

# Our Voices<sup>20</sup><sub>20</sub>

What Young People Have to Say About the 2020  
Elections & The Democratic Process

**Executive Summary**



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## About Platform

Platform is a political training and lobbying organization for young women-identifying, non-binary, and femme folx dedicated to ensuring our voices impact the legislative decisions about our bodies, lives, and futures.

## Listening Session Hosts

We want to thank the following individuals and organizations for hosting Listening Sessions, without whom this report would not be possible:

End Rape On Campus | Feminist Campus | Future Coalition | In Her Shoes  
Millennial Career Poll | Population Connection Action Fund/#Fight4HER  
Pride In Running | The Melanin Collective | The Reclaim

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*We attribute only the quotes in the Full Report, where explicitly mentioned, to the individuals cited and included herein. The analysis in this Summary or in the full Report does not necessarily reflect the perspectives of any other individual/organization, outside Platform, listed in relation to this report.*

There is undeniable youth power across the country—and it's growing. Between the 2014 and 2018 elections, turnout among young people ages 18 to 29 increased from roughly 20 percent to 36 percent.<sup>1</sup> Despite this stride, and despite increasing at a faster rate than any other age group, young voters—ages 18 to 29— still trail older voters in turnout. For example, among voters ages 65 and older, 59.4 percent turned out in 2014 compared to 66.1 percent in 2018, a difference of 6.7 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this growth, every election cycle we fall back into the same pattern: Political pundits predicting, analyzing, and shaming young people's turnout—without ever talking to young people. We know this is not how change happens, so we decided to ask the questions that needed answers and listen to young people who deserve to be heard.

With the support of youth-serving organizations as well as individuals in the Platform community, we hosted a nationwide Listening Tour composed of 24 Listening Sessions. Spanning approximately 36 hours with over 200 registrants ages 18-29, we captured the perspectives and insights of the youngest voting bloc—from 33 states, including Washington, DC. Now, we are pleased to present the ***Our Voices 2020 Report: What Young People Have to Say About the 2020 Elections & The Democratic Process.***

## Findings

*In regards to Political Engagement, participants shared they:*

- Feel a duty to engage in politics because they recognize that their own identities and rights, or those of their peers, are politicized;
- Were able to engage at a younger age if politics was regularly discussed or the news was constantly playing in a home where values and perspectives were shared. Conversely, if their home abided by a “no politics at the dinner table” rule or the young person disagreed with their parents' beliefs, it was harder to engage;
- Sometimes lack the information to feel comfortable or empowered to get involved and have trouble determining where to start;
- Have been actively silenced or discouraged from getting involved by older generations who say they are too young to understand and who do not represent their identities;
- Found their college experiences contributed to their political engagement either because their campuses had the resources to spark engagement, politics was a community activity, and/or they could see clearly how politics impacted their lives (often in the form of student loan debt);
- Started getting involved, or felt further compelled to act, when they saw people who share their identities leading and organizing;
- Found social media to be a source in normalizing and expanding young people's political engagement;
- Do not have the privilege to engage as much as they would like because they are juggling competing obligations to multiple jobs, school and family.

*When it comes to Our Current System of Government, participants shared they:*

- Are tired of engaging in a system of government that was not built for them and does not serve them in the ways they need and deserve;
- Believe their voices, and young people's voices, matter but are not necessarily heard through the traditional methods of engagement, yet they are able to find power in their own channels, such as protests and digital organizing;
- Do not feel represented in politics, whether based on their identity or their ideology. That said, young, local leaders and Representatives including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and The Squad give them hope;
- Believe the two-party system does not accurately represent them or their fellow young people. For some, this is rooted in a frustration of the growing partisanship. For many, it is based on a belief that Democratic Party is complacent and rests on the reputation of being the lesser of two evils, rather than actively fighting for or serving the communities on whose votes they rely on.

*As the Decision of 'If and For Whom To Vote' approaches, participants shared they:*

- Are compelled to show up because their lives have been defined by massive political moments including the good—the first Black President, the end to DOMA—and the bad—September 11 and the resulting Islamophobia, The Great Recession, the 2016 election, police and school shootings; and COVID-19;
- Are regularly discussing elections and candidates in peer groups that are not necessarily politically engaged, but that the shaming culture may prevent their peers from registering;
- Are voting this election cycle because there is too much at stake to sit it out, but recognize that many of their peers are discouraged by partisanship, gerry-mandering, electoral college, and politicians' failure to deliver on promises;
- Are not energized by the top of the ticket, but want to better understand their local elections;
- Face targeted disenfranchisement based on their age, and are subject to the same barriers and voter suppression that prevent all generations of underserved communities from voting.

## Recommendations

*Based on what we heard, we recommend:*

- Before Election Day campaigns emphasize the issues and the broader impact of the election, rather than just the candidate's name; stakeholders create resources that explain the election day process, answer questions up front, and emphasize that many people are just now registering for the first time so as to remove the stigma of not knowing; and political donors and strategists invest locally where the sense of representation and political efficacy is greater;
- The Democratic Party commit to bold reforms in its structure and policies that center historically and currently underserved and disenfranchised communities as well as reevaluate how it engages with its base so that voters do not feel like pawns in a political game but are empowered to be leaders within the party;

- After election day, stakeholders invest the long game via experiential and enhanced civics education in schools; expand opportunities for lobbying and interacting with elected officials; support organizations and programs that use relational organizing; advocate for and advance policies for automatic voter registration, no-excuse vote-by-mail, early voting, and Election Day as a holiday.

1. Jordan Misra. "Voter Turnout Rates Among All Voting Age and Major Racial and Ethnic Groups Were Higher Than in 2014." April 23, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html>  
2. Jordan Misra. "Voter Turnout Rates Among All Voting Age and Major Racial and Ethnic Groups Were Higher Than in 2014." April 23, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html>