

Your Vote, Your Choice: Pop Culture Getting Young People to the Polls

by Mark Daley, Media Relations Manager

“A dingo stole my ballot.”
“The cat swallowed my ID.”

And the ubiquitous “Sorry, I had to clean the bathroom.” All excuses made by young people who were asked, “Did you vote?” after an election. These funny excuses underlie a serious problem: Young people, at least according to the latest turnout figures, think democracy is uncool. In fact, a whopping 70 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds didn’t vote in the last presidential election.

Your Vote, Your Choice, the radio show, connects music, pop culture, and motivation to help create an antidote to widespread voter apathy. It’s where listening to issues and ideas breaks the cycle of mutual neglect between politicians and young people.

The series crisscrosses America, blending the best Indie-alternative music, interviews with campus activists, contests, information, and advice. *Your Vote, Your Choice* aims to make it easier for young people to register to vote.

Made possible by a grant from the Arkay Foundation, each program forms one element of an exciting multimedia publicity campaign by young people for young people.

My job as producer is to create something that informs, educates, and entertains—a recipe drummed into me as a broadcaster at the BBC. To this end, I’ve assembled a team that mixes the best radio veterans with some of today’s most exciting up-and-coming broadcast talent.

Our team includes John Dryden, the person behind the critically-acclaimed long-running *Daily Feed* radio satire column and PlanetPopRadio’s often amusing PSAs. WorldSpace Satellite Radio prodigy Keith Kleinfeldt produces the program’s unique jingles or, as they’re called in the business, “sound imaging.” We also have the mysterious host, Buffy, who, incidentally, doesn’t slay vampires for a living but is pretty good at dislodging the odd swinging chad.

Starting with a national special, our virtual jaunt across America’s political and pop cultural landscape took us to Illinois and Oregon. More stops are planned before Election Day.



Mark Daley produces special *Your Vote, Your Choice* shows with Buffy Baumann (center) and Kimberly Elliott (left).

You may be wondering what we’ve learned about America’s youngest potential voters so far. While it’s very early to draw any firm conclusions, there are a couple of things that have been mentioned too many times already.

First, same-day voter registration could radically increase turnout on college campuses. Some young people become interested in a race very shortly before the election—often too late for their registration to be processed in many states.

Second, and more disturbing, many young people don’t register and vote because they simply feel that politicians do not represent their views, values, and aspirations—and never will. These young people feel like they have “lost control” of their democracy. This deep disconnect is serious stuff that can’t be dismissed in mere soundbites.

So in a way, *Your Vote, Your Choice* is part of another kind of “election campaign”—perhaps the most ignored, least funded, yet most important, in American history. This is the campaign that hopes to get more young people interested in democracy and more politicians interested in young people.

Your Vote, Your Choice can now project the ultimate winner of this race: America’s democracy.

Check out the latest program at www>YourVoteYourChoice.org.

Apart from being ZPG’s Media Manager, Mark Daley is BBC America’s resident popular music expert at theBritbeat.com, and is a producer/DJ at WorldSpace Satellite Radio.

