



**POWERCA ACTION**  
**5 YEARS**

# **NEW LANES OF POWER**





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# INTRODUCTION

## VOTERS OF COLOR ARE CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE

Fabiola Argueta still remembers the terror that swept her household the night of the 2016 presidential election. She was only a sophomore at Garfield High in unincorporated East Los Angeles.

“I remember crying because my mom was an immigrant,” she says. “I kept thinking, why does this country hate us?” Argueta recalls the despair she felt. Just a week before the election, she had been registering young people to vote.

Now 23, she says, “I was sad, but organizing taught me that I have power. And I needed to make sure our voices were heard.”

Argueta is one of thousands of young leaders across our state who organizes in their communities. Refusing to accept the harm of broken systems, they care deeply and step up to lead fights for their families and neighborhoods.

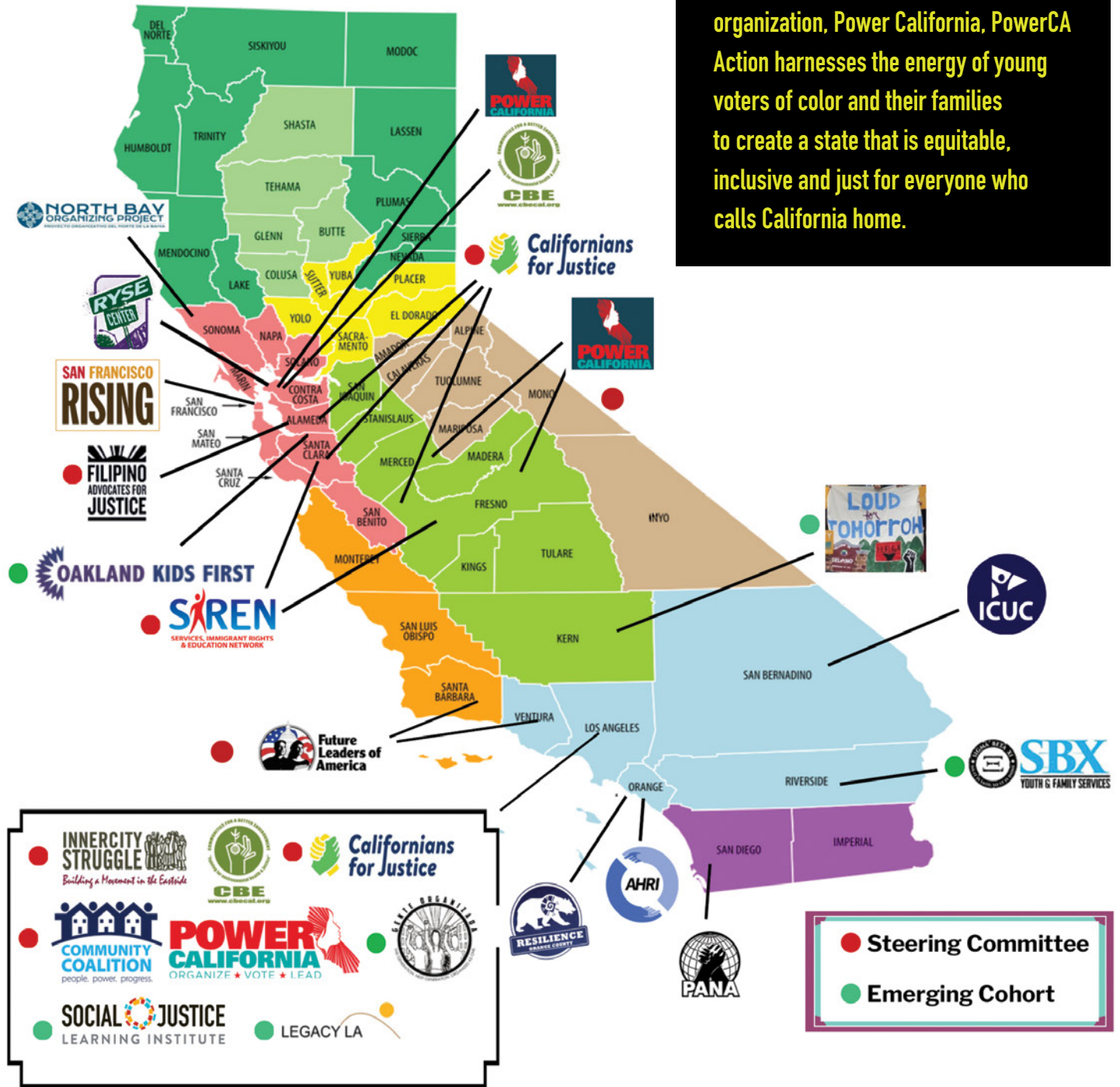
**In California, youth of color make up 75% of voters under 25. 50% have an immigrant or refugee background.**

