

Youth issues, apathy define voting trends

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THEY VOTED
Seniors Genevieve Larsen, Ty Larsen, Mateo Ramirez - Valenti and Lucy Janssens cast their ballots in 2024 general election.

Two weeks after her eighteenth birthday, senior Emarie DiBella left school during a free carrier on Nov. 5 to cast her vote at Pumpkin Park.

"It was a lot easier than I thought it would be," DiBella said. "All of the poll workers cheered and were very excited that I was there."

DiBella brought along two friends who were curious to see how the process worked.

"The problem with a lot of people my age is just trying to find the time," DiBella said. "But even if we had waited in a long line, the process of voting itself is easier than people make it seem."

DiBella stresses the importance of exercising the right to vote. She points out that voting is not just limited to the presidential election every four years, and it is important to get involved in any way possible – particularly for young women.

"There are so many women that live in countries where that is never going to be an option, and I'm just a teenager getting that opportunity," DiBella said. "Even if I am a very small part of a very large process in America, I feel like I am a large part of what has always been a freedom that people have fought for me to have."

NEW VOICES

Senior Chloe West, who is too young to vote, says she would "1000 percent vote if I could."

"It's hard for me when people are judgemental and hateful about any sort of political choice and then don't vote," West said. "It's not valid to try and have a voice and then not vote."

DiBella underscores the importance of young people being politically active.

"We are the future. We are the next generation. The people among us are going to be the people that run this country one day. Whatever policies they make, we will be affected either now or in the near future. So it's

important to make sure that we're aware of what's going on."

History teacher Amy Malin heads up the voter registration drives on campus. She reinforces the importance of teen participation. "If they want change or have an idea of what the future should look like, but they don't vote, then they are basically throwing up their hands and saying, 'Somebody else deal with it.'"

I DON'T KNOW, AND I DON'T CARE

Voter apathy is real.

"People say, 'It doesn't matter to me, I'm tired of hearing about it, I don't like either candidate, I'm just not going to vote,'" Malin said. "But when they do that, they will still be discontent with the way things are because nothing has changed."

Senior Daniela Laing echoes Malin's feelings, saying voter apathy is a "really dangerous ideal."

"You're removing yourself from things that affect you, and you're taking away culpability."

The recent general election offered proof of voter apathy. According to USA Today, voters aged 18-24 cast 14% of all ballots, a steady decrease from 2020 (17%) and 2016 (19%). According to the Texas Tribune, despite record registration numbers, all voter turnout in Texas fell by 6% in 2024.

St. John's Political Education Club President Jacob Green recently published the club's Perspectives magazine, which aims to provide a platform for students to share their opinions and educate themselves on various political issues and ideas. At the end of the day, if people do not like either candidate and still choose not to vote, "I think that's completely their choice and it's not a bad thing by any means," Green said.

A week before the election, History department chair Russell Hardin predicted that a large turnout of young voters could significantly impact the election.

"If polling is correct, it could be significant, especially in terms of what we're seeing with gender and the growing movement of young men to the Republican Party," Hardin said, noting the possibility of a conservative



generational trend based on how people tend to vote for the same party in their first few elections.

According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, around 42% of eligible youth voted in 2024. Of those, 52% favored Kamala and 46% favored Trump. Yet, like with every age group this election, there was a notable shift towards Trump this year as compared to 2020. About 56% of young men, a group clearly targeted by Trump's campaign, voted for him, a flip from the 56% of young men who voted for Biden in 2020. Young women also demonstrated a substantial increase in voting for Trump, from 33 to 40%. Although overall that means a 10-point jump (36% to 46%) in youth support for Trump between elections, young people aged 18-29 were still the age group with the highest support for the Democratic candidate this year.

Before the election, the Pew Research Center said roughly two-thirds of registered young voters (18-24) aligned themselves with the Democratic Party, while Republicans tended to skew older. Across all seven key swing states, Harris lost on average 10% of voters under 30 that President Joe Biden won in 2020, according

to NPR. Although Trump won all the swing states, the majority of the youth preferred Harris over Trump in these states—except Michigan, where both candidates were essentially tied.

The data may indicate a generational shift towards the GOP, but if young people had voted in greater numbers, the results may have been different.

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— CHLOE WEST —





ADDRESSING APATHY

DiBella says that voting in the United States is a privilege – especially when compared to other countries where citizens cannot vote.

“Just look at what’s going on in other countries in the world right now and how if you were to be a part of that country, how desperately you would want to be able to use your voice.” DiBella said. “Just the ability to have that choice is very, very special. But that comes with responsibility – and part of that responsibility is to use your voice to vote.”

Malin emphasizes the responsibility of living in a democracy: “Lots of people have come before us and fought for us to have that right. So to just throw it away seems like you’re kind of devaluing all of the work that they did.”

