

Why Civics Education is a Constitutional Right

And denial of proper civic education is a form of systemic disenfranchisement and voter suppression



TLDR: Knowledge is necessary to exercise constitutional rights. A denial of knowledge is a direct violation of these rights.

Civics Education is Needed for Democracy to Function

A fundamental tenet of having full citizenship means that one can participate in the political apparatus of the state and act in their own interests.



This requires having the knowledge to do these things, which many Americans lack.

Without civic education, citizens lack the ability to:



Use their right to free speech



Serve on a jury



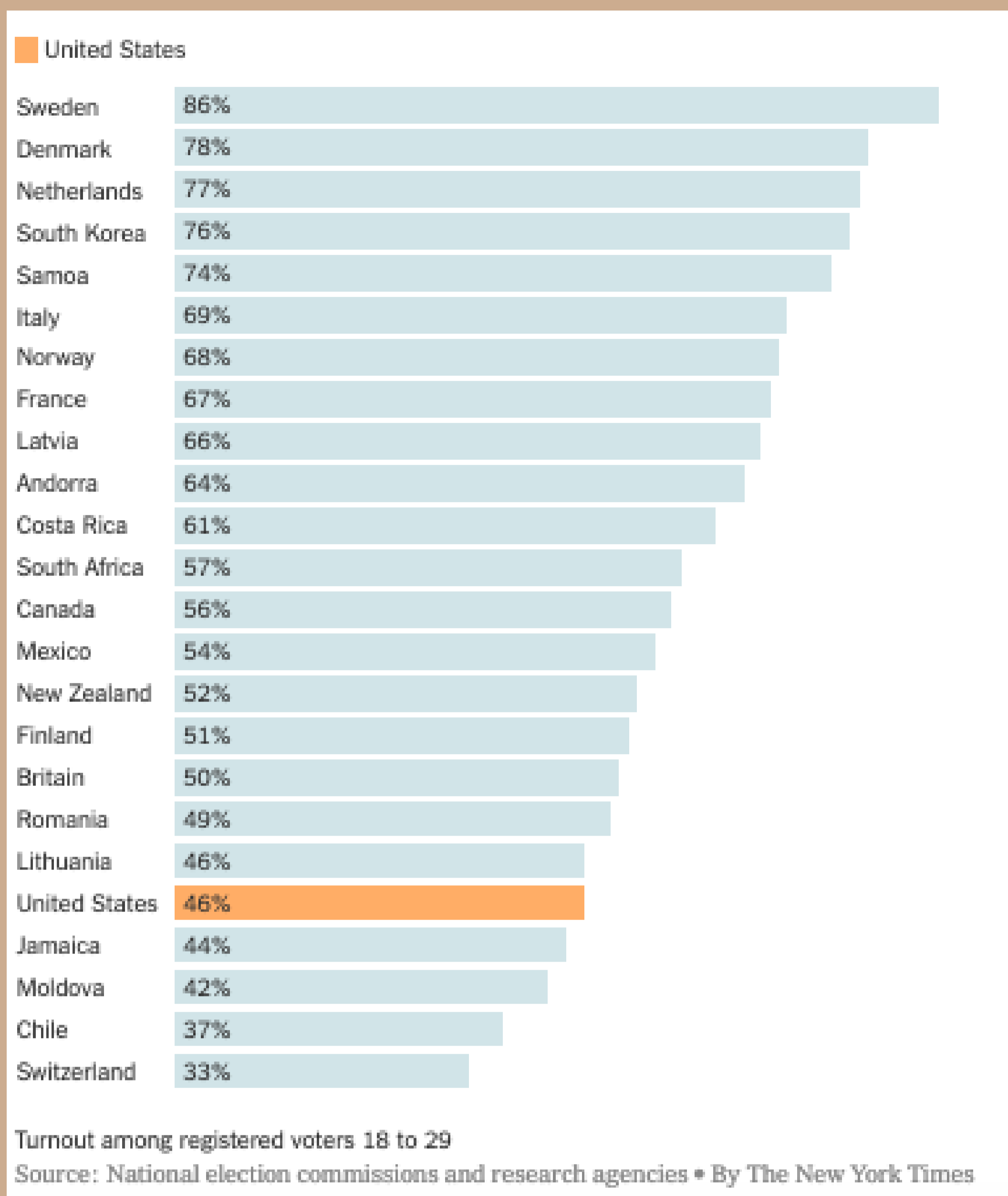
Make their voice heard by politicians



Make informed votes

Preventing someone from understanding how to exercise a right is the same as preventing them from exercising the right at all.

