

**OBJECTIVE**

Outline the need for youth voices in public policy and recommendations for inclusion in public policy discussions.

**01**  
**YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

**02**  
**BENEFITS OF YOUTH VOICE**

**03**  
**WHEN YOUTH VOICES GO UNHEARD**

**04**  
**HOW TO INCORPORATE YOUTH**

**01: Youth Participation**

Historically, youth political engagement has been instrumental in bridging racial inequity as evidenced by the influence of organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and youth leading the charge of Freedom Summer of 1964. In Columbus and many communities across the country, we see the power of youth activism in our nations racial unrest in 2020-2021. In response to the fatal Columbus police shooting of 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant, Ohio State University students organized and led a march and sit-in in downtown Columbus to bring national attention to racialized police brutality against the Black community.

Similarly, youth actively engaged in protests against the disparate, systemic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and Brown communities. In Columbus, youth organized protests to raise awareness about the nearly 15,000 evictions that were filed in March 2020<sup>1</sup>. On a national level, student-led groups such as March for Our Lives<sup>1</sup> and the Youth Climate Movement have influenced voting and policymaking to address issues that are affecting local communities. Since 2010, youth policy influence has grown from 37% to 57%, with 70% achieving greater policy impact<sup>1</sup>.



Zenner, S. (2021). Light Rocket via Getty Images [Stephen Zenner SOPHA Images LightRocket via Getty Images.jpg \(1024x683\) \(insidehighered.com\)](#)

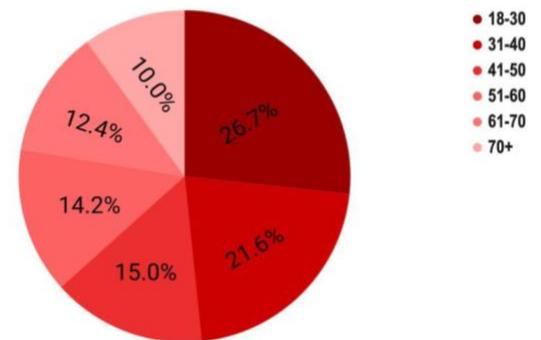
**02: Benefits of Youth Voice**

When it comes to understanding the challenges people of color experience, youth have unique experiences and perspectives that can inform policy and decision-making. Youth voice has never been more critical in shaping our communities as COVID-19 continues to shift how we work and live. Youth volunteerism also informs the youth perspective by learning, first-hand, about the highs and lows that Columbus community members experience.

Social Media Influence

Through social media, youth can bring attention to the issues on the ballot that may not have national attention. This is especially helpful in organizing young voters in Columbus.

**Percentage of Columbus, Ohio Registered Voters**



Voter Representation in Columbus

Youth ages 18-30 represent nearly 26.7% of all registered voters in Columbus, OH. With the support of youth, lawmakers would be able to have greater success pushing forward policies that improve the quality of Black and Brown community members and the community as a whole.

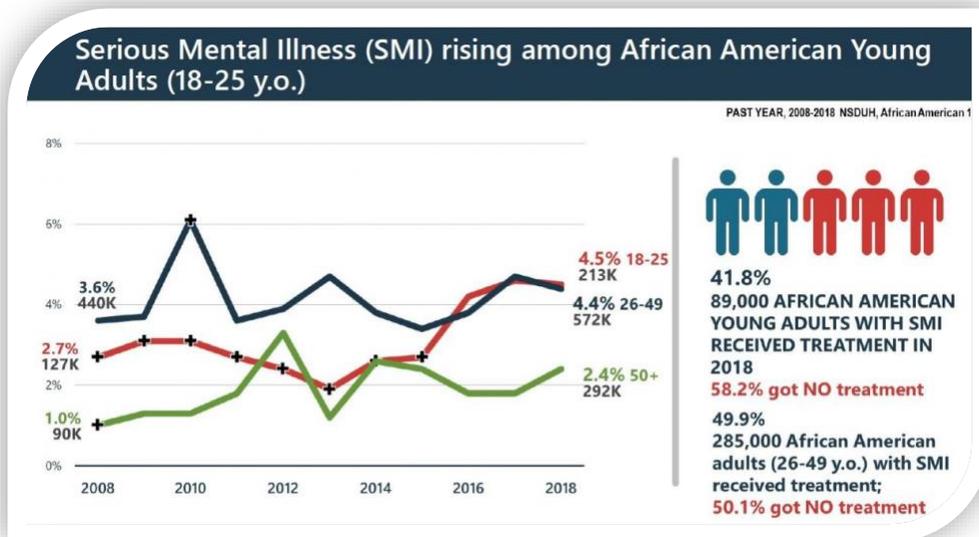
1 Langer, J. (2021, July 1). Ohio State Students Join Protest Over Housing Instability in Columbus. The Lantern. [Amira Khoury, a fourth-year in world politics, has experienced a great deal of financial instability throughout her life. \(thelantern.com\)](#)

2 <https://marchforourlives.com/>

3 Shepard D. (2017, March). How Young People Influence Policy: A Literature Review Policy Brief. Oxfam. [Oxfam 2017 Youth Influencing Policies in the 21st Century Literature Review D Shephard.pdf | Powered by Box](#)

**03: When Youth Voices Go Unheard**

Underrepresentation in policymaking and voter suppression/disengagement are two challenges to passing legislation that improves the quality of life for Black and Brown communities. Policy developed in this way reinforces systemic racism and its inequitable outcomes. For example, nearly all of the staff members of Columbus’s Legislative Research Office are over the age of 35 and none of the board members represent the youth age group. Because of this, policy is often disconnected from issues that really matter to Black and Brown youth. Another example can be seen in the increased demand for access to mental health resources, especially in light of COVID-19 social isolation. A 2018 study suggests that mental health issues have been steadily rising for youth ages 18-25, with nearly 58% of Black youth going without treatment. Failing to leverage youth engagement in the public conversation can result in misallocation of resources that really matter to youth.



US Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). 2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: African Americans. [PowerPoint Slides]. Retrieved from [2018 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: African Americans \(samhsa.gov\)](#)

**04: How to Incorporate Youth Voice**

Invite Youth to the Policymaking Table

Provide youth the opportunity to engage in policymaking. This ensures inclusion of their perspectives and experiences and enables lawmakers to make decisions informed by those who will lead our community in the near future.

Increase the Role of Student Councils in Schools

This would apply to both middle and high schools and would focus on data collection and community outreach to determine what type of issues families are really facing in order to build policies around these overlapping issues.

Create A More Representative Columbus Youth Council

Currently, there is a total of only 20 members and 1 student is selected from each school. This limits the voices and representation of Columbus youth as schools are made up of all types of students, not just those who are exceptional academically.

Leverage the Youth Perspective

Intentionally engage youth to organize and creatively engage in policymaking through various advocacy activity efforts such as protests and supporting legislation through Instagram and Twitter.