

# THE POWER OF

# TEENS

*In light of recent tragedy, teenagers are demanding change and standing up for their rights. This should come as no surprise, as throughout history, the youth have continuously shown their **strength in numbers**.*

**E** MMA GONZALEZ. DAVID HOGG. Lane Murdock. Sam Zeif.

These names have become synonymous with the wave of political activism sweeping across the nation. Their voices are being heard loud and clear. Their story is resonating from household to household, from community to community. Their ideas are generating debate on subjects that have previously been avoided. Their message is clear: no matter how young their faces are, these leaders will change the way America thinks.

These four students have helped spearhead a national debate on gun control, in the wake of the recent shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Through televised speeches, public protests and school walkouts, these teenagers represent a larger community that has caught the country's eye, and has provided a platform for the youth to express their opinions on relevant issues and shape the way society views them. Other high school students are following suit, organizing school walkouts and other protests in order to spur political change surrounding this issue that directly affects them, much to the surprise of the national news media, and perhaps the rest of the country, who

are looking on in awe at the immense amount of noise the American youth has managed to create.

This is not a new phenomena however, and the power of the teens should not be surprising, as the youth has been involved in political activism for decades. Perhaps one of the most well known student protests to date took place in 1965, in Des Moines, Iowa. This protest involved wearing black armbands to advocate for a truce in the Vietnam war, coordinated at the high school level by John Tinker and his friend Christopher Eckhardt. After being sent home multiple times, the students took to the courts, eventually making their way to the Supreme Court. After four years of arguing their case, the Supreme Court ultimately ruled for the First Amendment rights of the students in the Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District Supreme Court case. The decision highlighted the monumental impact teenagers could have on national policy and major political issues, setting a precedent for student activists to follow.

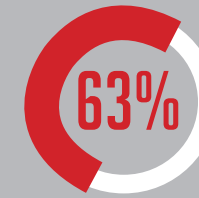
In 1975, the power of students was showcased yet again as they protested against the school board's removal of nine pieces of literature in the Island Trees School District in New York. 17-year-old student Steven Pico led a group of students who sued the board under the pretense that their First Amendment rights were being denied. Their case was taken to the Supreme Court, which ruled in the student's favor, again symbolizing the influence of a group of politically active teenagers.

Nowadays, student activism has extended past the classroom and onto social media. @schoolWalkoutUS is a Twitter account that was launched on February 16. Started by Murdock, a 15 year old that lives 20 miles away from Sandy Hook elementary, the location of a school shooting that killed 20 children in 2012, already has around 121,100 followers. School Walkout US started a petition on change.org, which currently has over 241,000 signatures, with the goal of spreading awareness for national gun violence protest set to occur on April 20.

Online movements such as #Enough and #MarchForOurLives have garnered national coverage, with some tweets having been shared over 18,000 times. In March 2016, a \$20 million cut was proposed from the Boston Public School district, which would have forced several academic and extracurricular programs to be shut down. To muster more local attention and encourage even more students to participate in their protest, students used the Twitter hashtag #bpswalkout. Their efforts paid off and about 2,000 students walked out of their classes and marched through downtown Boston protesting the proposed cut. This particular example points to the significance of social media as a wide platform for these teenage leaders, and its effectiveness in organizing large masses of young people under one message to advocate for.

With the proliferation of outspoken teenagers across the country questioning the status quo, the American public has begun to respond to their message. Although at a higher level than ever before, these teens are following in the footsteps of the young leaders that have succeeded before them. What may come as a surprise to many, comes as no surprise to America's youth, a group that is now determined to make a dent in the norms of the political environment they are subject to. The power of the youth is in their numbers, it is in their tenacity, it is in their determination and it is their collective message to fight against society's injustice. |

## BY THE NUMBERS



of students believe "dissent is a critical component of the political process"



of students participated in a demonstration in the 1960's

VS.



of students participated in a protest in the year 2005



students killed at a school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas



student-run marches organized for April 20th to stand in solidarity with the victims

student activism began in the year **1924**

Sources: Act.indivisible.org, U.S. Department of education Higher Education General Information, The review of higher education

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO YOUR OPINION NO MATTER HOW YOUNG YOU ARE... TEENAGERS DEFINITELY DO HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE SOCIAL NORMS BECAUSE WE'RE PART OF THE PROCESS THAT CREATED THEM.

Shelby Lopez Junior

Steven Pico. Christopher Eckhard. Cameron Kasky. Emma Gonzalez. Sam Zeif. Sarah Chadwick. Jaclyn ... Alfonso Calderon. Lorenzo Prado. Steven Pico. Christopher Eckhard. Cameron Kasky. Emma Gonzalez.