MSI VOTE

Ensuring Democracy and Promoting Voting through the Power of Minority Serving Institutions

Tyler Hallmark and Andrew Martinez

RESEARCH TEAM

Marybeth Gasman
Tania Irwin
Carol Sandoval
Jillian Cener

Frances Nan
Andrés Castro Samayoa
Chris D. Jimenez
Paola 'Lola' Esmieu

Center for MSIs

Graduate School of Education
Penn GSE

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Democracy is the process through which citizens make their voices heard. Yet, in the United States, students and racial and ethnic minorities are silenced each election cycle. The National Higher Education Act of 1998 requires all postsecondary institutions to "make [voter registration] forms widely available to students." However, despite this mandate, many colleges and universities have yet to institutionalize voter engagement. In this report, we examine the issues that students and racial and ethnic minorities face getting to the polls and the role that Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) could play in overcoming these obstacles.

Does the Youth Vote Make a Difference?

Without young people, Ohio, Florida, Virginia, and Pennsylvania would have flipped from **BLUE** to **RED** in 2012.

		OBAMA	ROMNEY
Ohio	18-19	62%	35%
	30-44	51%	46%
	45-64	47%	51%
	65+	44%	56%
Florida	18-19	66%	32%
	30-44	52%	46%
	45-64	48%	52%
	65+	41%	58%
Virginia	18-19	61%	36%
	30-44	54%	44%
	45-64	47%	52%
	65+	46%	53%
Pennsylvania	18-19	63%	35%
	30-44	55%	43%
	45-64	48%	51%
	65+	43%	57%

SOURCE: http://civicyouth.org/at-least-80-electoral-votes-depended-on-youth/

National Landscape

For this report, we are interested in examining those who are marginalized in the United States' electoral system. In particular, we focus on the challenges of two groups: young voters and ethnic and racial minorities.*

Young Voter Turnout

In 1971, the 26th Amendment granted the right to vote to those aged 18-20. Since then, however, voters aged 18-24 have consistently voted at lower rates than all other age groups (File, 2014). Generally speaking, the older the age group is, the more likely they are to vote. Yet, this is troubling when we consider traditional college-aged students, as Millennials now make up the largest share of the United States' electorate (Fry, 2016).

In 2008 and 2012, young voters demonstrated the impact that they could have on an election, turning out in record numbers and greatly helping elect Barack Obama. Without the youth turnout in 2012, Ohio, Florida, Virginia, and Pennsylvania would have flipped from Blue (Democratic) to Red (Republican).

However, outside of presidential elections, youth turnout is drastically lower. According to voting data, 41% of 18- to 24-year-old students voted in 2012 (NSLVE, 2017). In 2014, only 13% of the same age group did so (NSLVE, 2017).

According to an analysis by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), 19.9% of 18- to 29-year-olds voted in 2014, the lowest turnout for this age group in the past 40 years (CIRCLE, 2016). Moreover, only 46.7% of young people surveyed were registered to vote, which is also the lowest in the past 40 years (CIRCLE, 2016).

Made up of federally designated Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), as well as several other types of designations, institutions that fall under the MSI umbrella share a history of being established to address the lack of educational opportunities for low-income, racial and ethnic minority students or rapidly shifting demographics (Gasman, Nguyen, & Conrad, 2015). MSIs educate 20% of all college students and nearly 40% of all students of color in the United States.

*Please note that there is overlap among these two groups.

Racial and Ethnic Minority Turnout

In 1870, the 15th Amendment declared that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." However, through various polling taxes and literacy tests, many states continued to disenfranchise voters of color until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. In turn, Whites maintained their privilege and continued to disproportionately determine the future of the country for decades.

Since 1996, minorities have increasingly made their voices heard at the polls. As shown in the table to the right, not only have Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians increased in terms of shifting demographics (as demonstrated in the eligible electorate), they have also made an impact on that of the voting population.[1]

In fact, in 2012, Black voter turnout exceeded White voter turnout for the first time in history (in terms of relative proportion)—no doubt fueled by Barack Obama, the first Black president, being on the ballot (File, 2013). However, even though minorities are showing up to the polls more than they once did, disparities still exist, especially among Hispanic and Asian populations.*

Minority turnout was much lower in 2016, particularly among Black voters. As mentioned, Black voter turnout made up more than 13% of the voting population in 2012—a number that dropped to 12% in 2016, according to national exit polls (Ellison, 2016). This decline in Black voters could have meant as much as a two-million vote difference–a difference that some experts believe could have played a significant role in swing states (Ellison, 2016). For example, in North Carolina, a state decided by 177,000 votes, Black voters

