

# Gateway Journalism

## REVIEW

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### Gen Z at the polls



INSIDE:

How young voters could shape the 2024 election. Also, trans rights, Latinx voters and the influence of celebrities.

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The Gateway Journalism Review GJR (USPS 738-450 ISSN: 0036-2972) is published quarterly, by Southern Illinois University Carbondale, School of Journalism, College of Mass Communication and Media Arts, a non-profit entity. The office of publication is SIUC School of Journalism, 1100 Lincoln Drive, Mail Code 6601, Carbondale, IL 62901.

## **TO SUBSCRIBE:**

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## **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:**

\$25 — one year  
\$35 — two years  
\$45 — three years

Foreign subscriptions higher depending upon country.

## **POSTMASTER:**

Please send address changes to:  
Gateway Journalism Review  
Amber Easton  
School of Journalism  
1100 Lincoln Drive  
Mail Code 6601  
Carbondale, IL 62901

Periodical postage paid at Carbondale, IL, and additional mailing offices.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4** Gen Z's voice matters. Will they use it in the upcoming election?
- 5** Election Rizz: Millions of new Gen Z youth eligible to vote in 2024, could decide next president
- 8** 'A game of margins': A breakdown of young Pennsylvania voters
- 10** Voter turnout, stakes are high in Michigan
- 11** Kenosha County continues divisive trend for 2024 election
- 15** Young male voters in Wisconsin talk about Trump's push to win them over
- 19** North Carolina sees record early voter turnout in pivotal swing state
- 20** Presidential candidates offer two different visions for environment, how to deal with 'forever chemicals'
- 21** Election reporting initiative for students expands election coverage nationwide
- 22** Shaped by faith: a young councilman's coming of age
- 24** 'The anti-war vote:' Some Gen Z voters disillusioned by Democratic Party amid Israel's attacks on Gaza
- 26** News Analysis: As online activism grows, young adults struggle to evaluate flood of information
- 28** Swayed by fame? How celebs influence young voters
- 30** Why some college students are voting red in 2024 election
- 31** Opinion: What it was like to hear from Trump at NABJ
- 32** Opinion: Political Cartoons
- 33** Trans rights, gender-affirming care could be in jeopardy, depending on outcome of U.S. election
- 34** Latino immigrants worry neither presidential candidate will deliver on immigration

# Gen Z's voice matters. Will they use it in the upcoming election?

By Jackie Spinner

In 1988 I was a freshman in college, and the country had just elected George H.W. Bush president. More than half of young voters (53%), ages 18 to 29, voted for Bush, who beat former Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis.

Still, they represented just 20% of the total voter turnout.

Four years later, after I graduated, a slightly smaller percentage of voters in the newly formed 18 to 24 age group (46%) helped Bill Clinton defeat the incumbent Bush. In that election, the youngest voters represented just 11% of total turnout, although voters ages 25 to 29 contributed another 10%. But just like their young counterparts today, there was interest in a third party candidate. Independent Ross Perot received 21% of the 18 to 24 vote and 23% of the vote for ages 25 to 29.

In both cases, older voters came out in much higher numbers to cast ballots.

Clinton had been chasing the youth vote that year. A New York Times headline in June 1992 read, "Clinton Goes Eye to Eye With MTV Generation."

That was me, the MTV generation. Perot was our Bernie Sanders.

It is now 2024, and the MTV generation of TikTok, or Generation Z, is being courted again and by both presidential candidates, Democrat and Vice President Kamala Harris and Republican and former President Donald Trump.

A New York Times headline in October 2024 read, "Trump Wants Young Voters, but He's Nowhere to Be Seen on Snapchat."

Another 2024 headline from the Times read, "More Money Urgently Needed to Reach Younger and Minority Voters, Organizers Warn Harris Donors."

The reason for the chase is simple. Estimates show that 8 million youth aged into the electorate in 2024. That was just since the 2022 midterm elections. Gen Z, which represents people born between 1997 and 2012, now has 40.8 million members who are eligible to vote, according to the Center for Information & Research on Learning and Engagement, or CIRCLE, at Tufts University.

This generation already is voting at higher rates than previous generations, including mine.

That's why we are devoting our fall issue of GJR to Gen Z and the 2024 presidential election.

Every writer, illustrator and photographer for this issue is a member of Gen Z. They talked to voters their age in the battleground states of Michigan, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

We have stories about trans rights, reproductive freedom, Gaza protests, immigration and the environment because these are issues that matter to many young voters.

Like older voters, they also care about the economy. A U.S. News by Generation Lab found in July that the top issues for voters ages 13 to 34, which include Millennials, is inflation, access to abortion and reproductive rights and gun control and violence.

Approximately 45% of the Gen Z electorate are youth of color. This is a diverse group of Americans who believe in equality and fairness. They are charting their own course and challenging conventions in the workplace.

And they are increasingly using their voice.

As our correspondent in Michigan learned, that state had the highest youth voter turnout rate in the country (36%) in 2022, and currently has one of the highest youth voter registration rates in the U.S.

Pennsylvania also has had high youth turnout in the past three national elections.

North Carolina offers pre-registration, online registration and same-day registration for voting, and our correspondent in Wilmington observed long lines for early voting two weeks before the election.

But Gen Z also has been hard to predict. They initially came out enthusiastically for Harris, giving her a brat summer, but her appeal has since been dampened by Israel's continued strikes in Gaza and the U.S.'s handling of the widening Israel-Hamas war.

We also know that young women have moved left and young men have moved right, which explains why Trump has spent so much time courting undecided young men, the focus of our story from Wisconsin. Women between the ages of 18 and 29 are now 15 percentage points more likely to identify as liberal than men in the same group, according to Gallup.

Young voters are a powerful voice in American politics, accounting for half the population eligible to cast ballots on Nov. 5. The District of Columbia and 23 states allow voters to register up to and on day of the election.

It's no secret that many young voters are frustrated by the two-party system, and unhappy with their choices in candidates for president. Many are eager for election reform.

This election will ultimately hinge on whether they can overcome that disillusionment to cast their ballots anyway. If they can, it will be hard to ignore them.



Two West Chicago residents wear "I Voted" stickers after participating in early voting at the Humboldt Park Library in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024. Photo by Addison Annis

# Election Rizz: Millions of new Gen Z youth eligible to vote in 2024 could decide next president

By Olivia Cohen

Raven Schwam-Curtis, a New York native and social media influencer, launched her TikTok account in 2021 to break down long-winded, often hard to understand topics into videos her audience could digest in less than a minute.

"I became really invested in this idea of democratizing intellectual information and democratizing knowledge at large," said Schwam-Curtis, who is in her mid-20s.

Schwam-Curtis is one of the 41 million members of Generation Z who are eligible to vote in the Nov. 5 election, an influential voting bloc if they go to the polls. About 8 million will be eligible to cast a vote for the very first time.

They include about 4.5 million white youth and 3.8 million youth of color: 2 million are Latino, 1.2 million are Black, 500,000 are Asian and 80,000 are Native American, according to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Engagement at Tufts University.

Cleveland native Aubriana Hills, who is a 19-year-old sophomore at Howard University, said Gen Z will "definitely" have the voting power to sway the presidential election.

"I think Gen Z recognizes how important this election is for our future, and it's motivating a large majority of us," Hills said, who is double majoring in biology and

international affairs. "I do think where the issue comes in is for those of us who are uneducated about the election or feel as though their vote won't matter, so in turn, they opt out of voting."

The presidential race is in a near statistical tie between Democrat and Vice President Kamala Harris and Republican and former President Donald Trump.

At the time of publication, polls showed Harris and Trump at nearly a 50/50 split in the battlegrounds of Michigan, Pennsylvania and North Carolina. Young voters in those states could decide the election.

Continued on next page



A poll worker hands a Chicago resident an "I Voted" sticker after participating in early voting at the Humboldt Park Library in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024. **Photo by Addison Annis**

Schwam-Curtis said she believes that part of the reason Harris and Trump are tied is because younger, more left-leaning voters are unhappy with President Joe Biden's handling of social issues.

"For different reasons, folks are dissatisfied," Schwam-Curtis told GJR. "I don't think that there's one core reason that could be identified, but I think it's dependent on what's paramount for every voter. Those top issues, whether it's Israel, immigration, reproductive rights, economy, and who they think is more aligned with the kind of future they want."

Generation Z marks the cohort of teenagers and young adults born between 1997 and 2012.

Amber Wichowsky, an associate professor of public affairs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said that studies have shown that with this presidential election, reproductive freedom tends to be at the top of the list for Generation Z voters.

Looking back at the 2020 presidential election between Trump and Biden, Wichowsky said climate change was at the forefront of young voters' minds.

Wichowsky said a contributing factor for strong reproductive rights rising to the top of Gen Z's ideal ticket is because this is the first election since Roe vs. Wade was

overturned in a landmark decision in June 2022.

"It also is important to note that campaigns work to activate issues," Wichowsky said. "So when candidates are on the campaign trail saying, 'It's immigration,' 'It's the border,' or when candidates are out there saying, 'It's abortion,' that sends signals to voters that these are the issues that connect the voter to the candidate."

Schwam-Curtis said some of the most pressing issues for her include reproductive justice, Israel's bombardment of Gaza and the rise of Islamophobia and antisemitism as a result, and the economy.

"From my understanding, the economy and reproductive rights are the two major issues, and they're at the top of my list too," she said.

Schwam-Curtis, who is Black and Jewish, started her TikTok account, which has over 109,000 followers, to discuss the communities she belongs to. But with the United States' landscape of anti-Black, antisemitic, transphobic, homophobic and xenophobic rhetoric, the platform has broadened.

"It really was just sort of a natural lead in especially an election year, where all these things are coming to the forefront,"

Schwam-Curtis said.

According to a study by the Pew Research Center, Generation Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation than those that came before. As of 2019, one in four members of Generation Z were Hispanic, marking a significant jump in diversity among the cohort.

Aside from racial background, Gen Z is also on track to becoming the best educated generation to date, as well as the potential to be less religious.

Despite that, Michigan native Rose Casolari, 23, said that much of Gen Z is still young enough where family plays a large role in their lives.

"When you're young the first place you get to participate in a political conversation is usually around the dinner table and usually it's people with a higher authority leading the conversation," Casolari said. "There are a lot of factors that go into a person's voting habit and while one of those might be religion there are so many other factors that even if a Gen Z voter is secular, they are only losing one voice of thousands telling them how to vote."

A poll from Marquette University's Law Center found an uptick since July in Generation Z voters either with no preference for either candidate or those



A library worker wheels books into the 26 ward's early voting polling site at the Humboldt Park Library in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024.

Photo by Addison Annis

who are “double-haters.” However, the poll found that the number of young voters who like neither candidate remain below the level it was during spring 2024, when Biden was still in the running for re-election.

For Harris and Trump, 12% are unfavorable to both in October, a slight increase from July's 10%. By contrast, 21% were unfavorable to both Trump and Harris in May, the poll found.

A University of Chicago GenForward poll released less than two weeks before the election, and reported first by NPR, found that although Harris continues to outperform Trump among Gen Z and millennial voters by 47% to 35%, she doesn't have the support that Biden did among young voters in 2020.

Nikolas Ortega, an anthropology major at the University of Illinois Chicago, said neither Trump nor Harris is his first choice, but as a son of immigrants, immigration policy and the rhetoric around it is a key issue for him.

“We had Donald Trump, who was very anti-immigration, or somewhat along that line, and with a lot of derogatory stuff said about immigration, I want to see how they handle that,” Ortega said. “And in the current climate, I'm interested in how each candidate is going to help with the

Palestinian issue going on.”

Biden withdrew his bid for presidential re-election on July 21. Hours after his withdrawal, he endorsed Harris.

Wichowsky said when Biden still had his hat in the ring, enthusiasm among Generation Z voters lagged because they didn't support either candidate.

“Looking at polling data, late 2023 to early 2024 there was real lagging enthusiasm among Democrats, but especially younger left-leaning voters,” Wichowsky said. “If you look at how that shifted once Biden withdrew from the race and it was Harris, you saw a bump in enthusiasm, across those leaning left, you saw the sort of rising enthusiasm.”

As a whole, the Pew Research Center found that many young voters in Generation Z, as well as Millennials who span from 1981 and 1996, have similar views on major issues facing the country and Americans.

Similarly to Ortega, Alexis Willhite, a bioscience major at the University of Illinois Chicago, said immigration is a key issue for them, but also cited trans and LGBTQ+ rights, abortion and affordable housing as top issues.

Biden's dropping out didn't make much of a difference for Willhite.

As a voter from a younger generation,

Willhite said some of these issues might not change, even with Harris in the White House, marking the first time that both a woman and a woman of color has held the role.

However, Generation Z and Millennials are poised to make up over 60% of the American vote by 2036.

With younger generations reaching voting age or nearing it, politicians have been courting them to cast their ballot in elections.

Wichowsky said more politicians have been accessing young voters through TikTok and other social media platforms. But when it comes to enticing young voters to actually go to the ballot box, she said, it will depend.

“There are several factors at play here, but certainly it behooves them to campaign on social media because that's where young voters get a lot of their political information,” Wichowsky said.

At the end of the day, Casolari said the diversity of a candidate will likely play the “bigger role” for who Gen Z votes for.

“Candidates who can't emphasize or speak to certain identities are going to have a harder time getting the Gen Z vote,” Casolari said.

# 'A game of margins': A breakdown of young Pennsylvania voters

By Allie Miller

For Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald J. Trump, there is no clear path to victory without a win in Pennsylvania, and the state's young voters could help decide the race.

Among the swing state's young voters is 20-year-old Temple University junior Cecilia Schleinitz, a political science and economics dual major. Originally from Massachusetts and a student ambassador with PA Youth Vote, a nonpartisan organization that aims to empower and educate youth voters, Schleinitz said before President Joe Biden dropped out of the race and named Harris the democratic candidate, she still planned to vote for Biden. But since Harris entered the race, Schleinitz noted "a complete energy change," not just for herself but for a lot of young people.

"Okay, we have this younger woman of color who really does have energy like a young person, and is constantly involved with young people, has some outspoken stances on important issues," Schleinitz said.

