THE CHOATE INQUIRY

THE DRESS CODE

VACCINE MANDATES, NATIONWIDE

Cape Pine.—Newfoundland.

ONE STRIKE...FAIR OR FATAL?

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

INQUIRENDUM VERITATEM — FALL MMXXI
Choate students, faculty, and staff;

Welcome back, and thank you for reading The Inquiry. Amidst the buzz of a full, lively campus, our Masthead has been hard at work creating this issue. Contained herein you’ll find discussions of the student dress code, vaccine mandates, the one-strike policy, and freedom of speech, topics we believe are of great and particular interest to the student body.

We encourage you to read each of the following essays thoughtfully, and to reflect on both sides of each topic. Our writers are sharing their personal experiences and beliefs, and each of them have put forward compelling arguments. While debate over these issues is fully endorsed by the Masthead, the content of the following articles is not. We aim only to facilitate a forum for Choate students to freely share their opinions. Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

Finn McGaan, Editor-in-Chief
Brooke Edwards, Managing Editor
In Support

The Dress Code

Macie Simmons, Sixth Form
Getting dressed every morning may seem simple, but it can be a source of anxiety for teenagers. Pressure to conform to social norms is present at all high schools, including Choate. While self-expression is an important part of growing up, a uniform would alleviate unnecessary anxiety and create a sense of student unity. Additionally, a uniform would address the biased nature of our dress code and foster equality in the classroom. Implementing a Choate uniform would make our community more inclusive, unified, and productive.

The dress code is sexist as it affects students differently based on their perceived gender. Male students are rarely — if ever — singled out for their clothing; the same cannot be said for female students. The dress code is arbitrary and almost entirely up to faculty discretion. Unallowed items include “clothing that exposes the midriff, bares the back, has a plunging or low cut neckline, or is otherwise inappropriately revealing.” What constitutes “inappropriately revealing”? In my experience, it depends entirely on which teacher you ask. This vagueness allows some students to evade penalization, while others are consistently singled out for any questionable clothing. Instead of holding students to undefined standards, Choate should make the dress code as clear and direct as possible. By implementing a uniform, Choate would address the arbitrary, sexist nature of the current dress code.

Uniforms create a separation between students’ academic and personal lives, fostering a constructive learning environment. A study from the Long Beach Unified School district found that 78.4% of administrators believed student work ethic improved after implementing a uniform. As Choate students, we need ways to keep the stress and overwhelming nature of our academic lives apart from the things we do to keep us happy. At boarding school, it often feels like our entire lives revolve around our studies. It’s important to separate our time spent in the classroom from the rest of our day. Uniforms would promote focus in the classroom while still granting the opportunity to express our personal style on the weekends and in our free time. Through separating work and fun, a uniform improves both.

The Choate student body encompasses individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. When it comes to clothing, these differences can isolate students and create a disconnected community. The ability to keep up with trends and constantly buy clothes is a privilege only some can afford. A standard uniform would help eliminate these disparities. Instead of worrying about what clothing and brands are popular, students find comfort in knowing everyone has the same wardrobe. With the presence of a uniform, societal pressures of fitting are alleviated so students can focus on their studies. When we eliminate wardrobe differences, intellectual strengths will instead shine through.

The Choate mission statement asserts that the school strives to prioritize a “rigorous academic curriculum and an emphasis on the formation of character...”. As a collective, we students can all agree they’ve succeeded in their goal of providing a rigorous academic curriculum. However, character isn’t something that you are taught; it’s something you gain through personal experiences. The character instilled in Choate students is determined by the campus environment and attitude of the student body. If Choate implemented a uniform, a larger emphasis would be placed on respect, equality, and inclusion. A standard uniform would not only aid the “formation of character,” but it would also lay the foundation for a more cohesive and nurturing student body.