The Failure of Public Education



Among the 24 countries analyzed by the NYTimes, the US ranks 5th to last in youth voter turnout.

Some of the top reasons people don't vote is because they don't understand:

How to register and vote



What the different levels of gov. mean

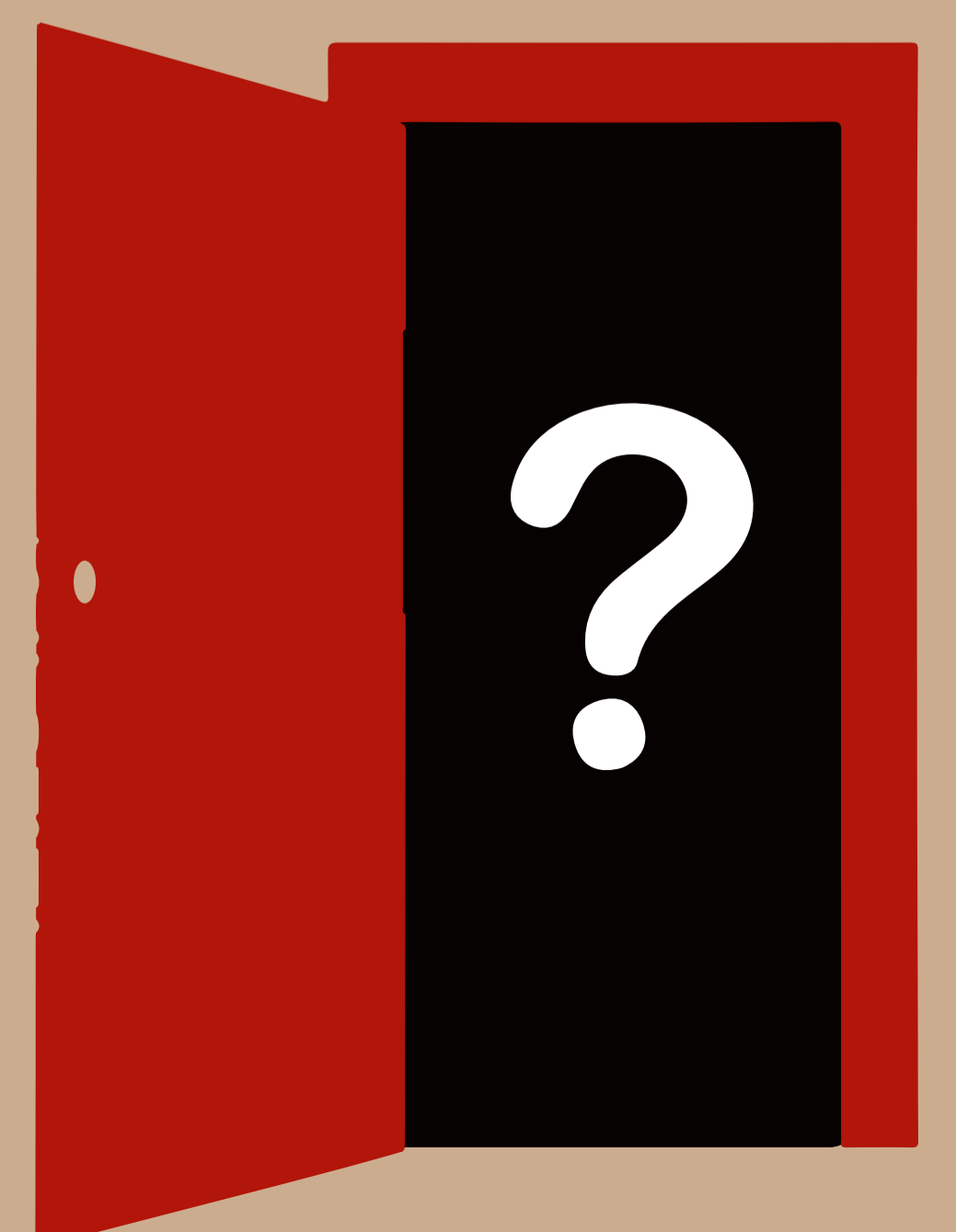


How to know who to vote for



Students don't understand the process, their impact, or where to start looking.

