Democracy Counts 2018:
Increased Student and Institutional Engagement

INSTITUTE FOR
DEMOCRACY&
HIGHER EDUCATION

Tufts UNIVERSITY | Jonathan M. Tisch
College of Civic Life

NSLVE NATIONAL STUDY OF
LEARNING, VOTING
AND ENGAGEMENT

IDHE: Research With Reach

REPORT FINDINGS

This report contains findings from the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement ("n-solve"), a landmark study of U.S. college and university student voting. Launched in 2013, NSLVE consists of a database of more than 10 million deidentified student records that have been combined with publicly available voting records for each of the 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 elections. Participating institutions include two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities, including graduate programs. Campuses must opt in, and at the time of this report, 1,031 colleges and universities in all 50 states and the District of Columbia participate in NSLVE. NSLVE contains a diverse mix of city, town, suburban, and rural institutions. Participating NSLVE campuses receive customized, detailed reports containing their students' aggregate voter registration and voting rates broken down by student demographics, academic level, and field of study.[1]

WHO ARE NSLVE STUDENTS?

The NSLVE database contains around 10 million college and university student records for each of the past four federal elections: 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018. The average age of students in the 2018 NSLVE database was 24 (median 21), and 70% were under the age of 25. Women made up 56% of NSLVE students, compared with 57% for all of U.S. higher education. A majority of NSLVE students were White (60%), while Asian, Black, Hispanic, and multiple-race students comprised 7%, 11%, 17%, and 5%, respectively. In 2018, 26% attended community colleges and 82% attended public universities; these generally track national enrollment numbers (31% and 78%, respectively). Most students attended college in state. In 2018, 16% of the students were graduate students and the remaining 84% were undergraduates (compared to 86% nationwide).[2]

Contents

Welcome

Dear Colleagues:

In the 2018 midterm elections, the average student voting rate at U.S. colleges and universities more than doubled from the last midterm elections, jumping from 19% in 2014 to 40% in 2018. The fact that student voting rates increased is no surprise since, according to the U.S. Election Project's analysis,[3] voting rates among all Americans increased 13.6 percentage points. What *is* surprising is that college and university student voting rose a remarkable 21 percentage points.

Perhaps now is a good time to stop focusing on why college students don't vote and start understanding why they do vote, something we have been studying for five years. No single mobilization effort, voter administration rule, charismatic candidate, or hot policy issue is responsible for voter turnout increases or decreases, but clearly something is happening on college and university campuses that warrants closer examination and even replication. Based on our research and work with individual institutions to date, we have seen practices that work and underscore the notion that colleges and universities have the power to drive change.

In recent years, we have seen a shift in institutional commitment by leaders and faculty away from apolitical civic learning and toward learning for the health and future of democracy, a task that is inherently political. We launched NSLVE in 2013 with around 250 institutions. Today, more than 1,000 U.S. colleges and universities participate. Tailored campus reports are sent directly to university presidents, and they are using those reports to galvanize the campus community. More presidents have put financial and human resources behind student political engagement efforts. More faculty across disciplines are talking with students about policy issues relating to their field and reminding students of their responsibilities to register and to vote.

In 2018, we saw new energy and a greater sense of agency among students that transcends demographic and disciplinary subgroups. College and university students today are more diverse than ever, and while they are not a monolithic group, the 20 million students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities present a formidable voting bloc. Students mobilized around competitive state races and high-stakes ballot initiatives, and around issues like immigration, gun violence, and the environment.

We also saw evidence that institutions are shifting from elections as episodic flashpoints to embracing political learning, discussion, and equity as year-round educational objectives for all students. Campus stories included in this year's report reflect some of this systemic change. Democratic participation derives from a robust campus climate and learning environment, not the work of individuals or departments alone. We encourage campuses to make discussions about pressing social, political, and ethical issues not just pervasive but also higher quality. All students, faculty, and staff should be skilled in the arts of discussion teaching, leadership, and participation.

NSLVE data catalyzed change on campuses. The alarming low voting rates in 2012 and 2014 were a wake-up call to many individual campuses and to the higher education community broadly. We thank our 1,000+ colleges and universities for having the courage to examine and understand the implications of their students' voting rates. We look forward to working with institutional leaders, faculty, education associations, and civic organizations to maintain this momentum and to ensure that changes to foster more political learning, discourse, equity, and participation are educationally substantive and sustainable.

Best,

Nancy Thomas

Director, Institute for Democracy & Higher Education
Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life
Tufts University

Executive Summary

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement is a study of U.S. college and university student voting.

At the time of this report, the database consists of deidentified records for 10 million students for both the 2014 and 2018 elections. These students attended 1,031 higher education institutions in the U.S. across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Participating institutions give NSLVE permission for their student enrollment records to be matched with public voting records, yielding precise data on their students' turnout. Key findings include:

Average Institutional Voting Rate

In the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, college students turned out to vote at double the rate from the last midterm. Across all NSLVE campuses, the average institutional rate in 2018 was 39.1% (up nearly 20 percentage points from 19.7% in 2014).

Women Voters

Women in college continued to vote at the highest rates in 2018, with Black women maintaining their position as the most active voters on campus, and Hispanic women making the most significant gains.