- Macie Simmons
In Opposition

The Dress Code

Ximena Castillo, Fourth Form
A uniform accomplishes exactly what it claims: makes everybody appear the same. The nature of humanity, however, makes this an impossible feat, given how different every individual is. Uniforms would transform campus into a stream of blandly dressed robots—just like Deerfield. Blazers and khaki pants do not fix the issues some pretend they do; rather, they are an inefficient, quiet way to control students. Choate is a diverse school with students from around the world, across different religions, genders, and personalities. Each student has their own unique culture, style, passions, and different sets of beliefs. Uniforms suffocate the natural sparks that exist inside students, restrict our ability to express ourselves, and ultimately create a sterilized atmosphere that causes more harm than benefit.

A uniform's homogeneous facade does not represent the actual people wearing it. Self-expression and individuality are amongst the most important parts of growing up, and the way we present ourselves expresses who we are. According to Dr. Carl Pickhardt from Psychology Today, establishing independence and fostering individuality are the two main psychological paths that adolescents take as they progress into young adulthood. Uniform policies have negative effects on teens’ formation of their identity, and on their self-expression through fashion. Self-expression is crucial, as it is how people understand who they are in the world and develop a sense of character. Through clothing, people express their own sense of individuality. Whether it be religion, culture, or gender, people use clothing as a tool to represent who they are. Distinctiveness can be difficult to foster in schools where students are expected to wear uniforms. Allowing students to pick their own clothing sends an empowering message to students that they are maturing individuals who are entitled to the most fundamental self-determination. Their sense of self-worth must originate in a liberated learning environment, rather than in one with no choice. Giving teenagers the freedom to express themselves not only recognizes their uniqueness, but also opens the door to a mutually respectful connection. When students are considered “free-range people” rather than robots, they flourish.

The damaging effects uniforms have on teenagers who do not fall into the gender norm must not be understated. Traditional uniforms establish harmful gender conventions and binaries, while continuing to maintain the outdated idea that fashion is gendered. The gender binary in the school setting is reinforced by gender-specific uniform rules. Uniforms are not all-encompassing; males and females have limited options, pushing people with different gender identities aside. Men are not permitted to wear uniform skirts in many schools with uniforms, as though a piece of clothing can only be worn by someone who fits into a societal norm. Dean Amo, a non-binary student, articulates that a uniform makes them feel: “trapped inside a caricature that only flaunts its femininity, forcing other parts of my identity to emerge in unhealthy ways.” They believe that a uniform reduces them to a female student, rather than a person. Transgender and gender diverse students face discrimination under uniform policies. Professionals fail to address gender discrimination and maintain that wearing a uniform protects students from feeling “left out.” Rather than forcing everyone into the same closet, educational institutions should teach students to embrace diversity.

Furthermore, uniforms have a negative effect on students’ body image. Students without uniform policies have higher self-esteem than students with them, according to research conducted at Arizona State University. Since clothing looks differently on everyone’s body, students will be more likely to compare themselves to their classmates when they all wear the same clothes. While uniforms help to eliminate the “best-dressed rivalry,” they also introduce a modern and more painful competition: the “best body rivalry.”
When all of the students are wearing the same outfit, they fill it out in different ways. For many students, this would be intimidating and would lead to unhealthy comparison.

Pro-uniformers claim that clothing is merely a tool for current fashion trends rather than a creative outlet. They would argue that the current styles only put “pressure on kids in terms of who's wearing what” and highlight socioeconomic disparities, according to Amy Fisher of the International Mass Retail Association. The research on school uniforms has resulted in a splintered debate, with reports ranging from uniforms having either positive or negative consequences in different fields of education, as well as controversy among scholars on whether the research accurately represents the subject of school uniforms. Aaron Jones of BYU conducted research to see whether there were any links between students' views of the influence of school uniforms and their socioeconomic status. A survey was given to 182 students in a school to gather impression data, and a separate survey was given to parents to gather socioeconomic status data. There were no major correlations between the School Climate component and socioeconomic status, according to the findings. It is possible that children judge each other on a variety of factors. If not the designer top, then it will shortly be the designer shoes, backpack, and bracelet. If anything, uniforms would highlight the items or accessories that are different from others. Whether or not there are uniforms, rivalry among adolescents will prevail.