Many don't even know what they don't know.



Widening Existing Inequality

Historically disenfranchised communities are hurt the most by lack of civic education, as many lack out-of-school opportunities to develop civic skills.

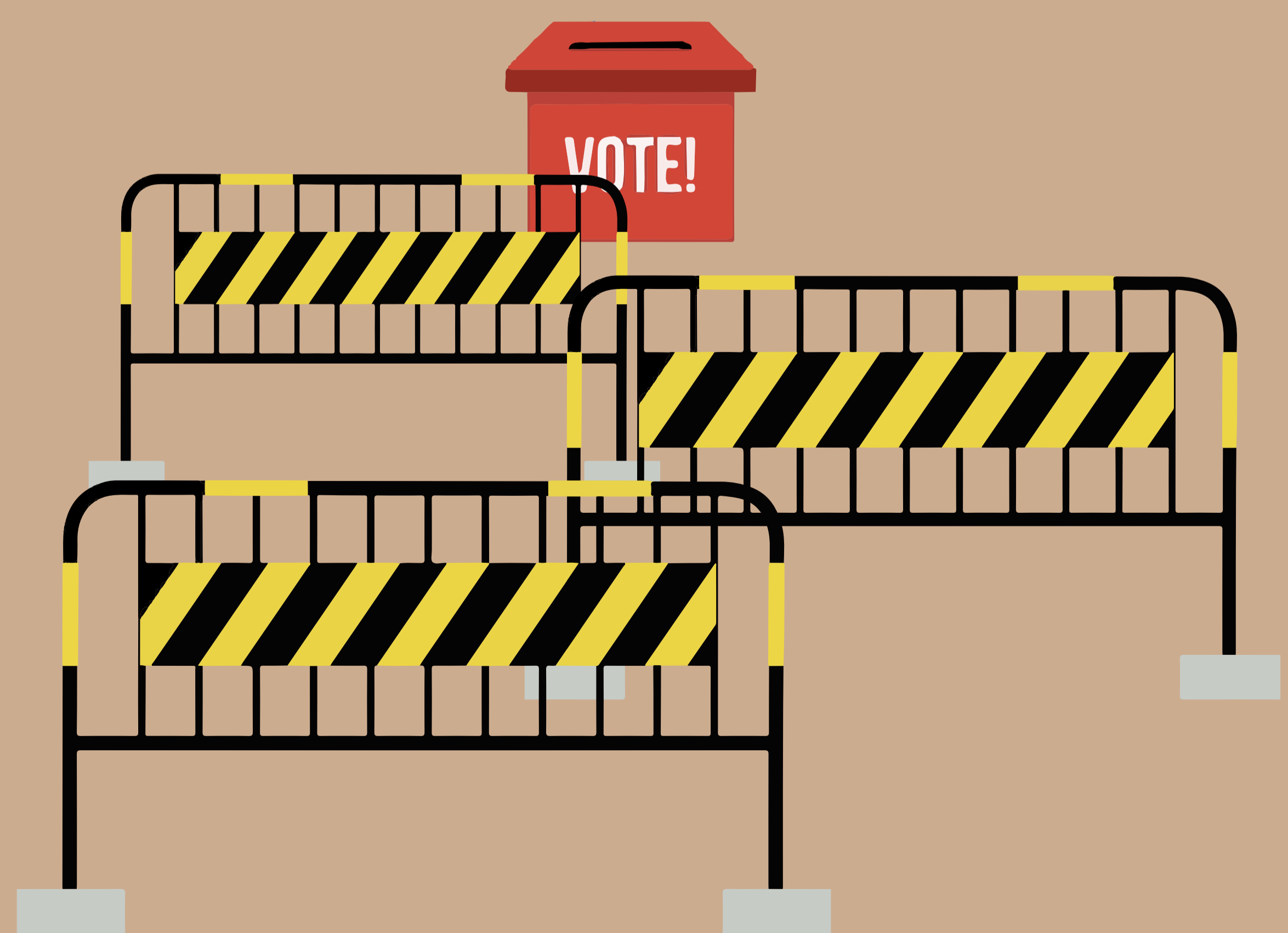
This includes (but is not limited to):

First generation and immigrant students whose parents don't understand the US system



Low-income students who lack the time to self-educate (and whose parents lack the time to help)