40.3%

NATIONAL STUDENT VOTING RATE

Narrowing Age Gap

While older Americans historically vote at higher rates than their younger counterparts, 2018 NSLVE data showed a trend toward age parity. The turnout gap between students over 30 and those under 22 dropped from 22.3 percentage points to 16.9 points.
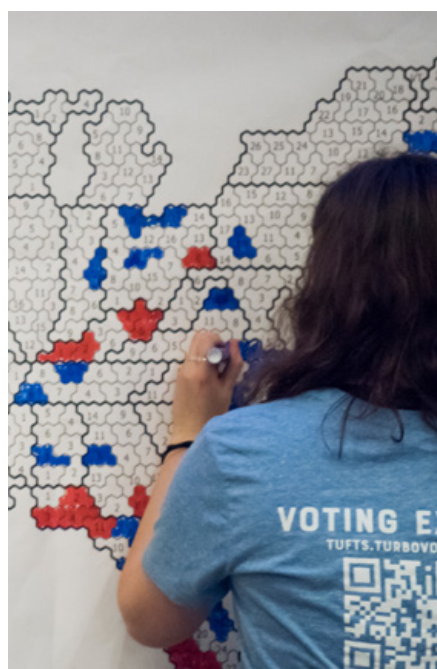
22.5

POINT INCREASE IN
HISPANIC STUDENT
VOTING RATE

Voting by Discipline

Voting gaps between disciplines persisted in 2018. Turnout rates among students majoring in STEM fields and in business lagged behind those of students in the humanities, social sciences, and education.

Increased Diversity

The largest voting rate increase across racial/ethnic groups was among Hispanic students, up 22.5 percentage points (from 14% in 2014 to 36.5% in 2018). Every racial/ethnic group of students had a higher voting rate in 2018 than in 2014.

Public and Private Schools

There was relative consistency in voting rates between students attending two-year, four-year, public, or private institutions. Women's colleges continued to vote at the highest rates among institutional types, but we saw that all types of institutions showed consistent upward movement between 2014 and 2018.

Increased Participation

In 2018, 99% of NSLVE campuses saw their voting rates increase from the 2014 midterms, and nearly half of institutions saw their rate increase between 15-24 percentage points.

99%

NSLVE CAMPUSES SAW
RATE INCREASES

2018: A Remarkable Midterm Election

39.1%

2018 AVERAGE INSTITUTIONAL VOTING RATE

UP FROM
19.7% IN 2014

40.3%

2018 NATIONAL STUDENT VOTING RATE

UP FROM
19.3% IN 2014

2X

THE VOTING RATE DOUBLED FROM 2014 TO 2018

The 2018 Average Institutional Voting Rate was closer to that of the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections than to the 2014 midterm.

Historically, voter participation rates in presidential elections have been far higher than in midterm elections. This election defied this longstanding pattern. The 2018 average institutional voting rate of 39.1% is far closer to those of the last two presidential election (47.6% in 2012, 50.9% in 2016) than to the previous midterm (19.7%). This suggests a promising trajectory to student voting.

ABOUT THE VOTING RATES

On this page, we present two estimated voting rates. The National Student Voting Rate (NSVR) is the number of student voters divided by the estimated number of students who were eligible to vote. It is our best estimate of the college student turnout rate for the United States. The Average Institutional Voting Rate (AIVR) is the average of the student voting rates of U.S. colleges and universities. This is the best benchmark to use to compare a given college to the average college in the U.S. Both of these numbers are adjusted to account for students who were not eligible to vote, but in slightly different ways. See the Technical Appendix for more detail on voting rate calculations, specifically how we identify and adjust for students who were not eligible to vote.

WHAT DO OUR ESTIMATED VOTING RATES MEAN?

The voting rates at NSLVE colleges and universities more than doubled, as did student voter turnout. The fact that these two numbers track closely together means that the increase in student voter turnout wasn't isolated to a few campuses: the gains were ubiquitous.

We also measure how many students registered to vote and, of registered students, how many actually voted:

73.3%
THE NATIONAL STUDENT REGISTRATION RATE

UP FROM 65.3% IN 2014

55.0%
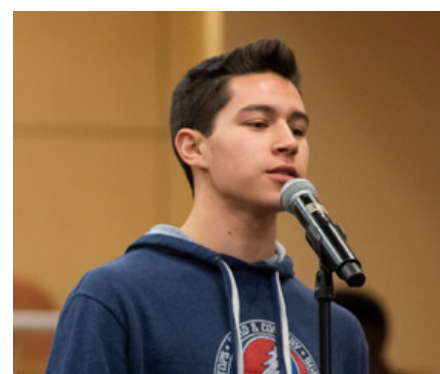THE NATIONAL TURNOUT OF REGISTERED STUDENTS

UP FROM 29.6% IN 2014

Extrapolating the National Student Voting Rate to all U.S. college and university students, we estimate that

7.5 million
STUDENTS VOTED IN 2018[4]

In the general population, voting rates increased **13.6** percentage points between 2014 and 2018, but for college students, the increase was **21** points.[5]
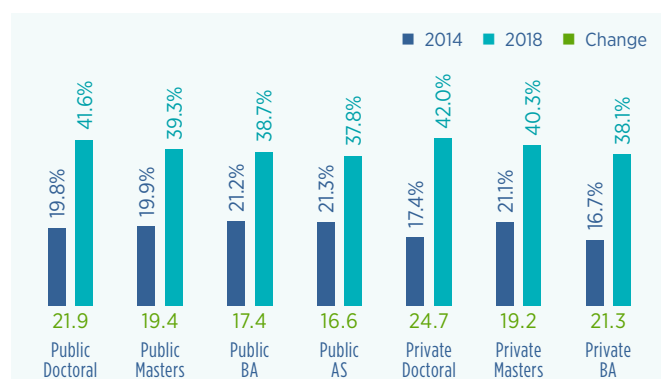
Institutional Rates: A Closer Look

We see many stories of individual campus successes within our 2018 NSLVE data. Nationally, positive change was the norm.