Of the 7.8 million eligible Generation Z voters ages 18 to 27 across the battleground states of Wisconsin, Georgia, Arizona, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina and Pennsylvania, the Keystone State has the most at 1.6 million. This means some of the deciding ballots are coming from the nation's youngest voters, many of whom will be voting in their first presidential election this year.

As of Oct. 15, Harris and Trump are tied at 48% in Pennsylvania, according to the New York Times.

Nationwide Harris has a 31-point lead among likely young voters — ages 18-29 — , according to the Harvard Youth Poll.

In the final days leading up to Election Day, both campaigns are still vying for votes in Pennsylvania on the campaign trail more than any other state — including several visits to the western part of the state from prominent members of both campaigns — making the outcome an unpredictable toss up.

When it comes to Pennsylvania, its landscape is geographically diverse: from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, from urban to rural communities, issues that matter to voters have regional patterns, said Kabir Khanna, Ph.D., deputy director of Elections & Data Analytics at CBS News.

"The regional patterns within the state are a microcosm of the country where you have these urban, cosmopolitan cities that are these blue hubs, so that would be Philly and Pittsburgh in this example, and often

the surrounding counties, like the Philly suburbs — Bucks, Montgomery, Delaware, Chester — have been trending even bluer as we see this widening split by education and party support," Khanna said. "Meanwhile, the smaller rural counties, well outside those areas, are deeply red and have certainly become even more Republican over the past few cycles."

The 2020 presidential election had the highest turnout of young voters in the nation's history, with about half of U.S. eligible youth casting a vote, an 11-point increase from the 2016 election. While this gives good reason to believe young voters will turn out again, Khanna said, "The best predictor at the individual level of whether someone will vote in an upcoming election is whether they have a history of voting."

Brian Schaffner, professor of political science at Tufts University and co-director of the Cooperative Election Study at Harvard University, also said young voters' habits can be hard to predict. But Pennsylvania's Gen Z voters could have a big influence, he said.

"Most polls are probably predicting that 18 to 29 year olds, a lot of them won't vote, and so their views on how they would vote are being discounted essentially when we talk about likely voters, because we think they're pretty unlikely as voters," Schaffner said. "But if they suddenly did vote, that could very well shift the margin, especially if they were voting overwhelmingly in one direction or the other."

One place that poses a big question is deep blue Philadelphia, Khanna said. Though about eight out of 10 Philadelphia voters will vote Democrat, he said "it's a game of margins."

"When we're talking those kinds of margins, the precise margin in Philly matters if it's an 84% win or a 78% win," Khanna explained. "Similarly, whether voters of color and young voters match their 2020 turnout, or whether some of them decide to stay home, those kinds of things can be pivotal."

Nationwide, 26% of Black men under age 50 are planning to cast their vote for Trump, according to an August NAACP survey.

In Pennsylvania, about one in 10 voters are considered to be persuadable, meaning they potentially could be convinced to vote for either party, Khanna said. But zooming in on Pennsylvania voters under 30, about 20% of them fit the persuadable voter profile — younger than the average voter, racially diverse, and tend to use social media as a source for news and politics — which is twice as much as voters overall, he said.

## Issues that matter most

Twenty-year-old junior Cynthia Alvarado, president of the Latin American Student Organization at Lycoming College in Williamsport, Pa., said feminism and race matter to her most as a Latina, and she will be casting her vote for Harris. While Alvarado hails from Houston, she will be casting her vote in Pennsylvania where she said she knows it counts even more.

"I don't agree with everything that Donald Trump stands for, being an immigrant and being a person of color, it's always just scary to see him being in a powerful chair, and knowing what people across the border are having to deal with in Americas, and just people here in general, being scared of being deported, not having the freedom that America said it would provide them." Alvarado said. "So knowing that Kamala Harris is coming from an immigrant household of a person of color, knowing that she will help middle class rather than upper class, is very good."

Khanna said though the issues that matter most to young voters tend to be the same across all age, racial, and gender groups — with the economy and inflation reigning most important — there are some issues among youth voters that pop more, like race and diversity.

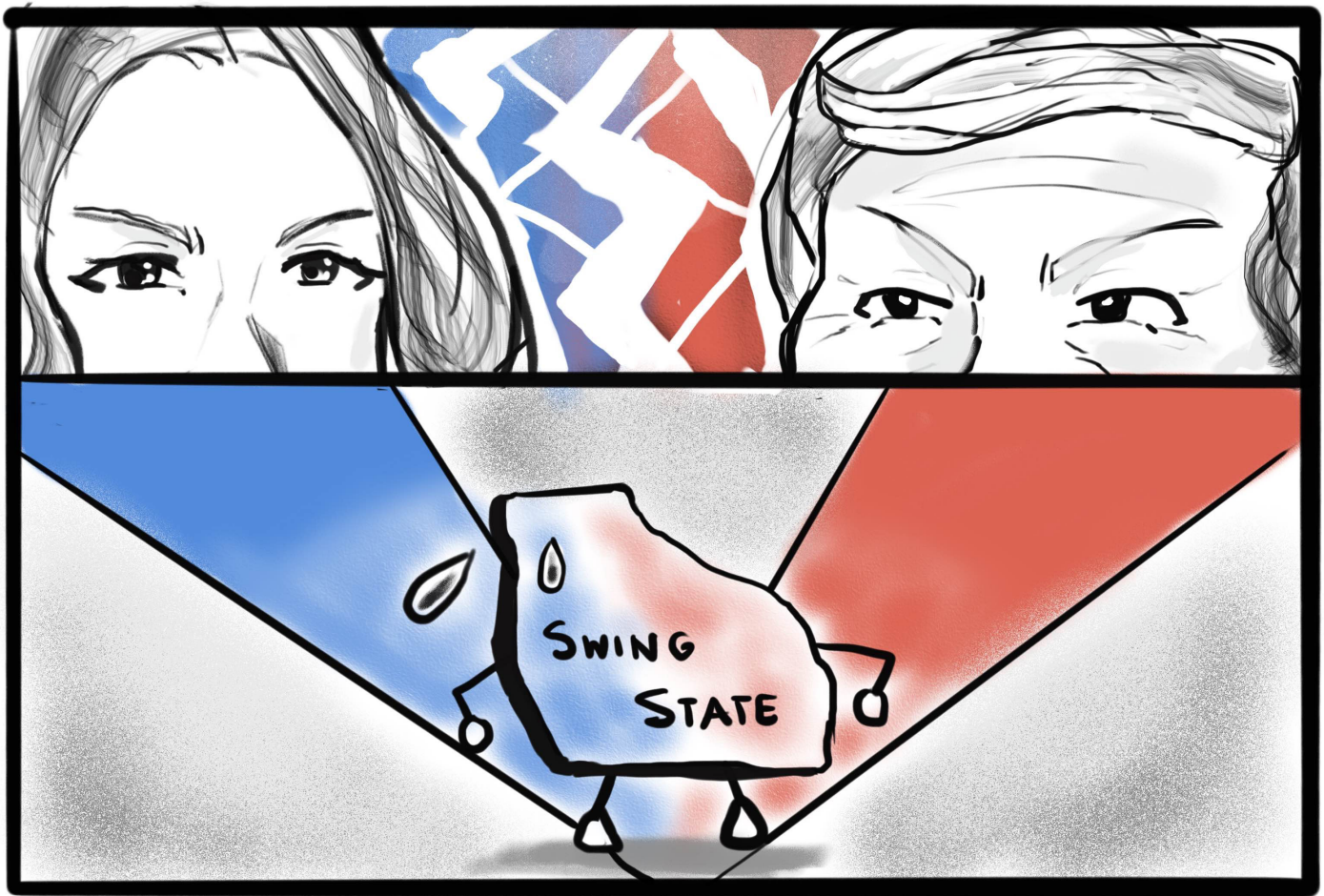
Fifty-six percent of young voters in Pennsylvania said issues of race and diversity are a major issue influencing their vote, compared to only one-third of voters overall, Khanna said. Housing costs are another standout issue among young voters in the state: Six in 10 youth voters said in a CBS News Poll that housing is either "somewhat" or "very unaffordable" in their part of the state, Khanna said. And abortion is another big-ticket issue, he said.

"About two thirds of young voters in PA say abortion is a major factor in their vote. That's compared to just about half of voters overall," Khanna said. "So it's not all of them, but it's more of a motivating issue for that group."

Climate change and gun control are issues that are especially important to young voters, Schaffner said.

Gun control is an issue that is influencing Justin Boehm's vote, a 21-year-old from Pittsburgh attending Westmoreland County Community College for electrical engineering and robotics. Boehm said he didn't vote in the last election and isn't a fan of either candidate this year, but said he's likely voting for Trump Nov. 5 because of his views on gun control.





*Jessie S.*

## SHOWDOWN FOR THE SWING STATES

Illustration by Jessie Shiao

"My biggest thing is, these are just tools. They are objects..." said Boehm, who leans Libertarian. "But as someone who loves things like rifles and all that, I understand the capabilities of these rifles that we use."

Boehm, like other voters on each side of the vote, said the economy and inflation are important to him. In a Sept. 3-6 CBS News Poll with YouGov of 1,085 registered voters across all age groups in Pennsylvania, 66% of respondents under age 30 rated the condition of the state's economy as "fairly bad" or "very bad."

Overall, Alvarado said she is planning to elect the president looking out for citizens as individual human beings.

"I'm very open minded to hearing both sides. I'm very open minded to hear what other people are saying," Alvarado said. "But once this person keeps re-stating things that do not agree with my values, really pushes me to the other side," Alvarado said. Knowing Trump "doesn't agree with my values, such as caring for me as a female, as a person of color, really influences my vote for the other side."

For Alvarado, the decision on who to vote for isn't a challenging one. But for others, like Kristin Newvine, a 26-year-old nonbinary

doctoral student at Penn State from Jersey Shore, a rural town in Central Pennsylvania, it's not easy.

Though Newvine's current plan is to vote for Harris, they don't agree with much of what Harris has done under the Biden Administration, specifically her handling of the war between Israel and Palestine. But one of the main issues driving their vote is socialized health care. Newvine said they are the power of attorney for their 77-year-old grandfather, and when they leave State College in five years following the end of their Ph.D. program, they are hoping the Harris Administration could be a proponent for helping their situation.

"I don't know what's going to happen to him if I don't stay, so it's like the idea that she may be fixing that area would be extremely helpful in my own personal life, and so I care for it," said Newvine, who is studying sociology. "But I also think that aging with dignity is very important, and in this country especially, we do not value the elderly and their care in a way that some other cultures do."

For Schleinitz, living in Philadelphia has made all of these issues matter to her. And Gen Z voters are among the first group to

have grown up with social media and started conversations surrounding mental health, she said, giving them "immense power" in the upcoming election, especially in Pennsylvania.

"People like to talk a lot about, 'Oh, my one vote doesn't matter,' or 'How's my one vote going to matter?'" Schleinitz said. "Well, I like to flip it and say, 'How does your voice or your perspective matter if you don't vote?' Because politicians, they pay attention to the people that vote, and so it's important that we take a hold of our political power in that."

Another predictor of voter turnout is education, Khanna said, with those in college or holding a college degree potentially having had more civic exposure.

"In the turnout models I'm running in Pennsylvania, while according to our latest voter files there are more like raw numbers of people Philadelphia County than Allegheny County — Philadelphia County is younger — our turnout models say that Allegheny County might end up with more voters this year than Philadelphia does, and it'll probably be close," Khanna explained. "Those will be the two biggest counties. They'll probably end up around 10% of the electorate each."



Illustration by Mel Chinnock

# Voter turnout, stakes are high in Michigan

By Noah Beaumont

Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump are making their last gambits in swing states like Michigan where youth voter registration is high. As in other battleground states, the election here could come down to young voter turnout.

The presidential race is in a statistical tie heading into the last weeks of campaigning. Both campaigns are targeting young voters, particularly the undecided.

The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement estimates that 40.8 million members of Generation Z will be eligible to vote in the Nov. 5 election, including 8.3 million newly eligible voters.

Because of this, both the Democratic and Republican candidates for presidents are campaigning hard in places like Michigan, where there are 15 electoral votes up for grabs.

The state boasts favorable precedents for both candidates. Michigan's winner has gone on to win the White House in nine of the last 12 presidential elections. It held a blue streak since 1992 which was broken by Trump in 2016 who won the state then.

Project FiveThirtyEight's poll average indicates Harris is maintaining only a small lead over Trump across Michigan at the time of publication.

The statistical tie could be broken by Gen Z, who are between the ages of 12 and 27, those born after Millennials and before Generation Alpha.

Michigan had the highest youth voter turnout rate in the country in 2022 with 36.5% of eligible voters casting ballots. It currently

has one of the highest youth voter registration rates in the U.S.

At 27, Joz Mara, a student at Lansing Community College, is just at the edge of Gen Z. Mara said they've already made their decision about who they plan to vote for.

"No unsureness," they said. "I like having rights. I have a uterus, I'm dating a non-cis person, I'm genderqueer."

Mara's concerns are not unfounded. The Trump Administration led to substantial allowances of LGBTQ+ discrimination through various institutions. A 2020 study of the administration's impact on the mental health of gender-nonconforming individuals led to greater fear for their personal well-being.

For many young voters, Trump's efforts to diminish women's healthcare and reproductive rights throughout his presidency has nullified him as a feasible candidate.

Jenna McIntire, 21, a criminology major, is voting Harris for "her interviews about abortion and women's healthcare, and what Trump says about women and the same issues."

In Carson City, Michigan, Doug Chuong, 27, a second-generation Vietnamese immigrant who works as an operations specialist for a freight brokerage, said he can't see himself voting for Trump.

"Personally, I am an advocate for human rights and women's rights," Chuong said.

He said he hears a lot of people who share his views about Trump.

"What I see a lot is people saying, 'Try not to list a reason you're voting for Kamala without listing Trump,'" Chuong said. "And, I

mean, Trump is a pretty good reason. The guy has been dishonest, unreliable."

For Michael Ricard, 20, a student at the University of Michigan-Flint, Trump's policies are the reason Trump will get his vote.

"The economy and policy factor into it," Ricard said. "Another big thing is global relations, how they were then versus now—I think it's been getting worse."

