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Millennials Need to Speak Up, Break Out of Electoral Apathy

By Paulina Sosa



Paulina Sosa is philosophy and psychology senior at The University of Texas at Austin and president of the Intellectual Entrepreneurship Citizen Scholars. She also serves as Congressional District Leader for the ONE Campaign, an anti-poverty advocacy group that fights extreme poverty and preventable disease, particularly in Africa. After graduation she plans to pursue a Master for Public Health degree.

Most people I talk to in my native Brownsville are so disgruntled at the political system that they couldn't name the city's mayor.

The reason for such low civic engagement was not because of the city's high level of poverty, the education system or even the lack of economic growth and opportunity. It is because of the people's lack of confidence in the system. This leads to utter apathy – especially among most of the youths from economically challenged families in Brownsville and across the country. Too many are not speaking out or even voting.

We now live in a society where politics has become solely a game of rhetoric and name-calling — a divided arena that is unmoved by calls for collaboration and synergy. The middle- and lower-class groups of our nation have become a focal point in today's politics because, simply put, they are the biggest demographic and a growing voice in our country. But we still need to see more people – especially young people – from these groups become politically engaged.

Political apathy is most prevalent in the country's younger demographic, about 18 to 30 years of age – otherwise known as the Millennial Generation. I realized that understanding the reason behind this apathy is crucial to improving political engagement. When looking into the underlying cause of political disengagement, there are a number of factors to consider: they did not grow up in a politically engaged home, were not educated on the impact policy had on them as individuals, or did not understand how they could make a difference.

When asked, most people tell me they don't want to bother with politics because they feel their voice doesn't matter to their elected officials. They believe that because they don't have a lot of money or power that their voice wouldn't make any difference. And it is this

very misconception that prolongs the cycle of apathy and low voter turnout from this demographic, leaving elected officials less aware of their opinions and concerns.

Disillusionment and corruption have caused apathy in the majority of our country's lower socioeconomic communities and in our country's young population. Too many people claim they do not have the power, the money or the voice to make any real impact or change in politics. But the good news is that we all truly do have the power to make a change. If we are the future, we can mold what the political system will look like. And you can start by voting this election.

Every person needs to realize their elected officials' purpose is to properly represent their constituents. If voters, specifically the 18-30 year old voting bloc, realize their potential voice and follow their civic duty to vote and be politically engaged, then elected officials will more properly represent their constituencies. This is how the cycle of apathy will change.

I believe that if the Millennials become more politically engaged, our elected officials will more highly regard our voice. This hope requires an integrated and cohesive effort between the community, elected officials and universities.

The University of Texas at Austin is home to a diverse student body from all different backgrounds, communities and socioeconomic levels. As a student in the Intellectual Entrepreneurship (IE) program at UT, the goal of which is to educate citizen scholars, I know voting and being engaged are powerful examples of how we can "leverage our knowledge for social good." So my challenge to everyone, no matter what your story may be, is to vote, to be civically engaged and to voice your opinions to your elected officials. The Millennial Generation is the future of tomorrow. It is up to us to decide what our future will look like. Remember: "What starts here changes the world."