Composition of the Voting Population and Eligible Electorate, by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1996 to 2012		
Year and Race and Hispanic Origin	Percentage of eligible electorate[1]	Percentage of voting population[2]
2012		
White, Non-Hispanics	71.1	73.7
Blacks	12.5	13.4
Hispanics	10.8	8.4
Asians and Pacific Islanders	4.8	3.9
Native Americans	0.8	0.6
2008		
White, Non-Hispanics	73.4	76.3
Blacks	12.1	12.3
Hispanics	9.5	7.4
Asians and Pacific Islanders	4.4	3.6
Native Americans	0.6	0.4
2004		
White, Non-Hispanics	75.2	79.2
Blacks	11.9	11.1
Hispanics	8.2	6.0
Asians and Pacific Islanders	4.2	3.2
Native Americans	0.5	0.5
2000		
White, Non-Hispanics	77.7	80.7
Blacks	12.2	11.7
Hispanics	7.1	5.4
Asians and Pacific Islanders	2.5	1.8
Native Americans	0.5	0.4
1996		
White, Non-Hispanics	79.2	82.5
Blacks	11.9	10.8
Hispanics	6.1	4.7
Asians and Pacific Islanders	2.1	1.7
Native Americans	0.7	0.3

SOURCE: https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2013/demo/p20-568.pdf

only turned out at 20% of the electorate in 2016, as compared with 23% in 2012—a difference of approximately 128,000 votes (Montanaro, 2016).

Although some may attribute low minority turnout to general displeasure with the candidates, much of the low turnout can be attributed to voter restriction laws. Fourteen states implemented new voter restriction laws before the 2016 election,

including swing states such as Wisconsin and Ohio (Regan, 2016). These state actions can be attributed to 2016 being the first presidential election since the Supreme Court shut down a provision of the Voting Rights Act, which previously required federal approval on any state election law (Regan, 2016). As we will discuss later in this report, these types of state laws have historically targeted racial and ethnic minorities.

* Black voter turnout peaked in 2008, stayed somewhat consistent in 2012, and then in 2016, returned back to pre-2008 levels.

[1] The eligible electorate is defined as the citizen voting age population. The voting population is those who actually reported casting a ballot.

Key Issues

For this report, we examined the key issues that affect student and racial and ethnic minority turnout across the nation. First and foremost, we look at the distance to polling sites, the time it takes to get to those sites, and why these factors disproportionately affect students and minorities. Secondly, we examine the various policies that perpetuate voter suppression. Finally, we consider other challenges that fall outside of the general structure of voting, reviewing topics such as misinformation, miscommunication, and racism.

Location

A significant issue that prevents students from voting is the locations of polling sites in relation to college campuses. Research has shown that the closer a voter's polling place is, the more likely they are to vote (Brady & McNulty, 2011). Of the 68 MSIs we examined for this report, 48 did not have a polling site on campus, including 17 for which the nearest polling site was over a mile away.[2]

When a poll is located away from campus, many obstacles obstruct student voter turnout. The time and effort it takes to travel to a polling site can be too much for some people, especially in cities where public transportation is limited. Additionally, when county election boards consolidate polling sites in order to reduce costs, some of these sites become overly crowded and may lead to hour-long waits for voters to cast a vote. In the case of Georgia, the consolidations of polling sites have disproportionately affected Black voters, such as in Macon-Bibb county, where one consolidation plan listed eight polling sites to be closed, six of which were located in Black-majority neighborhoods (Whitesides, 2016). When plans like these disproportionately have an impact on Black voters, it is no wonder that voters of color have been found to experience *much* longer wait times than their White counterparts (Famighetti et al, 2014).

Given that Election Day is typically on a Tuesday, many students are in class during the day and may not have time to make it to their respective polling sites, while others may have jobs and other life commitments. As an alternative, polling sites that offer early voting could have a tremendous impact on voter turnout for students and racial and ethnic minorities alike. However, in states such as North Carolina, policymakers have sought to cut down on early voting opportunities, which has resulted in an 8.7% decline in turnout among African Americans in the state (Roth, 2016).

Some institutions happen to sit on the axis between two different counties. This can be another obstacle for students, as they may not be aware of which county they are supposed to register in, and the polling site on-campus may not align with their respective county.

