereafter, strengthening his standing among NextGen's target audience of young voters.

NextGen centered pro-Biden messages in digital advertisements, which reached more than six million young Americans running on platforms most visited by young people, including YouTube, Spotify, Snapchat, and Pandora. These creative ads, like "[The Future We Need](#)," "[We Deserve Better](#)," and "[Our Country is Starving](#)," made the case that Biden is the best general election choice for young Americans. They increased support for Biden by 10 points compared to a control group. Learning from 2016's mistakes, NextGen made a conscious decision to center pro-Biden advertising rather than simply dwelling on negatives against Trump.



NextGen’s work helped boost Biden’s favorability with this key voting bloc, as demonstrated by [CNN’s polling](#) of 18 to 34-year-olds tracked from May, where Biden was 22 points underwater, to October, where Biden was +23.

Public and internal polls show young voters backing Biden by big margins over Trump, both nationally and in key battleground states, [including Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Florida](#). In some states, Biden is on track to triple or quadruple Hillary Clinton’s margin of victory among young voters. These remarkable statistics put Biden’s young voter support in the same historic territory as Barack Obama’s victory in 2008.

Margin in Favor of Democratic Candidate, Voters Ages 18-29 Nationwide (Source: Exit Polls)	
Obama 2008	+34 pts
Obama 2012	+23 pts
Clinton 2016	+19 pts
Biden 2020	+38 pts (Harvard IOP , Likely Voters)

[ADAPTING TO COVID-19](#)

In mid-March, COVID-19 began shutting down businesses and schools, effectively ending in-person organizing for the most significant election in America’s history. NextGen quickly adopted new tactics like [virtual concerts](#) and [influencer collaborations](#) that reached more than 80 million people in targeted communities. Being staffed by an army of digital natives has its advantages, too — NextGen organizers leapt into action to creatively expand the ways they were talking to young voters, with [Animal Crossing rallies](#), [dating app organizing](#), and virtual events featuring local celebrities becoming the norm.

“NextGen has consistently been at the forefront of the most imaginative and effective strategies to engage young voters,” said **NextGen America Founder Tom Steyer**. “Each election cycle, we have adapted to new conditions and trends while maintaining our commitment to mobilizing the most powerful generation in our politics.”

Due to the pandemic, NextGen also shifted its energy from the door-knocking and tabling of past cycles to phone calls and text messages, building a formidable distributed organizing team of over 22,000 volunteers to contact voters across its target geographies. Field staff and the distributed organizing program combined to send 25,884,385 text messages to potential voters, blowing past the 2018 total of 9,139,921 texts sent. NextGen also made nearly nine million phone calls in the 2020 cycle. Highlights included [National Vote by Mail Day](#), a holiday created



by NextGen that brought over 20 partner organizations together to contact nearly [3.7 million young people](#). On [National Voter Registration Day](#), NextGen organizers, partners and volunteers contacted 1.3 million more young people through phone calls and texts.

“We started 2020 with our usual plans to clipboard on campus, knock on doors in communities, and bring bounce houses and petting zoos to the polls,” said **NextGen America Executive Director Ben Wessel**. “Instead of letting the coronavirus throw our program into chaos, we adjusted and built our strongest get-out-the-vote effort yet. Young people could still find us everywhere — from their social media feeds to their phones, DMs, and even their Animal Crossing islands.”

After backing Biden in the spring, NextGen endorsed seven Democratic Senate candidates and gubernatorial candidates in North Carolina and New Hampshire. In October, NextGen expanded its turnout efforts to Alaska, Kansas, South Carolina, Texas, and Nebraska’s second congressional district.

[GIVE GREEN](#)

NextGen also helped fund critical Democratic campaigns throughout the country. GiveGreen, a fundraising partnership between NextGen America and the League of Conservation Voters with support from the Natural Resources Defense Council Action Fund, raised over \$43.6 million to date benefitting candidates in hundreds of races across the nation. The races were diverse: from federal House and Senate to the Texas Railroad Commission contest to state-level House and Senate campaigns, gubernatorial races, state Supreme Court races, and many more.