In total, 99% of campus voting rates increased between 2014 and 2018, and all of those who experienced decreases had above-average voting rates in 2014. From our conversations with campuses and quantitative surveys we learned about efforts and initiatives–many year-round rather than election-focused–that could explain this upward movement:
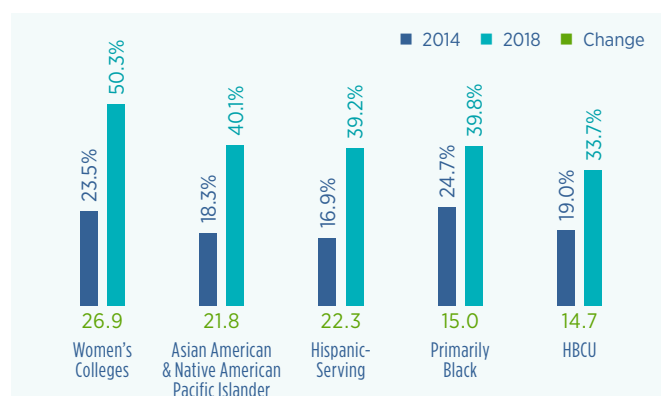
- Creative use of campus NSLVE reports
- Innovative student political learning experiences
- Robust involvement by faculty across disciplines
- Voter education on the mechanics of voting
- Political forums as active discussions
- Student issue activism
- Institutional leadership and champion support

Following the 2018 election season, IDHE ran a national survey that identified a number of topics that animated student involvement, including immigration, gun violence, President Trump, the environment, voter access, and local or regional campaigns and ballot issues.


Legend: ■ 2014 ■ 2018 ■ Change

	2014	2018	Change
Public Doctoral	19.8%	41.6%	21.9
Public Masters	19.9%	39.3%	19.4
Public BA	21.2%	38.7%	17.4
Public AS	21.3%	37.8%	16.6
Private Doctoral	17.4%	42.0%	24.7
Private Masters	21.1%	40.3%	19.2
Private BA	16.7%	38.1%	21.3

CAMPUS VOTING RATES

Historically, voting rates are comparable across institutional types. In 2018, that trend held.

Legend: ■ 2014 ■ 2018 ■ Change

	2014	2018	Change
Women's Colleges	23.5%	50.3%	26.9
Asian American & Native American Pacific Islander	18.3%	40.1%	21.8
Hispanic-Serving	16.9%	39.2%	22.3
Primarily Black	24.7%	39.8%	15.0
HBCU	19.0%	33.7%	14.7

MSIs AND WOMEN'S COLLEGES

MSIs and women's colleges continue to boast the highest voting rates across a broad range of institutional types. Hispanic-Serving Institutions also showed large gains in 2018.[6]
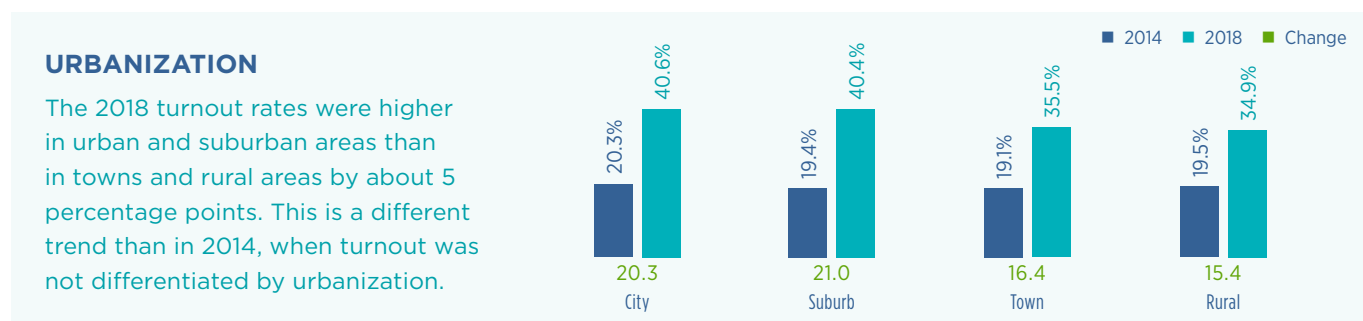
URBANIZATION

The 2018 turnout rates were higher in urban and suburban areas than in towns and rural areas by about 5 percentage points. This is a different trend than in 2014, when turnout was not differentiated by urbanization.

