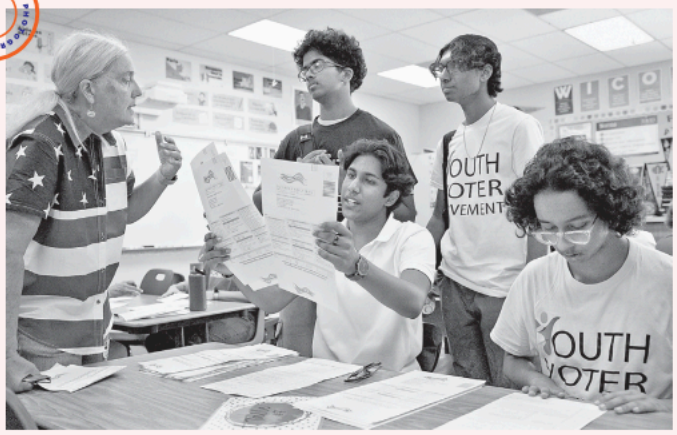
★ ELECTION ★

CAN'T VOTE? NO PROBLEM

BY REBECCA PITTS

PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA MORTON



Shivansh Bansal (center), 17, is making sure that as many people as possible get out to vote by helping his schoolmates register.

YOU HAVE TO BE 18 years old to vote in national elections. But you don't have to be 18 to care — or to play a role. Young people can advocate for issues they care about, support candidates and make sure everyone is able to have their ballots counted. Here's how kids and teens are getting involved in the election before they're old enough to actually vote in it.

REGISTERING NEW VOTERS

It bothers Shivansh Bansal, 17, that some people where he lives in Pleasanton, Calif., don't seem to care much about voting. He wants to make people in his generation more active in democracy. For Shivansh, that means starting now. "I read an article that said that if you can get people to vote in their very first election, they'll be voting for a lifetime," he says. So he spent seven months organizing a rally for all 1,100 juniors and seniors at his high school to encourage them to register to vote for the first time. (In California, you can preregister at 16, so as soon as you turn 18 you're able to vote.) Shivansh says he hopes to create "a ripple effect of people feeling empowered by their government."

KNOCKING ON DOORS

For Bayly Hoehne, making a difference requires some serious footwork. The 17-year-old volunteers for her local state representative in Connecticut by canvassing, which means going door to door to speak directly with voters. She reminds them about the upcoming election, asks what issues matter to them and shares how her candidate promises to address their concerns. "You're going to trust people in your community who have a conversation with you a lot more than you're going to trust an ad you see on TV," she says.

HELPING AT THE POLLS

This Election Day, Maggie Murphy, a high school senior, will be at Rocky Run Middle School, a voting site near her home in Fairfax, Va. She'll show people where to cast their ballots, assist with curbside voting and hand out stickers. One thing she learned in a two-hour training session to be a high school election page is that poll workers have to keep their political views to themselves. The job isn't to influence anyone's decisions — it's to make sure everyone has the "opportunity to vote and choose who gets to go into office," she says. ◆

3 WAYS TEENS ARE GETTING INVOLVED

A MOCK ELECTION FOR — AND BY — KIDS

BY ALEXANDRA FROST

THIS ELECTION year, Lulu Cole is on a mission. She wants to give a voice to kids in her state who are too young to vote. And the 15-year-old, who lives in Honolulu, wants to make sure that adults who *can* vote actually go out and do it. She's volunteering on a huge, statewide mock election so that kids can show the adults how it's done.

Lulu and two of her schoolmates, Kahn Ho and Sophia Howell, helped get more than 52,000 kids from 125 schools across the state to sign up to vote in this year's mock election. Every kid who registers gets a link to an online ballot where they can vote for national and local candidates. There are also yes-or-no questions — that Lulu helped write — on ideas like a ban on flavored e-cigarettes, lower speed limits, gun laws and responses to climate change. Younger kids (kindergarten through fifth grade) answer different questions, like "Should we have more celebration days to honor our different cultures in Hawaii?" and "Should we have more community gardens where people can grow their own fruits and vegetables?" When voting ends on Nov. 5 (the same day as the national election), the results will show lawmakers what Hawaii's youngest residents really care about.

