

In the world of youth trends, political activism is once again hip and apathy is so yesterday. The 2008 election has already provided much fodder for history book writers. The resurgence of the 18 to 25 voting block is one aspect of this election that will continue to play out in the years to come.

Over 3.4 million more young people voted in 2008 compared to the 2004 election.

Although there was a marked growth in total voters overall, young voters were responsible for 60% of the increase. The 18 to 25 set cast 18% of all ballots in 2008. Compare this to statistics from the US Election Assistance Commission, which reports that young people comprised 14.24% of all US votes in 1972 and a dismal 7.26% of US votes in 1996.

Television pundits and the blogosphere were abuzz with a belief that it was young voters that handed Barack Obama the election through dedicated volunteer work and increased voter turnout. On Oct 30, Obama addressed a reported crowd of 40,000 people at the University of Missouri. Many of the attendees were also students of the university.

Young people are also getting involved on a local level. Nate Kennedy, who studies Political Science and Sociology at the University of Missouri, took a semester off his studies to work as the campaign manager for incumbent Missouri State Senator Chuck Graham. Awarded Boone County's Young Democrat of the Year Award in 2007, Kennedy's passion for politics is almost as old as he is.

"I guess my earliest memory of politics and government is in kindergarten walking down to the library to watch part of President Clinton's inauguration speech,"

Kennedy reminisces. "I had no idea what was going on, but I've been interested in government ever since."

Kennedy founded the Young Democrats club at his high school in Poplar Bluff after George W. Bush came to speak at their town in 2004. College life has only heightened his activism. Kennedy served as president of MU's College Democrats in 2006. In 2007, he interned for a state senator in the legislative session, as well as the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee (SDCC). It was through the SDCC, which is in charge of all of the state senate races, that he met Senator Chuck Graham. His move to Graham's team was rather straightforward.

"I just asked him: 'Hey, I would really like to do this. I have been working with the SDCC for sometime, and really would like to transition onto this race'. So, I met with Chuck and got the job."

Running a campaign is literally a full-time job. Accordingly, Kennedy decided to take a semester off from his schoolwork. His days were jam-packed with everything from recruiting volunteers to fundraisers to writing press releases and attending small town festivals with Graham.

"By the end of the day I had some free time, but it usually wasn't until after dark," says Kennedy.

Although his stress level increased with his new job, Kennedy stands by his choice to join the race.

"I don't regret taking a semester off at all," says Kennedy. "This is a different part of political education that I cannot get in a classroom." He jokes, "of course, I'll be going back to school and I will graduate in eight, maybe nine semesters, we'll see".

Despite Kennedy's stoic voice and dry humor that belie his age, he acts like any other college student when off the campaign trail. With great exuberance, he gushes about his greatest political hero:

"Senator Thomas Hart Benton was a badass," exclaims Kennedy. "He was Missouri's first senator; the first senator to serve five terms. He shot Andrew Jackson among many other people. And there are some really awesome quotes on my Facebook wall from him." (One such gem of a quote by Benton is, "I never quarrel, sir; but I do fight, sir; and when I fight, sir, a funeral follows, sir.")

Outside of the political realm, Kennedy is also an avid deer hunter and musician. He plays the mandolin, drums, keyboard, guitar and bass. He's currently learning how to play the lap steel and fiddle.

Kennedy is involved in Columbia Missouri's local music scene, playing with the band Anna and the X's.

"I met Anna the first weekend that we were up here at school and we hit it off," says Kennedy. "We got together with some people that first semester and recorded a song, but then didn't do much for the last couple years...then we got together at the beginning of the summer, played a gig, and then recorded some songs...now we have an album! Or, she's got an album. I'm on a few tracks."

To Kennedy, music and politics are two different worlds to him.

"[They are] pretty separate, I'd say. All my friends are mainly on the political side, so they all come to the music events. That's about the extent it mixes," says Kennedy.

Playing music with friends and in live shows helps Kennedy blow off steam that accumulated through the campaign.

"[Music] is a way to get away from some of that stuff, as well. It's a big stress reliever to sit down and play for half an hour."

Despite his musical talents, Kennedy's true passion does lie in politics.

"I just can't grasp not knowing not knowing what's going on," remarks Kennedy on people who practice political apathy. "I understand through some circumstances how it's not the most important thing in everyone's day. But everything –everything– around you revolves around it and is effected by the government.... We actually have the opportunity to make choices in what happens in our government, so I don't know why people don't take that advantage."

Kennedy has noticed political tides changing among his peers.

"A lot of people don't take the time to understand what's going on and don't know the issues but I think that's changing," says Kennedy. "It has been changing over the last several election cycles. More young people are getting involved and voting in greater numbers every election."

On Nov 4, 2008, Kennedy employment as Senator Graham's campaign manager ended with the election. Unfortunately, challenger Kurt Schaefer bested Graham by 2 percentage points in what local paper *The Columbia Tribune* declared "one of the bigger upsets in recent local political history". However, Kennedy remains positive about his future and is looking forward to returning to his classwork .

"There's some pressure that I don't have anymore, but I'm moving onto the next phase, which is graduating," says Kennedy in retrospect of the campaign. "Even though i thought I would be devoid of anything political after November 4th, I find I'm having a hard time not keeping up."