Legend: ■ 2014 ■ 2018 ■ Change

	2014	2018	Change
City	20.3%	40.6%	20.3
Suburb	19.4%	40.4%	21.0
Town	19.1%	35.5%	16.4
Rural	19.5%	34.9%	15.4

INSTITUTIONAL VOTING RATES

This graphic shows the distribution of increases and decreases in institutional voting rates between the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections. Overall, the median change in institutional voting rate from 2014 to 2018 was +19.3 percentage points, and less than 1% of campuses had a lower voting rate than they did in 2014. These change rates are not necessarily reflective of campus voting rates; a low change may reflect the fact that an institution's 2014 voting rate was already relatively high.
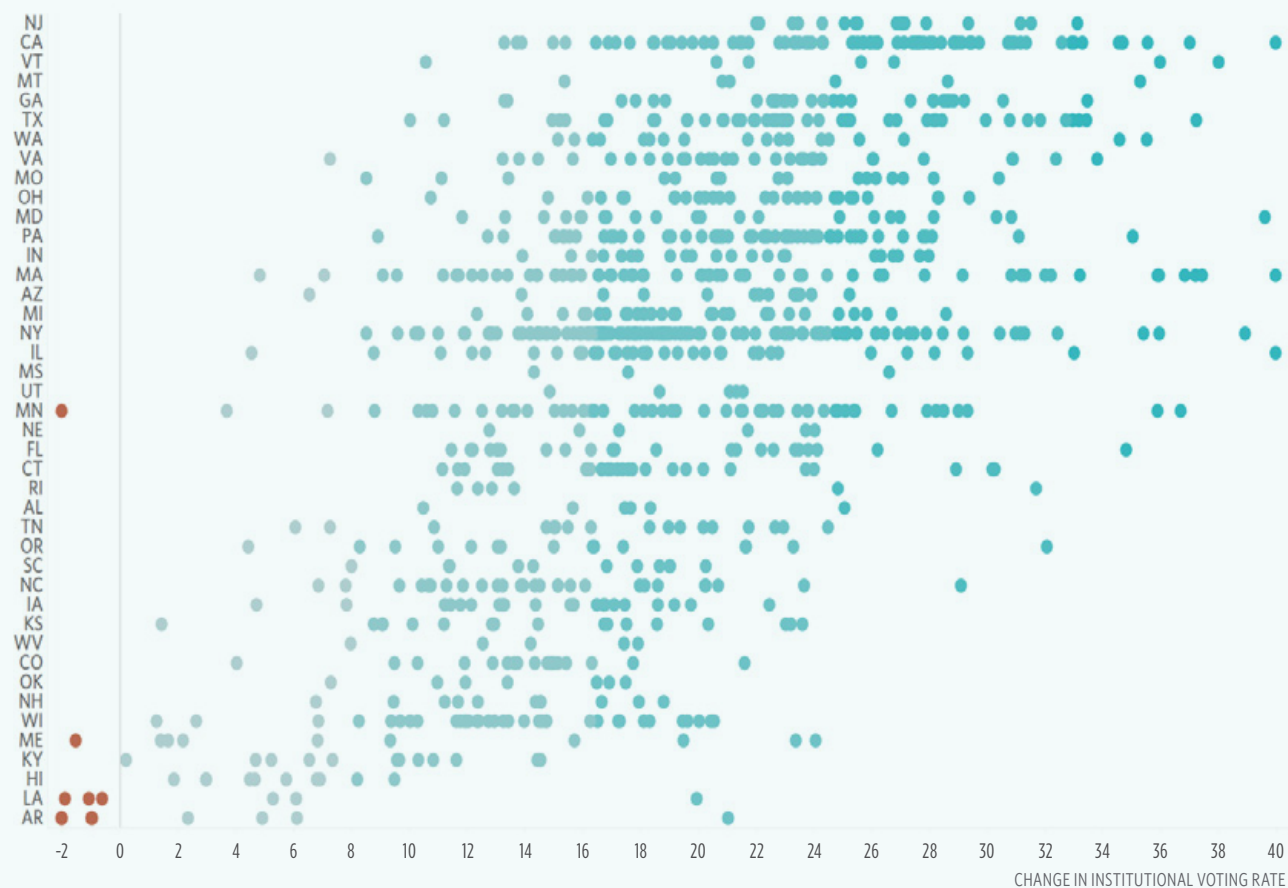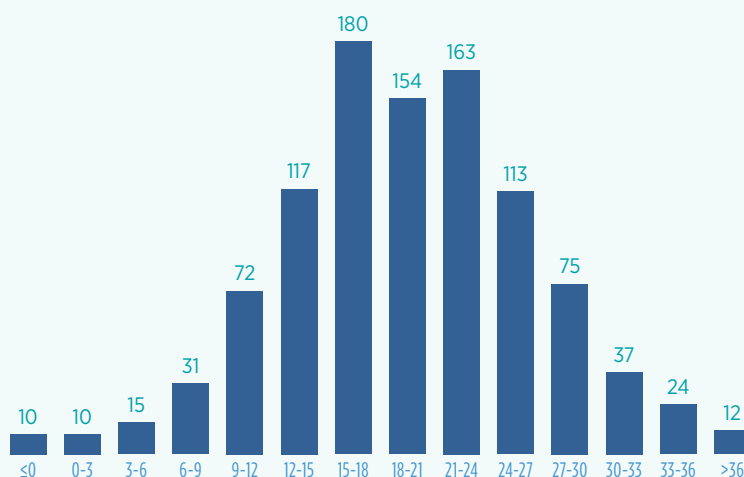
CHANGE BY STATE

Changes in institutional voting rates varied by state. This scatterplot shows these differences.[7] Each point in the figure represents an institution's change in voting rate from 2014 to 2018. Compared to the rest of the country, institutional voting rates in New Jersey, California, and Vermont increased the most on average, whereas Arkansas, Louisiana, and Hawaii had the lowest average increases. All change is relative however, and all of the institutions with small or negative changes had above-average rates in 2014.