Five years ago, PowerCA Action emerged to assert that young voters of color are the future of our state, and their political power should no longer be dismissed and underestimated.



# ALLIANCE PARTNERS

With our affiliated section 501(c)(3) organization, Power California, PowerCA Action harnesses the energy of young voters of color and their families to create a state that is equitable, inclusive and just for everyone who calls California home.





# EXPANDING DEMOCRACY

## YOUNG PEOPLE OF COLOR, A NEW MAJORITY

The first to pull up and the last to back down.

From the polls to the picket lines, this is the unmatched energy of young folks—especially young people of color—whom since the birth of PowerCA Action in 2018, have turned out in staggering numbers to demand the futures they deserve.

### **‘Decline-to-State’: The Untapped Base**

PowerCA Action knew that by 2028, 18-34 year olds would make up California’s largest voting block. By 2030, 3 in 4 will be people of color.

What’s more, nearly half (47.5%) of pre-registered 16 and 17 year olds in 2018 listed no party preference / declined-to-state, and nearly all decline-to-state voters under the age of 30 are not engaged by any political party.

Seeing the potential in swaying this massive, untapped base, we understood California’s future could no longer ignore young people’s political power. With Power California’s local partners, we could ensure young people had a place real and resonant enough to call their political home.

So we got to work guiding every last one to the table.

Over five years, across 58 counties and alongside 30 grassroots organizations and registrar’s offices, we’ve drawn in tens of thousands of young

folks of color, by organizing mass ready-to-vote events & festivals, political education bootcamps, peer trainings, youth conventions, fellowships, and paid leadership projects.

Headlining many of these events with cultural icons and practices—from murals and MCs to visual arts and influencers—we transformed the experience of politics for young voters by calling in the truths they live everyday.

With the critical help of our Alliance partners—who step up statewide to turn out their members, resources, and local expertise—together, Power California has successfully pre-registered and registered 100,000 young voters and had 609,000 voter education conversations since 2018.

**By 2028, 18–34 year olds will be CA’s largest voting block.**

By no surprise, young voters ages 18-34 that PowerCA Action identified as aligning with us on key issues voted at higher rates than all youth voters of color statewide in 2018 and 2022.