In 2013, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that the coverage formula in Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was unconstitutional. This ruling allowed for nine states, mostly located in the South, to implement changes to election and voting laws without federal approval. Almost immediately, many of these states started putting forth policies that could shape young voter and racial and ethnic minority turnout. The ruling had its first impact on the 2016 presidential election.

Policies

While getting to the polls plagues many students, there are numerous other policies and laws that are shaping the electoral process with regard to youth and racial and ethnic minority turnout. In recent years, these policies and laws have unfairly targeted these two groups, decreasing turnout and keeping them away from the polls. In some cases, these policies are political, seeking to prevent the opposing party from turning out at the polls. However, young voters and minorities often face the backlash of these policies.

Increasingly restrictive voter ID laws have been on the rise in recent years, going from four states that required photo ID in 2012 to seven states in 2016 (Lee, 2016). Recent legislation in some states has taken these laws a step further by banning student IDs and/or out-of-state IDs from the polls (Lerner, 2015). In the case of Tennessee, students may not use their student ID card as proof of identification; however, college and university faculty ID cards are allowed, despite the cards being nearly identical (Lerner, 2015). Additionally, young racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to have a driver's license, as they are less likely to drive (Wickman, 2012). Research shows that voter turnout has significantly decreased in states where these voter ID laws have been put into place, specifically in Kansas and Tennessee (GAO, 2014). Moreover, these laws have shown to have a more substantial impact on young voters (18-23) and African Americans, decreasing turnout more among these populations than any other comparison group (GAO, 2014).

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[2] For this report, we looked at MSIs in Arizona, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, and Ohio. For institutions with multiple campuses, we only mapped the main campus.

In 1993, Congress passed the National Voter Registration* Act (NVRA), which, among other things, greatly simplified voter registration by requiring states to follow a relatively uniform process. In turn, civic groups were able to organize voter registration drives on a much larger scale, engaging voters who may have otherwise not participated. Since then, voter registration drives have become vital in getting both students and minorities involved in the U.S. electoral process. However, in recent years, bills have been proposed in at least seven states—Florida, Illinois, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Texas—to place restrictions on these drives (Weiser & Norden, 2011).

In some states, it has become increasingly difficult to register under a new address when one moves to college. One example of this is in Arizona, where HB 2260 is currently under consideration. HB 2260 makes it illegal for students to use their dormitory addresses (or any other "temporary" university housing) while registering to vote. In other instances, such as in Virginia, homeless populations are given a space to write the landmarks that they live near; meanwhile, the law states that students must "establish domicile" in their given precinct, a policy that does not distinguish what it means to actually "establish domicile" (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

While mail-in ballots remain an option for students, there are also several policies that limit access to these for some students. Seven states—Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Nevada, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia—require that first-time voters cast their ballot in-person (Kolosky & Wondolowski, 2003). These policies can be particularly troubling for students, as they may not have the resources (fiscal nor temporal) to travel home to cast their ballot.

Further Challenges

To confront some of these myths, check out the Campus Vote Project's (CVP) **MYTHS AND MORE.**

LACK OF INFORMATION. As first-time voters, many traditional college-aged students are uninformed about the voter registration process when they first arrive on campus. This can be particularly challenging for students who are moving from another state, unaware of mail-in ballot options or how to re-register under their new address. Additionally, many face myths around the process, such as fear that it may have an impact on their financial aid. Although some of these issues need to be addressed by policy, as mentioned above, some challenges relate to the way information is distributed to students.

MISCOMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION. To go along with a general lack of voting information, 2016 brought much miscommunication around new legislation, particularly with regard to voter ID laws. Many news reports mention misinterpretation of these new laws by election officials and poll workers. One example was in Connecticut, where poll workers improperly insisted that voters show a photo ID to cast their ballot when, in reality, they could sign an affidavit instead (Iversen, 2016). If first-time voters, such as those seen in student populations, are already confused or unaware of policies that are in place, these miscommunications may further inhibit them at the polls.

RACISM AT THE POLLS. Despite racial and ethnic minorities earning the right to vote in 1870, race-based intimidation has persisted at polling sites in the United States ever since. In the contentious 2000 election, reportedly hundreds of students from Florida A&M University, an HBCU, were turned away from the polls due to not having a registration card or driver's license, and were not given the opportunity to sign an affidavit like other voters (Kolasky & Wondolowski, 2003). Reports of such discrimination tactics increased in 2016, ranging from clerks turning away women wearing hijabs to poll workers incorrectly asking for IDs in Black-majority neighborhoods in Texas (Vicens & Levintova, 2016).