Stories from an NSLVE Campus:
James Madison University

HARRISONBURG, VA

At James Madison University (JMU), the 2018 election season was about more than encouraging students to vote; it was a time for building long-term political learning on campus. Dr. Abe Goldberg, Executive Director of the James Madison Center for Civic Engagement, described the institution's burgeoning efforts as part of a year-round strategy emphasizing learning, noting, "our vision is to educate for democracy, which means that our voting rate is a symptom of our efforts, but it's not our end goal by itself."

One innovative idea JMU put into practice was a "Traveling Town Hall." At the events, which received local media coverage and grew to include aspiring members of Congress, candidates from across the political spectrum came to campus and engaged directly with students on issues of public importance. In a local city council race, there were two open seats and five candidates running. As Goldberg described it, at one of the Traveling Town Hall events, all of the candidates hopped in a van, were driven to three different residence halls, and after brief remarks answered questions from students. "It was standing room only, and a huge success. Ultimately, it's nice for students to see these political opponents travel to campus together, share their policy positions and strong differences, and then see them go as a group onto the next town hall. I credit our residence life staff for working in collaboration on this, knowing that we're all in this work together."

Goldberg cited a culture of commitment to civic learning and engagement on campus as vital to the work of the Madison Center and its partners, sharing: "we have strong support and leadership from the president of JMU. Civic engagement is built into the mission and vision of the university, and our office was created to help facilitate and coordinate that work, but we partner across campus with faculty and student affairs staff. Though we have a center focused on civic learning and democratic engagement and offer programming, we also are just as eager to collaborate with academic units as they incorporate these ideas into their work. It really is an 'all-of-the-above' at JMU."

According to Goldberg, JMU, The Madison Center, and partners across campus also rely on NSLVE data and recommendations from our Election Imperatives report to plan and institutionalize political learning. "We follow Election Imperatives pretty closely...we have a standing coalition who convene to discuss how to incorporate civic learning into the curriculum and how to offer related co-curricular programming in partnership with students, faculty, and staff. We also think about questions like, 'what do we do after elections to continue the momentum?'" NSLVE data help drive that discussion year-round at JMU, with campus voting information posted everywhere from the institution's website to fliers in bathroom stalls.

The Madison Center is a hub for resources and programming, including everything from dialogue-based events and student involvement opportunities to "tent talks," student-driven, issue-based setups on trafficked areas of campus that allow students to engage with peers on topical discussions. You can learn more about the work being done at JMU on their websites: *https://www.jmu.edu/civic/* and *https://www.jmu.edu/vote.*

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Stories from an NSLVE Campus:
De Anza College

CUPERTINO, CA

Some campuses are in districts where, at least during midterm elections, students might believe that their vote doesn't matter much. Such was the case for De Anza College, a community college in Cupertino, California where the 2018 candidates did not offer clearly differentiated policy positions. "Engagement in the 2018 election itself wasn't exactly 'dramatic' here," admits Dr. Cynthia Kaufman, Director of De Anza's Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action (VIDA). With large groups of both Asian and Latinx students, De Anza serves a highly diverse student body. Students commute, and many juggle families and jobs. These traits predict lower-than-average voting rates, yet De Anza defied the predictions in 2018.

The commitment to student learning for democratic understanding and participation is visibly supported by institutional leaders, faculty across disciplines, and a strong center, VIDA. The College supports year-round activities to create a vibrant environment for student political learning. Students are passionate about policy questions and particularly ballot initiatives. For example, with support from the student government, VIDA pays interns to work on renter's rights, higher education affordability, immigration, transportation, the environment, and health policy. VIDA also offers courses and experiences as part of a Leadership & Social Change Certificate.

Of course, Dr. Kaufman took advantage of the election season as well. Students, faculty and staff worked together on a wide range of collaborative activities. The administration ensures that students understand the mechanics of voting as well as their civil rights. Political science students in several classes are trained in voter registration and are then required to each register five voters. Closing gaps in voter participation based on race and ethnicity is also a priority. Working with the Asian Law Alliance, students attend naturalization ceremonies

and register new citizens. A forum, "Know your Proposition" exposed students to the pros and cons of often-confusing ballot initiatives. "These are not 'passive events,'" explained Dr. Kaufman "De Anza supports tons and tons of opportunities for students to learn and talk about issues."

The College also serves a significant number of students without citizenship status. While at some campuses, this might be viewed as a challenge and even exclusionary, at De Anza College, these students are viewed as an asset to political learning. "When we do our civic work," says Dr. Kaufman, "we are mindful of the different roles that international students and other noncitizens can play. While they can't vote, they can express their opinions, register people to vote, and educate voters. When they say, 'I need you to vote because I can't,' that often motivates their peers."