Jason Kosnoski, a political science professor at University of Michigan-Flint, said students seem to be asking critical questions about economic policy and foreign policy. He also noted that students are becoming skeptical of the two-party system.

"Biden tried to do a good job with reducing student loan debt, but it wasn't primary in his political agenda," Kosnoski said. "You can have a politician with an agreeable policy, but it depends on how salient that is. Politicians are not focused on what students are focused on."

Young voters have indeed been growing dissatisfied. A 2024 poll from Harvard Political Review found that a majority of voters age 18 to 27 are committed to voting yet increasingly disillusioned with politics, which could create challenges for young voter turnout.

Lukas Warner, 22, a senior at the University of Michigan-Flint, said if he votes, he will choose Harris. But his lack of trust in the government may keep him away from the ballot box altogether.

"I feel like it's being run incompetently," Warner said. "It makes me not want to be involved, which I know is a problem right now. I don't feel there's anyone that represents me."



The signatures of Donald Trump's supporters are seen on a campaign bus during a town hall for the Trump-Vance campaign at the Waukesha County Expo Center in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024. Photo by Talia Sprague

# Kenosha County continues divisive trend for 2024 election

By Emily Ramirez

For a century, Wisconsin has been a swing state in American politics, basically up for grabs to either a Democrat or a Republican running for president.

Kenosha County in southeastern Wisconsin, less than an hour north of solidly blue Chicago, has reflected that same division in the past three presidential elections.

In the 2012 presidential election, Barack Obama and his running mate, Joe Biden, won Kenosha County by a margin of about 12 percentage points, with 55.47% of votes going to Obama compared to 43.23% of votes going to Republican challenger Mitt Romney. Obama went on to win the entire state of Wisconsin in that election.

In 2016, the margin shrank to 0.33 percentage points, with former President Donald Trump winning 46.85% of Kenosha County voters compared to Democratic challenger Hillary Clinton's 46.52%, marking

the first time since 1972 that a majority of Kenosha County voted for the Republican ticket.

In August 2022, the Kenosha County primary showed 57.4% of ballot casters in the county identified as Republicans compared to 42.34% who identified as Democrats. Wisconsin Democratic Gov. Tony Evers would later win the statewide election in November of that year.

In the August primary held this year, the majority party in the county switched to 56.73% Democrat and 42.88% Republican.

Victoria Dominguez, 74, a longtime resident of Kenosha County noted changes in the political climate.

"I have seen that people seem to be more open about letting other people know their preferred parties," Dominguez said. "The Trump supporters are a little more vocal, but Democrats and the other third parties are simply silent, but present."

In August 2020, as the country was reeling from protests following the murder of George Floyd, a police officer in Kenosha shot and seriously injured Jacob S. Blake, a 29-year-old Black man. In the civil unrest that followed, Kyle Rittenhouse, 17 at the time, shot two people in Kenosha but was eventually acquitted of all charges in a criminal trial. The trial divided the nation, particularly over issues of gun rights and vigilantism.

For many in the county, the shooting, protests and the aftermath is what pushed them to vote. Dominguez voted for the first time in that election.

"After the protests that happened in Kenosha due to race profiling, our community seemed to be wanting some changes," Dominguez said. "The county has grown a lot and I also have seen that the number of Hispanic and Latino neighbors

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The shadow of a campaign staff member is seen on the side of a campaign bus during a town hall for supporters of former President Donald Trump at the Waukesha County Expo Center in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024. **Photo by Talia Sprague**

have grown as well. I am hoping that my vote counts to support changes to our Hispanic communities."

For the November 2020 election, the Trump-Pence ticket won Kenosha County by a margin of 3.14%, but lost the state of Wisconsin as a whole.

Four years later, the county is still divided over issues of gun rights. Both major political parties are attempting to reach out to voters through canvassing and rallies. In the month leading up to the Nov. 5 election, Republican and Democratic canvassers went door-to-door in Kenosha.

This photo essay represents a snapshot from those events.

### Republican Party

From Sept. 23 to 25, the Trump campaign led rallies across the state of Wisconsin ending in Waukesha, an hour north of Kenosha. The bus tour had the goal of hyping up voters and emphasizing the importance of reaching out. Rally goers spent the hour before the start of the rally discussing their excitement over a second Trump term.

Kathleen Summerhill, 41, was a volunteer for Trump Force 47, Turning Point USA and America First Policy Institute. Her inspiration for volunteering comes from her passion and worries about the economy. "I'm a mom of three kids, and I'm single. So

everything that I do is dependent on me."

Hilario Deleon, 23, chair of the Republican Party of Milwaukee County, shared those worries about the economy. The 2024 election "is one of the single most important elections of our lifetimes," Deleon said. He added that energy independence and taxes were also top issues for voters.

### Democratic Party

The Kenosha County Democratic Party hosted three watch parties on Oct. 1 for the vice presidential debate between Democratic running mate Tim Walz, the governor of Minnesota, and Republican running mate JD Vance, a senator from Ohio.

Two watch parties were located in the city of Kenosha with one held west of Interstate 94, known locally as Westosha. Local bar Union Park Tavern held another with about 20 attendees. Over half of the attendees were under the age of 35.

Andrew Weber, 32, will be voting in his third presidential election in November. He said the threat of Project 2025 is driving him and other young voters to the polls. "When I found out about that, the stakes got much higher. It's not going to do much to me, but I have a lot of people that it is absolutely going to destroy," Weber said. Project 2025 is the 922-page blueprint for an incoming conservative president from

the Heritage Foundation that Trump has tried to distance himself from in the weeks leading up to the election.

Along with Project 2025, reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights are driving factors for first-time voter Roux Davis, 18, who said, "The election determines whether or not I have the right to my own decisions."

Not all young voters share the same views. Tyler Kelly, 22, has been following the Harris campaign, including viewing a rally held in Milwaukee arena Fiserv Forum. Having voted in 2020, Kelly said the 2024 election carries new excitement with Harris as the candidate. "I just really feel the energy," Kelly said. "I think young people are ready to turn out in droves and elect Kamala Harris to be president."

Photos continued on next page



Protesters gather outside the Fairmont Hotel in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2024. Former President Donald Trump was being interviewed by Bloomberg News in front of the Economic Club of Chicago inside the Fairmont Hotel prior to the 2024 Presidential Election.



A passerby walks past protesters outside the Fairmont Hotel in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2024. Former President Donald Trump was being interviewed by Bloomberg News in front of the Economic Club of Chicago inside the Fairmont Hotel prior to the 2024 Presidential Election.

Photos by Talia Sprague



1 Vivek Ramaswamy speaks to and holds the hand of a supporter during a town hall for supporters of former President Donald Trump at the Waukesha County Expo Center in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024.

2 A supporter of former President Donald Trump sets up flags prior to a town hall for the Trump-Vance campaign at the Waukesha County Expo Center in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024.

3 Supporters of former President Donald Trump wait in line to purchase merchandise during a town hall for the Trump-Vance campaign at the Waukesha County Expo Center in Waukesha, Wisconsin on Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2024.





A pedestrian walks past an empty newspaper box containing a poster promoting the campaign of Vice President Kamala Harris outside of the Milwaukee Public Library in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024. Photo by Nathan Bieneman

# Young male voters in Wisconsin talk about Trump's push to win them over

By Nathan Bieneman

The Trump campaign has aggressively pursued a strategy of podcast appearances in the remaining weeks leading up to the Nov. 5 election in an effort to appeal to young men aged 18 to 24, a voting bloc that consistently has the lowest rate of voter turnout.

According to the Center for American Women and Politics, young men aged 18 to 24 are even less likely to vote than women in the same age range. The turnout rate of young men was 49% in the 2020 election and 40% in 2016. In comparison, young women had a 53.9% turnout in 2020 and a 46% turnout in 2016.

Wisconsin, one of seven swing states, played a part in deciding the election in former President Donald Trump's favor in 2016. In a close 2024 election that could be decided by a handful of votes, young male voters have become an important target of the Trump campaign.

Trump's media appearances in the last several months have included a series of podcast interviews with the Nelk Boys, a popular group of Canadian pranksters, and Theo Von, a mostly apolitical comedian. Trump also appeared on a livestream with Adin Ross. At the end of the livestream, Ross gifted Trump a custom-wrapped Tesla Cybertruck adorned with the now famous image of Trump bleeding and holding his fist in the air after surviving an assassination attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania.

Trump has also made use of sporting events to promote his campaign, like when he walked out to thunderous applause at an Ultimate Fighting Champion event in New Jersey days after his criminal conviction in New York City. He also attended a Alabama-Georgia college football game last month.

"Young men enjoy fighting, they enjoy

the Nelk Boys, anything like that," said Cameron Schmidtkecht, a 18-year-old student at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and an undecided voter. "Him going to the Georgia-Bama game, it's just cool to see someone that could be your president do something that you also enjoy."

Josh Pandl, a 20-year-old UWM student who is leaning towards voting for Trump, also said he thinks these appearances are helping the campaign.

"It makes him more of a people's person because he's going out and doing normal people things and talking to people," Pandl said.

Jonathan Jacobs, a 19-year-old UWM student who does not have any plans to vote, said while these appeals may work for some voters, the majority is not likely to take the strategy seriously,

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Patrons play pool and darts at a bar in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Saturday Oct. 5 2024.



A group of four consume a Shotski at an Oktoberfest celebration in Cathedral Square park near the Milwaukee School of Engineering in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Saturday Oct. 5 2024. Photos by Nathan Bieneman





A campaign billboard for former President Donald J. Trump outside of a bar called Stellas in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Saturday Oct. 5 2024.

Photo by Nathan Bieneman

"This is not really like a political thing," Jacobs said. "You're treating this stuff like a halftime show. That's not what politics is. I just feel like it's a bunch of phony stuff."

Nate Hall, a 21-year-old UWM student who plans to vote for Trump, also said Trump's strategy is a double-edged sword.

"It encourages young voters, but it also encourages the other side as well to vote against him," Hall said.

Hall pointed out that while a segment of Trump's audience will be entertained by the podcast appearances, just as many people will be lost as they will be gained.

"He brings in but he also brings against," Hall said. "I don't think it's going to be much of a benefit for him."

Hall said one of his major reasons for supporting Trump is foreign policy.

"I'm more of an isolationist," Hall said. "So I like his foreign policy. That's my main thing. I don't think he's the greatest

on some of the other things at times, but I don't know, I don't like the wars. I'm a big anti-war guy."

Pandl also said he likes Trump's policies.

"I think that in general Trump is going to be better for the economy," Pandl said. "I think that he's just a stronger leader that I think has better foreign policies and stuff like that."

Kathleen Dolan, a political science professor at the UWM, has conducted research on the degree to which gender impacts the results of political campaigns. Dolan said that tracking the impact of candidate appearances on new media platforms is difficult.

"We haven't caught up yet with them in terms of our research to know who's consuming what, and most importantly, whether it's having an impact," Dolan said.

Dolan said Trump's strategies seem

useful in terms of publicity but she doubts whether they will change people's minds.

"I think it is a strategy that is at least worth pursuing because the key in this election, and in presidential elections, the last three or four of them, it's not about persuading voters as much as it is making sure that they vote," Dolan said.

"What he is trying to do is not convince them to vote for him. He is trying to make sure they get out and vote."

Jonah Byron, a 19-year-old UWM student, will be voting on Nov. 5, for Kamala Harris. Byron said he understands the strategies behind Trump's campaign for young male voters like himself, even if he doesn't approve of those strategies.

"To young guys I think it does appeal," Byron said. "That's what his demographic of supporters like."



1 A flag supporting Vice President Kamala Harris and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz hangs outside of a house in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024.

2 A pro-Trump flag hung outside student housing near the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee campus in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Monday, Oct. 14, 2024.

3 A passerby walks past a political sign in the 2500-block of East Edgewood Avenue in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024. The neighborhood is across the street from the UW-Milwaukee campus.



# North Carolina sees record early voter turnout in pivotal swing state

By Emmy Berger

In just over 48 hours in early October, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington Young Democrats put together a canvassing event to register new voters. It was just days ahead of the Oct. 11 voter registration deadline, and there was an urgency to their actions.

As in other swing states, voters in North Carolina could decide the presidential race. Democratic candidate and Vice President Kamala Harris and Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump were in a dead heat at the time of publication, and, barring something unforeseen, that is not likely to change.

North Carolina voters seem to know what it is at stake. The North Carolina Board of Elections reported that the state set a first-day early voting record of 353,166 ballots on Oct. 17.

"When we're out canvassing, it's nice when we get people engaged in conversation. It's inspiring," said UNCW Democrats member Samantha Bryan. "There's definitely a good amount of apathy on campus, but it's not disheartening because we get an equal amount of support."

In North Carolina, Trump won the state in both 2016 and 2020, although the margin of victory was slim.

Often called a "purple" state, candidates deliberately work to swing North Carolina and bring its 16 electoral votes to their side.

"North Carolina is very much a battleground state," said Aaron King, professor of political Science at UNCW. "It is unique in that sense because there are only a handful of them. That's why we get extra candidate visits, and all the ads that we get. Being in a battleground state, particularly a battleground region of a battleground state, it is quite competitive here, particularly once you throw in the surrounding areas."

That's why getting young people to vote is key for many canvassers. In 2022 youth voter turnout ranged from 37 percent to 13 percent across the country, according to the Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, or Circle. North Carolina fell in the middle with 23.1 percent, a 6.9 percent increase from the state's youth voter turnout in 2014.

Ella Cacali, a volunteer for UNCW Young Democrats, said students frequently tell volunteers how relieved they are to have found them so they can register to vote.

"It's nice when those people are seeking you out and take action to register and you can actually help them out with that," Cacali



People stand in line for early voting at the New Hanover Senior Resource Center in Wilmington, North Carolina, on Oct. 21, 2024.

Photo by Emmy Berger

said. "It's a good feeling to have."

While there is a buzz in the air surrounding this election season, not all students feel excitement when seeing the canvassers and election signs on campus.

"There is definitely something to be said about over-saturating the environment," said unaffiliated first-time voter Braeden Potter-Gendle. "If every 30 seconds I'm watching an ad telling me to vote for somebody this or somebody that, it sort of makes me not want to vote for anybody at all."

Potter-Gendle said he will ultimately vote out of civic duty. But he won't engage with the canvassers.