BIPOC and formerly incarcerated students and parents who don't know how to overcome voter suppression tactics (e.g. obtaining voter ID)



Civil Rights Requires Civic Education

% of eligible voters that registered to vote (2018):

71.0% of White voter population

63.7% of Black voter population

54.2% of Asian voter population

53.7% of Hispanic voter population

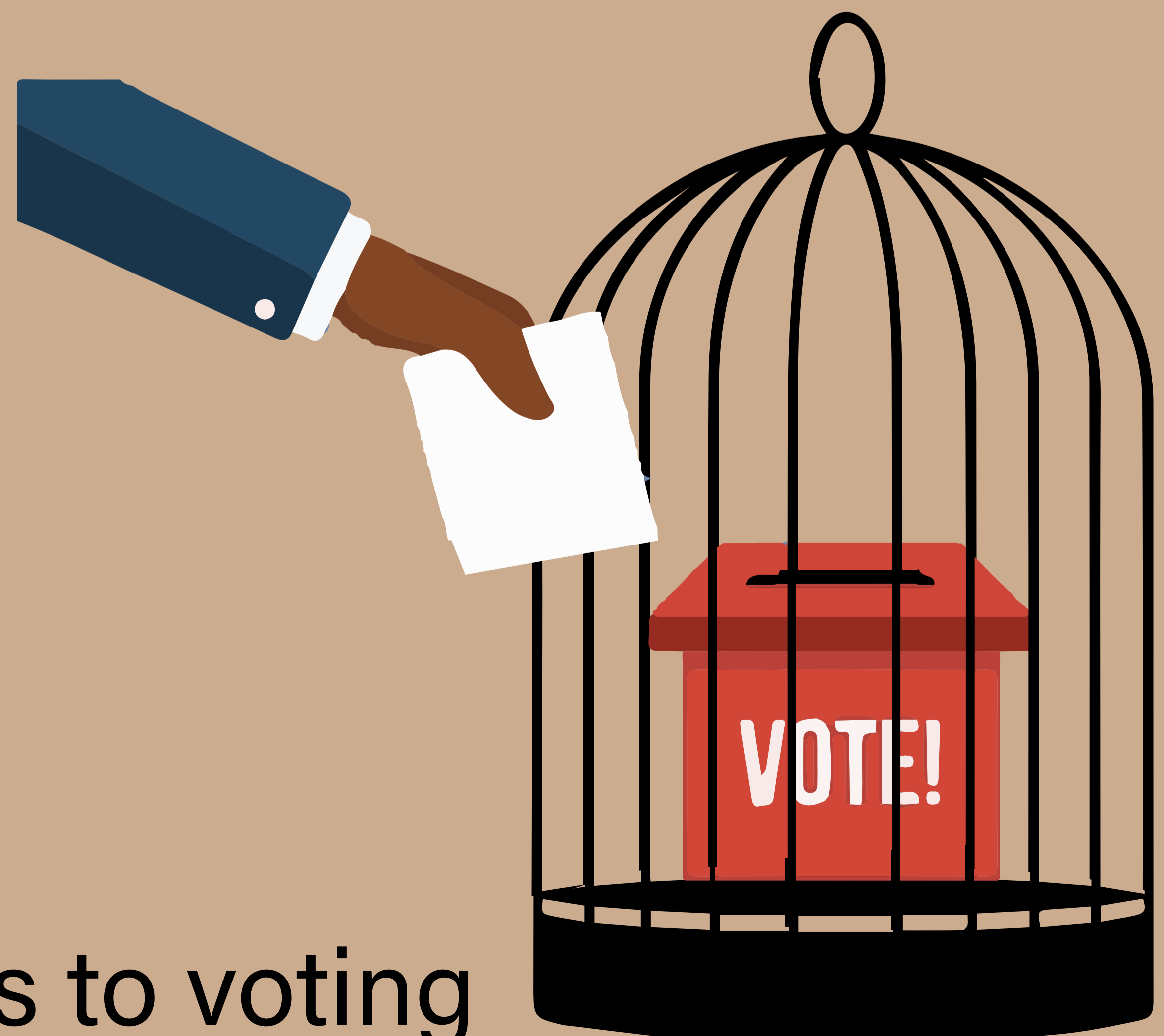


Having voting rights on paper doesn't mean anything if those voting rights can't be exercised in practice.

