**Prompt**

How should young people be advocating for change?

Youth activism has been growing for many years. Around the world, young people are speaking up and demanding change on issues from climate change to gun violence to social inequality. These activists use a variety of methods to make their voices heard. What is the most effective method for creating change?

After reading the provided articles, write an essay that argues the best method young people should use to advocate for change. Defend your claim using clear reasons and relevant evidence from the sources provided, and be sure to acknowledge and address counterclaims to your position.

**Source 1**

**“Parkland: How Protests Engage People and Create Change”**

On March 24​th, 2018, students across the country took to the streets to demand stricter gun laws. People marched in cities throughout the nation including Los Angeles, Houston, and Chicago. Crowds were in the tens of thousands​ according to ​*Associated Press.[[1]](#footnote-1)*​​ Protesters led chants and held signs saying, “Keep NRA (National Rifle Association) Money Out of Politics,” “Ballot, not Bullets,” and “We Are the Change.” It was an important moment for people asking for strong gun laws and for the youth of this country.

The march followed the February 14th shooting in a school in Parkland, Florida, where 17 people died. It was actually organized by the students who lived through the shooting. They made demands to decrease the chance of future school shootings. They said they were tired of politicians doing nothing. They did not want students to fear going to school each day. The movement, called March for Our Lives, called for bans on certain guns and restrictions on buying guns.

The March for Our Lives movement was a turning point. Adults and young people themselves realized the power of young voices and the importance of protest. Protests convey important messages to the world. They can also have direct effects on lawmakers’ votes. More importantly though, they empower the protesters themselves. According to Lois Beckett in the *Guardian’​s* “‘We Can’t Let Fear Consume Us’: Why Parkland Activists Won’t Give Up,” in 2018, following the nationwide protests, the percent of youth who voted nationwide was an estimated 31 percent. This was an increase of 10 percentage points. Many believe this rise was because of the March for Our Lives' efforts and the platform these protests created for youth voices.

More recently, youth organizations have also had a large role in June’s Black Lives Matter protests. The protests followed the murder of George Floyd and called for an end to police violence. On June 4​th, 2020, Teens for Equality led a march in Nashville of over 10,000 people, according to police estimates.[[2]](#footnote-2)​ The leaders were young women from the ages 14 to 16. The protest was well-organized and there were no conflicts with police.

Young voices are not going away. Today’s youth are ready to get out into the streets and make their voices heard when it comes to the issues that matter most to them. They are ready to make change.

**Source 2**

**"Climate Protests: When Protests Fall Short”**

On Friday, September 20​th, 2019, students across the world walked out of school. It was scheduled three days before the United Nations Climate Summit. Students demanded world leaders take action on climate change. According to the *Washington Post*,​ one of the largest protests was in New York City. It was led by Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. She has spoken before Congress and the United Nations about these problems.[[3]](#footnote-3)​

And while these protests were certainly some of the largest climate protests ever, they were not the first. People, young and old, have been asking for action on climate change for decades. In fact, the September protest came just six months after many students were part of a similar effort to demand climate change action.

But even with all this work, little has changed. Few countries have created new plans to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Even then, they often fall short of what climate change activists are asking for. Countries are also not held responsible if they do not meet their goals. According to the*​ Los Angeles Times*​, Thunberg described this, saying, “We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth.”[[4]](#footnote-4) ​

World leaders are certainly to blame for this lack of action. But isn’t it also maybe a failure of how we have been advocating? Are protests too separate from the actions needed to change laws and create policy? Our chants and marches cannot be left as just that. Our energy must extend to voting, to talks with friends and family, and to how we educate ourselves inside and outside the classroom.

**Source 3**

**Social Media: A New Space for Pushing Change**

Social media has changed the nature of activism. It has been used more and more by political movements, especially among young people. Rainesford Stauffer wrote a piece for ​*Teen Vogue*​ on the use of social media. It showed that social media has given young people a new space to share information and raise money. The effect is that young people are organizing and mobilizing like never before.