Lulu hopes that when adults see how many kids turn out for the mock election, they will be inspired to turn out for the real one — because, usually, a lot don't. Hawaii consistently has some of the lowest voter turnout in the country. (Americans aren't great at voting in the first place. Just 66 percent of eligible voters turned out in the 2020 presidential election — and that was the highest turnout in over a century!) "Some parents," Lulu says, "after talking to their kids about the mock election they did at school, might be willing to set a good example for them and participate in voting."

Amy Perruso, a former civics teacher and current state politician, has led the mock election for several years. She says it teaches kids to think about politics and prepares them for the future while letting them weigh in on important issues. Lulu thinks it can also help them feel more hopeful. "There's a lot that makes growing up right now hard," she says, "and feels like it's full of despair and nothing is going to change. I want to teach students we have more power than we think." ◆

GRAB A SNACK, DO YOUR LAUNDRY, CAST A BALLOT

BY HELEN I. HWANG

ILLUSTRATION BY TOMI UM



INSIDE 5 OF AMERICA'S STRANGEST POLLING PLACES

EVERY ELECTION DAY, millions of adults line up to vote at schools, community centers, libraries and other public buildings. But sometimes election officials don't have enough places. To make sure everyone is able to get to a polling location that's convenient, officials have to get creative, asking local business owners to lend space. Here are five unusual spots where Americans will pick the next president.

WASH, DRY, FOLD, VOTE

The City of Chicago doesn't own a building in the neighborhood of Chicago Lawn, so Wash Smart Laundry is helping out by tucking polling booths among the washers and dryers. It's making it easier for people in the area to cast their ballots. And it has been good for business, too, says Andrea Castillo, the manager. New customers have been coming in after hearing that they can do their laundry and their civic duty at the same time. But occasionally they get a little confused: When they're asked to show their ID to vote, some people accidentally show their laundry card instead.

PRESIDENTS AND PASTRIES

During the 2020 election, early in the pandemic, San Francisco officials wanted to spread out polling stations to reduce crowds. So they asked La Boulangerie, a cafe and bakery, to donate space, and things worked out so well that the place decided to keep doing it. This will be the third time half the cafe is emptied out to squeeze in six voting booths. Jennifer Cusguen, a manager, says the staff likes helping the community by making it easier to vote. And they've learned an important lesson: Voters love almond croissants. This year, they'll stock extras so they don't sell out again.

VOTE ON THE FLY

Andrew Robillard, who works at a regional airport in San Luis Obispo, Calif., volunteered at a polling place during the last election. It was pretty cool. This year will be even cooler: The polls will come to him. He helps run ACI Jet, where small planes are flown and maintained. Local residents will cast their ballots in the airport terminal as planes whiz by overhead. Then they can tour the airport, look at aircraft and sign up for flight school.

PICK A PRESIDENT, WIN A PRIZE

Usually, visitors to Perfect Games in Ames, Iowa, feed tokens into game machines. On Nov. 5, they'll feed ballots into voting machines. The activity center — with 24 bowling lanes, an arcade, miniature golf and laser tag — has been hosting elections for the past eight years. Tiffani Tucker, a manager, sees many parents give their kids money to play pinball while they go vote. Lucky!

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A BALLOT

For astronauts on the International Space Station, getting to a polling place is literally impossible. But they still get to vote. Astronauts who find themselves floating 250 miles above Earth on Election Day are emailed ballots over NASA's secure space-satellite network. They fill in their votes and beam the encrypted ballots to a ground antenna in New Mexico. From there, the ballots are sent directly to the voting clerk in their hometowns. Mission accomplished! ◆

HOW OLD SHOULD YOU BE TO VOTE?

'I think people should be allowed to vote when they are 22. Because I feel like that's when your brain fully develops, and you don't want to have people with an underdeveloped brain choosing who should lead the country.'

— Weston Howell, 11, Long Island, N.Y.

VULCAN THE FRENCH HOUND *WASHINGTON* ★ **POLL THE PARROT** *JACKSON*