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Examining Turnout Gaps

MIND THE GAPS

SEX: ■ Female ■ Male

RACE: ■ White ■ Black ■ Hispanic ■ Asian

AGE: ■ 30+ ■ 25–29 ■ 22–24 ■ 18–21
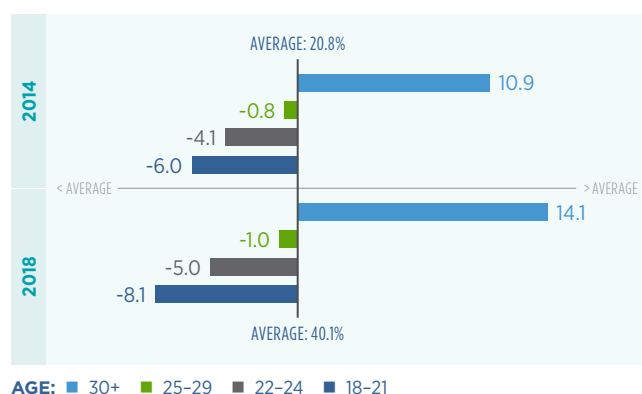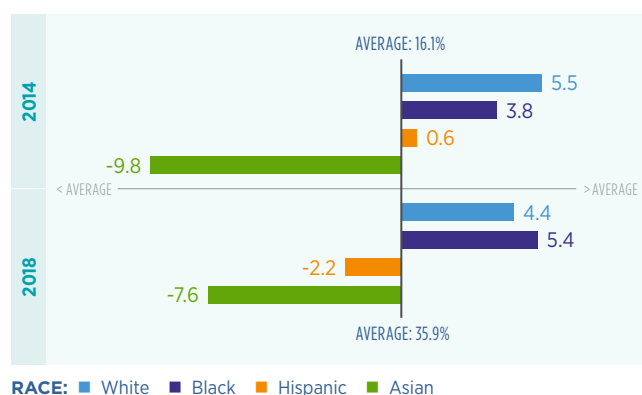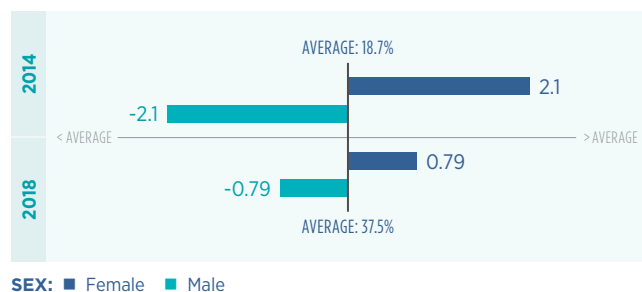
These charts depict several disparities in voting rate by different demographic group. Each category is labeled with percentage points above or below the average. The gap between any two groups is the difference between the higher and lower numbers.

At IDHE, we view the student voting rate as a reflection of the degree to which higher education is fulfilling its civic mission, including its role in promoting social, economic, and political mobility and equality. Ignoring equity gaps in participation can reinforce patterns of marginalization. For that reason, we encourage campuses to examine the political experiences of different groups of students, which manifest as turnout gaps.

Sex: In 2018, the voting rate was 39.6% among women and 35.4% for men, compared to 19.5% and 17.9%, respectively, in 2014.[8] The gap by sex widened from 1.6 percentage points to 4.2 points. However, both gaps are considerably smaller than those in the 2012 and 2016 elections (7.1 and 7.2 percentage points, respectively).[9]

Race: Voting rates for all racial/ethnic groups were higher in 2018 than in 2014. The largest increase was among Hispanic students: up 22.5 percentage points, from 14% to 36.5%. The White student voting rate was 41.4%, up 20.8 points from 2014. The Black student voting rate was 39.6%, up 18.1 points. The Asian student voting rate was 26.1%, up 17.5 points.

The largest racial gap in 2018 was a 15.3 percentage point difference between Asian and White students. In 2018, White students voted at a rate 1.7 points higher than Black students, a change from 2014, when the Black student voting rate was 1 point higher. These gaps are smaller than in 2016, when the White student voting rate was 3.7 points higher than the Black student voting rate.[10]

Age: Age is a consistent predictor of voting in the U.S. general population and among college students; older Americans vote at higher rates. The 2018 data showed a trend toward age parity, with the voting rate gap between students over 30 and those under 22 decreasing from 22.3 points to 16.9 points. However, those gaps are still wider than in general elections: the differences were 11 points in both 2012 and 2016.

Vote Share: The vote share (meaning, the percentage of all student votes cast by a given group) of White students decreased by 5.6 points to 57.5%, and the vote share of Black students decreased by 2.6 points to 10.6%. The corresponding increase was among Hispanic students (up 5.8 points to 14.3%) and Asian students (up 2.3 points to 4.4%). These trends are consistent with the analysis in our 2012-2016 National Report and proportional to the general trend in university enrollments.
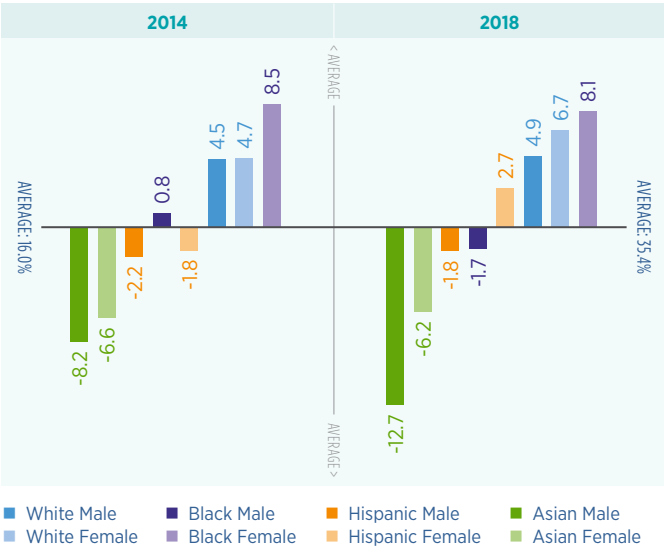
Equity-Gap Insights from 2018

We presented race and sex in different charts on the prior page. These data are complex, interdependent, and at times difficult to interpret. Demographics intersect to reflect students' unique experiences in college and in the political system. On this page, we break down the voting rate by race and sex to provide more specific insights into the equity trends among college students.

