



POLITICS

‘Let’s get this bread:’ Millennials and Gen Z voters in Florida are amped up

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Retirees typically wield more power at the ballot box than millennials and Generation Z voters, especially in midterm elections.

But interviews with dozens of students across six college campuses in Florida show that very few are planning to sit this election out. I
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More than 11,000 people voted early at two Miami Dade College sites in Kendall and North Dade, the largest number of early voters at any college campus in the state. The University of Florida was second with nearly 8,000 early voters and Florida International University was only a few hundred votes behind. A polling place in Tallahassee near Florida State University and Florida A&M University, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum's alma mater, ranked fourth among polling places at college campuses with more than 6,000 votes.

Near the FAMU quad, a table piled with Krispy Kreme doughnuts offered students a sweet bite and a voter guide.

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Amber Hannah, a 21-year-old pre-medical student from Tallahassee, stood in line for a doughnut. She plans to vote on Tuesday for Democrats Gillum and U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, since her sorority is holding a rally to get students to vote.

"It's technically a smaller election, but bigger for the state of Florida," said Hannah, who last voted in the 2016 presidential election. "I'm excited to see what happens."

The doughnut table, sponsored by the left-leaning political action committee NextGen America, drew a few dozen students. The liberal group founded by billionaire Tom Steyer, one of Gillum's early backers, registered over 50,000 young people across the state, and poured \$9.7 million into campaign ads.

Taylor Hemphill, a 19-year-old political science major and NextGen coordinator, said she's seen her classmates who didn't care about politics start to ask more questions.

"They'd be like, Tay, what's on the ballot? What's going on?" she said. "Just the whole scope of it all is really cool to see."

At Florida International University, which sits inside Republican Rep. Carlos Curbelo's district, the only college students approached by a reporter who aren't planning to vote are those who are unable to do so because they are not citizens, a dynamic also present at Miami Dade College.

Current college students straddle two generations. The first, called millennials, are between the ages of 22 and 36, according to the Pew Research Center. Voters under 22 are referred to as Generation Z, and many of them are voting for the first time this year.

Mateo Scotti, a 19-year-old FIU sophomore from Miami who was born in Argentina, is a first-time voter who said there was a huge push by his friends to get him to vote.

Scotti said he voted early for Gillum and Nelson at the top of the ticket and voted for Democrats with one exception: He voted for Curbelo.

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FIU students said both parties have a presence on campus, though Gillum's campaign has made the biggest push. Stephanie Sanchez, a 19-year-old FIU sophomore who tried to vote early but was unable to do so because she sent her registration paperwork in late, said Republicans have talked a lot about opposing socialism and are putting out a "filtered Trump" message.

Victor Perez, a 25-year-old FIU junior, plans to vote on Election Day, though he isn't excited about his choices and hasn't made up his mind yet. The only candidate he's decided on is Republican Gov. Rick Scott, who is running for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Nelson.

Perez voted for Barack Obama in 2012, but switched in 2016 to vote for Donald Trump.

At the University of Miami, young people from out of state registered to vote in Florida after Michelle Obama visited campus as part of a voter registration drive earlier this fall.

Annie Boyle and Noah Gardner, both 19 and sophomore music business majors at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music, said they plan to vote Tuesday but need to do more internet research to make informed decisions.

Boyle, who is from Chicago, and Gardner, from Hampden, Maine, both registered to vote in Florida under no-party-affiliation after the former First Lady visited the campus.

"It takes work to be informed," Gardner said. His knowledge of this election primarily comes from YouTube "slam ads," he said, and campaign posters. "There's no substance, it's just in your face. Everyone's trying to make me think a certain way and no one's telling me the truth."

Rachel Askowitz, a 23-year-old master's student in public health at UM, voted absentee on Oct. 14. She knows the exact date, she said, because she asked her mom to take a photo.

The Miami native said she cares most about healthcare, the environment and social policy issues like immigration and abortion. She used a voting guide from the Miami-Dade Democratic Party to learn about the various amendments and questions on the ballot, and she read about candidates' stances on their websites.

At FSU, several students voted in their own districts at home.

Rob Elder, a first-time voter from Stuart, said he's been waiting to cast a vote since he first got involved in politics at age 16.

The 18-year-old finance major said he started a teenage Republicans club in Martin County when he was in high school, and volunteered on U.S. Rep. Brian Mast's campaign for Congress.

Elder said he is excited to vote for Republican Ron DeSantis for governor, particularly because of the effect the governor will have on three upcoming vacancies on the Florida Supreme Court.

"DeSantis has done a pretty good job and if he gets it, he'll probably make conservative Supreme Court picks here in Florida," he said. "That's important to me."

Julia Alves, a 19-year-old political science major, said she went home to Kissimmee to vote last week.

She's a dog lover and has been involved in dog racing in Florida by 20. She's also been involved in legal active dog racing.

“I volunteered at the animal shelter in high school, and that’s where I adopted my dog,” said Alves, a first-time voter. “I have such strong opinions, and it’s cool to be able to voice it.”

Young voters from both parties agreed that Amendment 9, which would prohibit oil drilling in state waters and ban vaping in workplaces, was annoying and confusing.

“I like the environment and everything,” said Malori Wallace, an 18-year-old FSU student from Tallahassee. “But I don’t like how they combine things together in amendments. It’s annoying. There are some things that I wouldn’t vote ‘yes’ on if they didn’t include something else.”

Oleksandr Melchanov, a Broward Community College student majoring in accounting, said he hasn’t voted yet because he procrastinated during early voting but he’s definitely going to vote on Election Day. On campus, Melchanov is involved with Turning Point USA, a pro-Trump conservative group, because he feels he can exchange ideas freely with others there. After the first time he attended a meeting, he said he was surprised when he found himself agreeing with Bernie Sanders on his idea to lessen the power of big banks.

The 19-year-old from Dania Beach said he was born in Ukraine but grew up in the U.S. He became a citizen in 2013. He’s definitely going to vote for DeSantis, he said, because Gillum’s proposed tax hikes would negatively affect business owners, and consequently, the economy.

“I’m not a big fan of politics,” he said. “But I stay active. I understand it’s important to vote.”

Though they were decidedly in the minority, some young people who could vote don’t plan to.

Valeria Sarria, an 18-year-old from Fort Lauderdale, said she doesn’t plan to vote even though she’s registered as a Republican.

She said voting takes time she doesn’t have. Even though she identifies as a Republican she disagrees with the party on some topics, like immigration, so in order to vote she would have to look at each candidate individually. Researching each candidate’s stances and history is complicated, she said.

“I know I should be more involved,” the undecided Broward College student said. “But I just don’t want to search on Google today, so I’m not going to vote on this election. I’m being completely honest.”

At Miami Dade College, a substantial number of students are unable to vote because they are not U.S. citizens, though the students who plan to vote are mostly casting their ballots for Democrats.

Alexandra Montoya, a 19-year-old Miami Dade College sophomore, said she voted early for all Democrats because of the “craziness that’s been going on with the federal and state government.”

David Perera, a 19-year-old FIU sophomore, said he voted on the second day of early voting after a friend who worked for Republican state Rep. candidate Vance Aloupis’ campaign encouraged him to do so. Perera said he voted for “my boy” DeSantis for governor, saying that Gillum wants to raise taxes. He also voted for Scott and Republican congressional candidate Maria Elvira Salazar.

“I voted on the second day of early voting. Let’s get this bread,” Perera said, referring to an internet meme about earning money.

Alex Daugherty,