

HEALTH, LIFE SKILLS & SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Choices[®]

YOUR

VOICE

COUNTS

How you
can make a
difference
in this
election—
even if
you can't
vote,
p. 16



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She's America's

THESE FOUR TEENS ARE RESHAPING POLITICS AND MAKING

By JANE BIANCHI



Diana Zaragoza, 18, is registering voters



Tyler Ruzich, 18, ran for office



Poojitha Tanjore, 17, is working on campaigns



Marcel McClinton, 17, is talking to politicians

HERE'S WHAT'S HAPPENING THIS MONTH:

The people who are going to make decisions that could change the course of your life will be elected. Will you be able to afford college without going into crippling debt? Will more jobs leave your community? Will your parents have to choose between keeping a roof over your head or paying for your little sister's medication?

On November 6, the midterm elections will be held. Many politicians—including U.S. senators, U.S. representatives, and state and local officials—may be on the ballot in your state. The people who are elected will have the power to make laws that affect everything from the funding your school receives to the quality of the air you breathe.

But guess what? *You* have power too. For those of you old enough to vote, register ASAP. For those of you already registered, show up at the polls—and support the candidates you believe in.

For the rest of you, listen up: Even if you aren't old enough to vote, you can still make your voice heard. Read on to meet four amazing teens who are doing just that. Their goal is to shape the future they want to see in this country. Will you join them?

GREGG SEGAL PHOTOGRAPHY (DIANA); JILL HUNTER/AP IMAGES FOR SCHOLASTIC INC. (MARCEL); ALLISON SHELLEY/AP IMAGES FOR SCHOLASTIC INC. (POOJITHA); CHRISTOPHER SMITH/AP/GETTY IMAGES (TYLER)

Future. Are You?

THEIR VOICES HEARD. READY TO JOIN THEM?



“

I'm
registering
voters.

”

—Diana Zaragoza, 18
Lancaster, California

MOST OF MY LIFE, I KNEW nothing about voting. I figured that if you were an American citizen, you could show up at the polls. It turns out that's not true; you have to register to vote before you're able to [cast a ballot](#) on Election Day.

The problem is that not everyone knows this, which causes people to miss out on their chance to have a say. In fact, there's *a lot* of confusion surrounding the voting process. I decided to help fix that. →

● YOUR FUTURE

In March, I started volunteering to register voters with a nonprofit called NextGen America. After school and on weekends, I head to areas where there are large crowds, such as farmers' markets and local parks, and ask people if they're registered. If they're not—or if they're confused by the voting laws—I walk them through what they need to do and help them register on the spot.

Most people are really appreciative of what we do. I speak both English and Spanish, which is helpful because a lot of Latinos live in my area. Many people in this community think they can't vote, but I explain to them that yes, they can!

I'm so proud of the work I've done. In the month before this year's California primary—a voting event that narrows down the candidates—my volunteer group registered 150 people. Some of the volunteers aren't old enough to cast a ballot, but we're still making a big difference in the voting process. After all, retweeting and sharing political posts on social media can be good for raising awareness, but nothing produces as much change as voting does.

VOTING BY THE NUMBERS

18

How old you need to be to vote in U.S. federal elections. **FUN FACT:** The minimum voting age used to be 21, but it was lowered in the 1970s.

16

The age at which a few states allow teens to pre-register to vote. (In some other states, it's 17.) This means that you'll be ready to cast a ballot when you turn 18.

zero

How many selfies you should take with your ballot or in the voting booth. (It's illegal in some states!) Instead, take a picture of your "I voted" sticker and share that on Snapchat.