The Average Gap was Larger in 2018: While some variability between groups is to be expected, colleges and universities should aim to close turnout gaps. A useful measure is the average gap between the voting rates of different race/sex groups and the average of those groups. In 2018, the average difference was 5.6 percentage points,[11] compared to 4.7 points in 2014. (For context, general elections saw larger average gaps: 10.0 points in 2012 and 8.4 points in 2016.) The Asian male student voting rate was particularly low in 2018, as it was in 2014, and changed the least between midterms. We plan to examine this in future research.[12]

Women of Color Voted at Relatively High Rates: Three of the four female voting rates exceeded the average for intersectional race and sex groups. Among all race/sex groups, the Hispanic female voting rate increased the most. This is even more notable because theirs was the only group to go from below to above average. The Black female voting rate was the highest in 2018, as it was in 2014. The White female voting rate increase was disproportionately high.

Sex Gaps within Racial Groups were Higher for Students of Color: The voting gap by sex was much larger for students of color, meaning that women of color outvoted men of color by a higher margin than White women outvoted White men. In 2018, the White student sex gap was 1.8 points, compared to 6.5 points among Asian students, 9.7 points among Black Students, and 4.4 points among Hispanic students. All of these gaps also widened more for students of color between 2014 and 2018.

GAPS BY SEX AND RACE

Legend:
- White Male
- White Female
- Black Male
- Black Female
- Hispanic Male
- Hispanic Female
- Asian Male
- Asian Female

Race + Sex	2014	2018	Change
Asian Male	7.7%	22.6%	+14.9
Asian Female	9.3%	29.1%	+19.8
Black Male	16.7%	33.6%	+16.9
Black Female	24.4%	43.3%	+18.9
Hispanic Male	13.7%	33.5%	+19.8
Hispanic Female	14.1%	37.9%	+23.8
White Male	20.4%	40.1%	+19.7
White Female	20.6%	41.9%	+21.3

This chart shows differences in the voting rates of male and female students of four racial categories. Each group is labeled with percentage points above or below the average for all 8 groups.

Stories from an NSLVE Campus:
The University of Texas at Austin

AUSTIN, TX

In 2018, the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) took a student-driven approach to create a model for widespread involvement on a large campus. The unique characteristics of the institution – located in the capital city of an influential state, a Senate race that captured national interest, and strong presence from multiple political parties in the area – all served as assets in efforts to build campus engagement during the 2018 midterms. Kassie Phebillo, Program Coordinator for TX Votes, a nonpartisan voter education-focused student organization at UT Austin, summed up the work by describing a peer-to-peer network of partners working in sync: "What we do is student-driven. The leaders of this work are all students, and we do have other champions across campus but so much is student-led. We also take pride in being knowledgeable of the laws in the state, and we understand our campus well. We know who is doing what and how to work together collaboratively and efficiently."

The process at UT Austin was centered on the notion of everyone working towards the same overarching goals of growing student political learning and involvement, with each partner having an understanding of their own complementary areas. From the start, there was a coalition built that included cultural groups, political groups that represented views across the spectrum, and other interested organizations who just wanted to help. The result of this long-term planning was a series of diverse events and initiatives that drew attention across campus. Since UT Austin is located in Texas' capital, there are many opportunities for students to get involved, no matter their particular area of interest. Phebillo spoke about the accessibility of involvement, saying: "there are more and more organizations like TX Votes, Young Conservatives of Texas, Move Texas, and Texas Rising that just want to get students involved across the board. Your more traditional avenues for

involvement still exist but new ones that transcend party and just look to build involvement are also now possible for students."

Phebillo also noted that NSLVE campus reports helped in informing the work along the way: "[The students in TX Votes] did over 250 presentations in the fall in classrooms across campus, and we used NSLVE data in a few ways. We looked at voting rates by major and used that data to see which majors were highly engaged and which weren't, and that helped us decide how to engage each audience and where to prioritize our time. We also shared NSLVE data with the students to help them see the context at UT Austin and how things look from election to election. Having the data also creates a compelling message for academics…stories are nice, but the data helps inform what is happening and offers credibility to our message and specifics of where they've been and where they're going."

TX Votes also led a 2018 Texas Voting Summit, which according to Phebillo "helped act as a catalyst for a lot of universities that were thinking about doing something – I think a lot of universities get caught in that stage – but the actionable stage can get lost, and we helped inform students on how to evaluate their campus and effectively do the work within their individual campus contexts. The summit was also very diverse, and we brought together so many campus types – HBCUs, large state schools, private institutions, community colleges – that everyone was able to learn more about the state and apply lessons from other schools to their own institutions."

