

Stop shaming people for not voting

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College students are one of the most liberal subgroups in our society. But they're also traditionally less likely to show up to the polls and engage in the political process. So, it's surprising to see that a "Karen" mentality of shaming others for not voting is growing in popularity among today's students.

A [new Axios poll](#) finds that 6 in 10 college students are definitely or probably going to confront or shame their peers who don't vote.

"Political expression is etched into this generation's DNA," the pollster [told Axios](#). "Vote-hooky won't just draw side-eye, it could bruise a student's reputation in some social circles. Civic engagement is cool now."

The ironic part is that only [48.3% of college students](#) voted in 2016. So, unless we see a truly revolutionary spike in youth turnout this year, many members of this 60% of finger-wagging college students actually aren't going to vote themselves.

And let's be real: These outraged students aren't truly concerned with ensuring that their peers fulfill their civic duty. They don't just want you to vote; they want you to vote for Joe Biden. (Anyone who has ever stepped foot on a college campus and witnessed the way in which voter registration drives are conducted knows they are a nakedly partisan effort with the goal of amplifying turnout for Democrats.)

That's fine. But it's wrong for young people to look to their peers who are less willing to flock to the polls and support Biden with disdain.

There's nothing wrong with refusing to vote. No politician is perfect, but you shouldn't give anyone your vote unless they roughly approximate your values and you at least believe that they are fit for office. To do otherwise and just vote for voting's sake is not "your civic duty." It's actually a bad thing.

If voters continue to go to the polls and vote for candidates that don't represent them, then the parties have no incentive to do anything different next time around. Indeed, lock-step voting is how demographic groups get their votes taken for granted and get their needs ignored.

And there's no obligation to back a "lesser of two evils" candidate.

"Ultimately, however, the issue of voting comes down to conscience," Cato Institute senior fellow [Doug Bandow wrote](#). It is not "right to insist that the disaffected suffer through the humiliation of voting when the choices are so awful. Indeed, simply saying no and refusing to cast a ballot is a powerful form of dissent. A decision not to vote deserves the same respect as one to participate."

Oh, and the notion that “if you don’t vote, you can’t complain” is ridiculous. While voting is optional, bearing the consequences of governance — taxation, criminal enforcement, regulation — is not. People who vote or don’t have equally the same right to complain about the impositions of bad government because they don’t only apply to voters. (And, there’s little reason to think that voting would have changed or prevented any of them.)

When a system time and time again fails to represent you or provide you with reasonable options, refusing to participate is a morally valid option. College students eager to shame their peers who don’t go to the polls should instead reflect on why their favored candidates have proven so unappealing and uninspiring to so many young people.