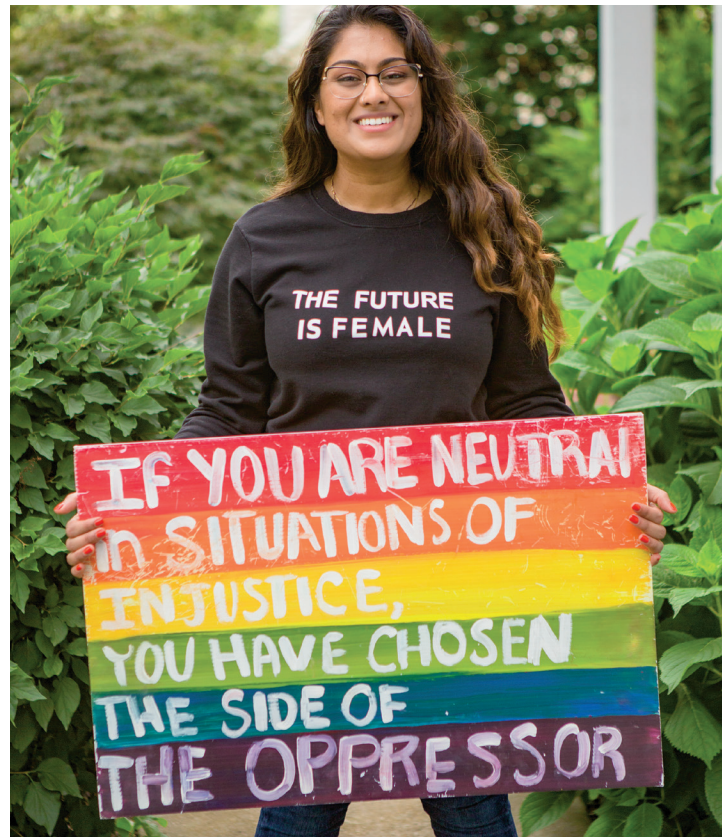
“
I ran for governor.

—Tyler Ruzich, 18
Prairie Village, Kansas

BEFORE I ENTERED SEVENTH GRADE,

the public school I was supposed to attend was shut down. My friends and I were placed into another school, but it became overcrowded, with about 30 kids packed into each class. Traffic jams in the hallways and stairwells made us constantly late to class, and it was difficult to get any personal attention from the teachers.

I later learned that this was all happening because of our former governor's policies. He'd spent way too much money on school administrators and not enough on teachers and students. That frustrated





COURTESY OF DELANCY SMITH (TYLER)

me and made me want to do something to fix the situation. So when I learned a few years later that there was no age minimum to enter the 2018 race for governor in my home state of Kansas, I decided to jump in. It seemed like a great opportunity to raise awareness about education issues.

My slogan was “A Republican for the Next Generation.” Most of my opponents were decades older. That didn’t intimidate me. But they pretended that my campaign didn’t exist—*that* hurt. I wasn’t invited to any of the gubernatorial debates sponsored by the Kansas Republican Party, but I didn’t stop fighting.

My initial goal was to get 10 people on my block to vote for me, but then the media picked up on my story. I started drawing larger crowds at campaign rallies, where I spoke about the core issues of my campaign. (Being on the debate team prepared me to give public speeches, so I didn’t feel nervous.) I *loved* those rallies. When people cheered for what I said, it reinforced my belief that I was doing something right by bringing a new, youthful perspective to politics. By the end of my campaign, I had raised \$10,000!

Even with all that support, I didn’t win August’s primary election. This means that I can’t be part of the midterm election, but I’m not giving up on politics. After high school, I hope to study political science in college. And even though I won’t be on the ballot this November, I’m proud that my campaign sent the message that young people aren’t just going to stand by—we’re going to stand up.

“

**I’m a campaign
volunteer.**

”

—Poojitha Tanjore, 17
Ashburn, Virginia

I’VE ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF THOSE KIDS WHO IS REALLY

hard on herself. When I was younger, I played softball and four different instruments, and I was always pushing myself to improve. I think about politics in the same way: There’s a lot that America can do better at. For instance, women make up

more than half the U.S. population, so why do they only make up 25 percent of our government?

To help create change, I became involved in several political campaigns, picking ones that had a message I truly believed in. In 2016, I volunteered for Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign as well as LuAnn Bennett’s—she was running to be a U.S. House Representative in Virginia. Then last year, I volunteered on Ralph Northam’s successful campaign for governor of Virginia.