Where Do MSIs Factor In?

MSIs represent 7% of all colleges and universities, yet enroll 20% of all students in the nation (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). They educate 40% of students of color. As seen through the missions of many MSIs, these institutions aim to create educational experiences that cater to the social and cultural contexts of their students (Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. A., 2015; Raines, 1998). As the racial and ethnic demographics of this nation continue to shift, with the racial and ethnic minority population projected to account for 46% of the total U.S. population by 2065, MSIs have an opportunity and responsibility to educate their growing demographic of young, low-income, and minority voters to become politically engaged (Cohn, 2015).

Low Turnout among Young Racial and Ethnic Minority Voters

Despite the unprecedented growth of Millennials and ethnic minorities in the United States, voter turnout for these groups remains significantly underrepresented. Although research suggests that young adults are more likely to vote if they are in college, registration and voting patterns have not grown at the same rate as the population (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Even when taking into consideration immigration status and eligibility to vote, since there is a growing population of permanent residents and undocumented students attending MSIs, there are still significant numbers of young students of color that are not showing up to the polls (Contreas, 2011; Flores, 2014). Even though MSIs educate a large portion of minority students, and students who are pursuing postsecondary education are more likely to engage in civic duties such as voting than those who have a high school degree (Frey, 2016), MSIs can do more to increase the number of young racial and ethnic minority students who vote. According to the Census Bureau's survey of voters, 26.9% of Latinos registered to vote claimed they were "too busy" or had a "conflicting work or school schedule" as the top reasons deterring them from voting during the midterm elections (Krogstad, 2016). Although these elections have historically had lower participation from eligible voters overall, this can be seen as an opportunity for MSIs to mobilize their students to make a difference in the direction of this country. While barriers for low-income racial and ethnic minorities to vote persist, such as voter identification laws, location of polling sites, or inability to vote because of familial or employment responsibilities, according to the Census Bureau's survey of voters, 15.6% of Latinos who decided not to vote claimed they were "not interested" or felt that their vote did not matter (Krogstad, 2016). With support from institutional stakeholders, MSIs can address this belief by offering educational programs on voting or disseminating information about the importance of voting. They can take it a step further by collaborating with other institutions or non-profit organizations to educate and empower not only their students but the communities around them as well.

A Legacy of Civic Engagement

MSIs already have a legacy of empowering their students and the surrounding community, whether by encouraging students' pursuit of education and opportunity or through civic engagement. Civic engagement is defined as "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivations to make that difference . . . through both political and non-political processes" (Ehrlich, 2000, preface vi). HBCUs, in particular, began with an intentional mission to developing civic learning outcomes for their students and communities (Gasman, Spencer, & Orphan, 2015). In a chapter devoted to HBCUs and civic engagement, in Thomas Elrich's book *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, it is noted that HBCUs have always been committed to the Black communities they are surrounded by, and their civic engagement is part of their institutional ethos rather than something they choose to do (Scott, 2000). Beyond civic engagement, HBCUs also catered to their surrounding community's needs. Many HBCUs offered daycare programs, voter registration, adult learner programs, and much more to strengthen both their study bodies and surrounding communities (Gasman, et al., 2015). During the Civil Rights Era, several HBCUs (e.g., Hampton University, Lincoln University, and Morehouse College) leveraged their access to mass media through student-run or faculty-led radio and television programs to educate their surrounding communities on issues that affected them (Gasman, et al., 2015). During the same time, Benedict College received funding for voter registration initiatives, while students at North Carolina A&T University were holding demonstrations in their community for integration within their local businesses (Gasman, et al., 2015). Gasman and others (2015) argue that "[i]n most cases, the programs offered by HBCUs were the community's only exposure to accurate representation of issues such as voting rights and desegregation efforts throughout the nation" (pg. 371). This holds true for other MSIs. Laden (2001) claims, "if it were not for the presence of the local HSIs in many Hispanic communities, these communities would be intellectually and culturally underserved . . . HSIs serve as the primary culture centers within their communities" (pg. 87).

