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NATION

Progressive party youth divisions more radical than conservatives

By [NOAH YIM](#)



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Three in five members of Young Labor are more radical than the broader party, a new study has found, while less than half of Young Liberals find themselves leaning further to the right than party colleagues.

A global survey of [political party youth wings](#) found that those on the centre-left tend to have more radical members than those on the centre-right, regardless of age or how recently the party won an election.

The survey found that youth party members who hoped to stand for office were less likely to be radical, but lead researcher Duncan McDonnell said there was still an imbalance of radicals between the Left and the Right.

“There is a cohort coming through parties – just like in the electorate – that perceives itself as being closer to the opposite ends of the political spectrum,” Professor McDonnell said.

“In terms of the youth wings, this is more true of the centre-left.”

He attributed this – at least in part – to the options available for ambitious conservatives, particularly in Europe, where right-wing parties have legitimate

electoral prospects.

Political party youth branches have an impact on national politics, given they are key recruiting grounds for office staff and campaign workers, and members often go on to become leaders of the party.

Anthony Albanese was president of NSW Young Labor from 1985 to 1987 and Peter Dutton was chair of the Bayside [Young Liberals](#) in Queensland in 1990.

Researchers also said the grassroots membership could have an impact on the direction of the broader party, citing more radical members brought in by UK Labour's Jeremy Corbyn and, in the past decade, the US Republican Party.

Progressive party youth wings were more radical and less moderate than conservative party youth wings across all six countries surveyed in the Griffith University study, published in the European Journal of Political Research. The paper was part of a broader YOUMEM project which conducted the international survey.

Of the 615 respondents in Young Labor during 2018, 61.5 per cent said they had more left-wing views than the broader party, 23.6 per cent said they were in step with the party, and 15 per cent said they were more moderate.

Of the 430 respondents in the Young Liberals, 47.2 per cent said they were more conservative than the broader party, 19.3 per cent said they were in step with it, and 33.5 per cent said they were more moderate.

The paper urged caution in generalising the findings because the survey of 4679 members was non-random, but concluded the data showed "centre-left youth-wing members consider themselves more radical compared to the senior party than centre-right ones do".

The study also found respondents who said they wanted to seek office tended to be less likely to identify as more radical than the broader party and that people who had been in the youth wing for longer were less likely to identify as radical. The researchers found no significant impact on the broader trend whether or not that party had won or lost the most recent election.

An earlier paper sourced from the same YOUMEM survey found that Australia's main party youth wings had an over-representation of [university graduates](#) – 86.8 per cent of respondents from Young Labor and 93.6 per cent from the Young Liberals.

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