The knowledge needed to politically engage should be free and accessible to all.

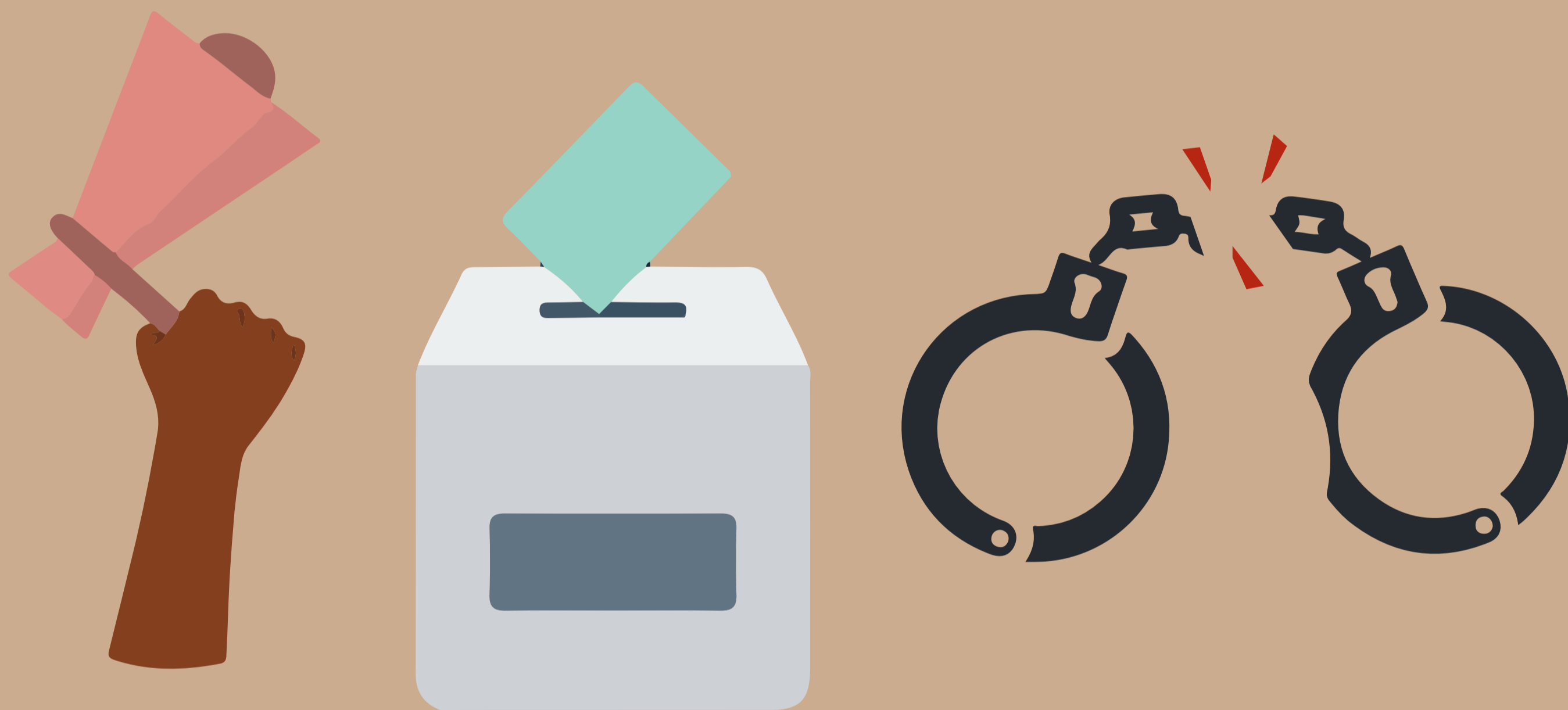
Until everyone can exercise civic power, the US will not be a true, functioning democracy.

