

THE SPARTAN SHIELD



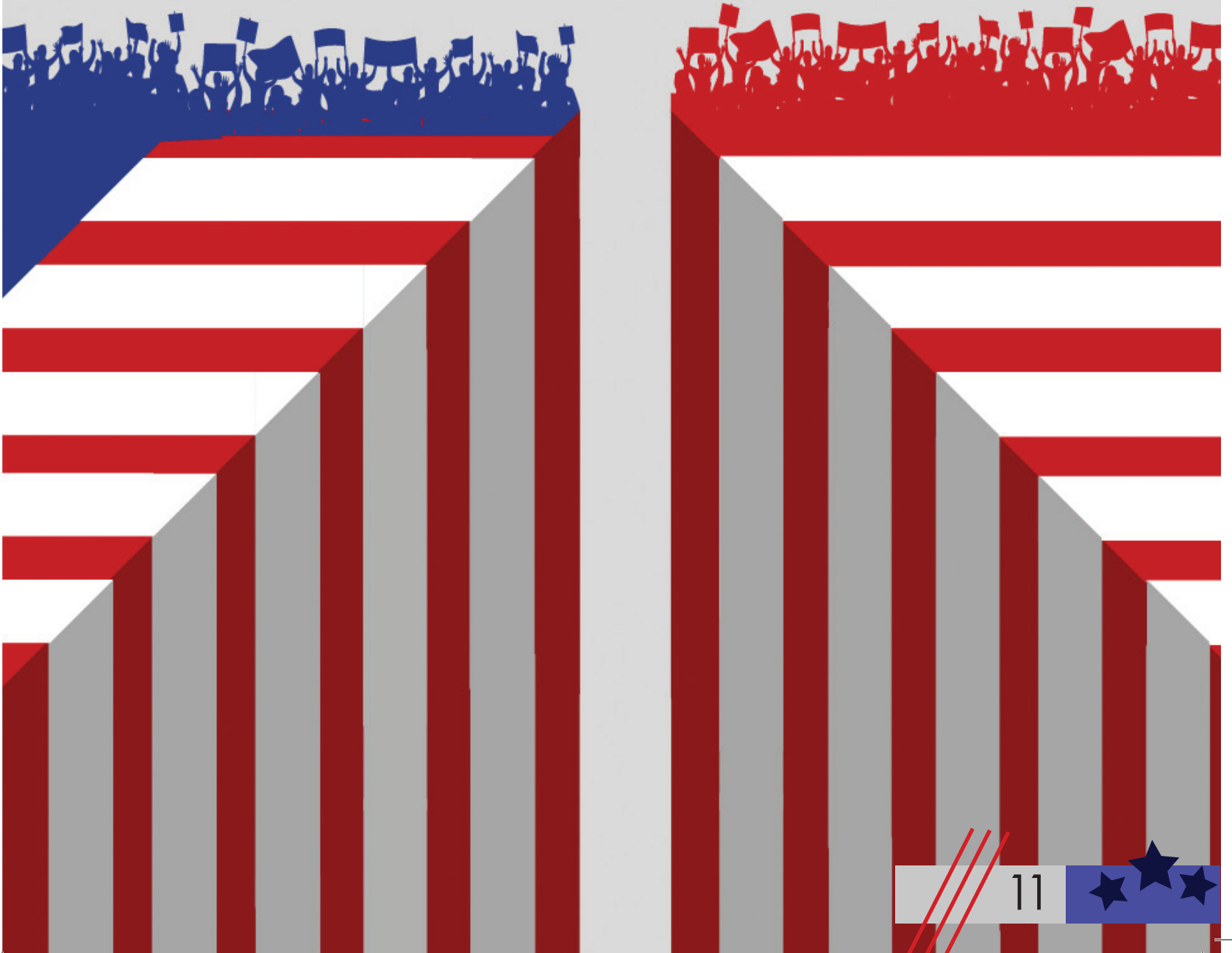
I VOTED!

I VOTED!

**DON'T SAY THE
"P" WORD!**

DON'T SAY THE 'P' WORD!

As the world continues to evolve, politics takes on new meanings. Explore our cover stories to understand more about how our world is interacting with politics, from political awareness and divisiveness to the way in which children are introduced to politics. The current state of our political climate is concerning for all parties involved and these articles will explore how this political crisis began, the main issues affecting it and where the light at the end of the tunnel must begin.



