

How Local Organizations are Mobilizing for Change in Syracuse.

Local Clubs and Organizations have emerged as powerful forces, using their platforms and reach to encourage voting among the younger generation.

By: Kylie Adedeji



Picture taken by Kylie Adedeji at the SU-ESF NYPIRG Office.

Over the last decade, younger generations have started to become increasingly involved in activism, from active participation in political protests to using their social media platforms to drive change. With the 2024 Presidential election being one of the first that Generation Z is eligible for, their voices have the potential to be louder than ever.

More than 8 million youth will have reached the voting age for the 2024 Presidential Election, as reported by Tufts. With a substantial and politically active population, political engagement amongst the youth could change the tides for the elections to come. Local organizations and clubs have taken off in Syracuse advocating for students and citizens alike to make their voices heard at the polls.

The Syracuse University Planned Parenthood Coalition Action, Unite-NY, and NYPIRG have pushed for civic engagement amongst the Syracuse population by educating younger citizens about what is on their ballot and their voting rights.

Unite-NY is just one of the many organizations canvassing around the Syracuse area, focusing on engaging and empowering voters on important issues of reform. The statewide organizing director of Unite-NY, David Green, focuses on educating the youth on political matters in America today and reforms that will impact their future.

“Where we play a unique role in (empowering voters) is the aspect of: ‘Hey, we understand the systems that we are in right now are pretty ancient, there’s some hang-ups and a lot of power going on,” Green said. “So, we want to take the young voters out of the some of nihilisms that they can get caught up in, and say ‘Hey, there’s hope.’”

In the wake of the digital age, young Americans have turned to nihilism due to their significant dissatisfaction with government policies. Younger Americans are getting fed an information overload so readily about late-century climate change, political turmoil, polarization, and the state of the abortion laws within the nation, which have contributed to uneasiness amongst American Youth.

As reported by the Institute for Citizens and Scholars, over 57% of young Americans are dissatisfied with American democracy, with 33% indicating no will to civically participate in voting.

To help counter Americans' growing apathy toward democracy, Unite-NY has focused its efforts on giving voters more voice and more choice by establishing five main reforms to revamp the N.Y. ballot: Ranked Choice Voting, opening up the Closed Primary System, imposing term limits, increasing ballot access, and Citizen Ballot Initiatives.

Ranked Choice Voting is an approach to transforming the ballot by allowing voters to rank candidates based on their preference, increasing competition while allowing candidates to gain actual support for their policies from the voters. Recent election primaries, as stated on

the Unite-NY website, have seen a significant decline from the prior years with 85% of the eligible voters staying home instead of voting, leading to “safe seats” around the state.

Citizen Ballot Initiatives would allow voters to propose legislation and approve or disapprove of legislation directly on the ballot, giving more choices on the ballot for the voters to vote on.

“I think it would strengthen the belief in democracy if you were able to vote on more issues on the ballot,” Green said. “Young people would feel more encouraged if they had a direct say on how they would want to change the constitution.”

The Syracuse University and ESF branch of NYPIRG canvasses around the University area, hosting events, and using their social media to hold informational campaigns with their main goal of highlighting why it is important to vote.

“Younger people, needless to say, have social media and are inundated with just the worst things happening all the time,” Project Coordinator of the SU/ESF branch, Reece Holt said. “The main purpose of our messaging is to cut through a lot of the noise and give students a direct pathway to use their voice to make a difference.”

NYPIRG has seven critical issues that they focus on and build initiatives off of which are: Democracy, Higher Education, Public Health, Climate, Consumer Justice, and Mass Transit.

“We can’t do all of our other campaigns without students being involved in the electoral process,” Holt said. “It’s turnout that really makes our work possible.” Without individuals turning out to vote and using their voices to elect people who align with their policies, it renders difficult for NYPIRG to do their job as Democracy is the backbone of all of their operations.

NYPIRG tackles an initiative of “Direct Advocacy” when increasing the political awareness of young voters. By developing close relationships with students and faculty of the Syracuse University and SUNY ESF campuses, the organization can directly talk to students about their voting rights and inform them of any issues of concern that are on the ballot.

NYPIRG has a student-led club that grants them a direct presence on campus, helping to make the students feel not only more comfortable but also more receptive to learning about civic participation.

Another student-led club that is taking the initiative to educate younger voters about civic participation and the electoral process is the Planned Parenthood Generation Action Coalition on the Syracuse Campus.

“With this up-and-coming election, I want to advocate and educate the campus community on why it is so important to vote, especially with our abortion rights on the line.” The current president of the club, Julia Kirezi said.

Kirezi believes that this current generation is known as the generation to change things and to push for progress. Kirezi is helping to make that change happen by organizing events and spreading awareness on the club’s social media to help and inform new voters on how to register to vote and of Proposition 1 on the New York ballot.

Sources:

- David Green, Statewide Organizing Director, dgreen@unityny.org
- Reece Holt, Syracuse University/SUNY ESF Project Coordinator of NYPIRG, syracuse@nypirg.org
- Julia Kierzi, President of the Planned Parenthood Coalition Action of the S.U. Campus, jlkirezi@syr.edu

Links:

- <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/41-million-members-gen-z-will-be-eligible-vote-2024>
- <https://citizensandscholars.org/focus-areas/accelerate/civic-outlook-of-young-adults/>
- <https://thred.com/culture/offbeat/understanding-gen-zs-expected-uptake-in-nihilism/>
- <https://unityny.org/issues-advocacy/initiative-and-referendum/>
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