"I don't necessarily trust that someone who is trying to canvas for the Democratic party or canvas for the Republican party is actually going to give me an accurate depiction of the way things are," Potter-Gendle said.

Potter-Gendle isn't alone in this. In 2020, 33% of Gen Z voters were registered as unaffiliated, with 26 percent being registered Democrats and seven percent being registered Republicans. According to PEW Research, younger voters are also more likely than older voters to be partisan "leaners," meaning they feel more comfortable extending beyond party lines when casting their vote.

Among young people, new voters are taking interest in issues versus candidates.

"It becomes more personal, such as women's rights and abortion rights, things to do with immigration in the country or student loans," said Mack Gregory, a local canvasser with You Can Vote. "All of that is very personal to students, so I definitely think

it's more issue driven."

Gregory said the students he talks to want to know more so they can make an informed choice.

"There is a clear drive that they want to be more politically active especially with how tense this election is," Gregory said. "Despite how tense it currently is, it is very sweet that so many students are willing to learn more about each other. They aren't going to immediately shut down."

But while many young people have personal political opinions, not all feel spurred to vote to support them.

Davis Bell, a UNCW senior who has consistently voted since he turned 18, said he thinks he knows why.

"The reason young people think the government doesn't care about them is because they don't care about the government," Bell said. "It's going to take a new generation of politicians because 99% of the people on this campus couldn't tell you the names of the politicians that affect their lives," Bell said. "Hell, I couldn't. I'm guilty of that as well."

King, the professor, said politicians would do well to engage more with young voters, even if young voters are not what candidates think are "the biggest return on their investment."

"Every new generation of voters is a brand-new opportunity for candidates," King said. "Young people need to take that advantage and present themselves as a formidable voting block to then tell political consultants and candidates, 'Hey, you need to pay attention to this.'"

# Presidential candidates offer two different visions for environment, how to deal with 'forever chemicals'

By Cin Castellanos



Illustration by Haley Nowak

In the 2024 U.S. presidential election, the major party candidates are taking starkly different approaches to the environment, which in turn will impact how they plan to address the class of toxic chemicals known as “forever chemicals” due to their persistence in the environment and the human body.

Scientists estimate that more than 200 million Americans could have toxic fluorinated chemicals in their drinking water.

Forever chemicals, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), are a large group of chemicals that make certain products nonstick or stain resistant. Exposure to PFAS is linked to cancers, weakened immune systems in children, weight gain and a host of other health problems.

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, nearly all people in the United States have measurable amounts of PFAS in their blood.

“Once they get into the environment, they don't go away. Once they get in the human body, they don't seem to go away,” said David Dolak, professor in the former Department of Science and Mathematics at Columbia College College who teaches environmental science. This lasting presence of PFAS is one of the primary concerns driving regulatory efforts.

Environmental issues like forever chemicals matter to Generation Z voters. A 2021 Pew Research Center study found that Gen Z U.S. adults are the generation most likely to engage in conversations on climate change and express concerns about its long-term impacts. Additionally, 67% of Gen Z advocate for immediate climate action on a weekly basis.

“This issue really is a thing that I pay attention to when I am considering voting,” said Casiel Garcia, a junior illustration major at Columbia College Chicago.

Although neither candidate has made forever chemicals a major campaign issue, a look at their general plans for the environment and their past records offers clues about how, and if, they will target them.

Democratic candidate and Vice President Kamala Harris was part of the Biden administration's 2021 PFAS Roadmap, which

set timelines for the Environmental Protection Agency to take specific actions and create policies for forever chemicals. It led to the establishment of strict new limits for the chemicals in drinking water implemented earlier this year.

Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, signed landmark legislation in 2023 in his state that prohibits the use of toxic PFAS across a range of common consumer goods.

“I believe there needs to be regulations on that,” said Tupac Austin, a senior music business major at Columbia College.

Harris' policy proposals focus on ensuring enforceable national limits on PFOA and PFOS, which are both part of the larger class of chemicals being PFAS, found in drinking water. She also focuses on investing in water-cleaning infrastructure and supporting marginalized communities disproportionately affected by toxic chemical exposure.

Meanwhile Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump has talked about climate change on the campaign trail but not PFAS specifically. Trump has also tried to distance himself from the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, which proposes to scale back key regulations, including reducing EPA funding in favor of industrial interests.

“Not a lot of these chemicals are being regulated, and because of that, people are going to get sicker,” said Emily Cruz-Tello, a senior music business major at Columbia College Chicago.

Eddie Stevenson, a junior animation major at Columbia College Chicago, expressed frustration with the lack of clear, actionable plans.

“I feel like both politicians have been so wishy-washy about talking about actual policies that it's so hard to even sit here and say, oh, this person's doing this and this person's doing that,” Stevenson said.

Harris' platform is distinguished by its commitment to environmental justice, particularly for low-income and marginalized communities. These groups are often more vulnerable to the harmful effects of pollutants like PFAS due to their proximity to industrial areas. Harris plans to direct federal resources toward these communities, offering water filtration systems, cleanup projects and medical assistance to those affected. For many student voters, this focus on environmental justice is a key consideration.

Meanwhile, Trump's deregulation strategy, while promoting economic growth, could reduce the government's role in protecting public health.

For Demi White, a junior marketing major at Columbia College Chicago, Trump's stance on deregulation, especially regarding toxic chemicals, raises alarm.

“I just think he's going to try to kill us,” White said.

Ultimately, voters in 2024 are faced with two highly contrasting visions for the future of PFAS regulation and environmental protection. Harris' platform offers stricter regulations, investments in public health and support for vulnerable communities. Trump's plan favors industrial deregulation and reduced governmental intervention.

But Avery Miller, a junior illustration major at Columbia College Chicago, saw both candidates' political promises as just that.

“They have all these claims that they're going to do these things but then have no actual outline of what they're going to do,” Miller said.

# Election reporting initiative for students expands election coverage nationwide

By Allie Miller

When the Center for Community News based at the University of Vermont launched its Elections & Democracy Reporting Initiative in August, its goal was to give student reporters the space and resources to fill the gaps in local election reporting. By mid-October, 125 colleges across 46 states had expressed interest in being a part of the project.

Since the initiative began in August, it has been a race to November, said Sarah Gamard, program manager for the CCN overseeing the project.

Because most local media outlets don't have the staff or resources to cover every race in their community, the students are filling the gaps.

"Local politics matters, local elections matter, and, in some cases, affect readership more than the presidential election," Gamard said.

Institutions that are part of the initiative's cohort send their election stories to CCN after being published on their own platforms, ranging from campus newspapers to university-related nonprofit outlets to news services. Upon receiving the stories, CCN publishes them on the National Community News Wire's Election Hub. Though it's not an exhaustive list, it serves as an aggregation of work students are doing across the nation this election season, Gamard said.

Across 10 of the 12 Midwestern states, 23 institutions have joined the Elections & Democracy Reporting Initiative, Gamard said. One is Denison University. The Reporting Project, from Denison University's journalism program, is a nonprofit news organization born in 2020 that covers Licking County, Ohio, and its surrounding regions. With the goal of being the local news source for the Licking County community, Julia Lerner, managing editor of The Reporting Project who advises the students, said the initiative has increased its election coverage.

Denison's location in Central Ohio, not far from Springfield, Ohio, where big-ticket issues like immigration are at play, lends itself to a "great experience for our students who are learning how to do this in a place where elections are pretty contentious and will mean something," Lerner said.

"Giving our students the opportunity to actually cover these major issues in a way that is supportive of our community is a game changer," Lerner said.

Corey Ohlenkamp, director of Unified Media at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, who oversees four student



"I Voted" stickers sit on a table at the 26th ward's early voting location in Humboldt Park Library in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024.

Photo by Addison Annis

publications at Ball State, said the resources provided through the initiative — including tip sheets on election coverage and a community of people all working toward the same goal — provide a huge confidence boost to student journalists.

"It's vital," Ohlenkamp said. "It's a chance to lean in and say, 'How are other people approaching this?'"

Races like county coroner and auditor are ones students might not know a lot about, Ohlenkamp said, but the initiative gives students the ability to look at others' coverage in different areas to understand reporting options. Seth Richardson, lecturer of journalism at the University of Minnesota, said there is generally a lot less coverage for local elections, which can be the ones that prepare people to be civically engaged through their lives.

"Expanding both the number of angles that we can explore, as well as the types of people who are exploring those angles can give us a more well-rounded understanding of this election," said Richardson, who added that he sees political coverage as the foundation of newsroom coverage.

Part of the importance of this initiative is connected to the fact that many colleges and universities — especially ones in rural counties — are located in news deserts, Gamard said.

"It's not ideal that we exist with news deserts. It's not good for any communities," Gamard said. "So a solution right now is to have student reporters learn the ropes by just helping professionals in ways that they can."

In 2023, the Northwestern Medill Local News Initiative labeled 1,766 counties in the U.S. as news deserts, defined by each county having one or zero local newspapers. Only the south has fewer media outlets than the Midwest. Of the Midwest's rural college campuses, 206 are located in or adjacent to counties with one or zero local news outlets.

Franklin College in Franklin, Indiana, also participates in the initiative. Located about 25 miles south of the state's capital of Indianapolis, Colleen Steffen, executive editor of TheStatehouseFile.com at Franklin College, said they're in a "weird news ecosystem," especially since Indiana has the second lowest voter turnout in the nation after West Virginia.

"We're really saturated for political news in Indianapolis, which is kind of a weird situation to be in," explained Steffen, who is also a lecturer of journalism. "So the students and I really have to look for holes in the coverage and little places that we can contribute and not repeat."

Faculty at higher education institutions who encourage and guide student reporters through the learning process — from writing candidate profiles, to sifting through court records, to finding out if candidates are really who they say they are — give Gamard hope.

"It's incredibly important for the students to learn this stuff," Gamard said. "Of course, not all of these students are going to become reporters, but they are going to become more engaged citizens, and hopefully that will create a ripple effect."

# Shaped by faith: a young councilman's coming of age

By Ryan Grieser and Lylee Gibbs

As a teen in St. Louis, Gabriel Dickerson said his life had veered off course. He was trapped in a cycle of bad choices and was in trouble.

In December of 2021, at the suggestion of an associate, Dickerson attended a Saturday service in Cairo, a small town at the very bottom of Illinois at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, 158 miles from his hometown. After the service, Dickerson knew he wanted more from his life – and that he needed a fresh start to make it happen. Soon after, he packed up and moved to Cairo. What he found in this small, rural town was even greater than he expected: He discovered his voice and ignited a passion to make a difference in service to his community.

Just over a year after making Cairo his new home, Dickerson ran for and won a seat on the Cairo City Council, taking nearly 63% of the vote in the April 2023 election.

When he was sworn into office the following month, the then 20-year-old became one of the youngest council persons ever elected in the town's 200-year history.

"I didn't come down here to be a politician," Dickerson said. "I didn't come down here to be an elected official or be in government of any sorts, I was just trying to escape what I was in and find something better for my life."

In the process, he's also working to make things better for Cairo. While breaking into politics in a bigger city can be challenging at his age, Cairo embraced his youth.

Cairo is the government seat of Alexander County, the fastest shrinking county in America. Its population of 1,600 is not only dwindling, but also aging, as what few young people remain leave for opportunities elsewhere. Dickerson wants to reverse those trends, and his youth may be an asset in getting it done.

"I want to tackle entertainment," he said, naming one of his top goals for the three remaining years of his four-year term. "We don't have anything to really do in Cairo. That's a lot of our problem right now, a lot of reasons why the kids don't want to stay here. If there's nothing for them to stay and want to hold on to, then they're not going to stay, they're going to leave. And if everybody starts leaving, then the city eventually dies."

Dickerson is also aware of Cairo's long and troubled racial history, marked by civil rights battles that raged into the 1960s and



Cairo City Councilman and Fire Commissioner Gabriel Dickerson, 22, looks out the window of the Cairo Public Library Oct. 4, 2024 in Cairo, Illinois. Dickerson was elected to the city council in May of 2023 where he is one of the youngest persons in the council's history to be sworn in. Dickerson, originally from St. Louis, moved to Cairo and says his biggest drive is his faith. "I didn't come down here to be a politician," Dickerson said. "I didn't come down here to be an elected official or be in government of any sorts, I was just trying to escape what I was in and find something better for my life. And so ever since then, because I did that for him, he's done things for me, and he's put me in these positions."

Photo by Lylee Gibbs

1970s and beyond, long after much of the country had conceded rights to Black people in government and workplaces. The town experienced shootings and riots that brought Army National Guard tanks to its streets and drew headlines across the nation. In 1980, white people, elected at-large, still entirely ruled the town, prompting a lawsuit by Black leaders who wanted a seat at the council table. That year, they were victorious in a federal consent decree that mandated Cairo move to a ward-based system, finally allowing a pathway for Black citizens to elect their own representatives.

When he won his Ward II seat last year and was later named Fire Commissioner,

Dickerson said he reflected on the significance of his own role on a council now entirely governed by Black citizens. While Cairo's Black citizens have made gains in the years since, Dickerson said that many of the town's problems today are rooted in racism.

"We're able to finally fight back again," he said, "but it makes it hard to undo everything that's already been done."

Maintaining a vibrant elected class is important for rural communities, and creating a space for young people at the table is essential to this effort, said Corey Wiggins, the federal co-chair of the Delta Regional Authority. The DRA is a federal-state program created in 2000 to support economic

development and community rejuvenation in the Alabama Black Belt and lower Mississippi River regions. It encompasses eight states and 252 counties including Alexander County in southern Illinois.

"I think ultimately at the end of the day, whether you're young or old, you want to have a good, strong, vibrant community," Wiggins said. "And I think as a young person who's serving on city council, elected government, serving on boards or just being active in our community, that voice is powerful, that voice has value."

## Driven by service, faith

Dickerson's path to political office has been shaped by his faith at nearly every step. It's what originally brought him to Cairo and is one of the reasons why he ran for city council in the first place.

"At the time that I came down here... I was going through a lot of stuff back at home or my hometown that I was putting myself through, and it was a point in time that I didn't know what to believe in," Dickerson said. "I didn't know if there was a God or not."