Politics Over Personality: America's Need to Support

By Makenna Leiby

The alignment with a specific political party can bring solidified opinions, new friends and advocacy opportunities into a person's life. Deciding your stance on important debates in your country is crucial in a time of close call votes. However, agreeing with a certain political party's opinions is far different than altering your personality to align with your political party.

Within recent years, the United States has become increasingly politically divided. One's political stance has become their most defining characteristic. Senior Amanda Nelson noticed a new trend in the way she finds herself describing others, "I sometimes feel like I mention a person's political party before I mention any other important things about them", she said. When describing a new friend, rather than bringing up their complimentary attributes, Americans now tend to mention their political affiliation above all. For some, attaining a friend of an opposing political party is an unthinkable feat.

Throughout former president Donald Trump's campaign period and presidential term, he grabbed the attention of an ultra-supportive group of Republicans. These supporters idolized Trump, and were not afraid to make clear that they wholeheartedly supported

ported his policies. Trump's fan base-like following caused a rivalry group to form that, in turn, dedicated their entire agenda to go against Trump's policies.

While it has been years since Trump served as president, the divide his reign created continues to sever America's ability to form relationships outside of politics. Similar to how fashion models seen wearing a certain brand influences the general public to buy from the brand, if one's favorite political figure is seen supporting a certain ideal, that ideal becomes the truth to their supporters.

Belonging to the Democratic party must mean you passionately support the current Democratic candidate and all their ideals, and the same for one affiliating with any other political party. The days of supporting only a few of a candidate's policies or voting outside of registered parties are over.

Politically involved individuals adopt the opinions of their political party as their personality traits, rather than experiencing life independently and deciding on their personal values. Relationships are most often built around holding a similar moral compass, but if one's morals are based upon those of a political figure, building non-political based relationships is nearly impossible.

The incorporation of social media into political campaigns and policy advocacy has done no favors for the divided state of modern America. The use of psychological marketing tools has always been present in politics, but

the inclusion of impressionable young people has made their effects more detrimental. Younger generations, biologically unable to access their critical-thinking skills, often believe the majority of information they find online is accurate.

As politically-based information infiltrates social media platforms TikTok and Instagram, young people are becoming more interested in the conditions of their country. However, they are likely to adopt the political party they see the most about on their social media feeds. Adolescents are observing the political content their

“Current voters care more about being undying supporters of their political mogul or party than voting based on the best decision for their country.”

friends or favorite celebrities are posting and accepting those ideals as fact.

The personal search for what one believes in is no longer stressed in modern society. Believing in the political opinion you see most about online has become the new norm. Current voters care more about being undying supporters of their political mogul or party than voting based on the best decision for their country. When a political party becomes the basis of identity, it becomes nearly impossible to see the value in another's opinion.

Society must remember a person can be kind, enjoyable or funny, while also being a supporter of an opposing political party. Experience life and base opinions on first-hand experiences, and then decide which political organization best suits your needs.

THE DIVIDED POLITICIZATION OF SCIENCE BY ANAGHA SUDHINDRA

The United States is infamous for its highly confrontational attitude towards many global issues. Citizens find themselves quick to pick a side or take a stance, even in situations where opposition towards a certain topic is not required.

One topic in high debate among extremists of the political spectrum is the trustworthiness of science. Science is easy to make political because it is an elite subject. The common man is often unable to comprehend the extent of scientific research, which easily translates to distrust. Science is also riddled with uncertainties. These uncertainties can be pried and prodded by political moguls attempting to push policy one way or another, leading to skepticism of science by constituents. Science exists in the agenda of democrats and republicans alike, serving as another emotionally-charged voting scheme.

The involvement of science in politics has taken an upturn in recent years with environmental tensions and pandemic action-items causing public division.

Climate change has become a facet of political ideology, creating fissures regarding all aspects of the topic, from debate on future action-items to varying levels of trust among scientific researchers. The largest disagreement comes from political extremists. Liberal Democrats place the most trust in scientific research and the involvement of humanity in climate exacerbation, and are supportive of policy and lifestyle change to mitigate environmental consequences. On the other hand, conservative Republicans find the warming of the Earth to be a natural phenomenon and believe policy and lifestyle change will have little to no effect on the environmental state of the Earth.

The differences in opinion have clearly rooted scientific basis, yet the story spun around scientific finds changes in order to appeal to candidates throughout the political spectrum. Those

among the left wing can identify quantifiable data on the human influence in climate change, like air quality levels, global temperature, water conditions. But those among the right wing are often swayed by Republican media influence, which discredits climate science at every turn.

According to Pew Research Center, 78% of Democrats consider climate change as a top priority, compared to 21% of Republicans considering the same. 70% of liberal Democrats are more likely to believe in scientific findings, compared to just 15% of conservative Republicans.

Americans are divided among their consensus on scientific based issues, due to high media politicization of such events. Sage Journals analyzed all climate change related articles from 1985-2017 and found political actors to be increasingly featured over scientific actors, creating a dramatization of science.

Politicians have many tactics to generate artificial conflict about scientific issues. Big Picture News revealed that Fox News can influence media personalities, including weather forecaster Joe Bastardi, to make comments about climate change on air. Whom the public perceives as prominent scientists, Bill Nye “the Science Guy,” and Neil DeGrasse Tyson often speak on climate change, under the public eye taking one stance of another, yet are not climatologists.

When masses of people are constantly exposed to such media influence and dramatization of scientific events, they naturally become divisive and take on politically influenced levels of trust in scientists.

Senior Aarya Joshi identified as a moderate but took a stance on the role of politics in science. “I think it is wrong to use science as a medium to push political agendas. Science is a field used for the betterment of humanity. It should not be tainted by the motives of profit or voter sentiments to give one political candidate or another a leg up,” she stated.

Many would agree fact should be featured in the media rather than twist-

ed sentiments intended to invoke an emotional response and gain votes, but this idea takes an interesting role in the recent rise of distrust in science exacerbated in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than any recent event, the COVID-19 pandemic was full of uncertainties. The public received devastating news from every which way, leading to dissenting opinions and transforming an otherwise human issue into a political issue. In 2020, the WHO issued many statements regarding pandemic safety procedures. Within the mere span of one year, numerous conclusions were made: the virus involved limited human transmission, the virus is extremely contagious, masks are recommended, masks must be mandated, social distancing is essential, some vaccines have faulty efficacies, varying strains exist with varying virulence.

The public was exposed to such a magnitude of information that many did not know what to believe. With a push from political actors discrediting science to due its ever changing nature, many Americans lost trust in science within the last three years.

Joshi commented on this pattern. “It is understandable how much of the public became distrustful of science within recent years. But that is not an excuse for political personalities to twist science into convincing tactics. Somehow, the public should have access to free, credible scientific information to formulate their own decisions rather than going off of political sentiments.”

The politicization of science has reduced the once pure industry to one filled with distrust and hidden agendas. Constituents must constantly analyze and extrapolate the true meaning of science in the political realm because of its dramatization in recent years.

MOVE TO END AFFIRMATIVE ACTION JEOPARDIZES

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

By Shobini Iyer & Anagha Sudhindra

The lawsuits

Created during the civil rights movement to provide more opportunities for people historically discriminated against, affirmative action in university admissions has become a standard part of the holistic process used by many higher institutions over the last few decades.

However, with any policy that involves race comes its own set of controversies. Colleges' use of affirmative action—the consideration of factors such as race and ethnicity when deciding to admit an applicant—has long been a deeply divisive issue.

Senior Luke Thompson is among many individuals who support the affirmative action process. “People who are against affirmative action are trying to bring back social constructions from a time long past. While you could make a logical argument that affirmative action disadvantages certain races, it is vital to making sure that everyone is equally represented and has an equal opportunity,” he said.

Anti-affirmative action movements trace years back to Ed Blum, a white conservative activist who has dedicated numerous efforts to end the affirmative action process. Since 1996, Blum has brought eight cases to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 2005, Blum founded the Project on Fair Representation, an organization with a mission to “support litigation that challenges racial and ethnic classifications and preferences in state and federal

courts.” Recruiting white student Abigail N. Fisher in his legal battle, Blum led a pair of lawsuits against the University of Texas at Austin for unlawfully denying her admission because of the school’s race-conscious admissions program.