With strict uniform policies, students are forced to wear the same basic clothes in their most outdated and dull ways. The worst enemy of imagination is this kind of comfortable discipline. Imagination is suppressed when surroundings are unexciting. The perception of the school atmosphere, which includes the clothes worn by the student body, has a significant impact on a student's view of the school as a learning environment. In order to take on opportunities that will challenge and develop them as learners, students must feel secure and confident in the classroom.

Students who feel uncomfortable may be hesitant to take small risks, such as raising their hand in class or socializing with their classmates. The clothes a student wears can, and ultimately will, have a tremendous impact on how they feel about school, and also how they see themselves as learners.

- Ximena Castillo
In Support

Nationwide Vaccine Mandates

Ella Sklar, Sixth Form
The ethical dilemma of a nationwide COVID-19 vaccine mandate has been in question frequently since the initial spread of COVID-19 and even more so now that three primary vaccines have been approved. Barring medical exemptions, all United States citizens should face required vaccination in order to enter public spaces. There is not a single American who has been free from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, so why would we not do everything possible to put a stop to it? Medical professionals have spent the past year rapidly developing a Covid vaccines to alleviate the suffering brought on by the virus. All three vaccines that have been approved, Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson, are over 90% effective at preventing hospitalization and have been proven as safe options for preventing the spread of the virus. There are several arguments to be made as to why a nationwide COVID-19 vaccine mandate should be put into place, with the primary argument being herd immunity.

Herd immunity is achieved when between 60% and 90% of a population is immune to an infectious disease, which lessens the likelihood of infection for the vulnerable population. The heightened transmissibility of new variants, precautionary measures like masking, and the duration of immunity due to previous infection all determine the target rate of herd immunity. Regardless of the target rate, vaccination is the quickest and most effective way to achieve herd immunity. The urgency for herd immunity does not only come from the demand to return to a normal lifestyle. As a society, we have a moral obligation to protect the most vulnerable members of the population. Regardless of a vaccine mandate, there are those who cannot receive the vaccine either because of religious reasons or because their immune systems cannot handle it the way a healthy person’s can. Because this portion of the population will never be vaccinated, more pressure is put on the rest of society to achieve herd immunity in order to protect them.

Considering this clear solution, it’s hard to imagine why anyone would want to prolong the devastation of this virus, but plenty of ‘vaccine hesitant’ individuals exist. The unknown aspect of the vaccine coupled with a relaxed attitude towards the virus often contribute to this hesitancy. The development of the vaccine began a little over a year ago, and that timeframe is considered to be too small a window for many. However, most of these individuals are unaware of the intense research and testing processes that occurred before the vaccine was approved. The CDC website states: “These vaccines have undergone and will continue to undergo the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history.” If the most reputable health experts in the country have approved of the vaccine and encourage its administration, why should those who are unqualified to speak on these matters be able to refuse the vaccine which could save the lives of others?

This isn’t a matter of bodily autonomy. People make sacrifices in the interest of the greater public good every day; we have the right to govern our own body until the decisions we make are at the expense of others. The COVID-19 pandemic has killed over 760,000 people since the start of its spread; 760,000 American citizens who have lost their lives to something now preventable. Those who do not get vaccinated aid the continued spread of the virus, therefore, additional deaths. They are not only jeopardizing their own health; those who are not immune are at risk of spreading the virus to susceptible people. Individuals with medical obstacles, who cannot get the vaccine, rely on the protection of those around them. There is absolutely no reason this suffering must continue, and it would be irresponsible and cruel to allow American citizens to prioritize their irrational hesitancies over the lives of others.

