

YOUNG VOTERS & THE 2018 MIDTERMS

As the dust settles on the 2018 midterm elections, there's no question that young people had an impact: from record voter registrations to turnout on election day, young people used their voices and votes to build power and address the issues that matter most to them. Young voters are engaged, progressive, and here to stay.

Young voters turned out. Young people registered to vote at record rates with early voting for young adults surging 188% since the 2014 midterm elections¹ and showed up to make sure their votes were counted despite sweeping voter suppression efforts aimed squarely at marginalized communities. Preliminary turnout numbers in select college campus districts (disproportionately voters 18-35) show significant turnout increases from 2014, as illustrated on chart on right.² Notably, one-third (31%) of young people (18-29) turned out to vote in the 2018 midterm election, up from 21% in 2014, representing the highest level of participation among youth in the past quarter-century.³

Young voters made a difference. With so many tight races and narrow margins of victory, young voters played a key role in outcomes. Young people helped elect candidates who care about reproductive justice, LGBTQ equality, and immigrant rights--candidates like Sharice Davids (KS-03) and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14).

Young people are in it for the long haul. Young people know that the future isn't won or lost in one election - it's built by people and communities across the country, every day. Young people are informed, engaged, and active in their communities, working to expand access to sex ed, defend abortion rights, and advance immigrant justice, racial justice, and LGBTQ liberation. They don't see these issues as separate, and they want to see elected officials understand the connections and intersections.

Campus	2014 Turnout	2018 Turnout
University of Florida	18.53%	47.28%
University of North Carolina - Greensboro	13.74%	35.42%
Pennsylvania State University	4.65%	33.42%
University of Michigan	10.51%	35.89%



URGE Georgia members at our Reproductive Justice Leadership Institute--URGE's signature training program to develop emerging leaders in reproductive justice.

BUILDING YOUTH POWER FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE: URGE'S APPROACH

URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity is the only national, multi-racial reproductive justice organization centering the leadership of young people. URGE envisions a world where all people have agency over our own bodies and relationships, and the power, knowledge, and tools to exercise that agency. We're making that vision a reality by engaging young people in creating and leading the way to sexual and reproductive justice, with civic engagement as a core strategy. URGE is building power in the South and Midwest where marginalized people are most under threat. The challenges are formidable: voter suppression and other threats to democracy, the specter of losing the federal protections for abortion guaranteed under *Roe v. Wade*, and the takeover of state legislatures by extreme anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ, and anti-immigrant ideologues make our work more difficult, and more necessary, than ever before.

We are developing a generation of young leaders actively engaged in every election - not just the "big" ones. We are building a culture of civic engagement to sustain this work for the long struggle ahead. Despite being ignored or even scapegoated by much of the political narrative, young people lead the way: in our communities, on campus, and at the ballot box.