MSIs having an Impact on their Communities

TOUGALOO COLLEGE

Tougaloo College prides itself on its community outreach and is often referred to as the "cradle of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement" (Rozman & Roberts, 2006). Although a private HBCU, Tougaloo has faced challenges in its pursuit of social justice as funders have disapproved of the institution's civic engagement and the state threatened to revoke its charter status (Williamson-Lott, 2008). Despite these challenges, Tougaloo remained committed to social justice and expanded its reach through the creation of the HBCU Faculty Development Network in 1994 and the development of the Center for Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility in 2004. The Center for Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility aims to engage in "activities designed to empower citizens so that they become active participants in the life of their communities by providing a forum for the sharing of ideas, expression of diverse views, and the formulation of opinions and actions that serve the common good" (Williamson-Lott, 2008). With both the Faculty Development Network and the Center for Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility, Tougaloo has been able to connect HBCU faculty around the nation, providing them with the opportunity to discuss and take action towards issues and community crises such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005. These entities provide opportunities for students at Tougaloo and citizens in the surrounding community to continue the legacy of this HBCU's commitment to civic engagement.

EL PASO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Considered one of the most productive and successful community colleges in the nation, El Paso Community College (EPCC) educates over 30,000 students among its 5 campuses, with 1500 of their students participating in the college's Early College High School Program (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Founded in 1969 as a border town institution only miles away from Juarez, Mexico, many of the students commute daily from Mexico for the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education. El Paso, Texas is near one of the poorest areas of Mexico, with many of its young adult population severely underprepared to enter college. Because of this, EPCC, along with the University of Texas at El Paso, local school districts, and other civic organizations, created the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence "to ensure that every citizen in the region has the opportunity to be challenged by teachers who believe that they can learn" (Conrad & Gasman, 2016, p. 105). Through this collaboration, the college's college readiness programs and Early College High School Program have enabled students from the community to better understand the demands of pursuing a higher education while also allowing them to earn college credit while in high school. EPCC also offers service learning credit, with over 1200 students participating in the 2015-2016 academic year conducting over 31,000 hours of community service. This HSIs' demonstrates its commitment to meeting the needs of its community by improving education attainment, promoting the importance of furthering education beyond high school, and preparing its students to become civically engaged through opportunities for service learning. By intentionally committing to improving the enrollment, attrition, and graduation rates of students in the El Paso area, EPCC has the potential to also increase the number of eligible voters to participate in state and local elections, as research suggests that pursuing college and earning a postsecondary degree increases the likelihood of a person to vote (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010).

PAUL QUINN COLLEGE

In 2011, the city of Dallas decided to expand a landfill in the area surrounding Paul Quinn College (PQC). As an institution in a food desert—meaning that the community had no access to fresh foods or grocery stores—students decided to take action and prevent the city from expanding the landfill (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Through their "I Am Not Trash" protests, modeled after the "I am a Man" protests in 1968, the students, staff, and faculty of PQC protested the expansion and educated the surrounding community about their efforts (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Not only did the students work together to prevent the expansion of a landfill in the South Dallas area, but their president, Michael Sorrell, after seeing that the school's football team was failing, and that both the students and surrounding community lacked access to fresh food, decided to convert the football field into an organic farm that now produces 10% of the food for the community (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Through student activism and innovative presidential leadership, this Texas HBCU is a contemporary example of how civic engagement can influence local communities. In an interview with the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, President Sorrell said, "We think institutions in cities have a responsibility to engage in the issues of importance to those citizens" (Kelderman, 2014). As during the Civil Rights Movement, HBCUs and other MSIs have a record of responding to their community's concerns.

These are some of many examples of how MSIs have in the past, and still today, remained committed to the issues affecting their respective communities. From the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s to contemporary local issues as those described with Tougaloo College in Mississippi, EPCC in El Paso, Texas, and PQC in Dallas, MSIs continue to provide opportunities for their students to become civically engaged as college students. However, even with these examples of how MSIs cultivate environments that promote civic engagement, gaps among voter participation for young minority voters still persist. As our nation continues to grow more diverse, MSIs have the unique opportunity and responsibility to empower their students and surrounding communities to use their civil liberties and right to vote to influence the direction of this country. While these examples have demonstrated the local impact MSIs can have within their surrounding communities, it is time to consider how MSIs can collectively create national change.
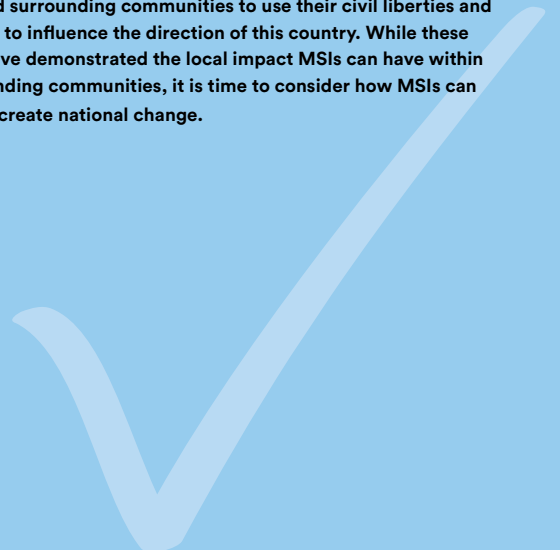
What Additional Impact Could MSIs Have?