“If you look at the history of the United States, there have been people that have made huge sacrifices to ensure that everyone has their right to vote to participate, particularly the history of people of color,” said U.S. History teacher Jack Soliman. “It’s a big deal. I don’t take that lightly.”

For Soliman, whether or not one votes is more important than who they vote for. “You need to figure out which of the two parties fit your interests and your beliefs. If you’re not satisfied, find a way to force your party to include your voice. If that means voting for a third-party ticket, then vote for a third-party ticket, but I would do that before I would not vote.”

Like Malin, Soliman emphasizes the importance of young voters especially. “You’re 18. It’s time to be an adult. Step up, get over the skepticism, and start doing a little more reading and start participating. It’s time to grow up.”

Hardin argues that voting in local elections is as important as participating in the presidential election.

“It’s not just about the top of the ticket,” Hardin said. “It’s the down ballot, meaning all of the local officials and all the other races that are happening at the same time. And so, to abstain from voting, it’s not that you’re just not choosing between Harris and Trump, you’re also not choosing the people that affect your life arguably on a more day-to-day basis.”

Local elections usually receive less media coverage than national and state-wide elections, yet Malin says that local elections can be more impactful. They also receive less turnout, too. The 2018-2022 estimates in State Senate District 17—the one SJS is in—there were 685,722 eligible voters. For the 2024 state senate district 17 election between Joan Huffman and Kathy Cheng, 369,937 people voted, a 54% turnout.

“In Texas, they’re making laws about what men and women can do with their bodies. They’re making laws about how parents can treat their children. They’re passing legislation at local school boards on what books are going to be allowed in the libraries, or whether or not they’re going to have librarians on their campuses. And part of the reason that you get individuals there who may be on the fringes of what most people think is because they’re the ones going to vote in those off-term elections.”

THE SUN ALSO RISES

Hardin says that whether going to school or voting, one should do their homework. For elections, that could include looking at websites to understand a candidate’s position or talking to friends. For Malin, it meant reading from the League of Women Voters Guide.

DiBella stresses the importance of going to unbiased websites to see how the news is reported from different perspectives, and then talking to other adults.

“Ultimately, come to a decision that you feel comfortable with, not a decision that was made for you by someone else in your life,” DiBella said.

West emphasizes not only being as “well educated as you can” but also broadening one’s mind and shifting viewpoints.

“Try to put yourself in a different perspective, maybe people of lower income or different race or different sex,” West said. “Because you’re not only voting for yourself, you’re voting for the country.”

Daniela Laing credits her perspective to Hardin’s U.S. Government and Politics class where she has learned about the way politics work. Soliman hopes that taking American history classes will encourage students to participate in democracy.

“I hope people come away from their social studies and civics classes with a sense that it’s part of their patriotic duty,” Soliman said. “I hope they will feel a sense of excitement to go and express themselves for the first time.”

Now that the election is over, Soliman implores students to “not just peacefully

coexist, but live together, talk and disagree comfortably with each other” whether their candidate won or lost.

“Why not start with the present?” Soliman asks. “The person is going to be president for the next four years whether you like it or not.”

Hardin notes the array of complex variables that impact a person’s politics and says that how one votes is not necessarily a reflection of their personality.

“Usually, people vote with self-interest in mind, but that doesn’t mean selfishness,” Hardin said. “That self-interest could be based on things that they have seen or experienced that are profoundly important to them. There is usually no single reason why people vote, so just understand that the same person you care about who walked into that voting booth is the same person you care about who walked out.”

When interviewed before the election, DiBella said that even if her preferred candidate did not win, life would go on.

“The sun is going to rise the next day,” DiBella said. “And it is still my job to continue to use my voice. There are other ways that I can make a change in my country.”

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RUSSELL HARDIN

SJS ELECTION UPDATE

Lizzie Fletcher ('93) won reelection for her third term representing the TX-07 congressional district over Caroline Kane, receiving 61.2% of the vote.

Wesley Hunt ('00) was reelected for the TX-38 congressional seat over Melissa McDonough with 62.9% of votes cast.

YOUNG VOTERS BY THE NUMBERS

42%

turnout among voters aged 18-29 in 2024

52%

turnout among voters aged 18-29 in 2020

14%

share of total ballots cast by voters aged 18-29 in 2024

17%

share of total ballots cast by voters aged 18-29 in 2020

19%

share of total ballots cast by voters aged 18-29 in 2016

58%

share of female voters aged 18-29 supporting Harris in 2024

68%

share of female voters aged 18-29 supporting Biden in 2020

56%

share of male voters aged 18-29 supporting Trump in 2024

41%

share of male voters aged 18-29 supporting Trump in 2020

Source: Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts

