

# 4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote... and What To Do About It

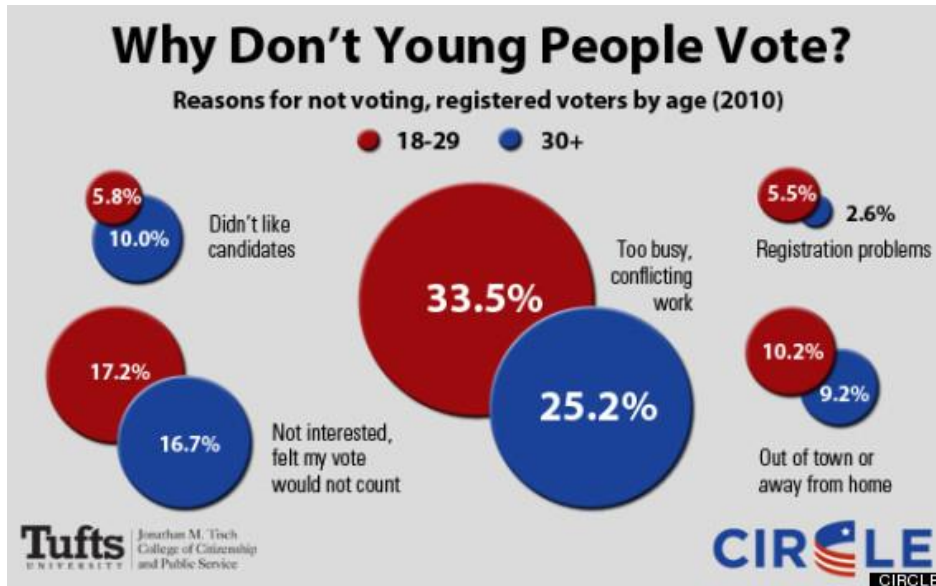
Too many young people don't vote. Why? Here are 4 reasons young people tell us they don't vote:

## 1. They're not asked or encouraged to vote by candidates, campaigns, family, friends, or neighbors.

- Young people who are contacted by an organization or a campaign are more likely to vote. Additionally, those who discuss an election are more likely to vote in it. [5]
- A young person's home environment can have a large impact on their engagement. Youth who live in a place where members of their household are engaged and vote are more likely to do so themselves. [5]
- Young people are more often transient and so they often feel less invested in local elections. [5]
- If young people don't vote, they're less likely to be targeted by political campaigns. Leaving young voters off contact lists is a costly mistake. Some campaigns still bypass young voters, but research shows they respond when contacted. The most effective way of getting a new voter is the in-person door-knock by a peer; the least effective is an automated phone call. [5]
- Research has [consistently shown](#) that contact by political campaigns is effective in engaging young people and driving voter turnout. This contact is particularly critical in civic deserts, where young people [are less likely to vote](#) than their peers in places where they perceive higher access to civic opportunities. [6]

**What To Do About It:** Focus on civic engagement, elections, and voting with all youth in your programs – even those too young to vote – and encourage them to research, discuss, and connect with local candidates.

- [Host a Service Stop to engage candidates.](#)
- [Encourage them to volunteer for campaigns.](#)
- [Ask your mayor to support service and youth engagement in policymaking.](#)



## 2. They're not taught how the government and elections work or feel like they don't know enough to vote.

- Whenever young people are surveyed, there is a significant lack of knowledge about how exactly the government works, and, therefore, how their vote actually matters- nearly 20 percent of young people said they don't think they know enough to be able to vote. [3]
- Having information about how, when and where to vote can help young people be and feel prepared to vote as well as reduce any level of intimidation they may feel. [5]
- They haven't learned how to register to vote. They haven't learned the best way to influence their elected representatives. They haven't learned that they have power. A healthy democracy needs well-informed, active citizens. But these citizens don't just magically appear. People learn citizenship. They learn it, for example, as children when they go the polling place to watch their parents vote. They learn it advocating for an issue they care about with their neighbors. They learn it by doing it. [4]
- College graduates are more likely to look for information about politics. And they are more likely to have friends who vote. People without a college degree, he says, are less likely to seek out political information. They also are less likely to have friends who care about politics or talk about voting. [2]

**What To Do About It:** Teach young people how to register and vote – and help them learn and practice these behaviors before they turn 18. Help them learn about the issues and encourage them to share what they learn with others.

- Educate voters by developing voter guides.
- Hold mock elections to teach younger students about the electoral process.
- Serve as poll workers or election judges on Election Day.