After spending years in federal courts, the case was ultimately ruled against in a 4-3 verdict by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2016. The court cited precedents to uphold these policies from landmark cases such as *Gratz v. Bollinger* and *Grutter v. Bollinger*, which examined the University of Michigan’s admissions policies.

In Nov. 2014, Blum filed federal lawsuits against Harvard and UNC-Chapel Hill, alleging race-based discrimination in the schools’ admissions processes. This time, these attempts were made behind the front of a different unnamed plaintiff: a new nonprofit group founded by Blum, Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA).

Now, this anti-affirmative action group has evolved into representing over 20,000 students and parents from across the country. The organization boasts their mission to “support and participate in litigation that will restore the original principles of our nation’s civil rights movement,” encouraging individuals to submit their experiences being wronged by the college admissions process.

Since that 2014 case ignited a burning flame to end affirmative action, this group has persistently continued to file lawsuits related to affirmative action—the same suits that have suddenly resurfaced in recent news.

On Oct. 31, the Supreme Court heard two oral arguments brought to them by SFFA: *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina (UNC)*, both alleging discrimination against AAPI and white applicants.

Joined by the newest conservative members of the court, all three dissenters in the Fisher case — Chief Justice John Roberts and

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito — are expected to rule in favor of Blum and strike down years of precedent.

An added layer to the current Supreme Court being the most conservative court in recent history, SFFA is also funded by large conservative trusts— including DonorsTrust, the Searle Freedom Trust, the Sarah Scaife Foundation and the 85 Fund. These donors are linked to the Federalist Society, a network of libertarian and conservative lawyers that six of the nine sitting SCOTUS justices are members of.

“As it stands, people don’t have equal opportunity, and affirmative action evens out this imbalance. If the court were to rule in favor of Blum, that would only send our country backwards,” Thompson continued.

As Blum prepares to face the Supreme Court, it seems like the stars have aligned for him to achieve his life’s mission: tearing down race-conscious admissions at every institution.

Personal implications

For Asian-American students across the nation, the presence of affirmative action in the admissions processes has long been a touchy subject. While promoting a racially diverse group of applicants and future students, affirmative action is perceived by many Asian-Americans as working against their favor. Due to the high proportion of Asian-Americans in the applicant pools of elite schools, many applicants who are of Asian descent feel that they are at an inherent disadvantage because their demographic is already over-saturated.

This is a shared sentiment among many Asian-Americans, who understand the higher role of affirmative action but are in plight over personal implications.

Julianne Binto, an Asian-American senior amid college applications, understands the relative unfavorability she has due to her race. “I am acutely aware of how affirmative action can make it harder for me to get into top schools. It is possible that I could have top test scores and extracurriculars, and still not be accepted due to the competitiveness the policy creates,” she stated.

Though attempting to ameliorate racial obstacles in the admission process, affirmative ac-



tion does disadvantage Asian-Americans formerly existing. Asian-Americans are highly saturated in the application pool, yet still underrepresented in university class sizes. Harvard's freshman class has stably maintained a share of 16-19% of Asian-American since the 1990's.

But the percentage of Asians in the U.S. population has more than doubled since then.

Asian-Americans have to work harder than counterparts of other races because of the generated competition. A 2009 Princeton study revealed that Asians had to score 140 points higher than white applicants on the SAT for the same chance of acceptance into top universities.

So why are so many Asian-Americans firmly supporting affirmative action, flooding to Boston to march for its safety and future place among public and private institutions? The answer is straightforward: diversity.

The entire premise of affirmative action is to encourage a diverse learning environment. But in response to UNC's challenge, Justice Clarence Thomas approached the ambiguity of the word. "I've heard the word diversity quite a few times and I don't have a clue what it means. It seems to mean everything for everyone," he stated.

UNC representative Ryan Park attempted to clarify this subjective concept. "[Diversity is a] broadly diverse set of criteria that extends to all different backgrounds and perspectives, and not solely limited to race. [UNC] value[s] diversity of all different kinds and all the ways that people differ in our society."

While Park gives a perfectly reasonable definition of diversity, the more contested question is "whether the benefits of diversity actually provide a compelling enough reason to practice

racial preferences in admissions," according to The New Yorker columnist Jay Caspian Kang.

Diversity offers countless benefits in the learning environment. Diverse conversationalists and problem solvers working together on one campus are more resistant to groupthink, grappling in a stasis of extended disagreement, leading to out-of-the box initiatives and creative solutions. These benefits of diversity are highly indisputable, but are they causally linked to the practice of affirmative action in admissions?

SFFA plaintiff Cameron Norris argued that Harvard is only racially diverse due to the implementation of affirmative action. At an exclusive institution such as Harvard, the application pool is substantially picked through and perfected, down to an ideal student body reflecting the principles, goals, and preferred criteria of the institution. But the majority of Americans do not attend such prestigious universities; they attend colleges which accept most applicants, voiding the question of racial preference.

Harvard purposefully accepts a certain number of Black applicants to constitute 15% of the student body. In contrast, Bunker Hill Community College in Boston accepts all applicants, naturally assembling a Black population of 22%. The "artificial" diversity created by affirmative action at top schools is the only way to maintain a diverse student body as the application pool is highly competitive.

Yet Asian-American students are more willing to apply to and attend a university implementing affirmative action—which is possibly disadvantageous in terms of admissions—if a diverse student body and faculty is guaranteed.

Voter survey showed that 69% of Asian-Americans are in favor of affirmative action. Bintu found herself among this percentage. "[Affirmative action] ensures underrepresented minorities are part of the college environment. Providing greater opportunities for everyone and enriching the college experience by encouraging diversity."

But why not take a color-blind approach to admissions, an ideal world where race, ethnicity and skin color are disregarded in the admissions process in favor of merit and character?

Such sentiment makes race an untouchable topic. Opportunity by race is not exempt in education, and therefore it cannot be exempt in the admissions process. Standardized testing delineates the discrepancies closely mirroring racial socioeconomic trends.

The 2020 average SAT math subject score out of 800 was significantly lower among Black and Latino or Hispanic test-takers, scoring 454 and 478 respectively, compared to White and Asian test-takers, scoring 547 and 632 respectively. This divergence likely stems from generational exclusionary housing and racially-targeting policies disadvantaging Black and Latino or Hispanic students for decades past.

Such disparities are found throughout education for certain races. A sudden shift to color-blind attitude in admissions, disbanding affirmative action, would completely eradicate any sort of diversity maintained at elite institutions. Top schools would become filled with majorities; contingents of wealthy backgrounds with access to educational opportunities and resources would quickly suffuse all open spots. Groups lacking equitable educational opportunity would have no chance competing for highly acclaimed spots at such institutions.

For many POC, primary and secondary education consisted of a homogeneous student body and faculty. Living and learning without an educational mentor to relate with or confide in can be discouraging for students attempting to find their place within an otherwise uniform society. Without affirmative action, this pattern would continue throughout post-secondary education and into the career industry. The effects of affirmative action work to alleviate racial discrepancies within education, and encourage a sense of community among POC.



VOTE! VOTE! VOTE!

BY JAKE WILSTED

HOW TO VOTE RESPONSIBLY



RESEARCH

Perhaps the most crucial element of voting is researching the candidates on a local, state, and federal level. One of the greatest dangers to democracy is straight-ticket voting, which is a pattern of voting solely ticking off candidates from a particular political party. When researching candidates, understand the policies they wish to enact, their endorsements and, if applicable, how they have voted on previous legislation.

Use reliable sources! Social media and biased news networks present a narrative. Be aware of this narrative and what an author of a news piece may be trying to convince you. The most reliable information can be found reading off of campaign websites, watching debates, and attending candidates' events throughout the political scope.



CRITICAL THINKING

Now that you have thoroughly researched candidates, you must decide who to vote for! Ask yourself the following questions: Which candidate do I want to represent my values and beliefs? Has this candidate proven they will represent me?

It is essential to have an open mind. The political candidates that will best represent you will not always be from the political party you typically identify with.



VOTE

On November 8th, 2022, go and exercise your right to vote! In Iowa, voters can vote in person, by absentee ballot or request a ballot by mail. It is crucial in our Nation's democracy to exercise the civil duty of voting.



SIX VOTES



DETERMINED THE WINNER OF IOWA'S SECOND DISTRICT IN THE 2020 ELECTION

RESULTS OF THE 2020 ELECTION:
IOWA'S SECOND DISTRICT

 **MILLER-MEEKS**
196,964 VOTES

HART
196,958 VOTES

DOES MY VOICE MATTER?