These uncertain thoughts were answered when, according to Dickerson, "the Most High showed himself to me." This led to Dickerson making the permanent move to Cairo and to one of the most important moments of his life: when he joined the local congregation of the Seventh Day Assembly.

"I came down on the Sabbath, so it was a Saturday morning when I came down here. That's when I met my mentor, and then we went to service together," Dickerson said. "I sat in the first pew, and I remember them playing the music, and I just broke down. I'm crying, tears all down my face, everything."

He knew he wouldn't be the same after that day.

"That was the first time in my life that I really felt something, and it's indescribable. It's just divine, you know?" Dickerson said.

This divine connection led Dickerson to begin digging deeper into his faith, prompting him to read the entire Bible and a number of commentaries. Now, he's a teacher himself.

"I teach on TikTok Live with my friend. He teaches the word, I teach the word, and it's just a beautiful thing," Dickerson said. "I came from a place of not knowing what to believe in, and now that I found it, it's not even a belief for me anymore... I know that Yah is real."

That initial Sabbath was important for more reasons than affirming Dickerson's faith. It also marked the day he met his mentor, Phillip Matthews.

Matthews, who serves as the shepherd of the congregation at the Seventh Day Assembly, is also the Alexander County Democratic Party Chair. Dickerson said Matthews helped him see his potential.

"I never really had somebody with spiritual insight like that really talk to me about what I got going on, and I think we made

a connection," Dickerson said, adding that Matthews "really wanted to push me to do better with my life."

Matthews, who has been the assembly's pastor for 29 years, said he has met a lot of people but not all of them have the special attributes that make Dickerson a standout. Many people, Matthews said, want to make something more of their life, but not everyone has the drive to do it like Dickerson.

For instance, he said, Dickerson wanted Matthews to teach him to play the piano, despite that he had no musical background. And though he quickly picks up new skills, Matthews said that Dickerson became a competent pianist in a relatively short amount of time through dedicated practice.

"He is unique. He has great abilities," he said, though noted that his sharp mind is only part of the equation. "It's not enough to have a desire to play. You have to have a commitment to play. So he's committed in whatever it is that he does and that's a strong trait that a lot of people lack."

Dickerson said it was Matthews who encouraged him to get involved in politics. But when Matthews suggested it to him, "I told him at first that I didn't want anything to do with it," he recalled. But then Dickerson agreed to give it a try, first by serving in a largely background role as a precinct committeeman. But then he got angry.

In 2022 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced plans to tear down the Connell Smith public housing apartment complex in Cairo. The decision displaced 53 families and shuttered some of the last affordable housing in the city.

Dickerson said that how HUD announced the decision was "really wrong," and that flipped a switch for him.

"I couldn't just sit back and not do anything, because I felt like if I did, if I'm seeing the problem and not being a part of the solution, and I'm part of the problem... somebody has to get out there and fight for those people that don't know how to fight for themselves," Dickerson said.

## Setting a good example

As a newly minted councilman who is also relatively new to town, Dickerson acknowledges he faces a steep learning curve.

"This is my first term, so I'm not going to sit here and lie to you guys and say that I have everything figured out, that I know exactly what I'm doing, because I don't," Dickerson said.

But only one year into his term, he's already leaving his mark. Dickerson said one of the best parts of his leadership role is helping set a good example for other youth. He encourages them to embrace their own potential and get involved, too.

One youth in particular drew Dickerson's focus.

"A young kid, he's two blocks down from

me... he's in middle school, but he comes to the city council meetings. I caught him in the hallway of City Hall one day... he was looking at the pictures of all the old council members and mayors," Dickerson said.

"I'm like, 'Is this what you want to do? You're interested in this stuff?' And he's like, 'Yeah. That's what I want to do,'" Dickerson said.

In today's world of hyper-partisan politics, Dickerson is a bit of a throwback.

"I'm not Democrat only or Republican, I vote for people and character," he said. "It doesn't matter who or what you represent, but as long as you have the right motives, I will vote for you, because that's what I believe in."

Working with the Democratic Party, Dickerson has met and talked with many politicians, including several high-ranking state officials. His motivation for running for office didn't stem from awe of them though.

"It wasn't really the fact that they were so high up that got me to that point where I was like, 'I want to do this to help people.' It was more the fact that I saw that they have influence to help people," Dickerson said.

The job doesn't always come easy. Dickerson feels as though his leadership style is both fair and stern. Though, being both new to politics and so young, he said he does sometimes experience times of uncertainty and awkwardness.

"What I will say is that I'm doing everything I can to the best of my ability to really make a difference. I don't want to just sit in the seat and not do anything... I at least want to, if I decide to run again, give people a reason to vote for me again," Dickerson said.

If Dickerson does decide to run for reelection, it seems as though he'll have a clear path to victory. Though Dickerson sees them as jokes, some people in town have started calling him the next mayor. One resident has an even higher office in mind for him.

"I have an older lady that lives a few blocks down and calls me Mr. President," Dickerson said with a laugh.

Dickerson isn't ready to say whether he'd run for a higher office, such as mayor, a state representative or even Congress.

"I plan to stay here for the next three years to finish off this term, and if the Most High allows me to stay again and run again, and allows me to hold the position, absolutely I will. If it's a higher office... I'm with it. If that's where he sends me, I'm not going to fight against any of it, whether I want to do it or not," Dickerson said.

And he hopes his perseverance sets a good example for other young people in town.

"Our young people have to get out of this mindset that there's nothing we can do. There is something we can do, and all that is just getting involved," Dickerson said. "The more you're involved, the more people you come in contact with, the more connections you make, the more legs you have to stand on."



Pro-Palestine students and community members march on Saint Louis University's campus on May 1, 2024. This was days after Washington University arrested nearly 100 protesters on its campus.

Photo by Kallie Cox

# 'The anti-war vote:' Some Gen Z voters disillusioned by Democratic Party amid Israel's attacks on Gaza

By Kallie Cox

In a contentious presidential election where the term "genocide Joe" was commonplace among Generation Z voters and at campus protests, Kamala Harris brought a wave of hope and excitement to voters appalled by Israel's onslaught of Gaza.

When President Joe Biden dropped out as the party's prospective nominee and Harris replaced him, young voters drowned the internet in memes and posts supporting her campaign.

Despite this momentary excitement — and the energy young voters brought to the Democrats with the "Brat-ification" of Harris and the coconut tree memes — that hope is dead for many and with it, their faith in the Democratic Party.

Now instead of the refrain "vote blue no matter who," popularized by millennials in the 2020 election, some young voters told GJR that they aren't going to make a decision until Election Day or will vote for a third party candidate.

The hesitance to vote Democrat does not in any way signal support for Trump, Gen-Z activists for Palestine are quick to point out. Instead, it is a matter of morality for a generation that argues it is watching a genocide unfold in real-time.

"This is not just an issue. This is a genocide, and it keeps, keeps us up at night," a voter and uncommitted delegate, Michael Berg told Gateway Journalism Review.

While many young voters aren't

supportive of Harris because of her policy decisions and rhetoric on Israel and Palestine, it is likely they will still vote for her.

Harris holds a 31-point lead over Trump among voters under 30, according to the latest Harvard Youth Poll and as Tuft's CIRCLE points out, younger voters aren't typically single-issue voters.

No matter how young constituents cast their ballots this election, voting on other important issues — including Missouri's abortion legalization amendment — is critical, says

Sonal Churiwal, a Washington University junior studying political science and women, gender and sexuality studies in St. Louis.



## Multi-generational support for Palestinians

While the pro-Palestine movement is made up of all generations, Gen-Z has been especially vocal with encampments and protests on college campuses.

As a survey by the Pew Research Center found, voters under 30 are more likely to show sympathy for the Palestinian people than for Israel. The survey, published in April, found that among 12,693 U.S. adults: "A third of adults under 30 say their sympathies lie either entirely or mostly with the Palestinian people, while 14% say their sympathies lie entirely or mostly with the Israeli people. The rest say their sympathies lie equally with both, with neither or that they are not sure."

Voters under 30 are also more likely to believe the U.S. should not be supplying military aid to Israel. "Only 16% of adults under 30 favor the U.S. providing military aid to Israel," the survey found.

The pro-Palestinian movement sent 30 uncommitted delegates to the Democratic National Convention to make a statement.

## Uncommitted

The uncommitted movement — whose slogan is "not another bomb" — was a grassroots campaign among voters to cast their ballots for "uncommitted," in the non-competitive, Democratic primary in protest of Biden's handling of the crisis.

The movement started in Michigan and spread to Missouri and several other states amounting to 30 electoral delegates.

Berg, one of Missouri's three uncommitted delegates, described the Democratic convention as joyful with a sense of euphoria among constituents after Harris was announced as the nominee. The movement was enthusiastic about the change and was planning to send a representative on stage to officially endorse Harris, Berg said.

This speaker was prohibited from giving a speech, he said. That decision and Harris' refusal to act on ending aid to Israel, cost her their endorsement and caused an impromptu sit-in at the convention.

"We did our best, but the Democratic Party, [...] or the Harris campaign, for whatever reason, made a decision that giving us anything was not something they were going to do. It was not something they needed to do and therefore we were unable to endorse Harris," Berg said.

While Berg himself is not a member of Gen-Z, his work as a delegate led him to interact with dozens of Gen-Z voters and activists. Many young delegates he encountered at the convention were very supportive of the uncommitted movement and several wore Keffiyehs in support of Palestine and signed on to a call for a cease-fire.

Despite the movement's criticisms of Harris, it does not want another Trump presidency, Berg said.

"None of us [...] want Donald Trump as president. Donald Trump was a disaster, and will or would be, or could be a disaster if he's chosen again," Berg said. "There's absolutely no indication that he would do anything except continue just the mass murder of Palestinians and support for Israel."

## Undecided

With just under a month left until election day, young voters remain "undecided" on Harris and are unsure of whether they will vote as their conscience dictates, or for what they describe as "the lesser of two evils."

Penelope Thaman, a junior studying anthropology and women, gender & sexuality studies, has been extremely active in the movement for Palestine and in organizing calls for Washington University to divest from Boeing. She is an activist and organizer and last year served as the spokesperson for the university's encampment.

"It's been such a year of grief and anger," Thaman said. Seeing the horrific videos coming out of Gaza and observing Israel's humanitarian crimes in real time has had a profound impact on her politics.

Thaman said she will not decide who to vote for until election day.

"Too much has been frequently happening for me to confidently say — even now that we're just under a month out — 'Oh yeah, I'll definitely vote one way,' [or] 'I'll definitely vote third-party' or 'I definitely won't vote,' I find there's too much change happening," Thaman said.

While Thaman said there was a spark of political genius from the Democrats and hope among Pro-Palestine activists after Biden dropped out, this was crushed when the party refused to interact with the uncommitted delegation.

"It shattered the illusion of the Democrats actually teaming up and being a large umbrella party for all these different groups of people. Because what does it mean if you want to include Republicans in your delegation and your convention, but not an elected Democrat representative representing Palestinians," Thaman said. "They are losing all these people who feel like they can't vote with Democrats because of the [party's] support of genocide."

Churiwal, a political science student, said institutional repression is thriving and is impacting protests and politics and shows a weakened democracy.

"When I think about what a democratic election and campaign looks like, that is a two-way street that involves political candidates telling constituents what they're voting for, but it also goes the other way, where constituents are voicing what they want and need," Churiwal said. "I think

the almost complete neglect of calls for a ceasefire, calls for divestment by candidates at every level has really shown how weakened our electoral system has become in taking newer views into consideration."

Despite Churiwal's disappointment in the Democratic party, she still views voting as a complicated and deeply personal act.

"I think signaling a premature commitment to vote one way or another, in some ways deprives us of our ability to truly be pressuring candidates to give us the policies that we want," she said.

Aaron Neiman was a professor at Washington University during the April 27 protest where over 100 activists were arrested on the school's campus. He was arrested and suspended and says he too sees a disenchantment with Democrats among Gen-Z voters.

Neiman said young voters cannot be counted on as a reliable voting bloc for the Democrats as they would have been in the past.

Harris "has done so little to make any kind of meaningful overture to young people who do care about this, quite a bit for [...] because it's the most horrifying thing they've ever seen and they're astonished by the silence of the authority figures around them as we all are," he said.

"Gen Z feels like a distinct generation from mine. I think they are broadly following the trend that came before them, which is waning support for Israel and for Zionism," he said. Neiman is a millennial voter. "Part of it, I think, has to do with the fact that a lot of the violence that Israel does cannot be hidden anymore. Everyone has a phone and everyone, especially young people, are inundated with horrifying images."

While many young voters aren't supportive of Harris because of her policy decisions and rhetoric on Israel and Palestine, it is likely they will still vote for her.

Churiwal argued that other critical elections — like the St. Louis primary that ousted Cori Bush, a strong supporter of Palestine — deserve attention.

"The recent elections have really underscored the importance of looking not just at presidential elections and general elections, but looking at local elections and primaries, because all of these are important to make sure that we continue to have voices that are advocating for Palestinian liberation and abolition in every part of our government system," she said. "I think as far as the Federal Election goes, it's really disappointing to be in college in an environment where most people would consider themselves progressive, but see a lot of rhetoric that is 'vote blue no matter what.' And I think this is almost a disgrace to what progressive politics looks like."



Illustration by Kailey Ryan

## As online activism grows, young adults struggle to evaluate flood of information

By Katie Kwasneski

Generation Z is turning to TikTok, YouTube and Twitch to engage in discussions and debates on the upcoming election. It's more than the content that's grabbing attention—it's the viral nature of these conversations.

Two recent videos skyrocketed in popularity: "Can One Woke Teen Survive Twenty Trump Supporters?" and "Can 25 Liberal College Students Outsmart 1 Conservative?" They amassed 10 million and 18 million views respectively.

The woke teen is Dean Withers, a TikTok influencer who graduated from high school in 2022 and now has 950,000 followers. The conservative is Charlie Kirk of Turning Point USA, an organizer of young conservatives and supporter of Trump's.

The debates feature hot button issues like abortion and transgender identity. These debates - hosted by the YouTube channel Jubilee, which describes itself as a company that "pushes boundaries, tackles taboos, and

breaks the rules" - are reshaping how young people consume political content. Jubilee embraces discomfort and conflict as tools to spark human connection. As they put it, "We're not afraid to go there."