Unequal access to knowledge about voting = unequal access to voting



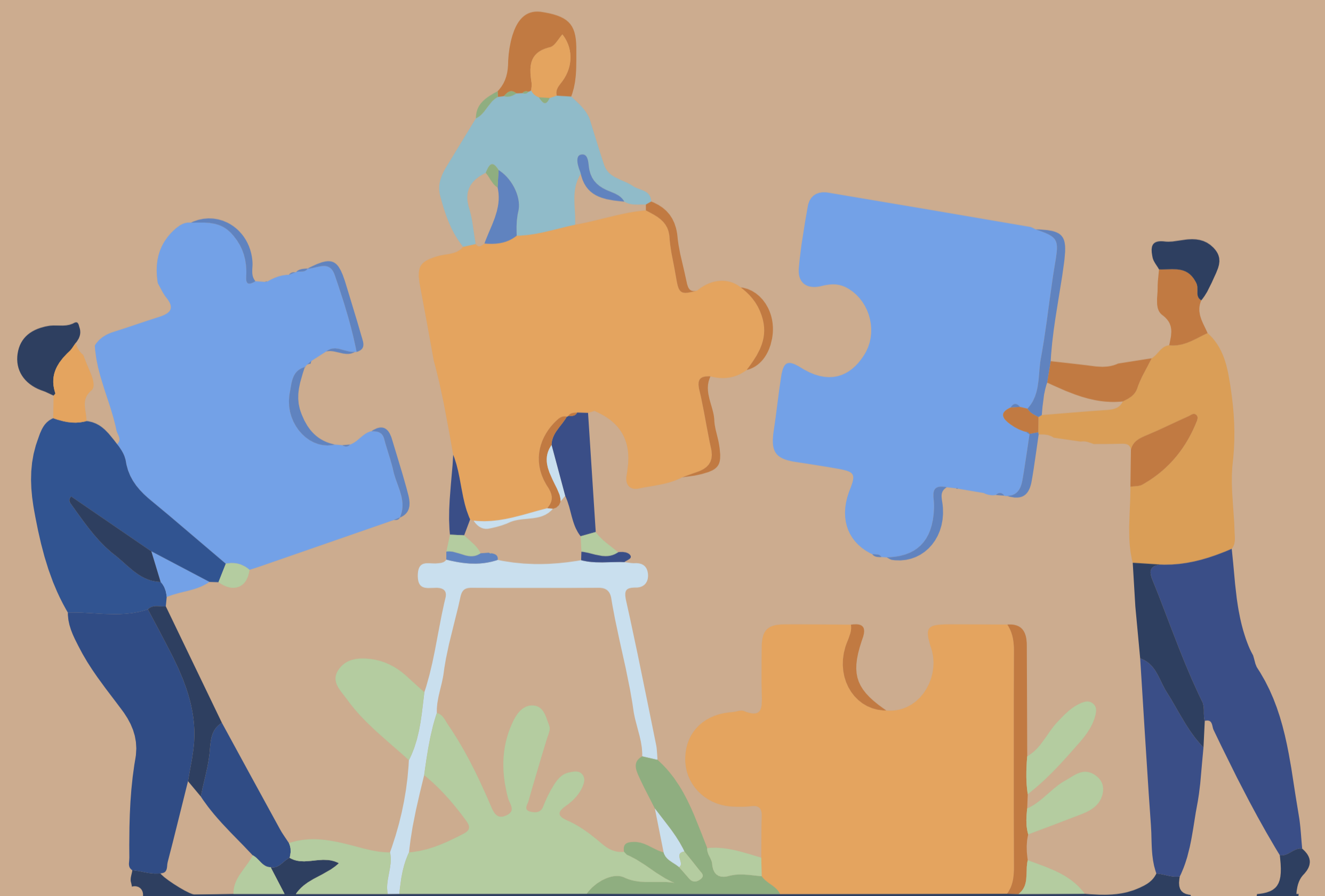
Civic Education Disrupts Cycles of Inequity

Civic education allows those who are most systemically oppressed to recognize how specific policies affect their communities



and what processes they can use to change it.

This enables them to restructure the system in ways that benefit themselves and challenges oppressive status quo,



eventually creating a more egalitarian, democratic society



The Impact of Civic Classes

Research shows that civic classes in the USA:



