

1st Place, Grades 9-12
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Voting Through the Ages

We've all experienced it: sitting on the couch, gazing at the TV when bright flashes of red, white, and blue announce a gallant candidate advocating for your vote. Maybe it's a drive through the neighborhood while being bombarded with picket signs riddled with unfamiliar names and slogans. Or perhaps it's that solemn voice on the radio, condemning the views of the other side. Regardless of the medium, each advertisement has one goal: to get your vote.

However, these political messages don't reach everyone. According to the Pew Research Center, large gaps exist between groups of voting age adults in the United States, most notably the "Millennial" generation (Fry). Based on data from the 2012 elections, the older generations, those 36 or older, had 60 to 70% of possible voters contribute; on the other hand, the Millennial generation, those 18-35, had only 46%. However, this voting disparity is not unique to this generation: data from previous elections, notably 1996, indicates that the next youngest generation, "Generation X," had only 41 % of the age group, aged from 18-31, actually vote. Therefore, the problem of the younger generations not contributing to the political process has remained an issue for decades. The question then remains, why?

Many young voters do not care about politics because they believe their vote is negligible in the overall election. Feeling insignificant in the election, most young adults become complacent about politics. This stagnancy creates a cycle where young voters choose not to pay attention to the political world and not to contribute. This factor stems from one issue: the lack of education about the government while it matters. Many schools offer a government or civics class, but for most students, this curriculum means nothing because there is no application as they learn. Young adults, having no political power until the age of 18, are simply expected to be

educated voters from scratch. Many voters eventually participate, but getting young adults to vote earlier will bolster the voice of the younger generations. Therefore, one way to get young adults more involved in the electoral process is inform people as they enter voting age through workshops.

These workshops would allow voters to reliably learn about the election. By hosting workshops at places such as colleges or community centers, any voter would have the ability to learn more about the electoral process with an instructor. These workshops would be an open area to learn and discuss the election system as well as the candidates' policies. Voters would also learn about the ramifications of voting and learn why it is necessary. By teaching voting age adults about the election and its process, these workshops would help create a more informed, receptive young voting population.

With the tumultuous 2016 election coming to a close, the voter turnout may vary drastically from previous years. However, it is imperative that we educate young voters now so the voice of the younger population will be heard.

Works Cited

Fry, Richard. "Millennials Match Baby Boomers as Largest Generation in U.S. Electorate, but Will They Vote?" *Pew Research Center RSS*. N.p., 2016. Web. 02 Nov. 2016.