YES! Unfortunately, when presidential elections reach over 155 million votes and local elections such as Iowa's second district almost reach 200,000 votes, many think, "what impact could by vote really have...?" The answer is simple: a lot more than you realize. If fewer people had this attitude, the results of elections throughout the nation would be different.

VOTING IN IOWA

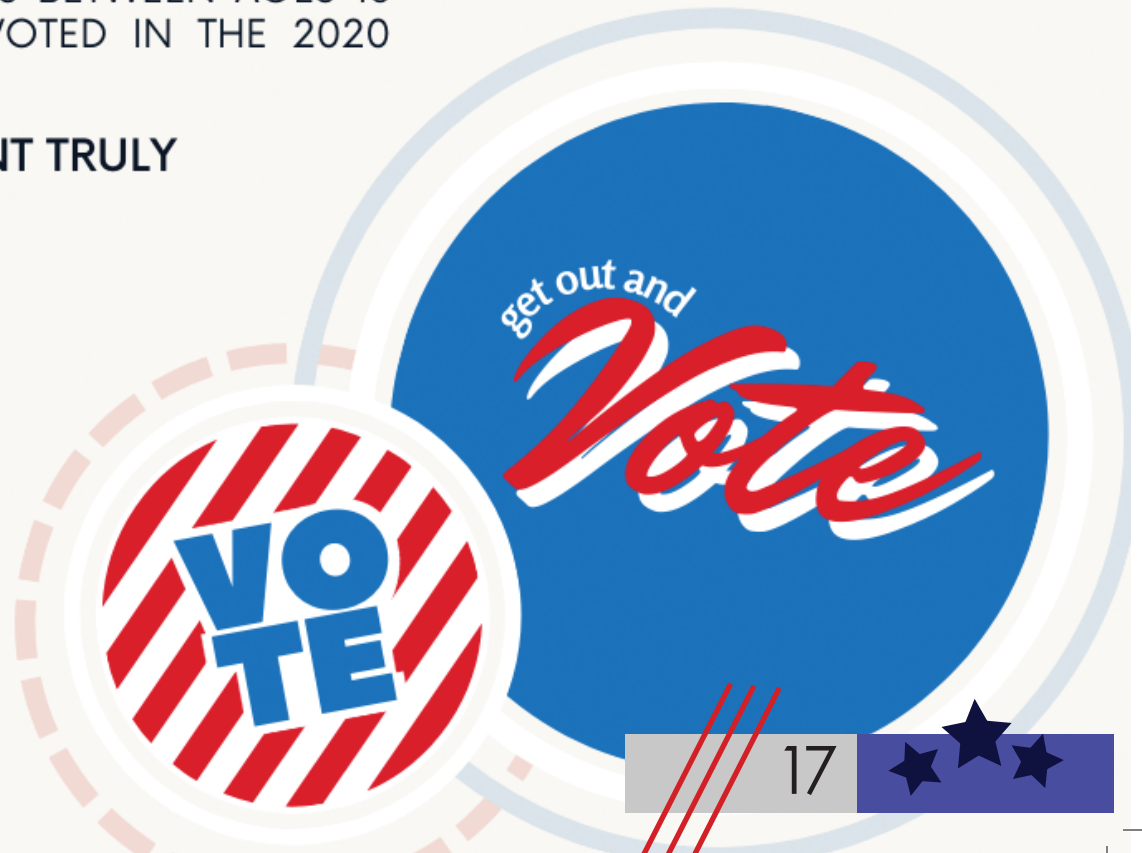
51% OF VOTERS BETWEEN AGES 18 AND 19 VOTED IN THE 2020 ELECTION

55% OF VOTERS BETWEEN AGES 18 AND 29 VOTED IN THE 2020 ELECTION

IS OUR GOVERNMENT TRULY REPRESENTING US?

If only half of the new voters are voting in elections, can we, the people, confidently say we are represented? Representation happens at all levels of government: federal, state, and local. It is a crucial element to the United States' democracy to vote as soon as eligible--18 years old.

62% OF THE NATIONAL POPULATION VOTED IN 2020



BY AYAH ALSHEIKHA

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS ROLE IN MODERN AMERICAN POLITICS

The state of politics in the United States has become further polarized in recent years. Amplified by a newfound political presence on social media, online content creators profoundly influence the political opinions of viewers and fans.