- Ella Sklar
In Opposition

Nationwide Vaccine Mandates

Kenny Tang, Sixth Form
It is undeniable that the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the way many of us live our lives. The virus’s volatile and deadly nature has caused tremendous financial and emotional distress within our nation and worldwide.

With the development of American COVID vaccines, Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson, there are now opportunities for our society to return to normalcy. These vaccines seem to be effective in restoring a pre-pandemic society, based on the results of their phase three trials and the gradual drop in the number of cases. But this doesn’t mean everyone should receive them. Despite the many positives vaccines may offer both individuals and society, there remain justifiable concerns regarding their safety, with evidence of negative reactions and even death in a small number of cases. If the vaccine was 100% effective, and had a statistical risk of zero, there would be no need for such a mandate; people would line up to receive the miracle shot that comes with no risks, and only offers them the bliss of being safe to live normally again. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and the vaccine, like any vaccine that has ever been developed in human history, comes with potential risks.

Mandating the vaccine only proves that it has risks and that the government which mandates the vaccine has conceded this reality of the danger this risk poses to the public. Moreover, it demonstrates that the individuals who issue the mandate believe that they are superior to other citizens of the nation as they believe their judgment of risk is correct, and can only be right as shown by their mandate of it upon others. To quote Ludwig von Mises: “‘Since nobody is in a position to substitute his own value judgments for those of the acting individual, it is vain to pass judgment on other people's aims and volitions. No man is qualified to declare what would make another man happier or less discontented.”

Mandating the COVID vaccine gives the government the power to expose its citizens to this undue risk. It shows that the government believes it has control over our health and ability to act. Having this threat from our government is dangerous, even more so than the coronavirus itself, because it threatens the foundational elements of our nation and human rationality. Furthermore, governmental obstruction of every individual’s right to act and enjoy their own health is a violation of personal liberties.

As is the case with all liberal societies, our society is created as the product of the actions of each individual man and woman who lives within its constructs. What makes American society so unique and appealing to all of us who live within it and are affected by it is the ability for every citizen to act upon their own accord and make decisions regarding their personal health. In reality, society is often plagued by failures in the system where the actions of an individual or a group of individuals are restricted. Thus the role of the government within this social construct is to maintain the freedom of every individual and protect that freedom at all costs. By mandating the vaccine, the government violates its responsibility to protect its citizens by overriding the individual’s autonomy. A federal mandate of the vaccine would strip citizens of their right to make life-altering decisions on their own, and create a precedent in which the government infringes on the autonomy of the American people, a fundamental principle of what defines and upholds our political democracy, and society as a whole.

The right of every citizen of the United States to make autonomous decisions regarding their health is a right that not only protects them from the health risks of taking a vaccine but protects liberal society. Many may say that because in our society we are interdependent, not taking the vaccine is putting others’ ability to live in good health at risk. But if those raising these concerns do not take the vaccine that they believe is effective in order to protect themselves, of
their resultant risk of contracting the virus is of their own fault. It is the responsibility of individuals to decide what is best for themselves. It is not the responsibility of individuals to decide what is best for others. It is not the responsibility of the American government to supersede the judgment of its citizens by enforcing a vaccine mandate.

Not only is it an inalienable right for individuals to determine whether the benefits of receiving a Covid-19 vaccine outweigh the potential risks, but it is also the only efficient way of achieving herd immunity and determining whether the vaccine is truly beneficial to society. Because society is the product of individual action, the only way for the vaccine to be a socially optimal solution to the pandemic is if the majority of individuals choose to take it. The critical issue for any individual making the choice to take the vaccine is the fact that it both offers tremendous rewards as well as risks. Mandating the vaccine would be inefficient because doing so dictates a standard over each individual’s determination of whether the vaccine’s benefits outweigh its risks. Allowing for the vaccine to be a choice is the only way we can maintain the foundations of American liberal democracy while living safely in a world where eating out with friends and going to the movies on the weekend is the norm.