# 5-YEAR VOTER IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

**100,000** PRE-REGISTERED  
AND REGISTERED

**7,047**

**150**  
PARTNERS  
ENGAGED

**609,000**  
VOTER  
EDUCATION  
CONVERSIONS

**YOUNG  
LEADERS  
TRAINED**



## Prop 15: Schools & Communities First

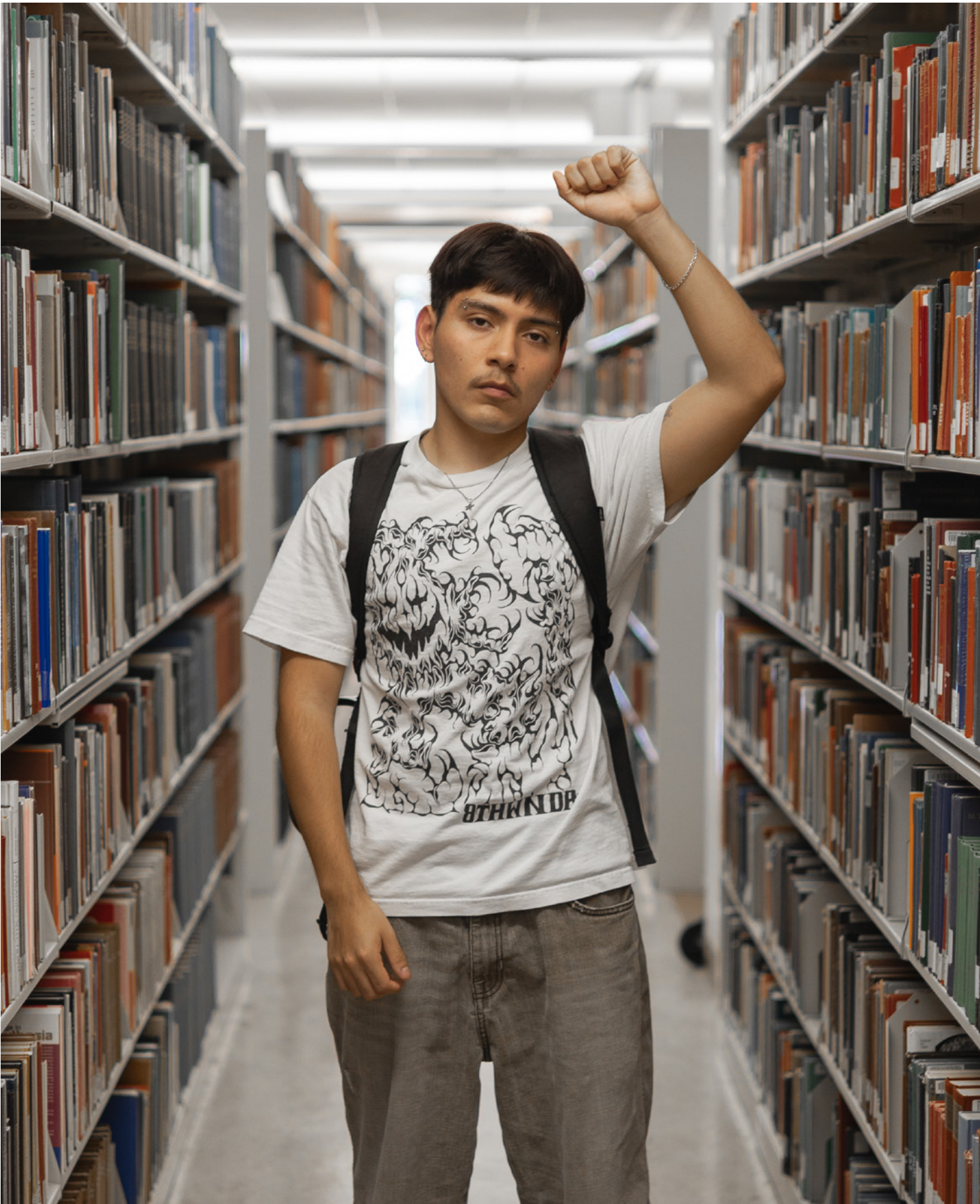
In the 2020 general election, our young organizers played a leading role in the statewide push to reclaim billions annually from wealthy corporations to invest in local schools and communities with Proposition 15, the Schools and Communities First campaign.

With our coalition partners, they submitted a historic 1.7 million signatures to qualify the

measure for the November 2020 ballot. PowerCA Action's field program alone reached 102,000 voters statewide, and persuaded nearly 20,000 Californians to opt in to volunteer.

While Proposition 15 fell short by just a few percentage points, the loss in the Central Valley was closer to 20 points, elevating the importance of organizing a base in untapped regions of our state to achieve future wins.





# SHIFTING NARRATIVES

## YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE MIC & IN THE MEDIA

Young people have too often been historically erased from media narratives, portrayed as politically disengaged and dismissed from participating.

As PowerCA Action began our integrated voter strategies, we leveraged our 501(c)(3) arm, Power California, to launch a youth of color poll—the first of its kind in California—to understand young people of color’s views on politics and voting.

Our findings surfaced powerful data that proved the dominant narratives far from true.

### Young People Highly Value Voting

Power California’s inaugural 2018 youth poll, which surveyed over 2,000 Californians of color between the ages of 16-24, showed what our Alliance partners had known: Young people care deeply about their communities and are politically and civically engaged.

**“The narrative is that young people don’t care about voting. That’s not true. We do care. It’s just that we’re not invested in.” — Fabiola Argueta, 23, Power California & InnerCity Struggle Member**

Many young voters represent a generation with a distinct experience: they’re often the first in their family to cast a vote in a U.S. election. Like first-generation college students, young voters of color in California are navigating an uncharted political system, but committed to represent for their loved ones and communities who can’t.

