

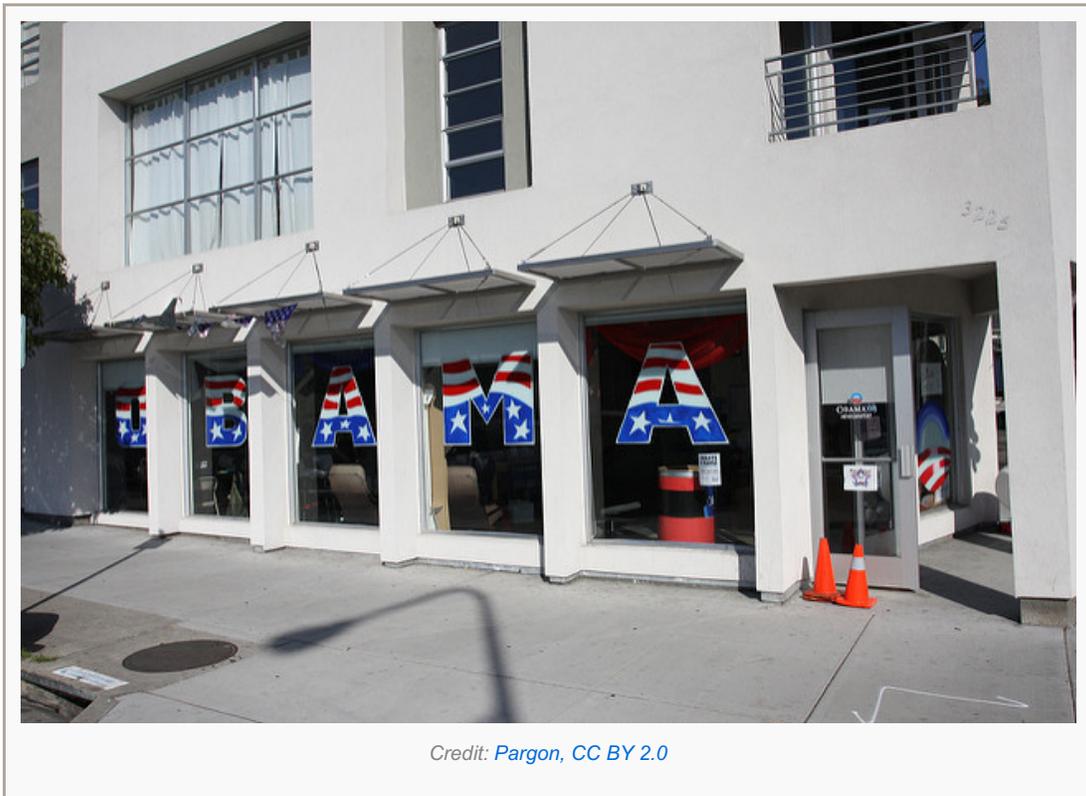
If we want to improve young voter engagement, there are lessons that can be learned from the US Presidential campaigns

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By Democratic Audit UK

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*The 2016 US Presidential election is in full-flow, with Hilary Clinton and Bernie Sanders fighting for the Democratic nomination, and Donald Trump still the frontrunner for the Republicans. Here, **Josie Torrice** looks at the lessons that can be learned from the campaign in terms of increasing the engagement of young voters, who are considerably less likely to vote than their older counterparts.*



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Young people aged 18-24 are currently the group [least likely to vote](#) in the UK, 20% less likely to vote than the average Briton and staggeringly only half as likely to vote at those aged 65 or over. This is particularly worrying when considering the evidence that young non-voters are less likely than previous generations to ever pick up the habit of voting. As [IPPR](#) suggests in their report *Divided Democracy*, almost every successive generation is beginning their voting life with a lower turnout rate than the generation before. At this rate turnout among voters who entered the electorate post 1990 might never catch up with that of the Baby Boomers. This is a stark warning. If voting rates amongst young voters don't improve, in a few decades we could be facing a crisis of democratic apathy with UK electoral turnout stuck at a paltry 44%.

One organisation is taking a completely new approach to fixing this monumental problem by taking young British students across the pond to campaign in the US Presidential Election race to see what we can learn from our transatlantic neighbours. [45 for the 45th](#), a bipartisan not-for-profit, based in the UK, have just returned from their first trip to Iowa and New Hampshire and are heading out to Ohio later this month before organising a final trip for the main event in November.

