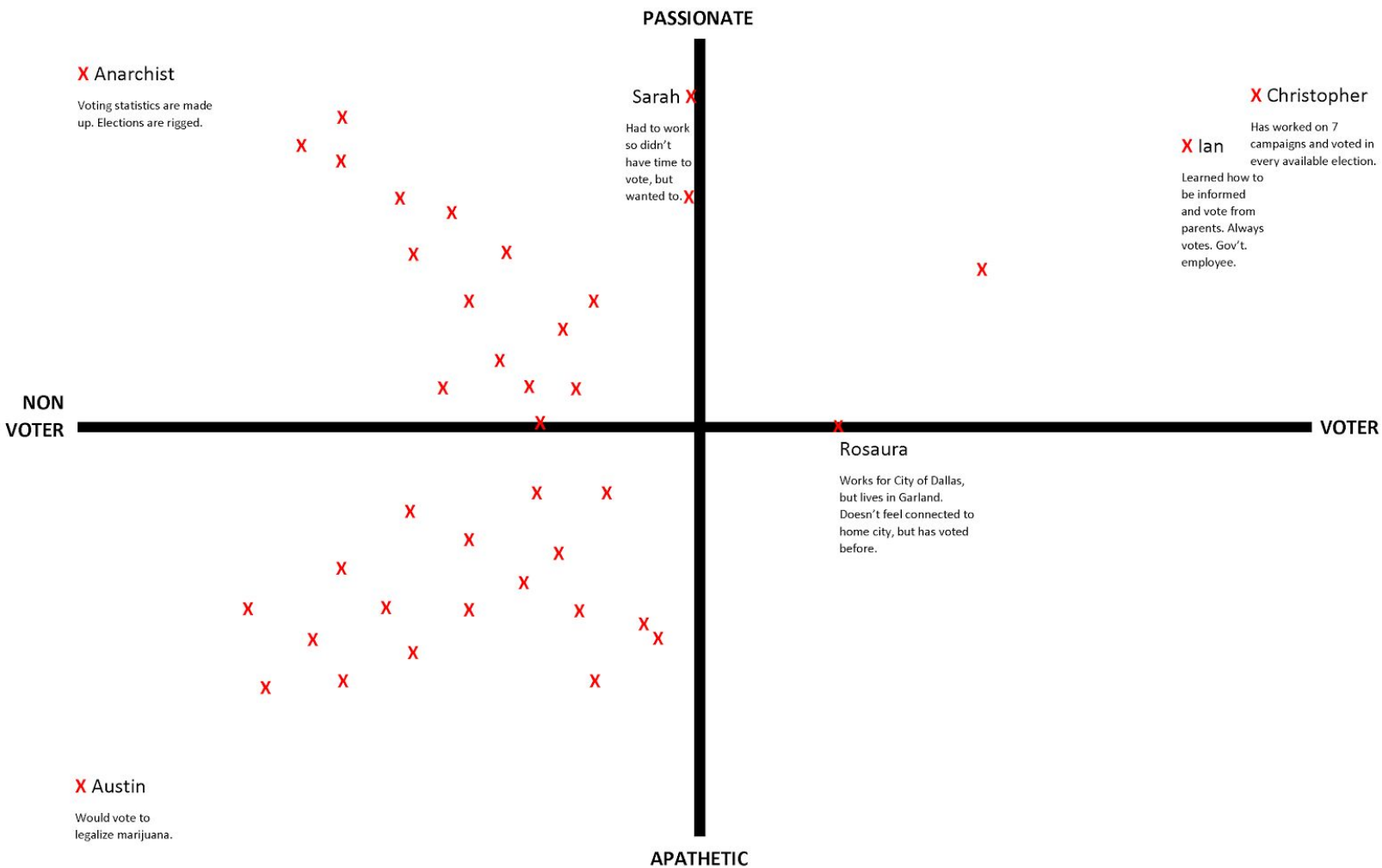


Team YAD Searches for Solutions to Young Voter Turnout in Dallas

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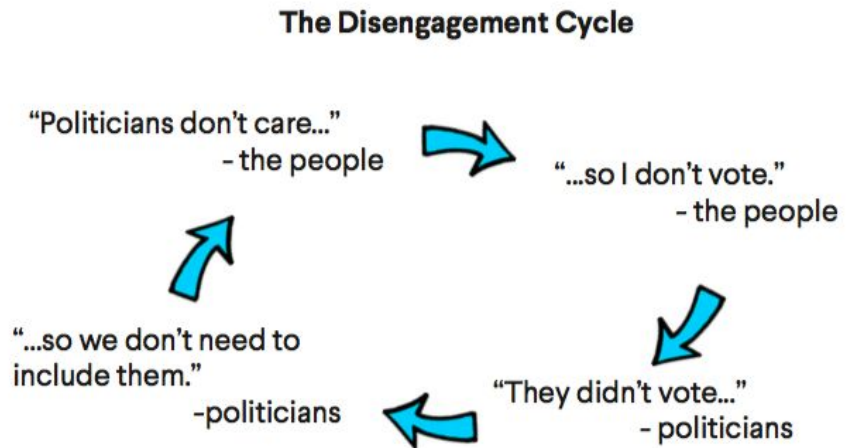
The process of human-centered design lends itself to seeking solutions in mediums that have seemingly insolvable problems. Take for example Team YAD (that's Young Adult Dallasite) of Kate Canales' Fall 2015 Human Centered Design class. Tackling the chronic problem of low voter turnout among Dallasites aged 18-29, Team YAD entered the field to find out just what was keeping the younger Dallas population away from the polls.

The team of four worked in pairs to canvas highly populated young adult areas for man-on-the-street interviews. Initial trepidation gave way to confidence and insightful conversations as strangers began to open up to the teams about their frustrations and trepidations with the electoral process. After spending time interviewing forty strangers about their voting experiences, including why or why not they were registered, when the last time they voted locally was, and their overall opinions on the voting systems and processes in Dallas, it was determined that there seemed to be a serious lack of information readily available for the consumption of the general public. The media bombardment over national issues and elections greatly overshadowed local politicians, issues and elections.



(A closer look at the man-on-the-street spread mixed with active voter interviewees.)

Having just broken the surface of the issue, Team YAD held in-depth interviews with experienced young voters to gather their insight into the voting process. It was unearthed that families and education do play a seemingly significant role in desire for young people to seek out the polls once they are of voting age. They rounded out their research discussing voter turnout and engagement with two Dallas City Council Members, Philip Kingston of District 14, and Tiffanni Young of District 7. It was the combination of the two councilmember's interviews that helped solidify the team's conclusions about what is currently keeping Young Adult Dallasites away from the polls. The festering pattern of the "Disengagement Cycle" came to light.



When Team YAD sat down with Councilmember Kingston, he was very quick to get straight to the core of the problem in engaging new and young voters in Dallas. The truth? It just doesn't happen. "You have to vote at least once to get marketed to," Kingston said, "the energy expended to get one new voter just isn't worth it." It takes something like two hours to get one new registration, and even then, it's not a done deal as to whether they even show up at the polls. Kingston also noted that people come out and vote when they find something wrong. If everything is going right, there's no incentive to show up at the polls. Councilmember Young also echoed these sentiments. The government doesn't rally people to come out and vote. People rally people. Both council members were hopeful that being the youngest city council ever elected in Dallas would inspire young people to come forward with their issues and realize they have to power to enact local change. Connected people make government systems run better, but for now, there is still a disconnect.