“The poll was about really bringing into focus that young people had not been part of the political conversations,” says Tyler Okeke, 22, current board member and former PowerCA Action leader who served as a media spokesperson for the poll results.

Los Angeles Times

Young voters turned out in force for Democrats in 2020. Will they stick around?

teenVOGUE

These Teens Are Leading the Fight to Lower the Voting Age

The Fresno Bee

Young voters are ready to make a difference in Tuesday’s election

As a result of the polls—which Power California conducted during every major election year starting in 2018—prevailing media narratives shifted to successfully include youth voices in dozens of headlines and stories, and called attention to the need for year-round civic engagement opportunities. “The solution is to involve us more deeply and more meaningfully,” says Okeke.

# PARKLAND

## A NATIONAL FLASHPOINT

In February 2018, all eyes were on the suburb of Parkland, Florida, where a group of predominantly white teens demanded gun reform in the wake of a school shooting that took the lives of 17 classmates. Their demands resonated across the country, sparking massive youth-led marches, school walkouts, teach-ins, and rallies.

**219 media hits featuring  
Power California youth voices**

But when the media and local elected officials centered solutions, the dominant response focused overwhelmingly on an antiquated safety narrative calling for more police, security, and militarization of public schools.

### Centering Racial Justice in School Safety

In California, gun violence was sadly not a new issue for young people of color and their families.

“The Parkland students got a lot of attention,” says Joaquin Gonzalez. “But that’s because the media normalizes violence in Black and Brown neighborhoods. The walkouts in LA was to make sure we were seen. This is what we as students of color experience daily.”

Following the 1999 Columbine massacre, public schools across the nation, and especially in California, adopted zero-tolerance policies and

divested in systems of care—often adding more police than college counselors—that further criminalized, suspended, and expelled Black and Brown students, and barred them from graduation and four-year colleges.



**“The media normalizes  
violence in Black and Brown  
neighborhoods. The walkouts  
in LA was to make sure  
we were seen.” – Joaquin  
Gonzalez, 19, Power California  
& InnerCity Struggle Member**

**Parkland served as a critical moment to shift the national narrative on school safety and awaken a new generation to connect their lived experiences to their vote.**

Power California leaders saw these conservative narratives gaining momentum, threatening to worsen student wellness, and more, reverse critical victories the youth organizing movement had won in ending the school-to-prison pipeline, from removal of metal detectors to the banning “willful defiance” suspensions.

In the wake of Parkland, as interest peaked amongst youth of color to join March for Our Lives, the national action on gun reform, Power California seized the moment to shift the national

narrative on gun violence and redefine school safety: organizers led a robust training program for civil action which centered racial justice messaging, direct action planning, and registering new voters.

Our 501(c)(3) arm collaborated with partners on the nationwide rally in Washington D.C. to integrate our narrative on school safety. At the rally, Community Coalition’s Edna Chavez’s story went viral when she shared, “I learned to duck from bullets before I learned how to read.” Moved, Parkland students soon adapted our narrative and helped reshape the dominant narrative.

California witnessed tens of thousands of young people participate in walkouts and thousands more in marches, with a shared message of safety rooted in care and community. Power California youth leaders registered scores of young people to vote at these demonstrations, awakening a generation of powerful leaders who were connecting their votes and voices directly to a nationwide legislation.





# DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF NARRATIVE LEADERS

For years, PowerCA Action’s Alliance partners had named communications capacity as a gap for their organizations. While our internal team could provide strategy and tactics aligned to our collective campaigns, we saw a need and opportunity to develop the long-term narrative capacity of Alliance partners.

## The Gen Now Fellowship

In late 2019, PowerCA Action launched the Gen Now Fellowship (initially called The New Majority Fellowship), a landmark narrative and strategic communications training program for Alliance partners. In partnership with ReFrame, a national nonprofit dedicated to building the narrative power of social justice organizations, our fellowship trained ten Alliance staff members through small group coaching, hands-on narrative strategy development, and skills workshops.

“The fellowship really shaped my leadership style, how I support my team, and how I show up,” says Daniel Gonzalez of Future Leaders of America,

who grew from lead organizer to director of organizing & advocacy during the course of the fellowship.