Vaccines have the potential of freeing us from the economic and social restrictions of the COVID-19 virus. They are a step towards finally achieving herd immunity and restoring the way we used to live before the pandemic. But only by allowing each individual to make the choice to take on its risks can we determine whether they are truly socially and medically optimal. Mandating the vaccine confirms its doubters’ concerns about its safety, sets a terrifying precedent of governmental tyranny, destroys the foundational principles of liberalism in our society, and derives a suboptimal valuation of the vaccine’s true social benefits. We must allow for each and every citizen of the United States to exercise their right to choose to take the vaccine on their own accord and determine whether it is their preferred pandemic solution.

- Kenny Tang
In Support

The One Strike Policy

Dylan Clack, Fifth Form
In a schooling system, it is inevitable that bad behaviour will occur. Teens will rebel against authority, it's a reality older than the concept of school as we know it. Less certain, however, is the way of dealing with such behaviours. Headmasters and behavioural scientists alike have struggled for hundreds of years over the concept of discipline in the school system, and have only come to one solid conclusion; there is no perfect solution. Especially in our teenage years, people respond completely differently to different types of discipline, making it impossible to claim that one system is “the right system”, especially in relation to substance abuse. Of course, some systems have become more popular than others, yielding better results in terms of the infraction rates and general environment of the schools. Amongst those, the One Strike Policy for substances has emerged as a favourite for prep schools, being implemented at Hotchkiss, Episcopal High School, Salisbury School and of course, at Choate Rosemary Hall. The schools most often argue for the one strike policy based on clear, rigid morals. As most of us know, Choate aims to prepare us for life after high school academically but also morally, emphasising “fidelity and integrity” with their school motto. The schools are fundamentally against the use of substances as a high school student and claim that anything other than the one strike policy would be a deviation from those very morals that they aim to teach.

The rigidity Choate holds around marijuana can be beneficial to the students in numerous ways. Firstly, it helps students’ understanding of the rules, making them less likely to be faced with unexpected consequences. A rule as consistent as the one strike policy leaves very little to be inferred, resulting in less misunderstandings of the rules. The consistency around the one strike policy is also beneficial to students that are hesitant to try such substances on campus. At schools with more complex policies surrounding drugs, students may find themselves rationalizing the use of illicit substances with thoughts of potential leniency if they get caught, but at Choate the outcome is clear and unwavering.

Finally, this idea of knowing the exact consequences can also act as a repellent in situations of peer pressure. A student that doesn’t feel comfortable with these substances but might otherwise succumb to the pressure of their friends can use the one strike policy as ammunition to stay true to their morals. They might say that they would take a hit, but their parents would kill them if they got kicked out, and they don’t want to take the risk.

In terms of legal advantages of the one strike policy, such a system prepares students for the outside world and stops students' drug activities from growing to a criminal amount. In the same sense that a one strike system stops the environment of drug use at a school, student’s drug habits would be stopped from evolving into a dangerous and criminal level with expulsion upon even the first infraction. The harsh consequences students face at Choate also mimic the American legal system, further preparing them for life after high school. It only takes one encounter with the police and marijuana to have permanent effects, and if that encounter comes at the expense of your Choate experience rather than a clear criminal record, the one strike policy is working in your favour.

Arguments have been made about the one strike policy driving students to use substances in more dangerous manners than other systems. The claim is that if a student were to be in a potentially dangerous situation under the influence of drugs, the harsh consequences of the one strike policy would deter students from getting the help they need. At Choate however, the safe Haven Policy makes it so students’ health is the priority while still maintaining consistent values. This policy protects students who are under the influence of any illicit substances from receiving disciplinary action if they are in need of any medical attention and enact the policy. Choate then takes rehabilitative approaches to the situation, once again prioritizing the students well-being.
The One Strike Policy is consistent in its severity. It sends a clear message about the school’s values and the consequences that follow consuming illicit substances on campus. The policy prepares Choate students for life after graduation morally and on a legal basis, all while maintaining students safety and well being at all times.