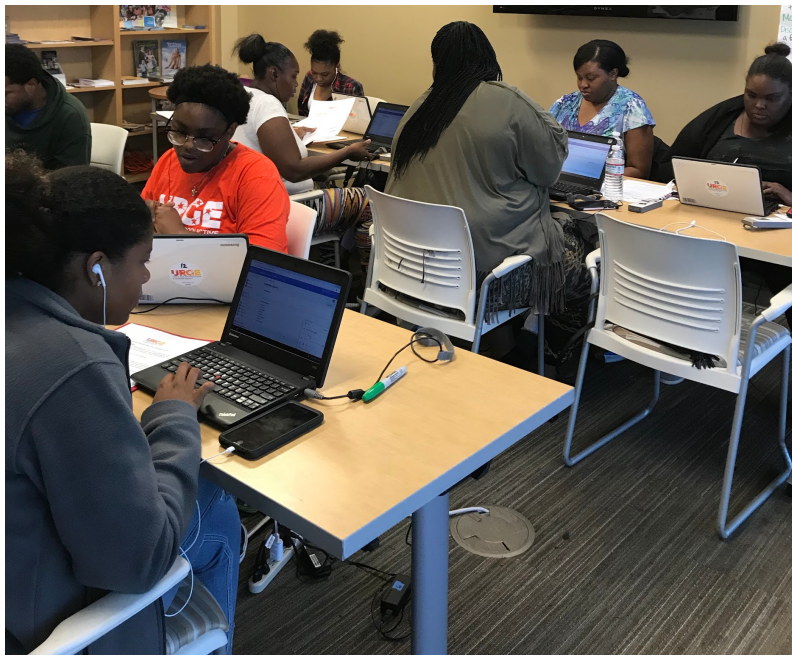
RECORD LEVELS OF YOUTH VOTER ENGAGEMENT & REGISTRATION

Even before the election of Donald Trump, young people have been leading the progressive resistance movement--and the last two years have seen more young people getting engaged than ever before. From the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students who organized the March for Our Lives, to the young survivors who told their stories of sexual assault as they opposed the Supreme Court nomination of Justice Brett Kavanaugh, young people are taking action for the issues they care about.⁴

- ▶ Young people attending a march or rally grew 200% from 2016 to 2018.⁵
- ▶ Engagement in online activism of young people increased to 48% in 2018, from 34% in 2016.⁶
- ▶ Nationally, voters aged 18 to 39 tripled their early voting rate since 2014.⁷

This increase in activism and civic engagement manifested in a surge in voter registration among young people.⁸ Many states - including URGE investment states Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, Ohio, and Texas - saw an increase in the number of young people age 18-29 registering to vote.⁹ Young people stated they didn't feel that they were being represented properly by elected officials and wanted to make their voices heard in the democratic process.¹⁰ Throughout our on-the-ground work, URGE saw this passion and energy firsthand.





VOTER ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT: URGE INVESTMENT STATES

ALABAMA

In Alabama, URGE organizers and student activists registered fellow young people to vote, educated them on the anti-abortion ballot initiative Amendment 2, and helped get out the vote on election day. Chapters at the University of Alabama and the University of Montevallo hosted the URGE Abortion Positive Tour, a stigma-busting program designed to spark courageous conversations about abortion. The tour in Alabama focused on educating young people about Amendment 2, a ballot initiative intended to pave the way to outlawing abortion in Alabama. Through this two-day event alone, nearly 300 young people pledged to vote no on Amendment 2.

In Tuscaloosa, Birmingham, and Montgomery, URGE canvassers met young people where they are, in busy campus buildings, through classrooms raps, and at community events like Pride. These teams also went door knocking in communities and had transformative conversations with voters about the harm of anti-abortion Amendment 2 through phone and text banks. While we were ultimately unable to stop Amendment 2 from passing, the young people of Alabama are ready to fight back to defend abortion access in the state.

OHIO

In Ohio, our chapters at Ohio University and Otterbein University hosted the URGE Abortion Positive Tour, focusing on abortion stigma-busting and building community. Chapters conducted non-partisan voter registration across their campuses, registering 107 young voters throughout Ohio.

Our canvassing operations focused in Northwest Ohio across Bowling Green and Toledo and

included door-knocking as well as phone and text banking. This built on our work in the spring primary election when, for under-30 voters, 28.2% of URGE contacts turned out to

IN ALABAMA URGE:

- ▶ Hired **37** canvassers
- ▶ Contacted **54,795** Alabama voters
- ▶ Secured **6,238** pledges from Alabamians to vote NO on Amendment 2



IN OHIO URGE:

- ▶ Hired **18** canvassers
- ▶ Contacted **2,763** Ohio voters
- ▶ Secured **456** pledges to vote

Top: URGE phone bank in Montgomery, Alabama: young people contact their peers throughout the state to protect abortion access and fight Alabama Amendment 2. **Bottom:** URGE Ohio students at Bowling Green State University used decorated golf carts to bring their peers to the early voting center serving the campus area during the Spring 2018 primary election.

vote compared with 7.5% of young people statewide. These exciting results show that URGE's model is working: when young people talk to their peers about the importance of voting, we see results.