Due to the unique investment in Alliance partners through our fellowship, many committed

**“The fellowship really shaped my leadership style, how I support my team, and how I show up.” — Daniel Gonzalez, 34, Future Leaders of America**

afterwards to expanding their communications capacity through dedicated staffing and resources, integrating narrative strategy as a key part of their organizing work moving forward.







# UNLOCKING A PROGRESSIVE CALIFORNIA

## THE CENTRAL VALLEY & INLANDS



**“Young people in the Valley are energized to make change. We’re building them up with leadership and training.”**  
**— Astrid Morales, 23, Central Valley Organizer**

As greedy and wealthy corporations continue pushing young folks and their families inland, unaffordable, unsafe living conditions follow. Yet too often, political and youth organizing overlooks these inland areas—which have the greatest needs and the greatest potential for building youth power.

That’s why Power California, in just a few years, has filled gaps to build fierce coalitions in inland cities like Fresno and Merced.

With our guidance and resources, local coalitions have fought to:

- shift media and public narratives in conservative, rural districts towards supporting renters, low-income families, and housing-insecure students
- win millions in city and COVID-19 recovery funding for youth programs and tenant protections

Through 99Rootz, a first-of-its-kind youth organizing program created by Power California in the Valley, organizers tapped in across local high schools to activate the leadership of more than 1,400 young people of color.

Connecting over their shared ancestral and cultural roots, these same young folks—turned skilled organizers through deep trainings, conferences, and academies on identity, political education,



# 2020-2021

## FRESNO EDUCATION JUSTICE COALITION FOR POLICE FREE SCHOOLS

### 500 PUBLIC COMMENTS



### 1,300 PETITION SIGNATURES



### 100 YOUTH+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGED



# 2022-2023

## FRESNO HOUSING COALITION FOR RENT CONTROL



### 1,200 VOTERS ENGAGED



### 92% AGREE: WE NEED RENT CONTROL NOW

### 169 VOLUNTEERS ENGAGED





**“Rent control would mean my community could advance themselves. We’d experience less stress and be able to afford what we need.”**  
**— Miracle Jackson, 22, PowerCA Action Member**

and voter pre/registration—have hit the streets to lead demands for their futures. They’ve reached thousands of neighbors at the doors, phones and halls of power to build support for campaigns like police free schools and rent control in Fresno, and affordable housing and youth jobs programs in Merced.

Our learnings from 99Rootz laid the foundation for our organization’s membership model, grounded in offering a political home for young people across multiple sociocultural identities—especially those who have aged out of youth programs in the years beyond high school—to not only be civically engaged, but to improve their communities.

While we’re still fighting for decision-makers to put dollars and commitments on our demands, our youth movement in the Valley is powered up and poised to win—transforming not only their under-represented regions, but tipping the scales statewide toward justice.





# DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION

## ELECTING LEADERS

### The Myth of a Blue California

To the rest of our nation, California has been seen consistently as an anchor blue state for national elections. But in reality, across California, Democratic moderates and conservatives have undermined and blocked progressive policies, harming low-income, immigrant, and BIPOC communities.

In our 2021-2024 Strategic Plan, PowerCA Action decided to take a bold leap—moving from the sidelines of the political battlefield to contesting directly for power.

### Entering the Political Battlefield: Lee Lor's Campaign

In 2020, PowerCA Action entered the political battlefield by running our own candidates through an ambitious fundraising strategy and leadership of multiple campaigns complete with research, field, paid media, and compliance.

We built on our integrated voter engagement (IVE) campaigns in 2017, 2018, and 2020, and year-round leadership development, where we conducted voter education and cultural activities to build up the youth of color electorate in the Central Valley. The on-the-ground foundation with voters meant we were more than ready to charge into the battlefield.

We began with the re-election campaign for Merced County Board Supervisor Lee Lor, who championed our critical issues like health care, housing, and youth investment. As the daughter of Hmong refugees, Lor was the Board's only woman and the first Hmong woman elected to a county position statewide.

Though we lost Lor's re-election to Former Merced City Councilmember Josh Pedrozo by a slim margin, the close race lit a fire amongst PowerCA Action leaders, who were more determined than ever to win.



# FUE XIONG VICTORY FROM VOLUNTEER TO CITY COUNCIL

Fue Xiong never saw himself in the world of politics. The son of Hmong immigrants, Xiong and his family settled in Merced, California in 1992 as refugees.