For this report, in line with the first challenge of *Location*, we asked the question, "Which MSIs have a polling site on-campus?" To answer this question, we mapped polling sites (as provided by State and County Election Boards) against the location of college campuses in five states: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

Our most significant findings came from North Carolina, a state that has repeatedly made the news over various county board rulings that have restricted the voting rights of students. In the chart below, we demonstrate three key items: the difference in votes between the presidential candidates (in terms of votes cast within the county), the total number of students enrolled at the given MSI, and the distance from the closest polling site to the given MSI.

Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania were selected for examination because of their history as "swing states"—states where the two primary parties (Democrats and Republicans) have similar levels of support. Arizona was selected due to its shifting demographics and the large presence of MSIs in the state.

Minority Serving Institution	County	Total vote difference between presidential candidates (2016)	Total number of students enrolled at given MSI (2016)	Distance from closest polling site to given MSI (2014)
Lenoir Community College	Lenoir	979	2,813	More than 2.0 miles
*North Carolina Wesleyan College	Nash	84	2,119	More than 2.0 miles
Richmond Community College	Richmond	1,882	2,664	More than 1.0 mile
Robeson Community College	Robeson	1,746	2,260	More than 1.5 miles
University of North Carolina at Pembroke	Robeson	1,746	6,441	On campus

Institution sets on the border of two counties, only one county is listed.

▲ *We recognize that many of these students, as listed under the total number of students enrolled, may have indeed voted in the recent election. Our report does not intend to say that these are the number of votes that were not counted, instead we hope to point to the power that these populations may have in the democratic process by simply looking at the size of the populations.*

The chart above does not include the faculty and staff at these institutions nor the number of eligible voters in the communities that surround them, which could only amplify the impact an MSI-centered polling site could have. Ultimately, these numbers show that placing polling sites near these institutions alone could have influenced the local and state elections. However, *four out of five* of these institutions did not have a polling site on-campus.

In Colorado, we saw similar findings:

Minority Serving Institution	County	Total vote difference between presidential candidates (2016)	Total number of students enrolled at given MSI (2016)	Distance from closest polling site to given MSI (2014)
Adams State University	Alamosa	143	3,404	More than 1.5 miles
Fort Lewis College	La Plata	2,938	3,707	More than 1.0 mile
Otero Junior College	Otero	1,985	1,410	More than 1.0 mile
Pueblo Community College	Pueblo	390	6,718	More than 0.5 miles
Colorado State University—Pueblo	Pueblo	390	7,563	More than 1.0 mile
Trinidad State Junior College	Las Animas	1,060	1,791	More than 0.5 mile

At all but one of these institutions in Colorado, the student population alone well exceeded the vote difference in the 2016 election, further demonstrating the impact that young racial and ethnic minorities could have on elections if MSIs' student bodies are encouraged to vote.

The furthest distance that we found between an MSI and a polling site was 10 miles in one such case in Arizona. Although this institution is primarily a commuter campus, this distance unfairly impedes students' ability to vote, especially if a student is in class all day on Election Day. Commuter campuses are just as important to consider as potential polling sites as those with on-campus populations, as they too are surrounded by greater communities that require voting access and because they are visited by so many people (students, faculty, and staff alike) each day.

In Arizona, we examined one county that is home to numerous MSIs, further assessing the impact that these institutions could have as a group on county and state elections. These findings are outlined in the chart to the right.

Minority Serving Institution	Total number of students enrolled at given MSI (2016)	Distance to closest polling site from given MSI (2014)
Estrella Mountain Community College	9,303	Less than 0.5 mile
Glendale Community College	19,871	On campus
GateWay Community College	5,637	More than 0.5 mile
Phoenix College	11,865	Less than 0.5 mile
South Mountain Community College	4,083	Less than 0.5 mile
Total Students Combined	**50,759**	
Total vote difference between 2016 presidential candidates in Maricopa, AZ	**44,454**	

Again, the numbers demonstrated in the chart above only show the number of potential student voters. If we account for faculty, staff, and the surrounding community for each of these institutions, the impact of more actively encouraging voting at MSIs would be further magnified.

