

Guest Column: Candidates must close Gen Z's enthusiasm gap

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President Joe Biden joined TikTok over Super Bowl weekend to engage the youth vote. Now Gen Z is more excited about watching the new season of “Love Is Blind” than voting for either Biden or Donald Trump.

There’s an enthusiasm gap about the election where Gen Z is concerned, and it has its roots in the candidates’ authenticity with this audience. The candidates can take concrete steps to overcome it, but they must do it now.

Taylor Swift may have persuaded 35,000 people to register to vote with a single Instagram post. But that happened in September. Meanwhile, there has been a lot of water under the bridge since. About 50 percent of young voters cast a ballot in 2020, an 11 percent increase from 2016. Gen Z is about to comprise America’s biggest voting bloc, along with millennials. But right now, 75 percent of voters under 29 disapprove of the way Biden has handled the conflict in Gaza. It’s making them unenthusiastic to get out and vote.

People from different generations tell me that Gen Z needs to “get over it.” The choice between the candidates in November involves more than a single issue. But it’s dismissive of young people’s energy to think they aren’t serious about their concerns.

Young people are engaging in politics through issues. This includes the Middle East, abortion rights, climate change, mass shootings and mental health. Their concerns need to be heard, and candidates need to engage them. Gen Z cannot stand it when people take their support for granted.

Meanwhile, a new study by the dating app Hinge has introduced the idea of “digital body language” (DBL). Young people pay attention to their suitors’ message tone and message timing, it says. They’re also more likely to show interest if a suitor makes the first move.

That’s true in the dating sphere, but Gen Z is also sensitive to how they’re courted in politics. Gen Z likes their candidates to be authentic, and Gen Z has a good radar for when they are being pandered. Especially given the strength of their concerns in some areas. They must see the presidential candidates exhibit more care over their “DBL” and their policies in many areas.

Democratic strategists have said Biden’s TikTok debut aimed to woo young voters. But his DBL was way off. As comedian Jon Stewart said on the “Daily Show” return the day after, Biden’s first TikTok post was cringey. He expressed a strange preference for eating Travis Kelce’s mom’s chocolate chip cookies. As Stewart said: “How do you go on TikTok and end up looking older?”

I’m not saying the battle for Gen Z’s votes on digital platforms is over, far from it. Trump’s youth enthusiasm gap could also cost him the election. Both candidates need to invest more heavily in courting Gen Z to avoid being ghosted at the ballot box.

The most important thing to note about the enthusiasm gap is not Gen Z’s fault. It’s on the candidates to engage them. There’s a myth that Gen Z is apathetic about voting. Gen Z is anything but apathetic about politics. They have strong opinions and they’re getting involved and leading on issues.

In the 2022 midterm elections, 96 percent of IGNITE participants voted. They’re fired up about America, and they want leadership that is as fired up as they are.

At the same time, their vote matters, and they don’t see it as cheap. What they want is candidates who seek to engage them with earnestness. They want candidates who make the first move with care and consideration.

If we continue to judge Gen Z and hold them at arm’s length, we can’t blame them for lacking enthusiasm about us.

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She wrote this for InsideSources.com.