IN TEXAS URGE:

- ▶ Hired **8** canvassers
- ▶ Contacted **20,422** Texas voters
- ▶ Secured **2,442** pledges to vote



TEXAS

In Texas, URGE engaged young people on issue advocacy, non-partisan voter registration, and non-partisan get-out-the-vote activities. The University of Texas - Rio Grande Valley hosted the URGE Abortion Positive Tour, where they highlighted the importance of access to reproductive health care, including abortion, for immigrant communities. Our chapters in Texas registered over 300 young people to vote through non-partisan registration events on campus.

In San Antonio, our eight-person canvassing team knocked doors and held text banks to talk to young people about voting. These efforts were squarely focused on ensuring people made a plan to vote, knew when and where to do so, and knew what identification they should bring with them.

KANSAS AND GEORGIA

In Kansas and Georgia, URGE chapters focused on non-partisan voter engagement. Chapters held events on why voting matters, educated members on voter suppression and the current rules in their states, and conducted non-partisan voter registration on campus. Chapters hosted URGE Abortion Positive Tour stops at the University of Kansas and Pittsburg State University in Kansas and in Georgia at Spelman College, Mercer University, and the University of Georgia.



TOP: URGE Texas voter engagement team gets training on new text banking technology. **BOTTOM:** URGE staff reminding folks on election day that Voting Is Sexy.

Through training, issue advocacy, organizing and voter engagement, URGE offers multiple entry points for young leaders. Our signature combination of reproductive justice values, bold campaigns, and youth-led organizing creates a solid foundation for young people to build their own culture of voting.

YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT

The 2018 midterm election was marked by a significant increase in youth voter turnout of the kind usually only seen in presidential election years. **In this midterm, youth turnout surpassed the 2014 midterm numbers.** There was a significant increase in **youth who planned to vote with the figure topping over 40%.**¹¹ Of the **33 million plus Americans who voted early**, there was increased youth early voter turnout across the board, especially in states like **Texas** and **Georgia** where the number of early young voters doubled that of 2014.^{12, 13} Young people knew from the beginning that this election had the potential to deliver historic outcomes for their communities: **81% stated that they believe they have the power to change things in this country.**¹⁴

Historic Gains for Women, People of Color, Young People, and the LGBTQ Community

Young people today are the most diverse generation ever to vote:

- **20%** of young people ages 18-34 identify as LGBTQ¹⁵
- Millennials who identify as people of color make up more than **38%** of those eligible to vote¹⁶

The 2018 midterm election saw record numbers of women, people of color, young people, and LGBTQ people running for office. The results bring our state and federal governments closer to true representation, both of the demographics and values of the New American Majority.

All 435 seats in the House of Representatives were up for grabs in this election while, in the Senate, 35 seats were in play. The candidates who ran in the 2018 midterm elections broke race and gender barriers:

- **410** women, people of color, and LGBTQ candidates ran for House, Senate, and governor seats.¹⁷
- The **964** candidates who ran in 2018 included:
 - **200+** people of color;
 - **26** lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender people; and
 - **272** women.¹⁸

Historic representation for Women, People of Color, and Young People in Congress

- **Over 100 women** will be members of the U.S. House of Representatives with over 34 of those being women of color.¹⁹
- **Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez** (NY) and **Abby Finkenauer** (IA), at 29, became the **youngest two women** elected to Congress.
- **Ilhan Omar** (MN) and **Rashida Tlaib** (MI) became the **first Muslim women** elected to Congress.
- **Sylvia Garcia** and **Veronica Escobar** became the **first Latina Congresswomen from Texas**.
- **Deb Haaland** of New Mexico joins **Sharice Davids** as one of the **first Native American women** elected to Congress.



- ▶ **Ayanna Pressley** was the **first Black woman** elected to Congress from **Massachusetts**.
- ▶ While the senate election in **Arizona** is still too close to call, Arizona will elect its **first ever woman senator** whatever the outcome.