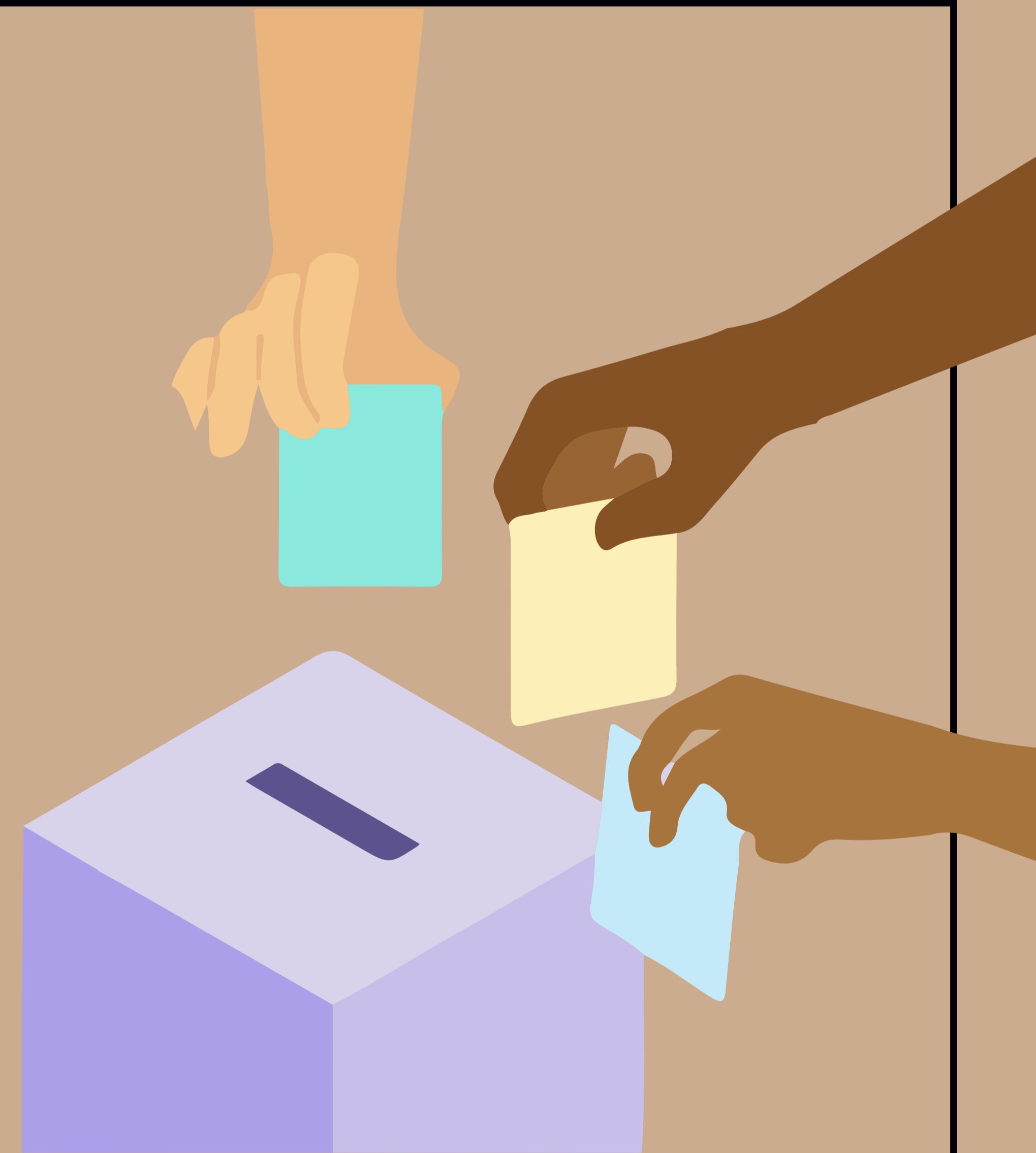
Provide Political Power to Those Who Most Need It

Civic education helps citizens understand their interests as a group, accurately connect policy to their own situation, and thus defend their interests in the political process.

Increase Political Participation

Controlling for all other factors, the more educated people are about the system, the more likely they are to participate.

One study found a single class on voting increases youth turnout by 5.7%.



Internationally: Studies in Kenya show that civilians who attend civic education workshops become more “participatory, knowledgeable about politics, aware of how to defend their rights, and informed about constitutional issues and the desirability of public involvement in the constitutional review process” for years after the workshop.

The Impact of Civic Classes

Research shows that civic classes in the USA:

Strengthens Democracy

The more knowledge students have about how the government works, the more likely they are to support the core values of democratic self-government, starting with tolerance.