- Dylan Clack
The one-strike policy has been instituted at Choate for years. The student handbook states that if a student or group of students are caught with hard drugs, including cannabis, they will be subject to immediate dismissal from the School. There are several objections to this policy, the most obvious being the fact that cannabis is swept into the category of “hard drugs.” With each passing year, the stigma around cannabis continues to dissolve—recreational use has now been legalized in fifteen states and decriminalization has occurred in thirty-one. This is the first strike against the one-strike policy: our culture does not consider cannabis a hard drug, and Choate’s classification is heavy-handed.

This January, NBC published an article comparing ten different drugs including alcohol, cannabis, cigarettes, and heroin. The article states that after conducting experiments and gathering extensive data, cannabis was shown to be the safest by far, even when compared to alcohol and cigarettes. Furthermore, an article published by Newsweek states: “You are 114 times more likely to die from overdosing on alcohol than you are from cannabis.” Upon closer examination of Choate’s policy on illegal substances, questions arise: why is cannabis blanketed by the one-strike policy when alcohol is not? Why is a drug fundamentally less dangerous than alcohol treated with such extensive disciplinary measures? With the rise of use among teenagers, Choate may need to consider revising its policies.

Currently, the rates of alcohol and cannabis consumption among high school students are very similar. Almost thirty percent of all high school students drink alcohol, and twenty-five percent use cannabis. If the consumption rates are this similar, and the risk of cannabis is minimal compared to alcohol, Choate’s policies are unfair. It makes little sense for the administration to punish marijuana more strictly than alcohol. Furthermore, there is no legal basis behind the policy: the use of both alcohol and marijuana is illegal for every high-schooler in Connecticut. As American culture transitions into one that accepts the use of cannabis, more states will enact legalization, and it’s only a matter of time before the drug achieves the same level of cultural tolerance as alcohol. Cannabis’ treatment by society as well as extensive studies surrounding the dangers of use illustrates the need for Choate to revise its one-strike policy.

There are numerous ways for Choate’s administration to address the cultural change in tune surrounding the use of cannabis, including a revised Safe Haven system, or even removing cannabis from the one-strike policy altogether. In terms of the Safe Haven system, if one were to be caught with any hard drugs on campus, the student should be given the option to enact Safe Haven on themselves, proceeding with Safe Haven protocols. If the student believes they need to remove themselves from campus to consult external resources, they should be encouraged to do so. Although this seems like a viable solution, at the end of the day it makes the most sense for cannabis to be removed from the one-strike policy altogether. The policy fails to give young students a second chance, and it’s time to bring cannabis out from under the blanket of hard drugs.

- Augie Swenson
In Support

Freedom of Speech

Spencer Bowles, Sixth Form
The First Amendment, which guarantees an American’s right to free speech, was created to protect the voices of the people from government overstep. Our nation’s Founding Fathers understood that the government should have no control over the expression of any individual’s opinion. Since the Bill of Rights was written, communication among humans had changed over the two hundred and thirty resulting years. This inevitable change, however, prompts the question: does the Constitution’s guarantee of free speech still function in modern-day America? Social Media has not only given a voice to every screen name-holder but also the ability for that voice to reach across the world within seconds. The censorship of some of these voices is the source of concern and for many in a debate that has been brought to the forefront. Censorship, however, does not impede the liberty of Americans.