Generation Z represents a segment of voters who will feel the impact of political decisions and policies the longest. It's important that they're getting reliable and relevant information. Are these discussions merely clickbait? Or are they conversations that genuinely enable progress towards engaging young adults in politics and civic duty?

To find answers to these questions, we need to understand what Generation Z cares about politically, why this online content resonates with their interests, and how they can examine it and confirm its credibility so they can use it as a tool to make informed decisions at the polls, both local and national.

In 2023, Murmuration, an organization

dedicated to social engagement of young people, conducted research to understand the younger generation's attitudes and perspectives on a selection of key issues to determine how to engage them in politics. It partnered with The Walton Family Foundation and SocialSphere's John Della Volpe, director of the Harvard Youth Poll and author of *Fight: How Gen Z is Channeling Their Fear and Passion to Save America*. The purpose of this research was to understand "Zoomers", and elevate their voices, due to the impact they stand to have on the future of America, given they're 70 million strong.

In the days and weeks immediately following the 2022 midterms, the survey gathered information from both voters and non-voters through various methods. Exit polls were conducted with 606 participants, including 151 individuals aged 18-29. Additionally, six focus groups were held, four of which included participants who voted in

the midterms, and two focused on non-voters. Both focus groups consisted of 18-40-year-olds. A national survey was also conducted, gathering responses from 3,227 individuals aged 15-25, with a comparison group of 1,036 adults aged 26 and older. Lastly, informal conversations with high school and college students across different regions of the country provided insights that may have been missed in more formal surveys or polls.

The research showed that Generation Z often relies on digital platforms to guide their political decisions. In fact, 36 percent of Gen Z get their information from the internet, followed by 12 percent from social media, and 10 percent from email.

When it comes to political issues, Zoomers prioritize topics that will shape the future of society. For the 2022 midterm elections, 78 percent of Gen Z voters said addressing systemic racism was crucial. Additionally, they stood out as the only generation to rank abortion and reproductive rights (29 percent) as their top concern. The economy and inflation followed with a combined 12 percent.

Other important issues for Gen Z included climate change, school safety, and student debt forgiveness — all areas that impact vulnerable populations.

However, a major concern for many young voters was a lack of information to complete their ballots. This led to 67 percent of Gen Z voters in the study not finishing their ballots.

To engage Generation Z civically, the key is meeting them where they are: online. Recommendations for reaching this generation include presenting information in familiar formats, using relatable messages, and experimenting with new ways of delivering content. Keeping public education front and center in political discussions is also crucial.

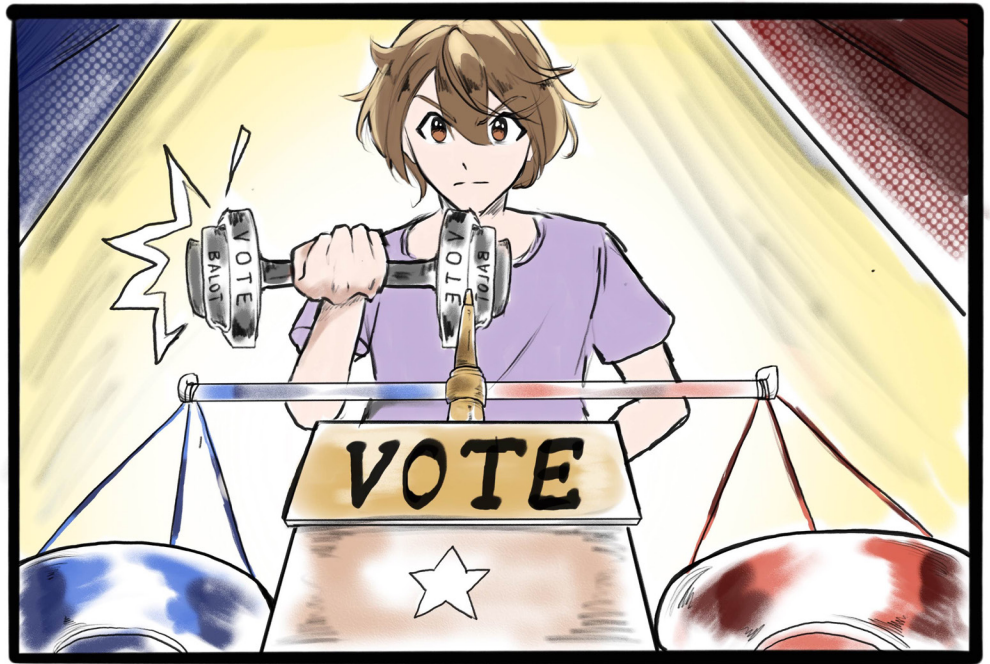
Many media platforms are already addressing the key issues Zoomers care about—systemic racism, reproductive rights, climate change and more—through creative, sometimes provocative content. “Can One Woke Teen Survive Twenty Trump Supporters?” brings these debates into the digital space, engaging younger viewers with bold claims and straightforward discussions on topics like racism and the economy.

The clickbaity title may be entertaining, but the perspectives offered can serve as a resource for older generations and institutions aiming to encourage young voter engagement.

### Information literacy

However, while online activism is growing, it poses a challenge: how can young adults critically evaluate the flood of information they encounter? Without traditional gatekeepers like news editors, it's up to Gen Z to sift through content, discerning fact from opinion.

This freedom comes with challenges. Todd Graham, professor of debate at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale,



## YOUR VOTE HAS WEIGHT TO TIP THE SCALES

Illustration by Jessie Shiau

warned that “the people who set up the videos are creating carefully edited, scripted at times, and ‘made-for-the-internet’ entertainment.”

As SIU lecturer Justin Young explained, “If you have a political opinion, you no longer need NBC or The New York Times to publish it. You can hop online and potentially reach millions worldwide. That’s a huge shift in how we communicate. Of course, there’s also the reality that large multinational corporations run by billionaires can place a thumb on the scale of which messages get seen or not seen by altering algorithms. We have seen this, for example, with Elon Musk.”

Universities play a key role in preparing students to thrive in this new media landscape. As Young points out, “College composition classes generally do an excellent job of teaching students about source reliability...that sort of thinking works whether you’re looking at academic journals, news media sources, websites, or social media.”

Graham also stresses the importance of public debate skills, emphasizing that “understanding how arguments are formed is invaluable.”

The Gen Z: Post-Election study found that many young voters felt under-equipped to make informed choices at the polls. Rather than relying on celebrity endorsements, which young adults can easily see through, researchers recommend universities explore smaller social networks and peer connections to mobilize young voters effectively. These peer-based networks may prove more persuasive, fostering a sense of trust and connection within the community.

Young also said he often recognizes a certain segment of students who have a “they’re all the same and nothing matters” attitude when it comes to politics and public

institutions.

“Of course, college students are often the most politically engaged, too - not just in right/left debates, but at what can be seen by some as more niche political issues such as animal rights, LGBTQ+ issues, and others. At 18 it can be hard to feel directly connected with issues of free trade, Social Security, etc. Engaging with students, whether on campus or virtually, on those more niche issues is much better at galvanizing them into action and debate.”

### What voters are saying

Jonas Mansky, a 2020 graduate from Iowa State with a degree in human physiology, said he is conscious about what he considers credible sources when he is engaging with political content.

“I usually go about all content online the same way, it depends on the source. If it’s a governmental source such as a newspaper or some kind of non-profit, I am more likely to trust it,” he said.

Shakira Del Toro, another student from Iowa State who received her English and creative writing degree in 2021, said she investigates political information in her social feeds.

“I don’t really trust anything on the internet, but I guess Facebook feeds me the most information which leads to Google searches.”

Shakira said that it’s hard to believe anything she reads or hears.

“I’m not really doing my due diligence as a citizen to be honest. I don’t keep up with politics. Hardly anything ever really changes or gets done,” she says. “Speaking to family, coworkers and friends probably influences my decision the most.”



Illustration by Kailey Ryan

## Swayed by fame? How celebs influence young voters

By Carly Gist

On Aug. 20, Taylor Swift drew over 90,000 people to Wembley Stadium for the final show of the European leg of her tour. Three weeks later, she drew over 400,000 people to a voter registration website.

Following the presidential debate on Sept. 10, Swift took to Instagram to announce to her 284 million followers that she would be voting for Vice President Kamala Harris in the upcoming election. She also encouraged people to register to vote, and her corresponding story shared a link to [vote.gov](http://vote.gov) which directs users to their state-specific election websites. The website is managed by the General Services Administration, whose spokesperson announced 405,999 users had visited through Swift's link in the 24 hours after she posted it, according to CBS News.

As the presidential candidates prepare for their biggest performance on Nov. 5, many celebrities have rallied in the wings. From singer Billie Eilish announcing her support for Harris on Instagram to

WWE wrestler Hulk Hogan calling former President Donald Trump a hero at the Republican National Convention, the entertainment industry's biggest stars have been speaking up for what they believe in.

But can celebrity endorsements really influence the outcome of this election?

John Shaw, director of Southern Illinois University's Paul Simon Public Policy Institute, said it's a double-edged sword.

"Celebrities, they can, as I say, generate interest, raise money, do events, hold fundraising events," Shaw said. "So I think, as a candidate, if you can get a celebrity endorsement, it's good, [but] you got to be a little careful, because some of them are not always hewing to the script."

He said celebrities can often say things that do not follow the message a politician is promoting, and many are controversial.

"I think the bottom line is, if you can get celebrity endorsements, I think it's good," he said. "They can be helpful. But I don't think you should base your campaign on or,

you know, devote an extraordinary amount of time and energy trying to corral celebrity endorsements."

Sakshi Bhati, professor of public relations and leadership in communication studies at SIU, said endorsements from celebrities can go awry quickly.

"There's this one big con that if this celebrity has a bad rep in the media today, something that they did in recent past that has changed their image and how people see them, and they have done endorsements in the recent past, that can also negatively impact the endorsement," she said.

Bhati pointed to the recent arrests of rapper Sean "Diddy" Combs. Since Combs was arrested on federal sex trafficking and racketeering charges, his past political connections have resurfaced. An article from USA Today highlighted interactions from both presidential candidates, including a 2012 video from a reality game show, in which Trump called Combs a "good friend"

and “good guy,” and a 2020 tweet from Harris, in which she thanked Combs for hosting a town hall on racial inequities and health disparities.

Bhati said the candidates have “really good PR teams,” however.

“They know how to get through such hard times when the celebrity endorsements can go south,” she said. “They know how to handle it, and they’re well prepared for handling such situations.”

### Survey shows little impact

The Daily Egyptian surveyed 41 people who self-identified as students, staff, alumni or community members to see what impact they believe celebrity endorsements have on themselves and their communities.

Linda Flowers, president of the Carbondale branch of the NAACP, said the organization has been visiting college and high school campuses because “We keep hearing that the young people are going to decide this election.”

Of the 41 participants, 87.8% self-identified as between the ages of 18 and 24.

Participants were asked how likely they are to change their vote due to a celebrity they like endorsing a candidate they do not like, as well as how likely they are to change their vote due to a celebrity they dislike endorsing a candidate they like. In both instances, over 85% of participants ages 18-24 said they were very unlikely to change their opinion. Yet Ava Steffens, secretary of SIU’s chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America, said she believes celebrity endorsements can have an impact on those who are not leaning toward a specific candidate.

“I think if there’s someone who doesn’t really have, like, established views, they’re kind of just more in the middle, has like a combination of both right-wing and left-wing views, I think they would be a little bit more easily influenced by a PR strategy,” she said.

Additionally, the survey asked respondents if they trust celebrity endorsements more, less or the same as endorsements from activists and other political figures. Three-quarters of participants ages 18 to 24 said they trusted celebrities less, while approximately 22% said they trusted them the same, and less than 3% said they trusted them more.

Shaw said celebrity endorsements can sometimes send out “a message of elitism and exclusion.”

“For maybe people in middle America, they might be seen as part of this kind of elite culture, you know, wealthy and kind of self-indulgent, which is very distant from our needs,” he said. “It can almost be a little alienating.”

### Are celebrities more trustworthy?

Hannah Connolly, who serves as student trustee for the SIU Board of Trustees, offered a different perspective.

“People don’t like to trust politicians or activists, because there’s always an agenda,” she said. “Whereas with a celebrity, everything is put out on social media, and you feel like you know them. Even though it’s very superficial...you’re more likely to trust them because [they] don’t feel like a politician who’s gonna make a decision that might hurt you in the end.”

Survey participants were also asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the following statement: Celebrities should remain neutral when it comes to elections and politics. Only 29% of survey respondents agreed, while nearly half disagreed.

“I think it is a good thing for artists to, in my personal view, talk about political and social issues, because they do have such a wide audience, and they do have such a wide influence,” Steffens said, adding that doing so can make artists “seem a little bit more in touch.”

Flowers said she thinks everyone should speak up for what they believe in, regardless of social status.

“I think it’s important for all of us because ‘I’m a celebrity,’ for instance, does that mean I lose my right as an American citizen who feels the election is important, that I lose my right to speak out?” she said.

She said the NAACP believes it is our duty as citizens to be involved.

“We’re not concerned with registering if you’re Democrat, Republican, who you’re going to vote for, but we think it’s important that we all get involved, because it’s our civic responsibility,” she said.

### Endorsements won’t sway election

In terms of impact, Shaw said he believes it is unlikely that celebrity endorsements will sway the outcome of the election.

“I don’t think it’s going to have a huge impact. It’s not going to shift the polls dramatically,” he said. “It could energize some young voters. Could give some people a little bit more interest in politics.”

He emphasized that endorsements “might be more important during primaries, in which you have candidates who are not that different,” calling back to 2008, when television personality Oprah Winfrey endorsed former President Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton.

“When she waded in and endorsed Obama, that was seen as a big moment,” he said. “There have been several very rigorous studies of this, and they tend to believe that... Oprah’s endorsement might

have given him a million votes in the Democratic primaries,” he said.

But the 2024 election has something past ones did not: an increase in social media usage. According to the digital marketing company Backlinko, use of social media has grown by 4.44% in the past year. The company estimates that 239 million Americans are active on social media, including 84% of Americans ages 18 to 29.