Many YADs said they feel disconnected from local government, imagining the voting type as an older person or the member of some elite club of wealthy people. They lack the resources to make an informed and timely decision, and the strict registration policies in place in the state of Texas are not conducive to helping inexperienced voters to proactively register to vote.

Human centered design promises unique insights and solutions to complex problems, so what can be done to tackle the monster problem of voter turnout? The focal point of human centered design research is to craft pointed, actionable questions that attack the heart of the issue. Team YAD is asking three of these questions to turn their research into solutions.

First we ask, *how might we make voting feel more important to young adults?* Most young adults simply don't see voting as a priority, at least not now. Team YAD ran across many young adults who said they would vote when they're older or in a different life stage, but they don't feel like voting is important to them here and now.

We also wonder, *how might we increase information density for local politics?* Team YAD's conversations made it apparent that many young dallasites suffer from an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality surrounding local politics. Additionally, there was a pattern where interviewees said they felt their local vote made more of a difference than a national vote, yet they were more involved in national politics than local politics. Team YAD thinks this voter mindset stems from the fact that information on national politics is pervasive while information on local politics much more difficult to find.

Finally, *how might we increase relationship between young adults and local politicians?* This questions is central to breaking the disengagement cycle that team YAD found in their research. Young adults tend to have moderate to high skepticism toward the the political system, which can discourage them from voting. In reality local politicians can be very accessible, but they only have so much energy to reach out to potential voters. When potential voters are more familiar with their local representatives, we can break the Disengagement Cycle.

Our hope with this research is to bring to light the shortcomings on both ends of the spectrum. The relationship between voters, the voting process, and elected officials is broken, but it is not shattered. Team YADs next step is to pursue various rapid prototyping measures that will transform the Disengagement Cycle into the Engagement Cycle.