But what about social media companies? A popular topic of conversation and mass media is censorship, typically of conservative viewpoints, by companies like Twitter or Facebook. In particular, the ban of then-president Donald Trump (P’00) from virtually every social media site on the internet. Most notably, Trump’s extremely notorious and active Twitter account was banned following January 6th’s storming of the US Capitol building. Many see this banning as a violation of a nebulous spirit of free speech vital to American culture. They argue that even though this wasn’t the work of the government itself, our corporate overlords are suppressing the viewpoints that don’t like, and therefore, they are suppressing our liberty. This argument, however, fails to understand that despite free social media being the status quo, social media companies still have the same right to free speech as the normal American. These companies purchase the servers, moderate the channels, and host a service for the general public to enjoy. If they don’t want a particular viewpoint shared on their platform, they have all the right to censor that viewpoint. In fact, in a world where we force social media companies away from preventing certain forms of speech from entering their websites, we are violating the company’s liberty and freedom. Just as every citizen can freely not speak. We would never force The New York Times to publish an article by Trump, so in parallel, we shouldn’t force Twitter to publish his tweets. Social media sites are merely relays and amplifiers for voices, but they are run by people who have control over what they want to relay and amplify.

The American Populus have become a group that feels entitled to not only a voice but also an audience. Free speech, as created by the founding fathers and upheld today, guarantees everyone the right to express what they want, when they want, but only that and nothing else. Free speech has never given Americans the right to force others to listen to them. Free speech has never given Americans the right to force others to relay their speech. No matter how unfair it may seem that social media doesn’t echo your viewpoints, these companies are awarded the same rights as any individual as they are conglomerates of individuals. At this current moment in America, no one is being silenced. Just the same, no one is being forced to speak. This is freedom.

- Spencer Bowles
In Opposition

Freedom of Speech

Anonymous
The denial of freedom of speech is not a partisan issue. People like to claim one side is disproportionately affected (the right) by censorship in the media, most notably citing former President Trump’s twitter ban, when the larger issue we should be examining is how youth voices are silenced across the aisle regardless of political affiliations.

As school shootings become more prevalent, climate change worsens, and social media allows a younger generation to learn about prevalent issues, students are entering the political sphere earlier in their lives. At the same time, our voices are scoffed at and dismissed as uneducated and naive by older generations.

There is a deep cultural disconnect between adults and teenagers. Older Americans have never been subject to active shooter drills, and consequently don’t understand the anxiety they propagate. Furthermore, the fight for climate justice has been led by younger generations, because the fear of irreversible environmental damage during their lifetimes is far more credible. As American teenagers, we aren’t demanding we be given unjust authority. We are still children, and have much to learn. We simply ask that we be given the opportunity to express our legitimate concern with issues that directly affect us.

For many teenagers, social media, especially alongside the rise of remote communication during the coronavirus pandemic, is the impetus of their voices. Educational information, debates, campaigns, and social justice groups can all be found at the press of the button on almost any social media platform.

On platforms whose audience and creators are largely young, restricting and removing content from one side of the political aisle reduces dialogue and destroys the public’s ability to develop nuanced opinions. While all social media platforms hold the right to censor information that is outright harmful or inhumane, algorithms and human monitors are prone to mistakes and biases of what they believe to be offensive or harmful. As a result of these biases, unfair censorship changes what information is viewed and shared. Article 19’s #MissingVoices campaign stresses this point. Activists like Greta Thunberg have been labeled as “delusional” and “laughable” by those older than her, and as a result they have had their political actions delegitimized.

A division is emerging amongst Republicans, with polls showing serious disagreement on many major issues. The beliefs of the older generation are not shared by emerging voters, many of whom support same sex marriages, the expansion of renewable energy and are less likely to disavow illegal immigration. The Republican establishment has been branded with the notion that all party affiliates hold the outdated beliefs of the older generation, and consequently, many fear ostracization for expressing loyalty to the party. In America’s democracy, the honest struggle for positions of leadership has been reduced to on the opposite side’s view of what is right and what is wrong.

If we weren’t silenced, if we were not threatened to get platforms taken away, if we had the resources to spread our voices where they need to reach our generation could do so much more. When Trump tried to ban tiktok after a bunch of teenagers decided to buy out the seats at one of his rallies the government knew how powerful our voices were, but instead of using them as a tool, instead of listening we were silenced. The equal representation of these voices is the only way in which we are able to participate in our own futures.

- Anonymous