Flowers mentioned that it has become common for many citizens, not just younger generations, to get their news from social media. Therefore, she thinks it will play an important role in the election.

“You’ll have more people getting some news that they wouldn’t get from traditional news outlets, like TV or newspapers,” she said.

Connolly pointed out how accessible social media has become as well.

“We have immediate access to technology and the platforms of candidates,” she said. “And I feel like a lot of students, even if they are first-time voters, do take that into consideration.”

Though Connolly acknowledged the influence celebrities’ endorsements can have on young people, she doesn’t see this as a threat to their independent opinions.

“Our generation is media literate enough that we’ll come to our own decision on our own terms, not necessarily because someone said so,” she said.

Connolly said that at the end of the day, when people find themselves in the voting booth, she doesn’t think celebrities will be on their minds.

“I think it’s more of a decision coming from you and what your interests are and what your priorities are,” she said.

Connolly, Flowers, Shaw, Bhati and Steffens all offered a similar sentiment to those who are voting in this upcoming election: Do your research and stay informed.

“There is very, very good information out there, but you need to find it,” Shaw said. “...So go to a trusted source... and as you evaluate candidates, make sure what you know is actually truthful.”

*Publisher’s Note: This article was originally written for the Daily Egyptian but reworked for the Gateway Journalism Review.*

# Why some college students are voting red in 2024 election

By Ava Steffens

With a tight presidential race, both major party candidates are trying to pick up voters, particularly among Generation Z, where 8 million young people join the electorate and could cast ballots for the first time on Nov. 5.

These young voters are progressive and tend to lean toward the Democratic Party. The Pew Center for Research found in April 2024 that 66% of voters between 18 and 24 associate with the Democratic Party.

So where does that leave young conservative voters?

On college campuses, even in more conservative communities, it can be particularly hard.

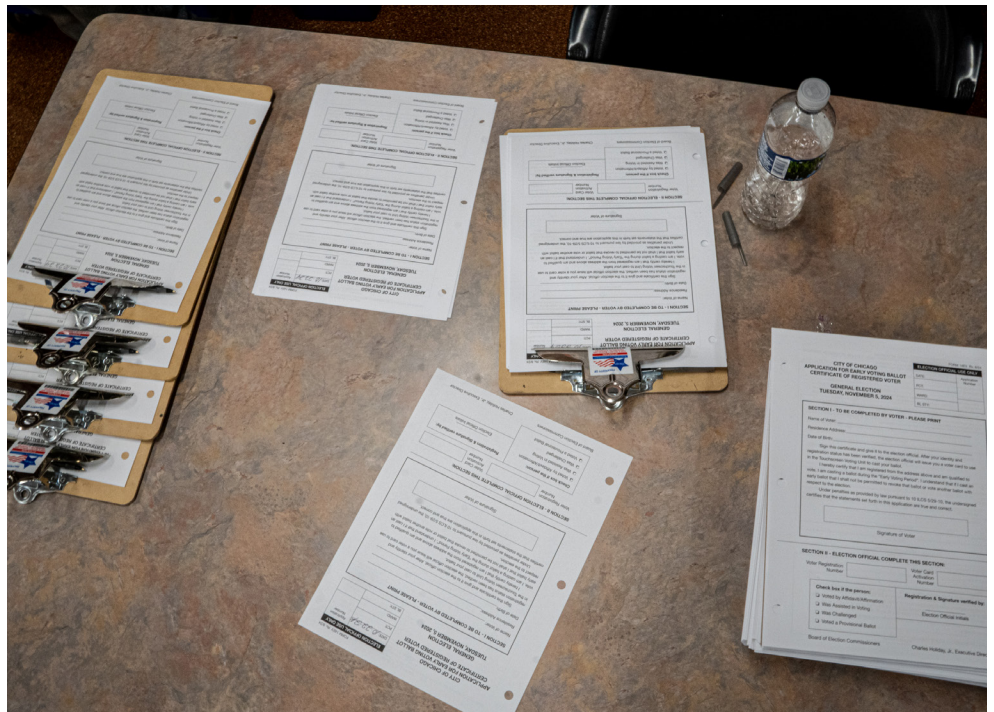
One student at Southern Illinois University Carbondale declined to give her name because she was unsure how her classmates would react. "I would say most of my friends don't agree with my views and that's okay," said the student, who is registered as an independent. "I also have friends who do. I would say opinions are split 50/50."

A poll conducted by Niche.com, a ranking and review website, found that almost half the students asked (48%) feel that the politics of the campus are pretty balanced. However, a significant group surveyed (27%) said the campus leans more towards being liberal. Very few (3%) report the campus overall being conservative.

College towns have become increasingly more liberal, according to The American Communities Project, which has designated 171 independent cities and counties as "college towns." Of those 171 places, 38 have flipped from red to blue since the 2000 presidential election. Seven flipped from blue to red.

Jackson County, where SIUC is located, is no exception. According to the official Illinois State Board of Elections 2020 general election polling data, 49.38% of votes in Jackson County were for Joe Biden, and 48.09% were for Donald Trump. While Jackson County might be split in votes, surrounding counties leaned more red in 2020. For example, 67.75% of Williamson County and 74.38% of Randolph County votes were for Trump.

Illinois is a predictably blue state because of Chicago and the suburbs. Central and southern Illinois are more reliably red. This is reflected in SIUC's student body since those



Early voting application forms sit on a table at the 26th ward's early voting location at Humboldt Park Library in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024.

Photo by Addison Annis

who attend the university come from all over the state, and in some cases, out of state.

Caleb Gentry, a senior at SIUC, described himself as more Republican-leaning. He plans on voting red in the upcoming election. "One of the things that comes up a lot is gun control. Do I think we need some regulation to make people owning guns safer? Of course. Growing up in a family that hunts and has served in the military, I don't see actual guns as the problem," Gentry said.

Republican-leaning students told GJR that they've received mixed responses from their peers when discussing their political views. A common assumption that the students wanted to debunk was that those with conservative politics were all intolerant of those from marginalized communities, specifically people of color.

Zachary Lochard, who is president of the SIU Chapter of Turning Point USA, an organization whose values lean more towards those of "right-leaning libertarians," said that he finds that Liberals and Democrats "tend to overuse the word 'racism' a lot more than they should."

If you label everyone on the right as 'racist,' then nobody is racist," he said, adding that he identifies as Hispanic-American and has been called a "race traitor" because of his political views.

Gentry also said there is a commonly pushed narrative of Republicans and Conservatives being overall intolerant of marginalized groups. He said Christians are often blamed. "I try to keep the peace, but I do have to bite my tongue a lot. I feel I would be shunned or attacked for my views in some areas," Gentry said. "A couple of coworkers were saying that people with

my religion were 100% the problem with everything. I get that there are a few bad ones out there, but it's times like that where I know if I say anything, respectful or not, I'll be made the bad guy."

While the students weren't too positive about what their peers thought about their views, they said that their families did. Some of their opinions are even a result of family experiences.

The students said they had a few specific issues impacting their vote. Across the board, the students seemed passionate about their right to free speech. Lochard noted that free speech was one of the main issues that Turning Point USA advocates. "Most Republicans are about individualism and self-sustainability," Lochard said. "The First Amendment is the one that allows us to have this conversation and sit down and talk about public universities and such."

The students expressed that they differ from other Republicans with certain individual beliefs that they hold. Gentry, for example, studies zoology and said he approaches the issue of climate change with a scientific perspective. "I'm glad I can share that with some people who are Democrats. It's obvious at this point."

Lochard said a large issue we see in politics today is the division between what defines a Republican versus a Democrat, mostly pushed by the media of both sides. "The divide we see is usually for a spectacle, and people adopt that themselves. It grows into a 'they vs. them' argument."

# What it was like to hear from Trump at NABJ

By Janiyah Gaston

Less than 48 hours before the opening of the National Association of Black Journalists convention in Chicago, the organization announced that former President and Republican candidate Donald Trump would speak on the opening day.

I hadn't left yet for Chicago, and at first, I was not sure it was even true until I checked NABJ's official X account. The announcement had been posted late at night when people were already in bed.

The move shocked many NABJ members, including me. When I checked the NABJ social media accounts, a lot of people were displeased by the fact he was going to be there. It's not unheard of for presidential candidates to address us. President Joe Biden joined virtually last year, and former presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton have all attended. Trump was invited in 2016 and 2020 but didn't attend.

The Trump Q&A was moderated by Rachel Scott, senior congressional correspondent for ABC News; Harris Faulkner, anchor of The Faulkner Focus and co-host of Outnumbered on Fox News; and Kadia Goba, politics reporter at Semafor.

I was going back and forth about going to the event because Trump has been notorious for not directly answering questions during interviews. On the other hand, given the comments he has said about Black Americans and reporters I wanted to know what he would say. In the end, I decided to attend because I would probably never get a chance like this again.

According to a September 2024 poll from the New York Times and Siena College, over all, Harris has 78% support from Black voters.

The Q&A took up most of the first day at the convention due to attendees having to go through security and the event starting an hour late. When Trump finally came out, right off the bat, I was thrown off because of how he was talking to Scott of ABC News when she asked the former president about his past statements.

Said Scott: "You have attacked Black journalists, calling them a loser, saying the questions that they ask are, quote, 'stupid and racist.' You've had dinner with a white supremacist at your Mar-a-Lago resort. So my question, sir, now that you are asking Black supporters to vote for you: Why should Black voters trust you after you have used language like that?"

Trump responded, "Well, first of all, I don't think I've been asked a question in such a horrible manner, the first question. You don't even say hello. How are you? Are you with ABC, because I think they're a fake news network—a terrible network."

He then slammed organizers for the program not starting on time.

I found it very rude and unnecessary for him to jump down her throat just because she did not say hi the way he wanted her to.

When they got around to asking him about different policies, I did not expect him to answer the questions seriously. When the moderators asked why Black voters should vote for him after he made disparaging comments about Black politicians, he started listing all the things he has done for the Black community.

Hearing him say how he has helped out history Black Colleges and Universities and create more opportunities for Black workers was ridiculous.

Hearing him say Vice President and Democratic candidate Kamala Harris changed her race to Black and then refused to explain what a "Black job" is, I could not take him seriously.

"She was always of Indian heritage, and she was only promoting Indiana heritage," Trump said. "I didn't know she was Black until a number of years ago when she happened to turn Black and now she wants to be known as Black."

Scott quickly replied, "She's always been Black."

Most of the time when Trump gave a response I was laughing because his answers never felt serious. When the moderators brought up how he aligns with JD Vance, his running mate, he danced around the question. The moderators brought up Project 2025, which has been a huge topic of discussion because it is essentially an outline of goals conservative groups would like to achieve if Trump wins the election. Before the moderators could finish the question, Trump decided to abruptly end the Q&A.

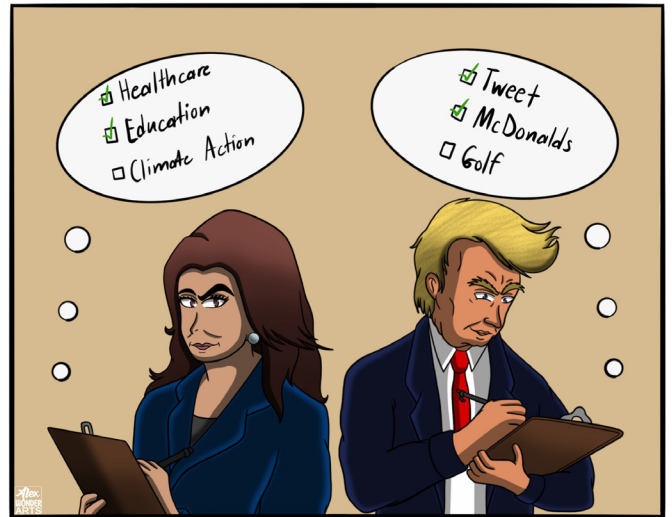
I did not learn anything beneficial during the Q&A. The event was surreal because I would see this man on TV, saying all these things and just seeing him say them in person made it real to me. This is an actual human being who thinks like this.

While Harris has the lead now, she is still fighting to get more of the Black male vote. In the New York Times/Siena College poll referenced earlier, 20% of Black men support Trump and 70% support Harris. Despite this, Harris is still making an effort to get support from Black men. She is working to start programs that help Black entrepreneurs as well as providing incentives to get more Black men to become teachers.



GEN Z HAS THE POWER

Illustration by Angela Kalish



"Different Priorities, Different Progress"

Illustration by Jaylin Peace

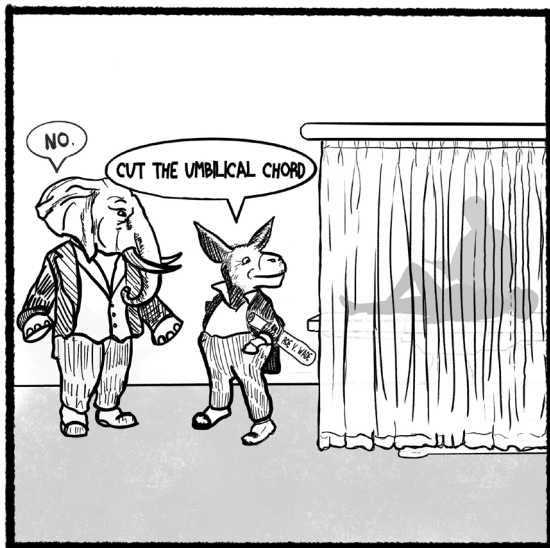


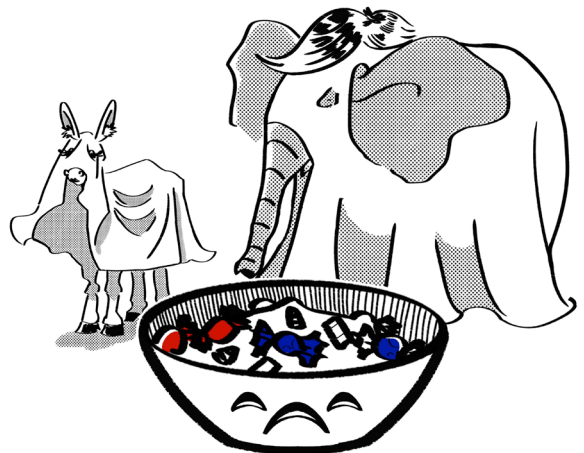
Illustration by Charles Pre



Illustration by Mel Chinnock



Illustration by Emily Diaz-Romstadt



"TRICK OR TREAT"

Illustration by Grecia Lopez-Macias



# Trans rights, gender-affirming care could be in jeopardy, depending on outcome of U.S. election

By Matt Brady

Callum Meyer, a sophomore at Columbia College Chicago, is a transgender gay man from rural Iowa. An illustration major, he decided to attend Columbia because he wanted to go to an art school in a city. He also hated living in Iowa, he said.

