

2018 MIDTERMS

Can MTV Use Peer Pressure to Get the Under-30 Crowd to Vote?

The network is throwing parties and using Postmates and Tinder to encourage post-millennials to vote in the 2018 midterm elections.

BY

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MTV is trying to encourage post-millennials to vote in the 2018 midterm elections.

By Mindy Schauer/Getty Images.

Would more young people cast their ballots if pulling the voting-machine lever felt like a party move rather than a chore? [MTV](#) is setting out to re-invent its political outreach strategy this year with its first-ever midterm election campaign, dubbed “+1 the Vote” (as in, “plus-one the vote”).

The network jumped into the election fray in the early 1990s, first in partnership with [Rock the Vote](#) and then in 1992 when it launched “Choose or Lose,” a voter-registration drive that fueled a surge in young voters for the presidential battle between [Bill Clinton](#) and then-President **George Bush Sr.** At an MTV town hall that year, candidate Clinton answered a question

about whether he had ever tried smoking marijuana by famously claiming, “I didn’t inhale it.”

MTV President **Chris McCarthy** was a high-schooler in 1992; he said the Clinton-Bush campaign made a deep impression on him. “I remember seeing [MTV News personality] **Tabitha Soren** have discussions with the candidates,” he said. “This idea of talking to viewers about voting—it was revolutionary back then.”

The network had never involved itself in the minutiae of midterms or local elections, but McCarthy said he’d started seeing research since the 2016 presidential election suggesting that “self-reported anxiety for young people increased dramatically.” A majority of young people “were nervous about the future of the country,” he continued. “They were struggling with the whole idea of voting, and it came to us that we needed to switch away from the [focus on voting] once every four years . . . and to harness one of the most powerful forces in their lives—which is friendships—and build it into the campaign itself.”

That idea morphed into +1 the Vote, which revolves around the idea of voting as a shared activity—bringing your friends to the polls just as you’d bring a plus-one to a club or party. MTV launched a series of P.S.A.s, a polling-place locator courtesy of TurboVote, and a voter-registration [tool](#) that allows users to check whether their friends are registered—and if not, encourage them to do so and vote. And it created an interactive [map](#) showcasing all the under-30 candidates who are running for office across America.

MTV also funded parties across the country with the idea that attendees would encourage their friends to vote, and the network has partnered with companies like Postmates and Tinder to reach millennials and post-millennials where they live. The celebratory element of the campaign will culminate with an election night after-party at Florida’s Miami Dade College co-hosted by **Charlamagne Tha God** and **Liza Koshy**, featuring guests like **Ashanti**, **Lauren Jauregui**, **Jazz Jennings**, and “March for Our Lives” co-founders **David Hogg**, **Jaclyn Corin**, **Jammal Lemy**, **Sarah Chadwick**, and **Delaney Tarr**. It was Tarr who [declared](#) at the march, “If they continue to ignore us, to only pretend to listen, then we will take action where it counts. We will take action every day in every way until they simply cannot ignore us anymore.”

“This is a generation that ritualizes everything,” McCarthy said. “They celebrate moments with their friends, whether it is through throwback

Thursdays or birthdays or Halloween. So we wanted to almost ritualize the idea of civic engagement.” MTV may not be the central force it once was in young viewers’ lives pre-Internet, but the network still sees viewer engagement as a core part of its brand. It partnered with the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to create polls tracking youth attitudes towards the upcoming midterms, which showed that there had been a 20 percent increase in young people’s likelihood to encourage a friend to vote in the upcoming midterm elections over the last five months. Of the 1,000 respondents aged 15-34 who were polled, 61 percent reported they were likely to go with a friend to their local polling station to vote. Only 49 percent described themselves as optimistic about the future of the United States, though that varied drastically between Trump supporters (74 percent of whom proclaimed themselves optimistic) and those who disapprove of the president (36 percent of whom feel hopeful). A massive 82 percent of participants responded positively to the idea that “there should be more racially and ethnically diverse people represented in the government.”

Beyond that, a new [survey](#) from the Institute of Politics at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government suggests growing enthusiasm from young voters for next week’s elections. The survey found that 18- to 29-year-olds were significantly more likely to vote in this year’s midterms compared to 2010 and 2014; 40 percent reported that they would “definitely vote.”

MTV is not the only creator of an entertainment-based 2018 voting campaign: comedian [Billy Eichner](#) paired up with Funny or Die for “[Glam Up the Midterms](#),” while 18-year-old *Grown-ish* and *Black-ish* star [Yara Shahidi](#) launched “[Eighteen x 18](#)” to inspire her peers to get politically active.

“This generation cares about so many things—they are way more awake and enlightened and connected than other generations before them,” McCarthy said. “They care deeply about these issues, but they are not getting solved [by voting] once every four years. They have to be solved every day in every community.”