

## Quarterly Issue Focus

Q3 2023

### The Power of the Youth Vote, Youth Voter Suppression and Youth GOTV

#### Background

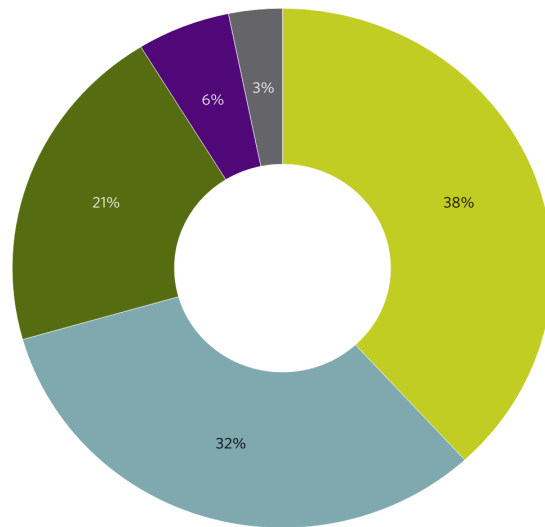
Research shows that increasing political polarization leads to greater voter interest and turnout.<sup>1</sup> This was true not just for the voting-eligible population as a whole – but also for youth voters. Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) estimates that 50% of young people, ages 18-29, voted in the 2020 presidential election. This represented an 11-point increase from 2016 (39%) and was one of the highest rates of youth electoral participation since the voting age was lowered to 18.<sup>2</sup>

Still, the drop-off between registering and actually voting is twice as steep for young people, and historically, youth ages 18-19 vote at lower rates than their slightly older peers. Researchers studying patterns of civic engagement have found that voting is a “habit-forming” behavior — whether or not someone voted in previous elections is a reliable predictor of whether or not they will vote in the next one. Research indicates that lower voting rates among new voters are the fault of “micro-barriers” — comparatively small things that get in the way of following through. Interviews with these non-voters generated comments such as: “I registered at home instead of at college and forgot to request an absentee ballot on time,” or “Voting is too confusing.” A post-2022 mid-term survey by CIRCLE indicates that a lack of time or information plays a role, with 38% of youth saying they forgot or were too busy to vote. Importantly, 21% said they didn’t have enough information about the candidates or the voting process.

#### Youth Who Didn’t Vote in 2022 Cited Lack of Time, Information, Other Barriers

Among youth (ages 18-29) who reported not voting in 2022, the percentage who cited each reason as the primary reason

■ Forgot/was too busy    ■ Didn't think it mattered/not important  
■ Didn't have enough information    ■ Problem with in-person voting  
■ Problem with absentee voting



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Source: CIRCLE 2022 Post-Election Youth Survey

CIRCLE concludes, “Numerous interconnected factors shape whether youth electoral participation is high or low. These include the competitiveness of elections, how much campaigns and organizations [reach out to young people](#), the state’s civic education policies, the demographic composition of the youth population, and state voting laws that can either [facilitate voting](#) or pose barriers for youth.”

#### The Power of the Youth Vote

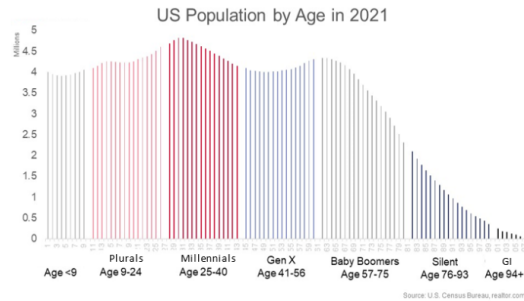
The Brookings Institution’s [State of Changes](#) project, which focused on how demographic changes affect voting trends, highlighted the end of the four-decade dominance of the baby boom generation in the US electorate. In 2024, Millennials and Plurals (born in 1981 or after) will represent nearly 45% of eligible

<sup>1</sup> <https://repository.upenn.edu/entities/publication/e2942099-97b9-4cda-9dc3-f822ac1f0c74>

<sup>2</sup> <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/half-youth-voted-2020-11-point-increase-2016>

voters and by 2028, they will make up almost half. Moreover, these two generations are the most diverse in American history – and that diversity is projected to increase. Older voters born before 1964 will fall below 30 percent of the electorate by then.

Population of Current U.S. Generations



CIRCLE asserts youth voters of color are part of the increased energy among 18-to-29-year olds. Voter suppression laws that target youth arise from the reality that young voters can swing elections. Young voters made a decisive impact on the 2022 midterms in states like Arizona, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania.