Frustrated with the city’s lack of support for working-class residents, Xiong began volunteering with PowerCA Action to fight for a better future for his family and neighbors. He quickly became a leader in Merced’s local politics, testifying at City Council in fierce support of a housing trust fund and deeper investments in youth services.

## Defeating A Republican Sheriff Incumbent

With both Xiong’s leadership and local organizing gaining momentum, PowerCA Action saw an opportunity to make history—that’s when Xiong entered the race.

The incumbent Sheriff Delray Shelton, with a long, establishment career in law enforcement, had the support of the Democratic party but consistently voted against affordable housing policies.

There was an opening: Shelton had won his last race in 2018 by a narrow margin, only six votes. At the time, a progressive majority was unheard of for any of the governing bodies in the Central Valley.

If Xiong won, he would secure the fourth vote needed to pass progressive policies like rent control.

“We knew we had a difficult race when we first started, given that our opponent was an incumbent, a sheriff lieutenant with lots of money,” says

Xiong, who raised \$51,000 compared to Shelton’s \$121,000.

Short on money, we focused our efforts on messaging early, bombarding high propensity voters with digital and mail based on oppositional research, pivoting mid-campaign based on tracker poll data, and solidifying turnout with a targeted field approach to medium and low propensity voters. As a result, we knocked on over 3,000 doors, reached 40,000 voters through digital ads and more than 15,000 mailers.



**“PowerCA Action helped to ensure the Merced City Council election was a priority race in the Central Valley.”**  
**— Merced City Councilmember Fue Xiong**

“PowerCA Action helped to ensure the Merced City Council election was a priority race in the Central Valley,” Xiong says.

Shelton ran on a platform centering crime and safety, but our campaign successfully shifted the debate to center housing and wellness as the most

effective safety strategies.

Xiong won his seat by 157 votes, creating an unprecedented progressive voting block on Merced City Council, and earning PowerCA Action our first people-powered candidate victory.

## THE NEXT GENERATION OF ELECTED LEADERS

Our path towards claiming power is a multi-strategy approach that includes endorsing and uplifting the next generation of progressive leaders in California. As part of our slate, PowerCA Action endorsed the successful runs of Santa Maria Councilmember Gloria Soto, and Visalia Unified School Board Trustee Dr. Randy Villegas.

“PowerCA Action is leading the way for a more inclusive, just, and equitable California by investing in candidates who will fight for working class families and community,” says Villegas.

For Filipino Advocates for Justice (FAJ), entering the political battlefield was about “finding new lanes of power,” explains Executive Director Geraldine Alcid. The Bay Area organization launched their 501(c)(4) arm FAJ Action Fund and helped to make history as they went all in on Robert Bonta’s 2022 campaign, endorsing their former board member to become California’s first Filipino American Attorney General.

The organization credits their win to being part of our Alliance network. “PowerCA Action shaped our organization’s civic engagement,” says Lead Organizer Daisy Maxion who explains that PowerCA Action helped to build their internal

capacity and infrastructure, from mass phone banking to collecting political data that led to the launch of their political arm.

**“PowerCA Action is leading the way for a more inclusive, just, and equitable California by investing in candidates who will fight for working class families and community.”**  
**— Visalia Unified School Board Trustee Dr. Randy Villegas**

As a result of their candidate’s victory, FAJ Action Fund is positioned to expand their impact, now flooded with requests for partnership from organizations and elected leaders. “It’s a big responsibility,” says Alcid.





# VOTE AT 16

## SPARKING A MOVEMENT—CITY TO CITY

As the Los Angeles Unified School District’s 2018-19 student board rep, Tyler Okeke, then 17, witnessed up close the harms of adult policy-making and politicking on young people.

**“Our youth vote efforts in LA and cities statewide changed the narrative.” — Tyler Okeke, 22, Former Vote at 16 Organizer**

Frustrated with decision after decision neglecting real student concerns, Tyler reached out to PowerCA Action to co-organize a campaign to expand school board election voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds. Together, we strategized with coalition partners, labor, and teachers’ unions to unanimously pass a resolution to conduct a study on expanding the youth school board vote.

Soon enough, youth and Alliance partners statewide joined the fight. Over the following year, our Vote at 16 movement sent resources and organizers to urban, suburban, and rural communities across California to build infrastructure and capacity to achieve the early right to vote.

