

CIRCLE Growing Voters: Policymakers

Policymakers and government officials play two major roles in supporting young voters. First, they can put policies into place—such as education standards, pre-registration, or poll worker programs—that help youth learn about and participate in elections. Second, they can take actions that welcome young people into the electorate by treating them as valued constituents.

THE FACTS

+9

PERCENTAGE POINTS

In counties that allow teens (ages 16-17) to pre-register to vote, youth registration rates were 9 percentage points higher on average than in counties without pre-registration.

+15

PERCENTAGE POINTS

In 2020, states that made it easiest to vote by mail by automatically sending ballots to registered voters, had 15-point higher youth turnout on average than states that made it hardest by requiring an excuse to vote absentee.

+20

PERCENTAGE POINTS

Teens living in an urban area were 20 percentage points more likely than teens in suburban or rural communities to have taken a course in U.S. government.

The CIRCLE Growing Voters is a paradigm shift to transform how policymakers and many other stakeholders can strengthen young people's equitable engagement in democracy. Learn more, engage in this work, and share it with others at:

circle.tufts.edu/circlegrowingvoters

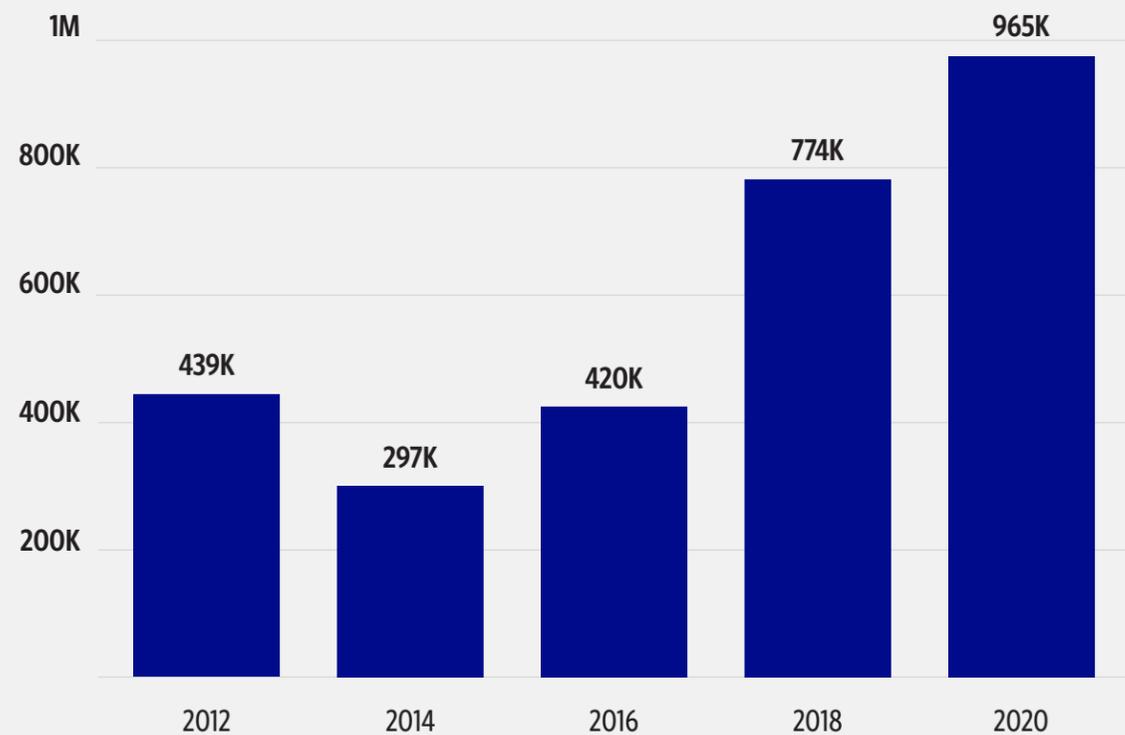


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Untapped Potential in Pre-Registration:

Allowing teens to pre-register to vote has proven benefits, but it's still massively underutilized even in the 24 states where it's available. The 965,000 youth pre-registered in 2020 represent only about 12% of all 16- and 17-year-olds in the country.

PRE-REGISTRATION IS ON THE RISE, BUT STILL MASSIVE POTENTIAL TO ENGAGE TEENS



Total pre-registrations of 16- and 17-year-olds

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: HOW POLICYMAKERS CAN GROW VOTERS

WHAT

Treat young people as your constituents.

Hire (and pay!) young people.

Enact and implement voter pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds.

Implement policies equitably and effectively.

Lower the voting age to 16 in local elections.

WHY

Asking young people to participate is the strongest predictor of electoral engagement, and helps youth feel like their voices and actions count.

Youth of all ages can be valuable team members, and compensating them for their time can make opportunities more accessible to young people regardless of their economic situation.

More than a third of states (and Washington, D.C.) allow 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, most of whom are in high school, and young people can get support from older family members and educators if they can register while in high school, and living with their families.

Having a bill signed into law is just one part of making systemic impact. Whether and how equitably a given democracy-promoting policy is implemented makes a big difference.

Young people's lives are affected by policies like school curricula and funding, healthcare accessibility, housing, policing, and more. They deserve to have a voice in the process.

HOW

Create opportunities like town halls, advisory councils, or youth committees to speak with young people about what they care about and how they want to be engaged. Target outreach for these opportunities beyond schools to reach all youth.

Hire youth to engage their peers, or to help research, analyze, and build support for key issues. You can also propose and support efforts to use public funds for youth programming that engages young people in this work within your community, such as paid youth poll worker programs.

If your state is not one of the states that allows pre-registration, introduce or support legislation to allow it. If/when it is, develop clear guidelines for who is in charge of pre-registration and use proactive measures to inform young people and those who work with youth that pre-registration is available and accessible.

Review whether and how policies—such as voter pre-registration, poll worker programs, and civic education standards—are being implemented to support a wide range of young people, especially those from underserved communities who may not be participating.

Take the time to learn about evidence that supports lowering the voting age and push for legislation to make it happen. Create or support an existing teen group that can help advocate for it and, if enacted, lead in reaching out to their peers who will be newly eligible to vote.

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