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Red. Blue. Red. Blue. Red. Blue.

Senior Olivia Hagge’s eyes nervously scan the phone screen in front of her as she watches the election map slowly fill in. It’s 2 a.m. on Election Night, and the 2020 Presidential Election is far from over. She waits, hopeful that the numbers in front of her will provide clarity. Eventually, Hagge accepts she will have to wait a little longer to hear the final result and heads to bed. One question remains at the center of her and the rest of the country’s mind: Who will be the 46th president of the United States of America?

BEFORE

BEFORE THE NOV. 3 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, STUDENTS AND FACULTY prepared for it and adjusted to the modifications in voting presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. And protests against racial injustice changed classroom discussion and promoted political debates among students. The 2020 election between now President-elect Joe Biden and President Donald Trump was unprecedented in many ways.

The COVID-19 pandemic was at the center of this election. It not only affected the voters’ perspective on each candidate, but also caused a large number of voters to mail in their ballots or vote early. According to the Pew Research center, 50.3 percent of ballots in 2020 were absentee, a substantial increase from 27.4 percent absentee ballots in 2016.

“[COVID-19] has absolutely affected this election,” government teacher Kiley McAbee said. “It made people scared to go to the polls, and a lot of it depends on what area you’re in. It’s definitely made people worried to go wait in line.”

According to the New York Times, while three-fourths of voters were able to receive an absentee ballot for this election, seven states, including Texas, required an excuse beyond COVID-19 for voters to receive one. Many Texan voters opted to vote early in hopes of avoiding crowds at polling locations.

“I had a wonderful experience, and I was willing to wait two hours because I think it’s important to vote,” Spanish teacher Marcela Garcini said. “The people that become American citizens work for it, and I have never missed any U.S. elections [since] I became a citizen.”

A significant increase in involvement among younger generations with the election was observed this year. According to a study at Tufts University, 53 to 56 percent of voters aged 18-29 voted, a rise from 47 percent in the 2016 election. While many members of Gen Z are still too young to vote, it is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation that voted in this election. Senior Olivia Hagge voted early on Oct. 28 and encouraged other students to do the same.

“It’s not our right to vote—it’s our responsibility,” Hagge said. “Because we’re a democracy, we need to have an accurate representation, [and] we need to have the people’s voice be reflected onto who is leading us. With this upcoming election, there are so many people who are now eligible to vote. Gen Z is the most diverse group of people [voting], and since we can vote, I think that will make a huge positive impact.”

For many members of younger generations, social media provided a platform to learn and share political opinions, especially during an election year. Alumna Victoria Hammett ’17 uses TikTok to share her political opinions and discuss current events with her audience of over 400,000 followers.

“We need to be talking about [political issues] right now, so I made a video about [Black Lives Matter], and that really created a shift with me and my content,” Hammett said. “I have this platform, and at this point in 2020, it felt silly to post about anything else. We’re seeing record breaking numbers of voters, and I think it’s largely a result of how vocal everyone is on social media right now.”

For many students, the election changed the way students interact with each other. Often, different political beliefs can affect relationships with peers in a positive or negative way. In a Nov. 9 poll of 128 upper school students, 97 percent of respondents said the election has affected their relationship with other students.

“The election has affected my student life in many social ways,” sophomore and Conservative Club member Blake Scheinberg said. “I am a very open and passionate Trump supporter, and I tend to get a lot of criticism and hate for just expressing my belief.”

Discussions surrounding elections continued into the classroom, where students and teachers analyze events during the election to better understand different perspectives.

“I love working here because while our student body is pretty divided in terms of Republican and Democrat and all in between, it doesn’t feel like that in the classroom,” McAbee said. “[Conversations] are very civil, and I love that, because I’ve definitely taught in places where that wasn’t the case.”

DURING

JOINING THE NEARLY 160 MILLION AMERICANS WHO VOTED IN THIS election, the highest voter turnout since 1900, many students and teachers cast their vote in the Presidential Election. That night, the results of the election were anxiously awaited, yet delayed for days by the high number of absentee ballots.

Results of the election were not concluded on Election Day, with several battleground states such as Arizona, Nevada, Georgia, North Carolina and Pennsylvania still counting their ballots. According to CNN, Election Day ended with 224 electoral votes for Biden and 213 for Trump, both candidates far from the 270 necessary to win. Several battleground states, including Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, were at the center of the country’s attention as their counts would be crucial in determining the final outcome.

“[Not knowing the results on election night] has happened before, but it doesn’t happen very much,” McAbee said. “Usually, the networks are pretty certain the election is going to turn out a certain way. I knew that it was going to take a while, but I know many of us still stayed up.”

With a turnout of roughly 66.8 percent registered voters, according to CNBC, Biden set the record for highest number of votes in history, with over 50.61 percent of the popular vote, according to Time Magazine.