Armed with tactics on everything from earned media and messaging to lobbying and direct action,

young leaders from PowerCA Action and our Alliance partners advocated with local coalitions for measures in San Francisco, Oakland, and Woodlake.

### A Groundbreaking Win

In the Bay Area, under the visionary leadership and organizing of the Oakland Kids First coalition, Californians for Justice and other Meaningful Student Engagement (MSE) coalition partners, PowerCA Action added value with messaging trainings and field program support, calling in the people power of our pre-existing voter registration work in Oakland.

Even our Alliance partners outside of the Bay Area recognized the need to push for wins that could





**“Even though I was in Long Beach, I felt called to the Oakland campaign because I wanted to mobilize as many youth that looked like me as possible to fight.” — Jeacile Bell, 25, Californians for Justice**

ripple from one city to the next. Jeacile Bell, then 22, recalls leading a satellite campaign from Long Beach with Californians for Justice for vote at 16 in Oakland. “Even though I was in Long Beach, I felt called to the Oakland campaign because I wanted to mobilize as many youth that looked like me as possible to fight. Location has never mattered—it’s always been about the youth and our collective solidarity.”

Together, we reached more than 6,000 Oakland neighbors who, in an overwhelming majority, passed Measure QQ to expand the school board election voting age to 16.

### **Leveling Up the Fight**

As local campaigns built momentum, we pushed forward at the State Capitol, too.

Throughout 2019, PowerCA Action leaders took city-level learnings to Sacramento, lobbying around proposals such as Proposition 18, the Primary Voting for 17-Year-Olds Amendment, to expand the voting age to 17. Our network of youth organizers met with state legislators and made waves in the press, presenting compelling data on young people’s readiness and demand to strengthen our democracy.

The uphill battle to expand the youth vote at the state level emphasizes our need for a strategy that targets power in multiple lanes. In a state where certain politicians do not believe young people are ready to vote, we must also work to shift the narratives, build up the youth electorate, and help elect new leaders who believe in the next generation.

Though Proposition 18 ultimately fell short, years later, the same proposal (SCA 2 – Stern) is now making its way successfully through the state legislative cycle.

To this day, Tyler still receives messages from youth across the country inspired to vote early, often, and on behalf of loved ones who can’t. They’re energized to replicate efforts like those in Los Angeles and Oakland. Lucky for us all, there’s a strong blueprint to build from.



# CONCLUSION

The last five years changed the rules of the game: California's young people of color have unlocked their ability not only to demand more, but to fight hard and win big.

They've risen to influence thousands of hearts, minds, and votes. They've powered the frontlines of campaigns and candidate races that are steadily improving the wellness of communities locally and statewide.

## Ready to Win: The Next 5 Years

Moving forward, we are laser-focused on deepening the youth organizing movement to further disrupt establishment politics throughout California.

- This means expanding youth leadership in the Central Valley and Inlands especially, where conservative forces maintain a stronghold against the needs of farmworking and low-income families.
- This means doubling down on youth-backed candidate races, identifying and investing in gifted, unapologetic leaders to execute campaigns and win electoral seats.
- This means recommitting to center young people of color as the shot-callers and play-makers of every plan and pivot. Our membership model is bringing together Gen Z and Millennial activists, healers, organizers, and hustlers from all across the state to hold those in power accountable.

This next generation of young leaders is quickly becoming the state's most formidable political force. We're ready to power their next moves, and hope you'll join us to make history together.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Executive Leadership

Luis Sànchez, Executive Director  
Saa'un Bell, Senior Associate Director  
Alicia Olivarez, Associate Director  
Elizabeth Lugo, Associate Director  
Jung Hee Choi, Senior Advisor Narrative & Strategic Initiatives

## Power California Alliance Partners

AHRI for Justice  
Californians for Justice  
Community Coalition  
Communities for a Better Environment  
Filipino Advocates for Justice  
Future Leaders of America  
Gente Organizada  
Inland Congregations United for Change  
InnerCity Struggle  
Legacy LA  
Loud for Tomorrow  
North Bay Organizing Project  
Oakland Kids First  
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans  
Resilience OC  
Ryse Youth Center  
San Francisco Rising  
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network  
Sigma Beta Xi Family Services  
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