Student protests in September 2018 were largely organized through social media. The protest followed a school shooting in Parkland, Florida. Ryan Pascal is a member of the Students Demand Action advisory board. According to ​*Teen Vogue*, he organized an entire protest over Instagram and Snapchat.[[5]](#footnote-5)​ Protests are even happening on a new app called TikTok. Many say it has been helpful in spreading news about the Black Lives Matter movement and the protests following George Floyd’s death.

Few believe that social media is completely helpful and healthy. However, that doesn’t mean that it cannot do great good. It has become a new place for young people standing up for what they believe in.

**Source 4**

**Social Media: A False Sense of Change**

During sad moments in our country, young people are now turning to social media. In a recent study, Common Sense discovered that the average American teen spends nearly seven and a half hours a day looking at a screen.[[6]](#footnote-6)​ Social media can help share important information. It also can lead to the spread of incorrect information. It can confuse and mislead people.

Sometimes social media gets it right. This includes when it gives a voice to oppressed groups. However, this does not mean it leads to actual change in our laws. The rise of online petitions is a good example. These petitions are used to collect lots of signatures quickly. A 2019 article from the ​*Atlantic*​ talks about how they don’t work the best. People presenting their demands in person works better than a single online petition.​[[7]](#footnote-7)

Social media can mislead people when lies spread. But more importantly, it can also give people a false sense of doing good. It can make them feel like they have done “enough.” People spend time posting online about solidarity and calling out horrible deeds. But they also must reflect on their own prejudices and ignorance and even voting practices. We cannot only call for change and show up for these movements online. We need to be there in person, demanding change.

**Source 5**

**Social Media and Art: A Space for New Voices**

One of the good parts of social media has been the rise of new voices. People often kept out of the spotlight now have a space to speak. Social media has led to a large change in representation. Representation is about who we see on social media, on the television, and in magazines.

Ayesha Chaudhry is sixteen years old. She is an immigrant from Pakistan who was interviewed by NPR. She runs a media company. They create makeup looks for people of all skin colors. She also takes photos for people who are rarely shown in magazines or on television.[[8]](#footnote-8)​ Not long ago, it would have been very hard for Chaudhry to have the audience she has today. This is because of her background and her age.

Social media is changing the voices and faces we hear and see every day. It is helping people who live in isolated communities learn more about the world and others. And maybe, this will lead to more kindness, compassion, and understanding.

1. A. Khalil and C. Woodward, “’Vote Them Out!’: Hundreds Of Thousands Demand Gun Control,” *AP NEWS*, March 24, 2018, https://apnews.com/2b001250a10c42878f0d80c07e14816c/%27Vote-them-out!%27%3A-Hundreds-of-thousands-demand-gun-control​. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Rankl, “These Kids Are Done Waiting For Change,” *The New York Times,* June 15, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/opinion/nashville-teens-protests.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article​. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Valerie Strauss, “Students Around The World Skip School To Protest And Demand Action On Climate Change,” ​*The Washington Post*​, May 24, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/05/24/students-around-world-skip-school-protest-demand-action-climate-change/​. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ​Tony Barboza. "Greta Thunberg Admonishes Leaders As U.N. Climate Summit Fails To Deliver Action," ​*The Los Angeles Times*​, ​September 23, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2019-09-23/greta-thunberg-un-climate-summit-global-warming​. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rainesford Stauffer. “Social Media Transformed Teens’ Ability to Build Activist Movements Online,” ​*Teen Vogue*,​ December 19, 2019, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/social-media-activism-changed-everything​. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Teenagers Are Rewriting the Rules of the News,” *The Economist*, January 12, 2020, https://www.economist.com/international/2019/12/18/teenagers-are-rewriting-the-rules-of-the-news​. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Antonia Malchik, “The Problem With Social-Media Protests,” ​*The Atlantic*​, May 6, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2019/05/in-person-protests-stronger-online-activism-a-walking-life/578905/​. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Anya Kamenezt, Jeffrey Pierre, Sequoia Carillo, and Elissa Nadworny, “I’m Willing To Fight For America’: 5 Student Activists On Protesting For Change.” ​*NPR*,​ June 19, 2020, ​https://www.npr.org/2020/06/19/880224955/i-m-willing-to-fight-for-america-5-student-activists-on-protesting-for-change​. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)