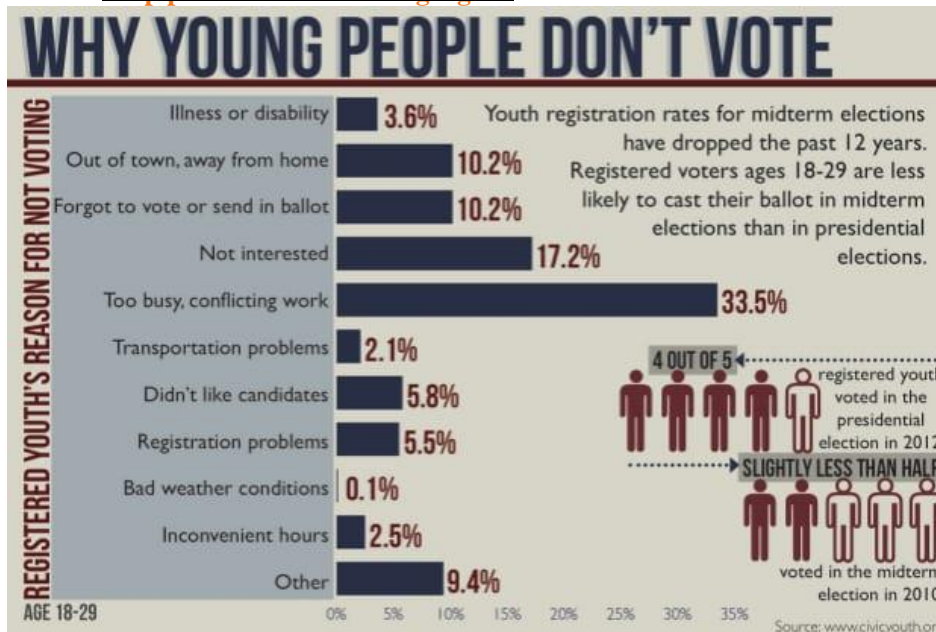
## 3. There are too many barriers for them to overcome.

- Too busy or had a conflict on Election Day / couldn't afford to spend time in long line; lack of transportation; inconvenient hours or location of polling place / trouble locating their polling place; registration problems / lacking proper ID; or being out of town / did not receive an absentee ballot in time to vote. [1]
- Among youth 18 and 19 years old who were not registered to vote, 23% said they missed the registration deadlines, 6% said they didn't know where or how to register. [6]

- Young people who are registered to vote turn out in high numbers. In the 2008 election, 84% of those youth 18-29 who were registered to vote actually cast a ballot. Guiding youth through the registration process is one potential step to closing the age-related voting gap. [5]
- A state's laws related to voter registration and voting can have an impact on youth voter turnout. Seven out of the top 10 youth turnout states had some of the more ambitious measures, including Election Day registration, voting by mail (Oregon), or not requiring registration to vote (North Dakota). [5]
- Many would-be voters face a range of barriers: voter ID laws, registration difficulty, or criminal records. [3]

**What To Do About It:** Ask the young people you work with if there's any reason they wouldn't be able to vote if they wanted to, and focus your voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts on addressing those barriers.

- [Conduct voter registration drives.](#)
- [Organize Get-Out-The-Vote activities.](#)
- [Help protect student voting rights.](#)



## 4. They're not interested in politics or feel like voting won't make a difference.

- They don't like the candidates or the issues. [1]
- Some are apathetic or too busy. Others don't like their choices, they don't think their vote matters, or they think the system is corrupt. [3]
- A majority of young people don't think voting is an effective way to change society. [3]
- Over a third (38%) of non-voters indicated they were not interested in the election or not involved in politics. [6]

**What To Do About It:** This might be the toughest reason to overcome. In the short term, we encourage you to help young people discover why politics and voting matters by showing them how the issues they volunteer to help fix also need to be addressed through policy to truly solve the problem. Long term, engaging them in advocacy for policies that make it easier to vote, or

for campaign finance or gerrymandering reform could help them feel invested in changing the system.

- **Educate voters and engage candidates about an issue you care about.**
- **Host a convention or debate watch.**
- **Become a citizen journalist and make your voice heard during the election.**

## Sources

[1] <https://civicyouth.org/why-youth-dont-vote-differences-by-race-and-education/>

[2] <https://www.sciencenewsforstudents.org/article/4-reasons-why-many-people-dont-vote>

[3] <https://www.npr.org/2018/09/10/645223716/on-the-sidelines-of-democracy-exploring-why-so-many-americans-dont-vote>

[4] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2018/09/20/many-young-people-dont-vote-because-they-never-learned-how-heres-free-class-now-schools-trying-change-that/>

[5] <https://civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/#2>

[6] [https://civicyouth.org/teens-and-elections/?cat\\_id=6](https://civicyouth.org/teens-and-elections/?cat_id=6)