“[The high voter turnout] is so significant because it shows people really are paying attention and wanting to be involved,” McAbee said. “It’s really good that people have been so involved in this election...People went and cast their vote and that’s phenomenal. It gives [me] a sense of pride, especially because so many young people went out to vote.”

In reaction to Election Day results, both candidates and their supporters expressed their opinions on each state’s outcome. The Trump campaign pursued legal action surrounding the results in Michigan, Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania, pushing for ballots to stop being counted. In response, the Biden campaign promised to fight for all ballots to continue to be counted. Both candidates posted statements on social media, confident that the results of the election would be in their favor.

“I believe that the election isn’t over yet,” freshman Taylor Turner said. “Trump is filing many lawsuits in counties and states [surrounding] voter fraud. This election isn’t over, and I choose to be hopeful that Trump will win.”

For many students, the complications and divisiveness of this election was a source of anxiety and stress. According to a poll of 128 students, 80 percent of students were nervous during the election.

“When it was 2016, I was in eighth grade, so I was interested in the election, but it didn’t really affect my life because I was so young,” Hagge said. “Now that this election is in 2020, the term of the next president will be aligned with the four years of my college experience. It’s going to be really interesting to see how those two parallel. [Because] I voted, I’ve been so involved, and it’s so interesting to [watch the election]. I’m older, and the people I go to school with are also older, so we’re all more involved in this together.”

However, many students observed that tensions surrounding the election at school were less than expected.

“Tensions were actually lower than I thought they were going to be,” junior Ruby Long said. “There were obviously people talking about the election, but it wasn’t quite as much as I thought it was going to be... I was glad because I wanted to talk about it with my friends... but it gets very heated talking about the election, in general...especially when people don’t agree.”

AFTER

ON NOV. 7, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA OUTLETS PROJECTED Biden to be the winner of the election, making him the president-elect of the United States.

After four days of waiting for several states to finish ballot counting, Biden won Pennsylvania, giving him enough votes to put him over the 270 electoral vote threshold. While his win was projected by many, it will not be officially confirmed until Jan. 6. His running mate, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, made history as the first person of color and female vice president-elect of the United States.

“What process goes underway to make [the results] official is that the states will call it,” McAbee said. “The Associated Press has their own projections, and they are pretty certain that the election will go a certain way. The state is what makes it official.”

Polls before the election projected a win for Biden, and he ended up winning by roughly 4.8 million popular votes. Election night, however, while watching results, some students believed that Trump would end up being declared the winner. As more mail-in ballots were counted, a victory for Biden was determined, as, according to The United States Election project, Democrats mailed in more ballots than Republicans did.

“Election night, I thought that Trump was going to win,” Long said. “I remember watching when Florida was leaning towards Trump, and Trump seemed to be more likely to win. I was pretty convinced that Trump was going to win, but then when we woke up the next morning, it looked more like Biden was going to win.”

For many, the outcome of the election came sooner than expected. With complications surrounding voting and the possibility of a recount, the possibility of a delay was anticipated.

“The results definitely came a bit sooner than I expected, but I don’t think that necessarily implies that the system was rushed,” sophomore and Progressive Student Union member Bridget Wang said. “I feel like the numbers are reliable but a double check isn’t bad.”

Once the election results were projected by many networks on Nov. 7, students had a variety of reactions. For students who supported Trump, the results of the election were disappointing, and many, including Trump himself, disputed the results.

“The results given on [Nov. 7] were very rushed, and I feel like the media was rushed to give a result,” Turner said. “The election is not over, and won’t be over for a long time. There are still many recounts and lawsuits being filed in states. It’s not up to the media to decide the election, it is up to the people.”

But other students were excited by the results of the election, relieved that Biden was declared the winner and stood by the results of the election as accurate.

“Initially, I thought I would be celebrating and so beyond excited, but honestly at this point, I’m just relieved,” Hagge said. “I’m so content knowing that I’m going to be in a safe country, in a safe place. Especially in college, I feel like I’m going to have a good experience and be relieved from all the exhaustion of the last four years.”

With Harris becoming the first non-white and first woman to be vice president, many people view her accomplishment as a big step for future generations.

“I’m so excited,” Long said. “It’s time we finally have a female vice president and hopefully, soon, a female president. It’s been way too long of not having female leadership in the country, and we really need it.”

While the results of the election were decided, the call to continue to pay attention to politics is not gone.

“It’s important to not stop thinking about politics or worrying about politics,” Long said. “We need to use the momentum that this election has given us and keep using it to make the future better.”

91

Percent of students think that the pandemic affected the election process

63

Percent of students and teachers who voted think the results came sooner than they expected

90

Percent of students and teachers who voted chose to vote early

59

Percent of students think social media negatively affected the election

97

Percent of students think voting is important