

How biased do you think we are?
Comparing lay and academic predictions of Americans' attitudes
toward younger and older adults

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Abstract. Psychological work on age perceptions has mostly focused on prejudices targeting the older fringe of the population, tacitly assuming that age-based stigma rises throughout one's lifespan, such that younger adults enjoy a more positive image than do older ones. In a pre-registered study surveying a large, US-representative sample (Study 1: $N = 1,000$), we find the exact opposite: Americans reported the most favorable attitudes toward the oldest age cohorts and the least favorable ones toward the youngest. Importantly, this pattern varied in degree but remained robust across participants' age, gender, race, political affiliation, and level of education. Furthermore, social dominance orientation—which generally denotes a bias in favor of dominant groups and hostility toward lower-status ones—was associated with more unfavorable attitudes toward younger—but not older—adults, consistent with the notion that the young, specifically, are being prejudiced against (see Figure 1). In two follow-up studies, we are expecting lay people (Study 2; $N = 550$) to be more accurate at predicting this pattern than age researchers (Study 3; *ongoing*), whom, we posit, will overestimate attitudes toward younger cohorts and underestimate those toward older ones. In an aging world where younger adults are rapidly becoming a minority, our findings stress the urgent need for academics to reconsider what age-based prejudice looks like and develop a better understanding of anti-young ageism, its causes, and its consequences.

Figure 1. Attitudes of a large US-representative Sample toward Different Age Cohorts, as a function of SDO