Candidates for State Governments Broke Barriers

- ▶ **Kalan Haywood**, a **19-year-old Black man**, became the **youngest state legislator** in the U.S. after winning a seat in the Wisconsin State Assembly.
- ▶ Healthcare rights supporter **Laura Kelly** was elected **governor of Kansas**.
- ▶ **Kristi Noem** will be the **first woman governor** of **South Dakota**.
- ▶ **Janet Mills** elected **first woman governor** of **Maine**.
- ▶ **Jared Polis** (CO) will be the **first openly gay man** to serve as **governor** in any state.

Building Power in Texas

The historic Senate race in Texas created a surge in voting among young people. In Texas, early voting for people ages 18-29 increased nearly five-fold from 2014.²⁰ Much of this increase has been attributed to the popularity of candidate Beto O'Rourke among young people.²¹ During the last Texas statewide election in 2014, young voters were energized around Wendy Davis's bid for governor, but she ultimately garnered only 38.9% of the electorates vote. While Beto lost his bid for Texas Senate, he earned 48.3% of the vote. This surge of voters is reflected in the outcomes of other races throughout Texas.

- ▶ In addition to electing the first two Texan Latinas to Congress, voters in Texas's 7th Congressional district elected **Lizzie Pannill Fletcher**, who supports the **Equality Act** and **Title X family planning program**.

Making History in Kansas

Kansas voters elected **Sharice Davids** to Kansas' 3rd Congressional district. Not only is Davids one of the **first Native-American woman** to be elected to Congress, she's also one of **Kansas' first openly LGBTQ candidates**, as well as the first in her family to attend college.²²

Groundbreaking Gubernatorial Races in Florida and Georgia

In Georgia, the governor's race is still too close to call, amid rampant voter suppression.²³ If elected, Stacey Abrams would be the first Black woman governor in U.S. history. It may be days before anything is declared, but regardless, Abrams has made history as the first Black woman to be a gubernatorial nominee of a major party in Georgia. In Florida, Andrew Gillum narrowly lost the gubernatorial race and would have been the first Black governor of that state.

The lesson of these historic campaigns is the power of organizing, particularly when led by young people and people of color. Young people in the South are building power and supporting candidates who speak to their values and are just as diverse as they are.



DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS: VOTER SUPPRESSION

The greatest loss of the 2018 midterms is the ongoing voter suppression that targets Black and Indigenous people, young voters, and anyone unable to meet the increasingly draconian standards and rules states have implemented. This cannot be overstated: any victories in the 2018 midterms came only in spite of a massive coordinated effort to stop historically underrepresented people from participating in our democracy.

KANSAS

Dodge City, Kansas voters —disproportionately people of color—were forced to leave town in order to vote in the midterm elections.²⁴

GEORGIA

Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, who ran the election while also running for Governor, was sued after not approving 53,000 voter registrations of disproportionately Black Georgians.²⁵

TEXAS

Voters in Texas reported voting machines switching their votes during early voting.²⁶

NORTH DAKOTA

Native Americans living on reservations were targeted with voter suppression.²⁷

Despite these challenges, voter registration and turnout actually increased.

- ▶ In Texas, young voter turnout was up 508% based on early voting numbers with the rate of African-American and Hispanic voters more than doubling.²⁸
- ▶ In Georgia, 18-29 year old voter turnout increased by 474% based on early voting numbers.²⁹
- ▶ Specifically in Georgia and Texas, there were increases in African-American voters of 165% and in Hispanic voters of 571%.³⁰

These numbers reflect increased young voter engagement and mobilization—all before actual election day.

ABORTION ON THE BALLOT IN OREGON, WEST VIRGINIA, AND ALABAMA

Abortion opponents increasingly use divisive and misleading ballot initiatives to dismantle abortion rights in the states. That strategy was on display this year in Oregon, Alabama, and West Virginia, where anti-abortion extremists sought to undermine recent progress and take away longstanding rights. With a Supreme Court that now tilts against abortion rights, efforts to undermine state protections are potentially, disastrously consequential.