In the past, political matters were practically hereditary, as new generations assumed the views and opinions taught to them by their parents, and so on. There were few external influences in the world of politics, as it has always been custom to avoid such taboo topics of discussion. This left people comfortably uncomfortable with the “P” word, and only recently has this unspoken rule been challenged in the form of social media influencers.

Social media’s influence on the population, specifically younger generations, has never been stronger than in 2020, when Instagram and Facebook statistics showed that social media usage rose by almost 50% from the previous year. Social media thrived in this era when people essentially had nothing better to do than scroll absent-mindedly through platforms like TikTok, Instagram and Twitter for hours each day.

The over usage of social media led to unique ecosystems and communities formed online, each introducing viewers to new ideas that were left to fester in the minds of bored, iso-

lated quarantiners. Junior Luci Patel shared how social media affected her during the pandemic, “I started using social media in 2020 because I was bored during quarantine, and my TikTok feed became my most-used form of entertainment,” Patel stated.

Politics were brought into the media more heavily in 2020 when the Black Lives Matter protests became rampant and highly publicized throughout the United States. These protests incited mass conflicts all over the internet, with debates over the subject being found in the most obscure comment sections. At this point in time, a simple video of a dog could be made political, showing the intensity and significance of politics in the media. This outburst of opposition led to swarms of political (and overly-politicized) matters being brought to social media. The outpour of content related to this micro-revolution was substantial, with online creators broadly displaying their varying opinions across the internet.

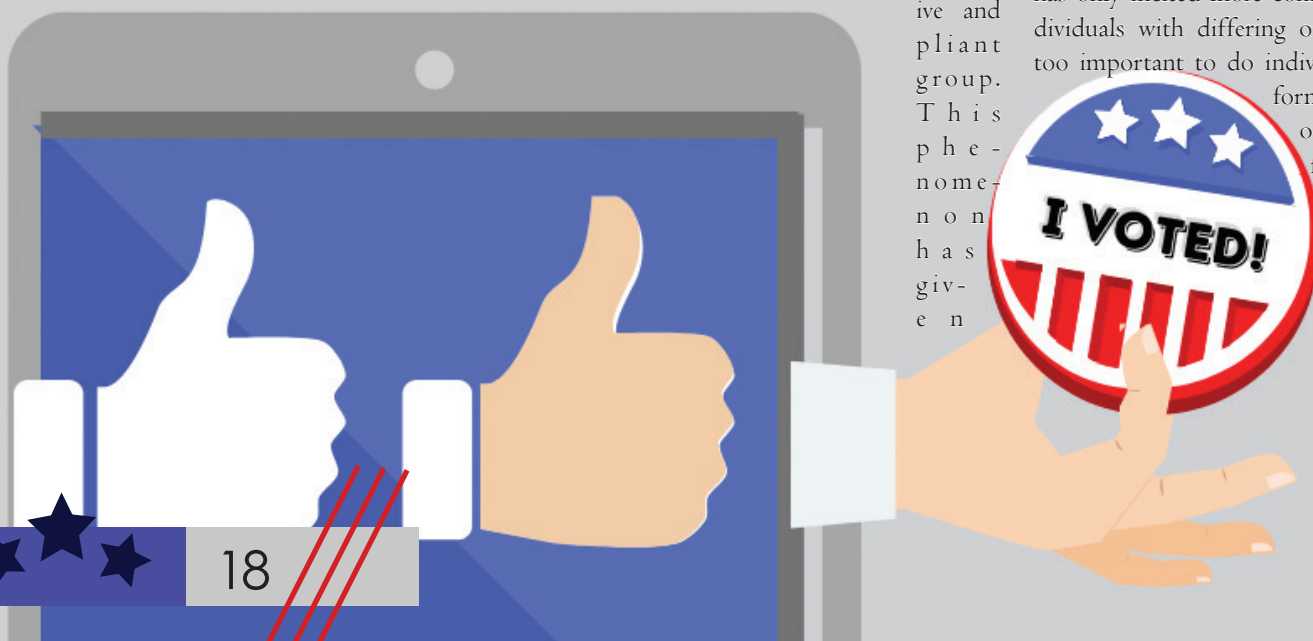
Creators like Ben Shapiro, Christian Walker and countless more on both sides of the political spectrum are known for their extremist opinions and are not afraid to share them with the world. With the massive numbers of youth on social media, starting at as young as ten years old, the demographic of social media users has shifted to a younger, more na-

ive and pliant group. This phenomenon has given more power to the words of influencers, as the publishing of their often radical and extremist ideologies is being absorbed into the minds of children far too young to develop a well-formulated opinion.