### Youth Voter Suppression

States with the highest youth voter turnout had policies like automatic and same-day registration. In contrast, states with low youth voter turnout had more barriers, including voter ID laws and more onerous voter registration processes. Truthout’s excellent 2023 article, [Voter Suppression Laws Are Targeting Youth — But They Are Fighting Back](#), identifies common youth voter suppression tactics:

- Prohibiting student IDs as viable voting ID
- Prohibiting out-of-state drivers’ licenses as viable voting ID
- Refusing to place polling sites on campuses
- Gerrymandering Black and Indigenous educational institutions
- Shortening mail-in ballot deadlines
- Barring students from registering to vote until two months before they turn 18

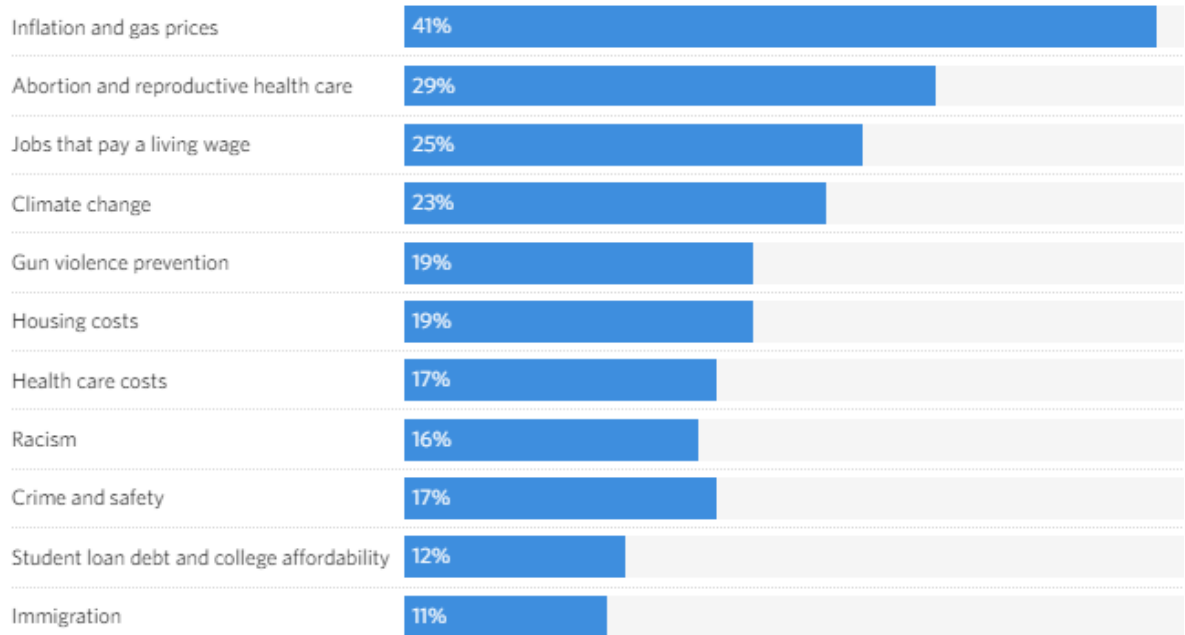
College students in particular may not live in the place where they are registered to vote, making them especially vulnerable to new rules around residence requirements, forms of ID, mail voting, and online voting. They also are more likely to be affected by the closure of polling places. Last, 75% of youth cite social media as their preferred information source. However, MIT Sloan reports that false information has become a feature of social media which can also suppress the youth vote.

### Important Issues for Youth

The results of CIRCLE’s post-2022-Midterm survey of youth priorities and concerns is shown on the next page:

## Young People's Top Issues in 2022: Inflation, Abortion, Jobs, Climate, and Guns

The percentage of young people, ages 18-29, who named each issue as one of their top 3 concerns.



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However, young people with different identities and experiences also prioritize issues differently. There were key differences according to educational attainment, gender, race, and ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

### Civic Education

Illinois instituted a strong civics program beginning in 2015. The High School Civics Bill HB4025 provides high school students a semester-long civics course including:

- Instruction on government institutions
- current issues discussions
- service learning, and
- simulations of democratic processes.

In 2019, a Middle School Civics Bill passed with bipartisan supermajorities in both chambers. However, strong civics and media literacy programs may not be enough to educate young people.