Alabama Amendment 2

Despite a coordinated effort by state advocates, in which URGE alone talked to 54,795 Alabama voters, Amendment 2 passed, changing the Alabama constitution to deny any right to abortion care in the state. This will likely lead anti-abortion legislators to pass even more punitive restrictions on people who seek, and clinics that provide, abortion care.





West Virginia Amendment 1

West Virginia’s Amendment 1 mirrored Alabama Amendment 2 in changing the West Virginia constitution to exclude abortion care from the rights protected therein. This measure also passed, and in addition to removing the legal right to abortion from the state constitution, will lead directly to the loss of insurance coverage for abortion in West Virginia’s Medicaid program.

Oregon Measure 106

A bright spot on the landscape for abortion rights, Oregon defeated Measure 106, which would have banned insurance coverage for abortion for low-income and other Oregonians.

Left: URGE Alabama on campus at the University of Alabama to bust abortion stigma and collect pledges to vote against Amendment 2.

SELECTED BALLOT INITIATIVE WINS				
State	Issue	Initiative	Outcome	Impact
Florida	Voting Rights Restoration	Amendment 4	Passed	Amendment 4 restores voting rights to those with prior felony convictions, who are disproportionately people of color.
Oregon	Abortion coverage	Measure 106	Failed	Oregon maintains insurance coverage for abortion.
Nebraska, Idaho, and Utah	Medicaid Expansion	Initiative 427 (NE), Proposition 2 (ID), Proposition 3 (UT)	All Passed	Medicaid eligibility will be expanded in all three states, which will give more low-income young people access to health care.
SELECTED BALLOT INITIATIVE LOSSES				
State	Issue	Initiative	Outcome	Impact
Alabama	Abortion access	Amendment 2	Passed	Abortion will no longer be protected in the state constitution, opening the door to more restrictions.
West Virginia	Abortion coverage and access	Amendment 1	Passed	West Virginians will lose abortion coverage and abortion will no longer be protected in the state constitution.
North Carolina	Voter Suppression	Voter ID Amendment	Passed	North Carolina voters will now be required to bring ID to vote, which will block eligible people from voting.

2019 OUTLOOK

As we look to 2019, URGE's policy priorities, shaped by the voices and values of young people, remain clear. We are invested in achieving:

- comprehensive, medically-accurate, LGBTQ-inclusive sex education;
- access to abortion for all, wherever a person lives and whatever their income;
- access to health care and justice for immigrant communities; and
- equality and liberation for LGBTQ people.

In 2019 and beyond, we will continue to mobilize young people in service of these goals and URGE's mission -- from Congress to campuses, from state legislatures to the streets.

116th Congress

The 2018 midterms created a power shift for the 116th Congress. Now that Democrats have a majority in the House of Representatives, the Republicans no longer have control over every branch of government and could see increased roadblocks to their policy priorities. Overall, the power shift will create more gridlock as the House will assuredly block more conservative proposals by the Senate or the Administration. The House has significant executive oversight responsibilities and will use this power to serve as a check on the Trump Administration. The budget and appropriations process, which is led by the House, will lay bare the tensions between the Administration's proposed budget and the new House majority's priorities.

"A lot of work still needs to be done but I'm proud to say voting is a tool that can be utilized to fight for marginalized communities."

Clarissa Brooks, URGE student journalist, Spelman College in Georgia

In this election, young people engaged in politics and policy in unprecedented ways, and they are not going anywhere. We will make our voices heard when federal or state legislators or the Trump Administration push policies and spout rhetoric harmful to young people, our loved ones, and our communities. We call on our elected representatives to do the same, by speaking out, championing bold, progressive policy proposals, and rejecting divisive and extreme attempts to roll back progress.