Such influencers have caused extreme polarization between right-wingers and leftists on social media, and the conflicts that have erupted on the internet are innumerable. Dustin Miller, yet another observer of media politics stated, “I can’t even begin to describe all of the ridiculous arguments circling around the internet in 2020. It was such an extreme display of political sides that I have never seen before.”

Teenagers have resorted to getting their news updates from social media, with influencers acting almost as news reporters to report information to their followers. With the majority of young people found on social media having formed such extreme political views based on influencer content, young people are finding their paths in the political world. For the first time, political opinions are being developed individually, and the idea of generational patterns has diminished, especially with Gen Z trailblazing the political world despite past generations.

With the good also comes bad, where young, developing minds are too easily influenced into opinions that may not be truly self-formed. In addition, the influx of political content on social media has blurred the line between taboo and small talk, which has only incited more conflicts between individuals with differing opinions. It is all too important to do individual research to form independent opinions aside from external influences such as social media.



Many young Americans share the experience of having an elementary school “election.” As young kids, they were given a piece of paper and told to vote for one of two presidential candidates. Most of the students were relatively uneducated on the nominees, and made choices based on the name that

was more familiar to them. But,

what used to be a harmless activity to teach kids about democracy might now be divisive and inflammatory. Kids are developing real political opinions at younger and younger ages due to the ways politics are exposed to them.

A large part of how kids learn about politics and become partisan is due to their parents. When adults openly discuss their political beliefs, their children absorb and internalize those opinions, taking them on themselves. CNN reported kids who hear their parents express dislike for a candidate or party interpret this as meaning those people are essentially “bad.” Vanessa Woeful is a mother to four kids between the ages of two and 13, and knows how important it is to stay neutral. “Kids want to say and do everything like their parents when they are young. So it influences them greatly, but I think it’s important for each child to be taught about both sides so they can make a decision on their own.”

During election years, this exposure can be suffocating to adults, let alone kids. The average person has had experience with political ads, making them less susceptible to persuasion. Kids haven’t

By Jae Jepsen

Playground Politics: Early Exposure to Political Division

developed these critical thinking skills yet, which can make them vulnerable. Woeful has noticed her son being influenced by media, “He hears things on TV, radio or whatever and has so many questions. He does have opinions and strong opinions.” With the increasingly aggressive nature of these advertisements, children see politicians making personal attacks against one another, normalizing this type of division.

Even if there are no partisan beliefs introduced within a home, kids will still be exposed to politics in school. Values solidify around 8th grade, when students are formally introduced to political par-

While teachers try to stay neutral, the way parties are introduced may imply antagonism between the two. Hall describes how she depicts each one: “When I introduce political parties, I present them in an unbiased way. I showed the values each party believes in and what has been done in the past so students can form their own opinions.” By presenting the parties based on their stances on divisive issues, teachers unintentionally paint them as opposites. As beneficial as the exposure to both can be, the clear divides present even in explanation may make kids more defensive and hostile towards those who disagree with them.

If we ever want to resolve division among adults, we need to begin the change with kids. If parents encourage their children to decide their own beliefs, Americans will be more educated on both sides. If campaign ads are limited to facts, viewers won’t be misled. If schools introduce political parties as allies rather than adversaries, people will have more empathy.

“When I introduce political parties, I present them in an unbiased way. I show the values each party believes in and what has been done in the past so students can form their own opinions.” -Amber Hall

ties for the first time in Social Studies.

Teacher Amber Hall has instructed the class many times, and knows exactly how integral her class can be when it comes to students’ newfound notions. “It starts with parents and school exposing students to what is going on in the world. Then, as young adults coming to your own conclusion about what you think is best.” When students are exposed to both sides of the spectrum in school, they can determine what resonates with them, often based on the way they were raised.

Maybe, with the commitment of parents, teachers, and politicians, elementary school mock “elections” can be harmless and fun once again.