### LWV Vote 411 and Rising Stars Civic Leadership Program

The League of Women Voters operates in all 50 states and more than 700 communities. That national presence is critical for young voters, many of whom are preparing to go off to college or the military. The League of Women Voters' Vote411 website won the 2020 People's Voice Webby Award and is considered the nation's premier online, nonpartisan election resource. It is a critical component in fighting mis- and dis-information targeted to youth. Importantly, VOTE411 provides accurate and complete state-specific election information -- which can differ greatly from state to state -- on:

- voter registration options, deadlines, and status
- absentee ballot rules
- early voting options

<sup>3</sup> <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/youth-2022-concerned-about-issues-neglected-campaigns>

- voting locations
- candidate information
- background on ballot questions

The League's Rising Stars Civic leadership programs and volunteering opportunities allow youth to gain invaluable experience in the political and civic engagement arena while also contributing to the community. Students can volunteer for voter registration drives, participate in forums and debates, and engage in meaningful dialogues on local community issues. This program serves as a vital bridge between academic learning and the real-world experience needed to drive positive change in our society.

### **League of Women Voters Positions and Advocacy**

Over 20 years ago, the League of Women Voters launched *Making Democracy Work*<sup>®</sup>, a campaign focusing on five key indicators of a healthy democracy: voter participation, campaign finance reform, diversity of representation, civic education and knowledge, and civic participation. Despite the importance of civic education, The League reports that the federal government spends only five cents per student per year on civics but \$50 per student per year on STEM education. At the federal level, LWVUS supports the funding of civic education and educates Congress about its importance. There is even more incredible work conducted by state and local Leagues across the country to support civic education.

In 2022, the League of Women Voters of the US sent a letter to the US Senate urging them to pass the Youth Voting Rights Act as a measure to support eligible young voters' access to the ballot. Young voters still face unique difficulties voting despite the promises of the 26th Amendment to outlaw denial or abridgment of the vote on account of age. Provisions in the bill include pre-registration options for future voters aged 16 and 17, offices for voter registration and polling places at all public institutions of higher education, state requirements to accept student IDs as compliant voter identification for federal elections, and codification of the right to vote from a college domicile without durational residency requirements.

The LWVIL supported IL HB2446 and the two similar Senate bills SB1421 and SB2072, all of which allow for 16-year-olds to preregister to vote on or after their 16th birthday. These bills did not pass out of committee. A Demos policy brief explained, "Engaging potential voters at a young age is a successful way to increase voter registration, not just in the short term but also over a lifetime. Voters who are engaged at an early age are more likely to stay engaged. Pre-registering 16- and 17-year-olds to vote can be an important first step to engaging young adults. It has also been proven to work. In 2008, pre-registered young voters in Florida turned out at a rate 4.7 percent higher than young voters who registered after turning 18."<sup>4</sup> These bills did not pass out of committee in the 103rd General Assembly.

### **Other Youth-Focused Voting Organizations and Websites**

Here are some of the many organizations dedicated to educating and empowering youth voters:

- [NextGen America](#) empowers young voters to engage in the political process.
- [Rock the Vote](#) engages and builds the political power of young Americans.
- [TurnUp](#) is a youth-led voter registration and turnout initiative.
- [Stanford History Education Group's Civic Online Reasoning](#) tool offers both single lessons and a full curriculum.
- [Youth Service America's ServiceVote](#) campaign asks young people to help register, educate, and get their peers out to vote; to connect their volunteering and service to voting and advocacy on the issues they care about; and to call on public officials to create spaces at every decision-making table for young voices
- [The Student Learn Students Vote coalition](#) provides funding, resources, connections, and strategic direction, to increase college student engagement and voting.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.demos.org/policy-briefs/millions-polls-pre-registration-16-and-17-year-olds>

- [18byVote](#) is a youth-led organization that helps 16, 17, and 18-year-olds understand how, when, and why to vote.
- [Campus Vote Project](#) works with over 280 universities, community colleges, faculty, students, and election officials to reduce barriers to student voting and institutionalize reforms that empower students with the information they need to register and vote.
- [Civic Influencers](#) uses cutting-edge data to target often overlooked campuses such as trade, technical, and vocational schools and communities where higher civic engagement can make a difference in an election.

### **League of Women Voters of Roselle-Bloomington Youth Voter Engagement Activities**

How can the League of Women Voters of Roselle-Bloomington expand its civic education, voter registration, election information, and GOTV efforts to youth voters aged 16-29? CIRCLE issued its [Growing Voters](#) report which details a framework for developing the next generation of voters. Based on comprehensive research, including findings from teen surveys, the report includes actionable recommendations for educators, organizers, policymakers, journalists, funders, families, young leaders, and more. Our local League will examine the report to enhance our voter service efforts.