When I say these campaigns were my life, I mean it. I volunteered after school and on weekends from 5 a.m. to midnight. I made phone calls and canvassed (that’s where you go door-to-door and talk to strangers about your candidate in order to gain support for the campaign). I was so dedicated that I was put in charge of important tasks, such as training hundreds of people how to canvass. →

● YOUR FUTURE

It was an overwhelming amount of responsibility, but I didn't have time to be nervous. Campaigns are fast-paced and extremely hectic, and when there is a problem, you often have just 10 seconds to solve it.

My goal is to encourage other teenagers to become politically active as well. That's why I started volunteering with an organization called Rise to Run this past June. It inspires young women in high school and college to run for office by teaching them how campaigns work, encouraging them to volunteer for ones that inspire them, and more.

I'm busy! But whenever this job gets tough, I keep going because I know that there's always a younger girl out there who needs a role model like me to look up to.

TIME TO STEP UP!

In the last midterm election (November 2014), only 17 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds cast ballots, the lowest percentage recorded in 40 years. Yikes! Participating in politics—and encouraging your friends to do the same—could make a huge difference.

“
I challenge politicians to change their stance on gun laws.
”

—Marcel McClinton, 17
Houston, Texas

IN MAY 2016, I WAS CO-TEACHING SUNDAY SCHOOL

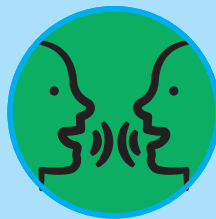
to preschoolers in a church when we heard gunshots in the parking lot. I crouched below a window, terrified. Luckily for us, the shooter never came inside, but he killed one person and injured six outside. It was devastating.

For a couple of weeks, I couldn't sleep. I felt disappointed in our society for letting this become the new normal. I tried to forget about what happened, but videos of shootings on the news brought back the trauma. Then, after the February 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, I knew I had to do something. Enough was enough.

Now I volunteer with the Brady Campaign to

Let's Talk Politics

IT CAN BE POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS POLITICAL ISSUES WITHOUT BUTTING HEADS. HERE'S HOW.



TALK IN PERSON

Get offline and have the conversation face-to-face—or at least over the phone. You'll both be less likely to say something insulting this way.



ASK QUESTIONS

Don't just make statements about what you believe in. Show curiosity and interest by asking the person you're talking with what he or she thinks. You may be surprised by what you learn.

Click to teamenough.org to find out what grades your state's elected officials received.



JILL HUNTER/AP IMAGES FOR SCHOLASTIC INC (MARKED)
Prevent Gun Violence, where I fight for stronger laws. This past summer, I was part of its youth-led team that brought “report cards” to members of the U.S. Congress. These report cards graded them on how much they have—or haven’t—supported gun violence prevention legislation. It was empowering to meet with these politicians face-to-face and put pressure on them to change their minds.

Some people assume that I’m liberal, but I’m not. In fact, I had a Republican Party internship and my dad owns guns. I don’t believe in gun bans, but I am in favor of a moderate approach to gun violence prevention. People getting killed senselessly isn’t a partisan issue—it’s a human issue. But it’s an issue that teenagers can help fix if we make our voices heard, so let’s get loud!



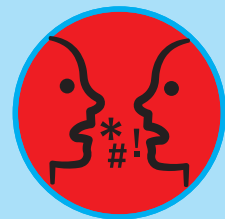
ADJUST YOUR PERSPECTIVE

It’s unlikely that you are going to change someone’s mind. Instead of trying to persuade the other person to switch sides, make this your goal: understanding his or her point of view.



POINT OUT COMMON GROUND

Even if you are on opposite ends of the political spectrum, there’s often at least one thing you can agree on. Mentioning what that is during the convo can help make politics feel less divisive.



KNOW WHEN TO END IT

If the person you’re talking with offends you or if you feel like you can’t respond respectfully, call it quits. Say: “This is heated. Let’s end this because our relationship is more important to me.”

SOURCES: Joan Blades, J.D., co-founder of Living Room Conversations and AllSides for Schools; Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, Ph.D., director of the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement