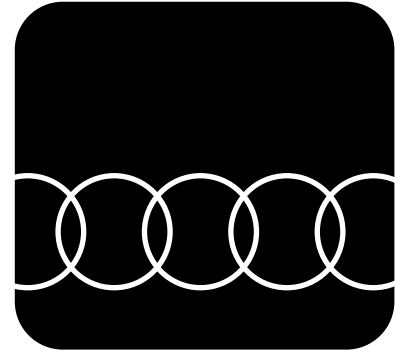




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THE NEW GENERATIONS PROGRAM



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Young People in Politics: Age Diversity in Allegheny County's Elected Officials, 2002

SUMMARY

Analysis of 2002 Allegheny County elections records shows...

Young adults between 18 and 40 make up **more than a quarter of the county's population, but only 12 percent of its elected officeholders.**

The median age of all residents of Allegheny County is 39.5 years old, while the median age for elected officials in Allegheny County is more than ten years older —51 years old.

There is **substantial range of median ages** for elected officials in the county's 130 municipalities, ranging from a low of 42 (in Plum) to a high of 71 (in Kilbuck).

CONTEXT

When it comes to running for elected office, age matters. At the most basic level, age is a criterion to be eligible to run for office. For the vast majority of offices at the local level, the minimum age for officeholders is 18; state legislators, big-city mayors and governors must be somewhat older (21, 25 and 30, respectively).

More importantly, age matters to the essence of democracy. Long-term studies have shown that young people view government differently, vote at lower rates and feel less connected to the electoral process.¹ The implications of these studies are severe: a study by the Washington Post, Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University projected that, in the next 20 years, voters over 65 could outnumber those under 30 by a 4 to 1 margin at the ballot box, in effect creating a "political gerontocracy" in America.²

The lower rates of political engagement by young people and the older demographics in our region raise a series of questions about our local political system. What is the age distribution of public officials in Allegheny County? How well are young people represented in the ranks of elected officials? How does the age distribution affect the substance of policymaking? If young people have a different set of concerns than the rest of the population, do existing politicians effectively address these concerns if they

themselves are not young? And finally, what does this mean for the accountability and representativeness of our local political system, and ultimately, the sustainability of our region?

METHODOLOGY

This report aims to answer the first and most basic in this series of questions: what is the age distribution of elected officials in Allegheny County? In order to determine the age of current office holders, we obtained lists of elected officials from the Allegheny County Board of Elections. With 130 municipalities in the county, there are literally thousands of public officeholders — mayors, city or borough council people, constables, tax collectors and auditors. We chose to limit the scope of our examination to three major and relatively higher profile groups:

- **86 Mayors** (including the Allegheny County Executive)
- **130 City Councils** (sometimes called commissioners, council members or supervisors)
- **43 School Boards**

These three groups represent a total of more than 1,300 officeholders.

After selecting the offices to be analyzed, the County Elections Board assisted us by cross-referencing the names and addresses of the office holders with the date of birth listed on their voter registration cards.³ Ages were calculated for the year 2002.



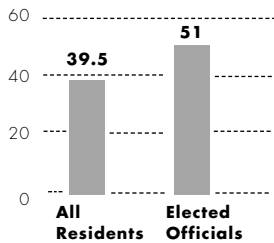
FINDINGS

The median age of all residents of Allegheny County is 39.5 years old,⁴ while the median age for elected officials in Allegheny County is more than ten years older — 51 years old.

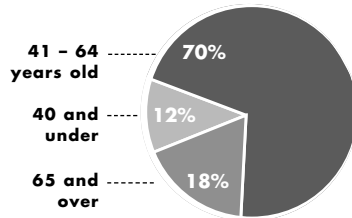
For the general population of Allegheny County, 26 percent is between the ages of 20 and 39,⁵ and 18 percent of the population is 65 years old or older.

For elected officials, young adults are underrepresented relative to their share of the county population. Twelve percent of elected officials are 40 years old or younger, less than half the proportion of young adults in the general population. Eighteen percent are 65 or older — exactly proportionate to the general population.

Median Age in Allegheny County 2002



Age of Allegheny County's Elected Officials 2002



2002 Median Age of...

Allegheny County Residents	39.5
All Elected Officials	51
Mayors	58
Council Members	51
School Board Members	50

86 = Number of Mayors in Allegheny County, 2002

Mayors

Of the 130 municipalities in Allegheny County, 86 have some type of elected executive, usually a mayor.⁶

The median age for mayors in Allegheny County is 58, the oldest median age of the three groups we studied. Only 13 percent of mayors were 40 years old or younger, while more than a third were 65 or older. More than one in five mayors was 70 years old or older.

Mayors...	Number	Percentage
Age 40 or younger	11	13%
Age 41 - 64	44	51%
Age 65 - 69	12	14%
Age 70 or older	19	22%

849 = Number of City Council Members in Allegheny County, 2002

City Councils

All 130 Allegheny County municipalities have some form of municipal council, be it a city or borough council, a board of supervisors or a set of commissioners. (This includes the City Council for the City of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County Council.)

The median age for the 846 councilmembers for whom we had age data is 51. Twelve percent of councilmembers were 40 and under, while one in five (20 percent) were 65 or older. Twelve percent were 70 years old or older.

Councilmembers...	Number	Percentage
Age 40 or younger	106	13%
Age 41 - 64	570	67%
Age 65 - 69	68	8%
Age 70 or older	102	12%

387 = Number of School Board Members in Allegheny County, 2002

School Boards

There are 43 school boards in Allegheny County, with 387 members. The median age (for the 382 school board members for whom we have age data) was 50 years old, the youngest of the three groups we examined. While school boards had the lowest percentage of "young" board members (10 percent), they also had the lowest percentage of members between 65 and 69 and over 70 (5 percent and 4 percent respectively).

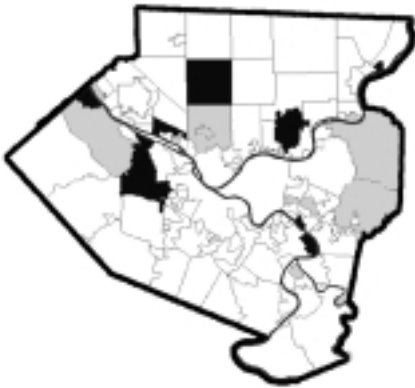
Board Members...	Number	Percentage
Age 40 or younger	37	10%
Age 41 - 64	313	81%
Age 65 - 69	21	5%
Age 70 or older	16	4%

Individual Jurisdictions

We also wanted to highlight the individual jurisdictions that have the lowest and highest median ages. We examined municipalities by calculating the median age of the jurisdiction's mayor and council together; we also calculated the median age for the 43 school boards in Allegheny County.

No jurisdiction had a median age younger than 40, so we examined jurisdictions with median ages of 45 or younger. Fourteen jurisdictions were relatively "young," with median ages of 45 or younger. (These are listed in the table below.) At the other end of the spectrum, we examined municipalities (mayor and council) with median ages of 65 or higher. The eight "older" municipalities are also listed below.

Three school boards had a median age under 45: the Penn Hills, Steel Valley and North Allegheny districts. No school boards had median age of 65 or higher, so we report the two boards with the highest median age: Bethel Park (59) and West Mifflin (64).



Map of "Youngest" and "Oldest" Allegheny County Municipalities

Median Age of "YOUNGEST" Municipalities:

Plum	42
Aspinwall, Ben Avon, Edgewood, Reserve	43
Forest Hills, South Versailles	44
Leetsdale, Monroeville, Moon, Port Vue, Ross, Springdale Borough, West View	45

Median Age of "YOUNGEST" School Boards:

Penn Hills, Steel Valley	44
North Allegheny	45

Median Age of "OLDEST" Municipalities:

Duquesne	65
Brackenridge, McCandless, Robinson	66
Crescent	67
Fox Chapel	68
Braddock	70
Kilbuck	71

Median Age of "OLDEST" School Boards:

Bethel Park	59
West Mifflin	64



NEXT STEPS

This research raises additional questions about the exact nature of young adults' participation in the political process. Future research could help refine our understanding of the problem and suggest programmatic solutions.

For instance, this research could be extended to compare how young people fare in primary and general elections. Do young people run for office in greater numbers, but ultimately fail to make it past the primary stage? This might point to a lack of support, resources or visibility for younger candidates, which could be solved by targeted training or aggressive fundraising campaigns for young candidates. Alternately, are young adults simply more apathetic toward politics in general? This might suggest recruitment for entry-level political involvement, candidate recruitment for primary races, and broad "get-out-the-vote" campaigns.

It is also important to understand how the impact of the two major political parties. How do their rules and procedures affect the selection and demographics of local candidates? How well are young people represented in the rank-and-file and party

leadership? Given the role of party committees in selecting and supporting candidates, what proportion of committee members are 40 or under?

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, why does it matter that young people are underrepresented in politics? Do the interests and political and policy concerns of young adults differ from those of middle-aged people and senior citizens in southwestern Pennsylvania, and if so, how? Generally speaking, what are the substantive differences in perspective among the various age groups? In other words, are young people's issues left off of the table now, and how would the election of younger public officials address this problem?

Additional research can provide a better understanding of the political landscape in southwestern Pennsylvania and help align our perceptions to the region's realities. By informing practical strategies, this realignment can yield a more new cadre of political leaders who represent the region's demographics, values and aspirations.

The New Generations Program

was created by the Coro Center for Civic Leadership to help inform a wide range of regional demographic conversations and initiatives. New Generations staff conducts applied research that is aimed at developing a better understanding of the region's talent attraction and retention challenges. Coro would like to thank the Richard King Mellon Foundation for their generous support of the New Generations Program.

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Please visit our website at www.newgenerations.info

For further research on leadership diversity in southwestern PA, check out "*Diversity Among Elected Officials in the Pittsburgh Region in 2002*" by Monique Constance-Huggins and Ralph Bangs. This report focuses specifically on diversity as it relates to women and African-Americans, and examines elected officeholders in the 6-county region. The report is available at www.ucsur.pitt.edu/publications.htm

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END NOTES

¹ Donald P. Green, Alan S. Gerber and David W. Nickerson. "Getting Out the Vote in Local Elections: Results from Six Door-to-Door Canvassing Experiments," May 18, 2002 <http://www.yale.edu/isps/publications/doortodoor.pdf>

² "Too Young to Matter," The New Dem Daily: Political commentary and analysis from the DLC, October 22, 2002.

³ We were unable to obtain birthdates for small number of officials, and we excluded these individuals from our analysis.

⁴ Please note that the median age for Allegheny County includes children under 18 who are not eligible to run for elected office.

⁵ Available Census data does not align precisely to the age groups used in this report. For our purposes, "young" officials are generally between 18 and 40 years of age; the closest Census demographic groups are 20 to 39. Therefore, the exact proportion of the general population in the 18-40 demographic is likely slightly higher than 26 percent that we cite.

⁶ The "Mayor" category also includes the office of the Allegheny County Executive.