Data from the State of Pennsylvania, another swing state, are limited. Nonetheless, further encouraging voting efforts at MSIs in this state could certainly have an impact on elections.

Being a state that is determined by popular vote, Pennsylvania was decided by less than 45,000 votes in the 2016 Presidential Election. Although the total student population at these MSIs alone does not exceed this number, we have strong reason to believe that efforts to promote voting at these MSIs would certainly encourage their surrounding communities to vote as well, cumulatively resulting in numbers that could significantly shape election results.

Minority Serving Institution	Total number of students enrolled at given MSI (2016)
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania	711
Community College of Philadelphia	18,966
Eastern University	3,505
Harcum College	1,636
Lincoln University of Pennsylvania	1,904
Peirce College	1,708
TOTAL	**28,430**

Recommendations

MSIs have the responsibility to develop leaders for the future, and our future rests in the hands of democracy. To ensure students have a voice, below we provide recommendations for institutions to get more involved in the electoral process and push their students to be change makers around voter engagement. Our recommendations focus on four main areas:

❶ Establishing polling sites and early voting sites on-campus

❷ Being a voice for students' rights

❸ Informing students about voting and registering them appropriately

❹ Getting out the vote

Establishing Polling Sites and Early Voting Sites On-campus

The first step for any college or university seeking to increase student voter turnout is to explore whether the institution has a polling site on campus. If the institution does not have a polling site on campus, what steps would need to be taken to establish one? The answer varies by location—sometimes the city in which an institution resides sets laws governing polling sites, while other times, such laws are established at the county level. Additionally, the timeline of establishing a polling site can sometimes be a matter of days, while other times, it may take up to a year. Regardless, *the first step in this process is to contact your county elections board*. MSI administrators and leadership are key figures in taking this first step, but students, faculty, and staff also have a responsibility to call on these institutional leaders to take action.

> The State of Illinois recently passed SB172, which mandates that public universities provide opportunities for early and general voting in high traffic areas on their campuses.

However, simply establishing a polling site at an institution should not be the end goal. Students and racial and ethnic minorities alike have been shown to have a higher turnout at sites that offer early voting. Therefore, we recommend institutions strive to establish a polling site for both day-of voting and for the early voting period. Again, this is a process that would begin by having an institution contact its appropriate county elections board to learn about proper protocol.

For institutions that may struggle to establish an on-campus polling site, there are alternative ways to get students to the polls. Some institutions have partnered with various transportation services, offering vans or buses to get students to their proper polling sites on Election Day. In Florida, one local busing effort, "The Love Bus," has worked to get racial and ethnic minorities to the polls, including stops at Florida Memorial University, so that students could get to the polls in-between classes (Lerner, 2016).

BallotReady is another great resource helping to ensure that voters are informed and ready to vote for every office on their ballot by providing nonpartisan voter guides and a plan-to-vote tool. They are currently piloting a student-facing voter guide in the 2017 Virginia elections that will likely be scaled nationally in 2018. More info can be found here.

Rock the Vote is another program similar to TurboVote that many institutions use to register their students to vote. The program is free and able to be taken advantage of in any U.S. state or territory.

Being a Voice for Students' Rights

In recent years, some states have implemented policies that have resulted in discouraging student voter turnout. All institutions should be aware of voting policies being implemented, both in their county and in their state, and how those policies influence their students and communities. In these cases, how might an institution use its voice to fight for student voting rights? How can institutions support student activism related to voting? To answer these questions, we provide a few examples of ways institutions may have an impact:

In Minnesota, many students struggled with registering to vote at their new addresses, as they were not aware of the process that it took to retrieve proof of residency from their institution. In response, some institutions, such as St. Catherine's University, an AANAPISI, worked to provide university housing lists to election officials ahead of time in order to streamline this requirement for voting registration. For students who attend these institutions, this process has made it easier for them to register as they may now register with a student ID.

All around the nation, students are standing up against laws that seek to disenfranchise them. Seven students at two HBCUs, Fisk University and Tennessee State University, filed a lawsuit against state legislation that banned student IDs from the polls in March 2015 (Lerner, 2015). Although the lawsuit was eventually dismissed in court, the students made their voices heard and engaged the community around the institution in their fight for voting rights.