"My last couple years in high school, Iowa passed three anti-trans laws," Meyer said. "I was banned from playing sports, using the men's restroom and all trans minors could not pursue gender-affirming care anymore."

Iowa is one of 26 states that have restricted gender-affirming care. Human Rights Watch estimates that nearly 40% or 118,300 trans youth aged 13-17 live in one of these states. This includes 2,300 youth living in the two states of Arkansas and Montana where courts have put on hold or blocked bans.

In Missouri, a ruling is expected by the end of the year in a major court battle over gender-affirming care. Transgender minors, their families and health care providers have challenged a 2023 law that restricts physicians from prescribing gender-affirming medical care to minors.

In the meantime, Missouri voters will go to the polls on Nov. 5 to decide Amendment 3. If passed, it would reverse the state's abortion ban, which went into effect in 2022 after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*.

Republican Missouri Gov. Mike Parson is campaigning against the amendment, telling voters in an open letter in mid-October that it "also opens the door to allow children to get sex change operations without parents' knowledge in our state." But there is nothing in the amendment related to trans-gender care.

In their campaigns, former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris have carved out starkly different positions on trans rights and gender-affirming care. Trump has said on "day one" he would reverse the Biden administration's expansion of Title IX that prohibits federally funded schools from preventing transgender students from using bathrooms, locker rooms and pronouns that align with their gender identities. He also has threatened to cut federal funding to any school or program that includes critical race theory, gender ideology or what he deems "inappropriate racial, sexual or political content."

"As the saying goes, personnel is policy and at the end of the day, if we have pink-

haired communists teaching our kids, we have a major problem," Trump said in an X video posted on his campaign account.

In a slick anti-trans TV ad, the Trump campaign shows people in drag and trans athletes. "Kamala Harris is for they/them," the ad proclaims at the end. "Donald Trump is for you."

The Harris campaign has not officially released any policy proposals concerning gender-affirming care so far. But Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, who is Harris' running mate, signed an executive order in May protecting and supporting access to gender-affirming health care for LGBTQ people in the state.

Why does this matter?

According to research from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, about 40 million members of Gen Z ages 18-27 will be eligible to vote in the 2024 presidential election.

Terry Griffith, an adjunct instructor at Columbia who identifies as queer, teaches many queer-theory-based classes and asks her students to bring in news articles for discussion.

She said the uptick in laws targeting trans people are being used to frighten LGBTQ+ people.

"Students feel two ways in my opinion," she said. One is "feeling personally attacked" and the other is feeling badly."

To Meyer, the student from Iowa, the only option for voting is for the third party.

"Living in a red state under both Trump and Biden has made it abundantly clear to me that neither Democrats nor Republicans are going to take significant action to protect LGBTQ+ rights," he said.

Even though Columbia College first-year Margot Torresin, a film and television major, does not favor either candidate, she will still be voting.

"There's all [this] 'lesser evil voting,' but I feel like a lot of people have that notion right now that they don't support somebody that they don't agree with," said Torresin, a transgender woman who has been medically transitioning since she was 16. "I feel like with any president, I don't think I would have ever agreed with, but am I still going to vote? Yes."

Torresin is from a part of Wisconsin that borders a very rural area. "A lot of people don't look at you as an equal," she said. "It's nice here to have some of that, and while not all LGBTQ experiences are the same, there's a lot of shared perspectives."

Many programs and schools that offer LGBTQ+ courses depend on federal funding and thus the outcome of the election.

Columbia is not one of them.

According to Ginny Johnson, assistant vice president of Student Financial Services at Columbia College, the college does not receive federal funding to support operational costs because it is a private, non-profit institution.

This is also the case with federal financial aid for students.

"To clarify, federal financial aid funding is not based upon sexual orientation," Johnson said in an email. "The Department of Education does not collect information on a student's transgender identity."

Torresin said that for a lot of people who identify as LGBTQ, colleges and universities are the first spaces to explore those subjects, and by cutting LGBTQ courses, which Trump has proposed, the student body would be impacted.

"I fear that these courses are hanging on by a thread," she said. "They're very important because they make people feel seen and they give people a voice."

While Columbia is not in the crosshairs of federal funding cuts, other public schools and institutions with LGBTQ students are in danger of having their rights taken away.

Meyer believes that the best way to advocate for the rights of LGBTQ students in K-12 institutions is to show up to protests, sign petitions, engage with the local ACLU and speak up in the community.

"So many young kids don't have a voice, and we have an obligation to speak up for them," Meyer said.

To Juniper Czaja, a transfemme student at Columbia, the most important way to advocate for the preservation of LGBTQ courses at schools and institutions is to build a community and solidarity through support, specifically through consulting with your friends, dorm mates and people living around you.

"Make your voice known," said Czaja, a sophomore BFA film and television major. "If you're comfortable with your identity, be loud and proud about it and highlight the diversity you bring to Columbia and the diversity at Columbia."

*This story first appeared in the Columbia Chronicle. It was reprinted with permission.*



Chicago residents stand at polling stations inside of the Humboldt Park Library, participating in early voting in Chicago on Tuesday, Oct. 22, 2024.

Photo by Addison Annis

# Latino immigrants worry neither presidential candidate will deliver on immigration

By Jamari Shelton

As the 2024 presidential election approaches, many Latino voters, the fastest-growing voting block, express distrust, confusion and anxiety about choosing candidates.

"I often feel that when going to vote, I change my mind because of the anxiety," said Unique Gonzalez, 22, a Mexican-American resident of Chicago. "Because I'm American and live in a democracy, my vote should matter, right? I believe that is only true to an extent."

With a family income that falls below the average American and as a member of a historically marginalized population, Gonzalez said she feels she lacks the money and connections that might make her vote more significant. Because of that, Gonzales plans to sit out the election for the fourth year.

An estimated 36.2 million Latinos are eligible to vote this year, up from 32.3 million in 2020, according to a Pew Research Center

poll. Latinos account for 50% of the total growth in eligible voters during that time.

Miguel Loza-Cruz, 18, a student at Columbia College Chicago and a first-generation voter, will be casting a ballot for the first time this year.

"I really care about the immigration policies deeply. It's something near to my heart," Loza-Cruz said.

Democratic candidate and Vice President Harris has campaigned for comprehensive immigration reform, backing the sweeping bipartisan Senate border bill, which stalled in the Senate in May, rejecting mass deportation of undocumented immigrants and advocating for paths to citizenship for undocumented spouses of citizens and DACA holders.

In contrast, Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump has said he would deport 15 to 20 million undocumented individuals with the help of the National Guard and local police. He also opposes the

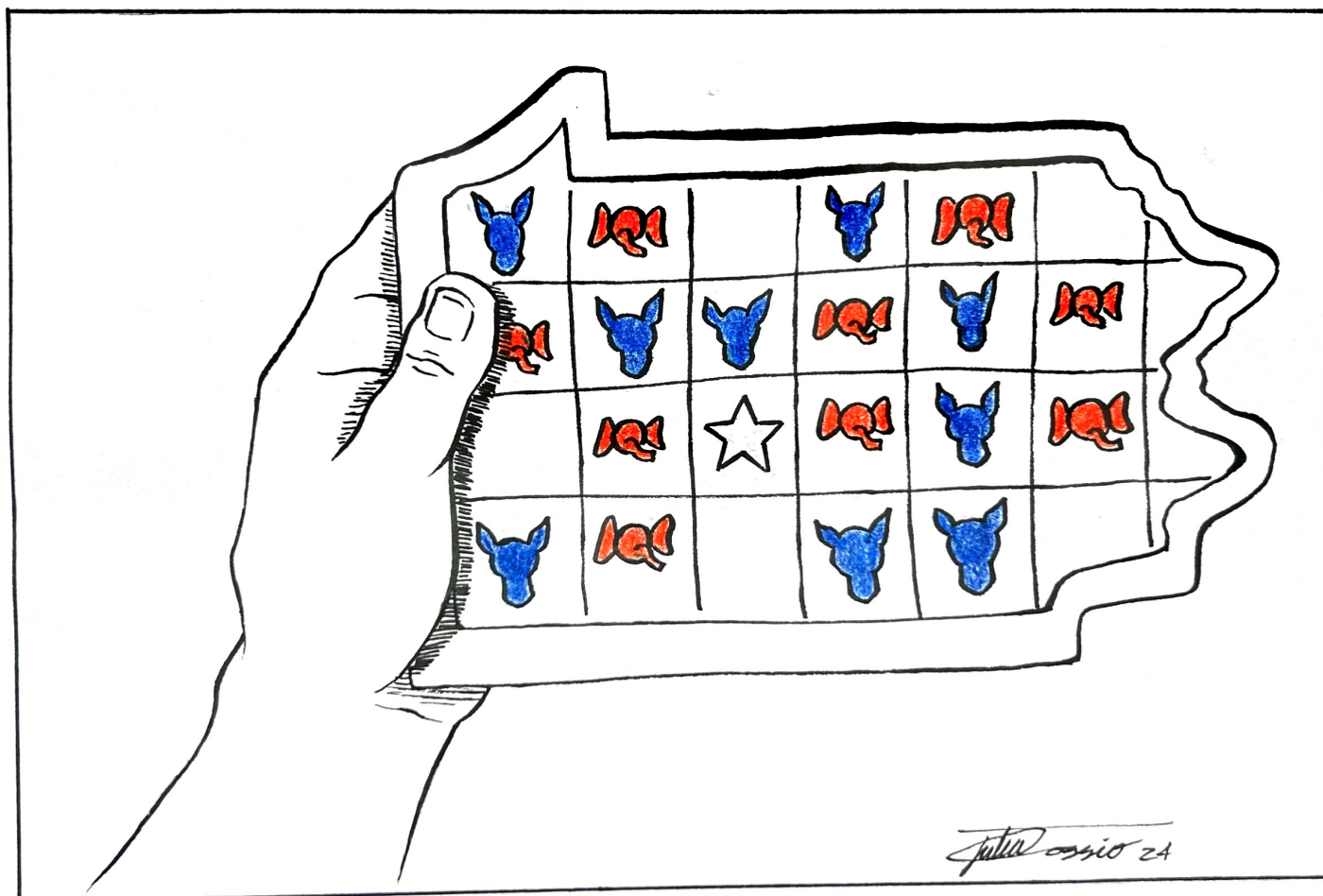
Senate border bill, which would overhaul the process for seeking asylum in the United States and impose an "emergency authority" that would leave asylum fully out of reach for those crossing between ports of entry for much of the next three years.

Trump, who also attempted to revoke DACA, said he would reinstate his ban on people from select Muslim-majority countries entering the U.S., revoke automatic citizenship for certain U.S.-born individuals and stop President Joe Biden's humanitarian parole for immigrants from Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela. Harris also has stopped short of criticizing Trump's plans for mass deportations.

Loza-Cruz said he has concerns about both candidates. A lot of politicians are just all talk, he said.

Fears over Trump's plans are giving some Latino voters the urgency to head to the polls in November.

Angelica Ramirez, 22, immigrated to



## ELECTION BINGO

Illustration by Julia Cossio

Chicago with six other siblings at the age of 5 under her father's dual citizenship status.

"I never had to worry about that," Ramirez said. "We came into the state with papers."

But her uncles didn't.

"It makes me nervous," Ramirez said. "What if they get deported? They've been here longer than they've been out in Mexico. Some immigrants won't teach their kids Spanish because they felt it'll make them a target by ICE."

When their grandmother passed away, Ramirez' uncles, unable to leave the country, had to watch the funeral through a Facetime call.

Columbia College Student Zoe Davis Phillpotts, 26, born to first-generation parents, said she's not a big fan of either candidate's immigration policy, though she prefers Harris.

Phillpotts said her main concern is Trump's support for another ICE raid, such as the one in 2019, when Trump, then president, planned ICE raids targeting undocumented immigrants, focusing on those with criminal records, framing the operations as essential for public safety. This resulted in the widespread arrest of thousands of undocumented immigrants and the separation of many children from

their parents.

Gonzalez said she feels the same. She wants to see more grace in the process. If someone is caught without papers they should be assisted in getting residency, before being dragged out the country, she said.

Whether Harris' plan to reject mass deportation would change this is uncertain. The Biden Administration this summer was on track to match Trump's deportation numbers, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

For Phillpotts, Harris' positions seem "too liberal."

"We should have a little bit of structure, more security for the border patrol for California and for Texas," Phillpotts said. "I still don't want a mass of immigrants coming into the country...not as a way to be conservative but for safety."

Columbia College Chicago freshman, Jadzia Rojas, 19, said she's unsure if she'll vote as she doesn't know how the process works.

"Nobody's ever told me how to vote," Rojas said. "Do I just put 'Kamala Harris' on a paper and that's it? When do you actually go out and vote?"

Rojas planned to reach out to local peers to figure out how to head to the

polls and cast her vote, as immigration is something she's passionate about, yet hesitant when it comes to the candidates.

"You'd think candidates would want a modern approach with their proposals," Rojas said. Trump "wants to go backwards in time with his" while for Harris, "it's just what you want to hear. It sounds so good on paper and to the ear."

Rojas said that while she has faith in Harris, she wants to do more research before completely backing her.

In response to challenges like these, Latinx organizations are stepping in to bridge the gap.

Mario Jimenez, a senior at Columbia College Chicago and Latino Alliance president, noted that efforts on campus have been aimed at empowering Latino students to take part in the democratic process.

"At Columbia, we have events encouraging students to vote, but our main goal is to empower Latino students through activities that help them learn about their culture," Jimenez said "We believe it's important to vote, so we encourage students to go to places where they can learn more about the candidates and officials running for office."

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