Gossip, participate, have a say.

A fundamental part of growing up is discovering your identity and finding your voice. Unlike in previous generations, where media consumption was passive and went directly from the source to the consumer, we are now able to create media and not be as reliant on traditional sources. We can see this especially through social media, where everyone is able to have a platform to voice their opinions on.

Generation Z is the first to grow up with the internet. With the amount of easily accessible information available, teenagers have become more opinionated and educated, specifically regarding politics. A 2020 Washington Post letter to the editor writes that “politics is easily accessible for everyone.”, which brings its own challenges like misinformation, but is beginning to remove the elitist atmosphere surrounding politics.

Over the past few years, social media has catalysed youth involvement. Teenagers like Greta Thunberg led the “school strikes for the climate” movements, encouraging millions of teenagers around the world to protest and demand government reform. Although the momentum has died down, there are still sporadic strikes taking place, showing a real dedication to the movement rather than just “skipping school” like many determined at first. The controversies stemming from these strikes show how older generations cyclically discredit their successors. At first, involved students were not taken seriously, and labelled as lazy for just wanting to miss their classes. After years of continuous efforts, governments finally began to listen. However, even if some of the original goals have been met, these events highlight a much larger issue, the place of young people in politics.

The 2016 Brexit referendum showed that 73% of voters between the ages of 18-24 voted to remain in the EU, while those over 65 chose to leave by 60%. The Economist documents the turnout within the younger group to be at 58%, while the older voters stood at 88%, the highest of all the age groups. With Brexit’s consequences affecting future generations, many debated over the required voting ages, with some saying it should have been lowered to 16, and others wanting to add a maximum age. Around Britain, there have been campaigns to lower the voting age to 16, with some elections in Scotland and Wales already implementing these changes. In general, older generations tend to have more traditional and conservative views, which oppose the more liberal ideas of young people. Bureaucratic political systems make it hard for teenagers to contribute, or even have their concerns addressed, and leave us stuck with the consequences we were not involved in.

Lowering the voting age would increase independence within teenagers and force them to educate themselves on political matters. With social media, there is pressure to perform politically. There is no longer any privacy with political views, and participation is encouraged, and neutrality is often looked down upon. Why are we only keeping politics on social media with no purpose or goal instead of encouraging youth groups and direct government involvement where real change can happen? Allowing young people to use social media for their political views without having a place to direct their efforts leads to politics becoming a mockery, such as joke support for Kanye West and Donald Trump’s election campaigns. Some areas of New York allow people as young as 14 to help make community decisions, in something called participatory budgeting, which allows them to grow their independence in a regulated way. Often local council meeting run late and on school nights, making it inconvenient for teenagers to attend.

Politics have evolved from a boring adult dinner table conversation to something discussed openly between friends. To say young people are not educated or mentally developed enough to make smart choices, is unfair, as there is no proof most voting adults are able to vote in a competent manner either. Often, arguments against youth involvement claim brain formation causes irresponsible and emotional reasoning, similarly to what was said about women before the suffrage movement. These arguments of “kids being kids” or “being too young to understand” are just used to hide the real issue. Politician's fear of youth political power.