

NINE INSIGHTS INTO YOUTH CLIMATE ADVOCACY

The end of the 2010s also marked the rise of the youth activist in American politics, and nowhere has that impact been felt more than in the climate movement.

Whether it's been Greta Thunberg of Fridays for the Future, Varshini Prakash of the Sunrise Movement, or youth activists at your neighborhood school, young people have leapt into the fray as powerful moral and policy-minded leaders in the fight for climate action. Check out this tipsheet to learn more about what drives youth climate activist, the cultural context they arise from, and ways to support and grow their power.



1 TALKIN' 'BOUT MY GENERATION

When we talk about youth in American politics, we usually think of **two generations**: Millennials and Gen Z. Millennials were born from 1981-1996 (ages 24-39), coming of age during 9/11 and the Great Recession; Gen Z were born from 1997-2012 (ages 8-23), shaped by powerful forces like school shootings, the climate crisis, and the push for racial justice.



2 THE FUTURE IS HERE

Millennials and Gen Z are **more racially diverse** across their generation than their elders, with Gen Z being the least white generation on record. These two generations have often been described as "**digital natives**," or individuals who rely on their devices, social media, and the power of the world wide web for **information and entertainment**. However, youth audiences also understand the vagaries and limitations of the internet, and are among the **savviest consumers** of digital information.



3 A SILENT PLURALITY

By the numbers, Millennials and Gen Z make up the biggest block of eligible voters in 2020, accounting for nearly **40% of the electorate**. However, while youth turnout has **dramatically increased** over the last few election cycles (jumping from 20% in 2014 to 36% in 2018 for 18-29 year-olds), that's still far behind older generations.



4 DISILLUSIONED, BUT NOT DISENGAGED

Just because young people don't vote doesn't mean that they are politically disengaged. While American youth are solidly progressive, many feel **disillusioned** by their policymakers and the two-party system, which **complicates** their willingness to vote. As seen in recent years, however, youth are more than willing to **engage in activist behaviors** and support direct action, suggesting that they believe these to be more **efficacious** pathways to change.



5 INGRAINED INTERSECTIONALITY

Contrary to older generations, Millennials and Gen Z refuse to “pick a lane” when it comes to sociopolitical issues, largely because they don’t accept the lane markers. Instead, youth activists participate across **a number of different causes**, including climate change, gun safety reform, racial justice, and gender equity. For them, issues like these are **clearly linked** together in a holistic progressive vision, which might explain why young people gravitate toward **bundled policy concepts** that promote structural change in their communities and nationally, like the Green New Deal, rather than “bandaid solutions.”



6 WINNING WITH CLIMATE

Young people are **really engaged** on climate change and clean energy. And yes, that includes **younger Republicans**. Youth audiences are deeply concerned that they’ll face the brunt of warming and climate impacts this century, and face the tension of **believing ardently** that they can create a brighter climate future while **feeling disempowered** by the weight of a seemingly broken political system.



7 FINDING THEIR VOICE

Youth advocates can be exceptionally powerful messengers, particularly when they’re speaking about authentic concerns authentic like their future prospects in a climate change-ravaged world. Research has shown that student-aged youth can persuade **parents** and **older generations** into adopting pro-climate behaviors, and youth-led organizations have been successful directing outreach to fellow climate-concerned youth.



8 HELPING THEM HELP THEMSELVES

One of the ways that older or more established climate advocates can support youth activists is to train them to develop their organizing and leadership skills. This can take a variety of forms, including developing **online training curricula** and providing opportunities to **join, design, and lead** in campaigns.



9 IT’S TIME TO NETWORK

Beyond organizing and working on campaigns, advocates can aid youth activists by helping them **connect with other youth climate activists** and youth-led organization like **Zero Hour, Future Coalition, and Sunrise Movement** to exchange insights and share their experiences.