The Kavanaugh nomination made clear to young people the impact of the courts. We will not stand idly by while the Senate acts as accomplice to Trump by filling the federal courts with anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant judges. We will not allow this judicial coup on our watch. Young people are committed to pushing back against harmful judicial nominees and fighting for judges who respect the rule of law and our humanity.

Young people will be watching the new Congress, ready to hold each and every official accountable. We call on legislators who have defended our communities to fight for our shared vision of reproductive justice by championing proactive policies to: defend abortion access and lift bans on abortion coverage (such as the EACH Woman Act); end



discrimination against LGBTQ people (such as the Equality Act); ensure justice for immigrant youth (such as the Dream Act), and advance comprehensive sex education (such as the Real Education for Healthy Youth Act).

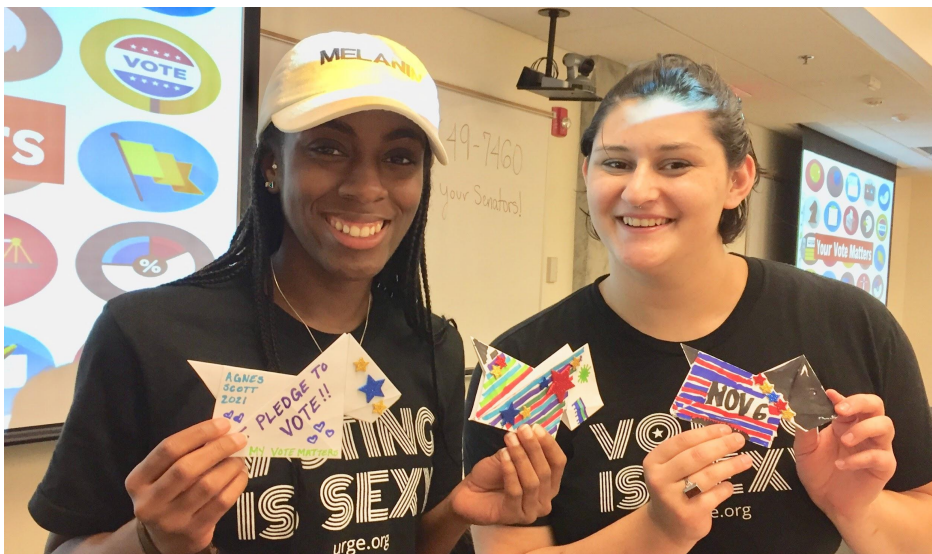
In the States

Young people will hold officials who share our vision of reproductive justice accountable to bringing proactive policy to make abortion access a reality in the South and Midwest. We will look to governors like Laura Kelly in Kansas and Michelle Lujan Grisham in New Mexico to show what kind of leadership is possible when you support LGBTQ equality, racial justice, reproductive autonomy, and the right to vote.

For states where we may not yet have the level of support to pass proactive policies, we will continue to build power in our communities and create a culture of civic engagement among young people. We will work with our legislative champions in these states to introduce proactive policy as a beacon of the world we seek to create. Young people's dedication to reproductive justice will not waver just because the election is over - we are ready to focus our power on fighting back against harmful policies during state legislative sessions in 2019.

I vote because I refuse to accept histories of injustice as histories of the past. By participating in this system, I am given a voice in electing officials who stand on the side of creating justice in our country.

Reilly Wieland, URGE student journalist, Kenyon University in Ohio



URGE Georgia student leaders at Agnes Scott College hold a "Voting Matters" event, discussing voter suppression challenges and the importance of voting as one tool to make your voice heard.

What's Next for Young People

Our future is never won or lost by any given election - it's built by people and communities across the country, every day. Young people will continue to build power in our communities to bring our vision of reproductive justice to fruition, and URGE will have their backs every step of the way. We will continue to cultivate a culture of civic engagement among young people with sustained investment in the South, Midwest, and communities of color. We know that young people vote. We know that when young people vote, they make a difference.

Our progress does not stop here. Young people are leading the way to sexual and reproductive justice for all.

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