During the run up to the 2015 UK General Election a variety of groups used innovative tactics to encourage young people to register to vote and to get to a polling station on May 7th. Bite the Ballot's National Voter Registration Day, which included a huge drive across social media platforms, helped to encourage over [130,000](#) young people to register to vote on the day of the registration deadline. Other groups focussed on even more specific demographics with [Operation Black Vote](#) targeting BME voters and [RegistHERtoVote](#) working to boost turnout amongst young women. Together these campaigns achieved incredible success using social media, celebrity endorsements and a targeted approach.

However on election day the turnout amongst young people actually fell. According to Ipsos Mori research, turnout amongst those aged 18-24 [decreased](#) by 1% with a shocking 8% fall in turnout among young men.

It would appear that the more targeted campaigns fared better than those with a general approach. Operation Black Vote published data suggesting that voter turnout in the most diverse constituencies [increased](#). The most diverse, East Ham, saw a 5% increase, turnout in Ealing North went up 2.7%, and Birmingham Ladywood reported an increase of 4.7%. Similarly RegistHERtoVote celebrated a turnout increase of 5% amongst women aged 18-24 and have been gearing up their campaign to ensure this trend continues for the Mayoral elections in May.

The groups mentioned above demonstrated that social media-led campaigns, specifically targeted, can be effective in increasing voter registration and turnout. However, we must not be complacent and constant innovation is the key to creating real change. This year there is one campaign taking a completely new approach.

Rather than targeting young people through their computer screens or via traditional media, 45 for the 45th is adopting a far more hands on approach in order to tackle political disengagement among 18-24s. They are taking three groups of young British students out to the U.S and onto the campaign trails of their chosen candidates. Following the trips the young people, "45ers", will produce a report analysing their experiences of the campaigns. The report will include a set of recommendations for political parties in the UK to better engage young people in the political process.

In the 2008 presidential election voter turnout amongst Democrats aged 18-29 [increased](#) by 13 points to a 20 year record of 66%, beating the average voter turnout by 14%. Overall [turnout](#) of those aged 18-29 was estimated as between 49.3 and 54.5%, beating UK 2015 youth turnout by between 6.3% and 10.8%. We clearly have a lot to learn.

During the 2012 US presidential election turnout amongst young voters predictably fell, as is often the case when an incumbent runs, however, it still beat the UK 2015 turnout by [1%](#). And, with Obama unable to run again, the prospect of the first female President and an underdog socialist inspiring his own youth movement, not to mention a rather infamous celebrity candidate, this year's US race looks set to break another youth turnout record.

Even if this turns out not to be the case, the energy emanating from our Stateside neighbours is undeniable and infectious. With US election coverage blanketing social media and conventional news sources in the UK, it feels exciting; it feels engaging in a way that arguably our own elections just don't. Of course this is a matter of opinion, but there are lessons we can learn from the US process, if only that our MPs need to get on Snapchat, as Hillary Clinton has.

More seriously, the 45ers who have returned from Iowa and New Hampshire have reported an incredible energy and drive around the Clinton, Sanders, Trump and Rubio campaigns. Kit Evans, a student at Durham University commented on how personal the election felt in Iowa, with residents surprised that the 45ers hadn't yet met all the candidates. Is this 'personal politics' something our MPs could more fully embrace in the UK?

Claudia Blair, an undergraduate from Cardiff, queued for three hours with thousands of others to get into a Sanders rally, something she could not imagine happening in Britain. The 45ers were even thanked on the doorstep while campaigning for Clinton, with Republican supporters happy to engage in a conversation with them about the merits

of each candidate.

If we can learn the lessons of the Iowa and New Hampshire campaigns and bring these back to UK politics then we have an opportunity to engage the millions of missing young voters. It's clear that young people are interested in politics. The huge influx of applications 45 for the 45th experienced when they opened the selection for the trips clearly demonstrates this. We know that young people, like Kit and Claudia, can enjoy actively campaigning, even on a snowy Iowan doorstep. Now we need to translate this energy to the UK political stage; from Snapchat to a more personal politics, there are lessons we can learn from the US and 45 for the 45th are determined to do just that.

The next 45 for the 45th trip leaves for Ohio on the 9th March, where the 45ers will campaign for Kasich and Clinton, getting out onto the doorstep, phone banking and attending rallies.

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