

Younger generation disenchanted by political climate

by Layla Saqibuddin

It's no secret that younger generations generally have significantly lower election turnout rates. The U.S. Census Bureau cites that only 17.1 percent of 18- to-24-year-olds voted in 2014.

According to The Washington Post, adolescents are "uninterested" in the political process because they feel their opinion and vote won't have an impact.

"I just don't feel I can change politics. Or, if I could help change it, I'd just be voting for someone whose solutions I don't agree with," said 25 year old Austin Batey.

However, Senior Anahi Toolabian

plans to vote, and she believes her voice can make a change.

Senior Stephanie Kacius agrees, noting that the right to vote is something that should not be taken for granted.

"Most of the time I think people are just picking the lesser of two evils when it comes to who their voting for, which I think is unfortunate but the reality," she said.

"Politics right now are really disheartening. I think it's why you see in the polls that young people are not affiliating with political parties," said Ashley Spillane, president of Rock the Vote, an organization whose mission is to engage and build political power in millennials.

Founder of Civics Education Network (CEN) Stephen Young believes that having open discussions with students will instigate students to become more engaged in politics.

"If we want kids to vote, to be engaged, we need to address them directly, hear their concerns, give them a reason to be engaged. This means honest, direct, adult-like conversations, not high speed 'kid' conversations," said Young.

Though many high school seniors may be old enough to vote, one-quarter of them demonstrated only a proficient level of civics knowledge, based on the latest results from a prominent national exam according to The Washington Post.

This national exam showcases civics-based skills and illustrates how schools are not providing the knowledge students need in order to be politically engaged.

Senior Neil Dhote believes students should be optimistic of the future and believe that despite the fact that they may not have the best knowledge of politics, it's still important to stay involved.

"It's dangerous if everyone has the mindset of 'Oh, my one little vote won't do anything.' The important thing to remember is that every vote can make a difference," he said.



Vote if you care, and you do

by Ezra Wallach

Regardless of whether you're voting in a few weeks, you still probably have some idea what your political beliefs are.

Unlike in the past, candidates almost always vote along party lines no matter the scenario. During the Kavanaugh confirmation process, all but two democrats voted against his nomination while all but one republican voted for it. Many democrats claimed to vote against him due to his lies and alleged sexual misconduct, and while this undoubtedly played a role, we also can't ignore the influence of his conservative political views regarding issues including abortion.

Abortion is something many people care about even if they aren't that political; many religious people vote Republican based on the fact that most of the party's candidates are pro-life.

On the other side of the aisle, you'll find those who vote Democrat due because of their belief and worry about climate change. Just four Republicans in the senate believe climate change is real, and there are surely some people who line up with this ideology and, despite being conservative on other issues, could find themselves voting Democrat this year.

There are obviously other important issues such as healthcare, minimum wage, and the military that can alone cause people to vote one way or another.

Look, politics are really complicated, but the good news is, you don't have to know everything about everything to vote and to be politically engaged.

Each important issue in our society comes up in our government, even something as small (or not) as NFL players standing for the national anthem. Some of these issues can be important enough to us that we vote for the candidates that share our beliefs on these single issues.

If changes in the government seem to be having a small impact on your life so far, then consider the following that could happen in the near future—I'll stick to abortion as an example for this but many issues could work.

Let's start from the beginning: states have the right to create their own voting systems. For example, some states require an ID to vote while states like Florida ban voting altogether for convicted, but now freed felons.

This year, citizens of Florida can opt to allow felons to vote in the next election, a state that was decided by just 537 votes in the 2000 election. Considering that many felons are African-American, and that African-Americans often vote Democrat, and that there are over a million felons who can't vote in Florida, this election could've easily gone the other way.

But, Bush won Florida and the presidency, and went on to nominate two conservative justices to the supreme court, who would both likely vote to overturn Roe v. Wade and essentially give states the authority to ban abortions.

Keep in mind that these justices are nominated by the president, but confirmed by the senate; voting in the midterms is essential to supporting a certain viewpoint on a topic like abortion. Now, because of Bush and Trump, we are left with a majority conservative Supreme Court that could vote against your views despite the fact that you supported the presidents or congressmen who voted to confirm them.

Abortions affect so many people, but the heart of the issue doesn't really involve politics, mostly just people's morals and religion. Believing in higher or lower taxes shouldn't dictate whether you are pro-life or pro-choice. Issues as consequential as these can and should be important enough for people not just to vote, but to pay attention to which party and candidates they are voting for.

I want to challenge everyone to consider an issue they find super important to them and find out which party or candidate votes in support of what you think about it. This party or candidate could be different than who you thought you supported or who your friends and family support, but the process of figuring this out is remarkably important.

Find an issue you are passionate about, and know that this topic can easily be affected through your vote.

Civics surprises students

by Stephanie Kim

Since the institution of the civics requirement in Illinois high schools starting with the class of 2020, the civics classes have been met with mixed reviews from students and teachers alike.

There are three main ways to fulfill the civics requirement at New Trier: a student can take Civics (also available over the summer), Civics and Social Justice, or they can take AP Government & Politics in their senior year.

While an increasing number of students take the Civics or Civics and Social Justice class to satisfy the requirement, a large portion of students opt instead to knock it out with AP Government & Politics since taking civics itself would interfere with their schedule.

Junior Maddie Dieffenbacher faced this issue, prompting her to have to take Civics the summer before her junior year.

"I agree that this requirement conflicts with our schedule," explained Dieffenbacher. "Although it seemed like less work than other history classes I have taken, there was still projects, essays, and readings assignments that would be hard to balance with five other classes going on at the same time."

Though cumbersome for some, it has proven to be interesting where topics are applicable to the real world. For sophomore Caroline Cody, a Civics and Social Justice student, civics is fascinating.

"I love Civics, and the reason I decided to take it was because it sounded like a class I would really enjoy," said Cody.

Cody said the class is non-typical in the way it prepares students to understand what happens in the real world, not just within the context of the classroom.

"We did a unit on the people in charge and we've learned about social justice and how to see the minority's perspective," explained Cody. "Everything I have learned so far I use and will continue to use in the future."

Social Studies teachers Lindsay

Arado and Alexander Zilka were the duo at the forefront of the implementation of the civics curriculum at New Trier.

According to Zilka, Illinois mandates that four main ideas have to be taught in civics classes: government institutions, civic engagement, discussion of current and controversial issues, and simulations of the democratic process.

"It's important for students to be able to talk about current issues in an educated way and in a civil way," explained Zilka. "Part of what I'm trying to do in Civics is to help students do that—to hear alternative points of view, think about them, and not necessarily agree with them but to listen."

Though the civics classes learn the same fundamental topics, there is only a set standard for what needs to be taught; there is none for how the civics topics should be taught exactly, giving teachers leeway to approach teaching the mandated elements of the curriculum as they see fit.

Civics teachers Christopher Van Den Berg and Zilka take a very "hands-on" approach in order to teach students the application of civics.

"We want students to feel like they're engaged in this process of being good citizens, so as teachers, we need to model that to help them see how their engagement is going to produce a more open, thoughtful society," said Van Den Berg.

In Van Den Berg's classroom, when he surveyed his students to see where their opinions on the class stood, he discovered that though many of the students had initial exasperation or low expectations for civics, after being in the class for a couple of weeks, they have been able to derive the inherent value from learning civics.

While civics may be mandatory, it no longer feels like a "dumb requirement"—a common assumption. "Across levels, there is a consistent message coming from the students that this [class] is valuable, that there's a connection to their lives and the world," noted Van Den Berg.