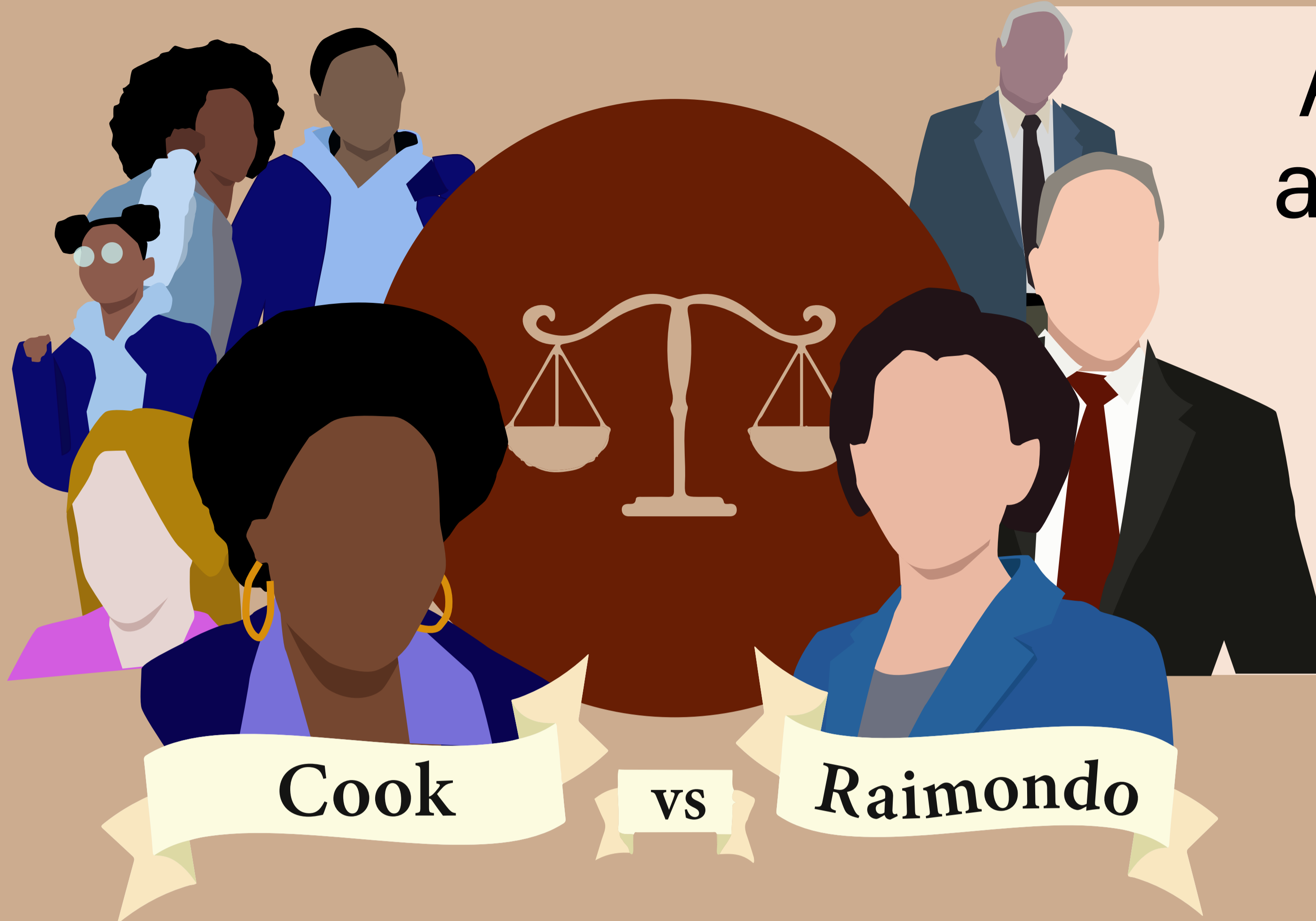


Increase Understanding of Political Issues

The more knowledge people have about issues, the more consistent their views become, and the less likely they are to fall prey to misinformation.



Combating Ignorance and Xenophobia: Studies show that the more we understand how our political processes work, the less likely we are to mistrust public life, and the less likely we are to fear new immigrants.



A group of high school activists and parents of younger students in RI are currently suing the state for the right to a civic education.

If they win, the case could lead to education becoming a constitutional right in the USA (which it currently isn't).



Education is not protected by the constitution, because there hasn't been enough evidence to show that citizens need education to exercise their rights.

RI students avoided this issue by focusing on civic education.



Donate to the community groups leading this cause: ARISE, PSU, & the Center for Justice



Sources

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