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Teens Share Views in High School Mock Election

Adults aren't the only ones casting their votes during election season. Students from a high school near Milwaukee participated in a 2022 midterm mock election in their government class. Along with voting, students worked together to create their own political parties with platforms that reflected the issues that were important to the students. Listen to hear 11th graders share what issues matter most to them, and find out how their mock election results compared to the results from the actual midterm election in Milwaukee.

Transcript

ELISSA NADWORNY: For most U.S. voters, elections boil down to a choice between two parties - Democrats and Republicans. But political opinions don't always fall into two camps. That's a lesson a group of 11th graders in Wisconsin spent their Election Day learning. NPR's Sequoia Carrillo visited their classroom.

LUKE PIWONI: OK, ladies and gentlemen, we're going to get started here. So...

SEQUOIA CARRILLO: Luke Piwoni teaches government at Kewaskum High School, about an hour outside of Milwaukee. Tuesday was a big day for his juniors. They voted in a mock election that mirrored the real election happening nationwide.

PIWONI: So I handed you a ballot as you walked in. Please, first task is vote on that, and then bring it up into the ballot box here.

CARRILLO: The 11th graders had been researching the big issues on the ballot for weeks.

PIWONI: We want them to learn about these issues so that they can figure out what issues matter to them and, you know, make their own decisions that way.

CARRILLO: Kewaskum is in Wisconsin's 5th District. It's historically conservative. But on Election Day, Mr. Piwoni didn't want to focus on Republicans versus Democrats. He wanted students to make up their own minds about where they stood. So while the mock election ballots were counted, he asked his students to create their own political parties, based on their own beliefs. And the results looked pretty different from the platforms we're used to seeing. First up is the Chameleon Party.

UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT #1: We chose to represent a chameleon because chameleons can change into purple. And that's what we hope for all states.

CARRILLO: They support action on climate change and stricter gun laws. And they also support the death penalty and increased military spending. Next up, the Hardy Party.

UNIDENTIFIED STUDENT #2: We do not support open borders, but we will allow immigrants to come in. But they have to go through the process. They can't just walk in.

CARRILLO: The Hardy Party also campaigned on being pro-choice and pro-guns. In fact, abortion and guns played a role in almost every platform; so did climate change. But all six parties had a mix of ideologies. Despite that, the tally from the mock election was pretty partisan, along with some surprising write-ins.

PIWONI: All right. First up for governor - Evers, 2; Michels, 17; and Elmo received a vote.

CARRILLO: Tony Evers, the Democratic incumbent, didn't fare too well against his Republican challenger, Tim Michels. He only barely outperformed Elmo. Republican Senator Ron Johnson won reelection 15 to 3, with one write-in for Harry Potter. Every Republican candidate on the mock ballots won in a landslide. Wisconsin's real election was more mixed. The Senate race went Republican by a slim margin, and the Democratic governor won reelection handily. For Mr. Piwoni, comparing the mock election to the real election is sometimes the most important lesson.

PIWONI: Just really that reflection piece, I think, is important for them to really kind of get a gauge and see if their understanding of politics and our system is in line with what actually is occurring.

CARRILLO: And that's a big part of teaching his students to be engaged citizens.

PIWONI: Some of the issues might change for them, but they're hopefully going to be invested and involved because that's the ultimate goal, is to make sure we have productive, active citizens.

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Listening Comprehension Questions

1. Why did the teacher want his students to learn about the big issues on the ballot?

2. Why did one group of students name their political party the Chameleon party?

3. How were the students' political parties similar to and different from one another?

4. How did the mock election results compare to Wisconsin's real election?

Classroom Discussion Themes

5. What might the students have learned from their classroom activities on their mock election day? Explain using details from the audio story and your own ideas.

6. If you were to create your own political party, what issues would be part of your party's platform and why?

LIVEWORKSHEETS