Informing Students about Voting and Registering them Appropriately

The majority of first-time, full-time, and Bachelor's-seeking students are first-time voters, as the typical age of those entering college is 18 years old. During this transition, many students are overwhelmed with information about transitioning into adulthood and prioritize the transition to college over their democratic engagement. While many student (and independent) organizations actively seek to educate and register students to vote, institutions should also be participating more in these efforts.

Democracy Works' TurboVote program, for example, has partnered with several institutions to get students informed about voting during the Fall registration period. TurboVote is an online tool that helps voters get registered, update voter registration, request absentee ballots, and receive election reminders and notifications. Higher education partners have access to the aggregate data for their respective campuses to help discover bottlenecks and inform voter outreach strategy.[3]

The Campus Vote Project in partnership with NASPA (National Association of Student Affairs Professionals), will work with your institution, including through the Voter Friendly Campus designation program. The program guides campuses in institutionalizing democratic engagement with an individualized plan and recommendations and evaluations through the program. Plans coordinate administrators, faculty, and student organizations in electoral engagement. California State University, Chico, an HSI, received a Voter Friendly Campus designation in 2017, setting an example for MSIs to further encourage civic engagement.

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[3] For full disclosure, it should be noted that TurboVote is a sponsor on this report and is eager to get more MSIs involved—please contact CMSI or TurboVote directly if you would like to begin the process of helping your particular MSI promote voting efforts on your campus.

Getting out the vote

Ultimately, an institution can do everything right to prepare students to vote—establish an early polling site on campus, receive state support via policies, and inform students the minute they step on campus. However, none of that matters if student voters fail to show up on Election Day. Therefore, it is vital that students, faculty, and administration alike consider the various ways in which they may drive voter turnout at their respective institutions during election season. Below are some recommended micro-tactics to promote voter turnout:

¡ Encourage student governments and student groups to register and inform their peers to vote by providing incentives (e.g., stickers, cookies, etc.) or by hosting social events

¡ Inform students about what will appear on the ballot by providing non-partisan handouts about voter eligibility, polling site locations, candidate names, and ballot initiatives

¡ Host candidate forums and/or issue debates, open to students and the public alike

¡ Market non-partisan voting information available via school email and social media accounts

¡ Weave in reminders to vote with the campus fabric—during class registration, residence hall meetings

¡ Appoint someone to lead voter mobilization efforts

¡ Incorporate non-partisan voting information into class curricula

¡ Challenge faculty to encourage their students to visit a polling site on Election Day

¡ Organize a student poll worker program

¡ Fund and organize student registration and Election Day activities, such as rallies and door-to-door canvassing (both on-campus and in the community)

The National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) is a service to over 1,000 participating U.S. colleges and universities—NSLVE provides a free report to each institution containing aggregate student voter registration and voting rates, broken down by student demographic and education information. Additionally, NSLVE serves as a database for research conducting first-of-its kind analysis of college student voting habits based on actual student enrollment and publicly available voting records from the 2012, 2014, and (coming soon) 2016 federal elections.

NSLVE is a signature initiative of the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE) at Tufts University. The mission of IDHE is to shift college and university priorities and culture to advance political learning, agency, and equity. We achieve our mission through research, resource development, technical assistance, and advocacy.

To evaluate how your institution is doing with regard to promoting voting, enroll your institution in the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).

A sample institutional report from NSLVE can be found **here**.

The Walk2Vote program is a great example of involving students and the community in celebration of increasing political participation. They have many resources to share with campuses that want to create similar events. More can be found **here.**

The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge believes that more young people need to participate in the electoral process. Recognizing colleges and universities for their commitment to increasing student voting rates, this national awards program encourages institutions to help students form the habits of active and informed citizenship.

Hundreds of colleges and universities have joined the Challenge and have committed to making democratic participation a core value on their campuses. Together, they are cultivating generations of engaged citizens, which is essential to a healthy democracy.

To learn more or to sign up, visit allinchallenge.org. Participation is open to all accredited, degree-granting postsecondary institutions in the United States.

For further reading on how we might engage students in the electoral process before college, check out the **Report of the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge, "A Crucible Moment"** and the ideas42 report on **"Graduating Students into Voters."**

For more on what you can do to help increase voter turnout for students and the larger public, check out these resources:

IDHE Action Guide

CVP Best Practices Guide

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