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Stories from an NSLVE Campus:
Rollins College

ORLANDO, FL

Engaging events, relationships with local officials, and the cultivation of diverse dialogue were all part of 2018 political engagement efforts at Rollins College. "There was a general sense on campus of getting everyone involved, regardless of political affiliation... students were mindful of 2016, and how polarized that election season was, so they actively tried to create spaces for fellow students from different political viewpoints to come together and discuss policies," observed Bailey Clark, Associate Director of the Center for Leadership and Community Engagement.

A major force at the institution during the 2018 campaign season was the Rollins College Democracy Project, a student-driven, nonpartisan organization on campus that seeks to involve all students, regardless of background or political leanings. The group brought together various constituencies at Rollins, including the College Democrats and College Republicans, to host and moderate events. "The Democracy Project also worked with faculty at Rollins to partner on events... for example, we have an event monthly called "Politics on Tap," where faculty host a dialogue on a hot button political issue for student discussions. Recently, we had a faculty member from the Biology Department come in and lead a discussion about Big Pharma, and at another we had faculty from Social Entrepreneurship talk about climate change and the role of corporations," Clark described. Using NSLVE data, Rollins worked with faculty in departments across disciplines to help engage students in areas of study that hadn't traditionally participated in democratic engagement initiatives in the same numbers as their peers.

Working with local organizations was another central aspect of the 2018 election engagement work at Rollins College. Clark spoke about partnerships that advanced student learning. She reflected: "We partner regularly with the Orange County League of Women Voters. In 2018, Florida had several amendments

on the ballot that were confusing for students, and the League representatives came in and led a discussion on the amendments, what the language meant, and the pros and cons of their possible implications in a useful, nonpartisan way." The office also partners with the Orange County Supervisor of Elections Office, whose staff visit Rollins and assist with voter registration and education. Students serve as ambassadors for Rollins in an empowering way, helping the officials navigate campus and connect with the community.

Partnerships extended across campus departments, as well. "We were very proud of the collaborations with the Office of Residential Life & Explorations staff. We partnered with them to host voter registration drives in the residence halls, meeting students where they are. In the past we've done a lot of tabling to talk to students, but when we went to the lobbies of the halls, they were more likely to stop and engage with us, and even go grab a roommate or friend to join in as well," Clark expressed. "We also have the backing of our administration and the President...which is helpful because it shows that Rollins College takes democratic engagement very seriously and it is truly part of our culture here."

You can learn more about the Rollins College Center for Leadership & Community Engagement on their website: *https:// www.rollins.edu/leadership-community-engagement.*

Does your campus have a story to tell? Send us an email to be featured in future reports: IDHE@tufts.edu

Civics across the Curriculum

Civic learning belongs across the curriculum and across all levels of student learning. Our data can be broken down by graduate and undergraduate status and class year, which we do in the individual campus reports; here we provide national averages. With these breakdowns, each participating NSLVE institution can identify which groups on campus are highly engaged and who might need more attention. For example, at some colleges many students study abroad in their junior year. To avoid a drop in voting rates among juniors, these campuses should prepare those students to register and vote absentee or by mail before they leave for the semester. This is the responsibility of all colleges and universities under the Higher Education Act, which requires that institutions provide voter registration materials to all students.

We also break down the data by field of study. Campus responses to IDHE surveys indicate that these are among the most useful data they receive from our office. Unfortunately, some faculty view civic knowledge or engagement as beyond the scope of their discipline. We disagree. Every field of study contributes to the health and well-being of communities and the nation. We urge faculty to explore with their students the public relevance of that field. If the curriculum cannot absorb this layer of learning, we recommend using disciplinary clubs and societies as opportunities to build faculty-student relationships and have discussions about the most pressing ethical, social, and political issues their students are likely to face as professionals.

Disciplinary clubs and societies are typically underutilized as forums for political discussion and reflection on public issues relevant to their fields of study. By interacting with these clubs, faculty can strengthen their relationships with students and bring attention to public issues relevant to the discipline.

We view gaps by class year and academic field as essential data for understanding civic learning. Every discipline has public relevance. Leaders in disciplines with low voting rates should consider why their students might not be voting. The answer may lie with the culture and priorities of that school or discipline, or it might be due to the barriers to voting that students face.

VOTING RATES:
CLASS LEVELS

Voting Rates	2014	2018	Change
Undergraduate Students	16.6%	36.3%	19.8
First Year	13.0%	31.6%	18.6
Sophomore	16.0%	35.5%	19.5
Junior	15.8%	37.5%	21.6
Senior	19.2%	41.1%	21.9
Graduate Students	27.1%	45.4%	18.3

VOTING RATES:
BY FIELD OF STUDY

Voting Rates	2014	2018	Change
Education	27.5%	47.0%	19.5
Social Sciences	20.0%	41.3%	21.3
Humanities	18.8%	38.8%	20.0
Health	18.7%	37.9%	19.2
Business	17.2%	35.6%	18.4
STEM	15.5%	34.4%	18.9

Glancing Back, Looking Forward

When IDHE began providing NSLVE data to individual institutions after the 2012 and 2014 elections, the reports set off alarm bells within the higher education community.

Before the 2012 election, higher education lacked reliable measures of student civic participation. The average institutional voting rate in 2014 was 19.1%, and students ages 18-24 voted at a rate of 13.4%. Some institutional leaders and educators immediately understood these facts and their implications for student learning, while others were slower to receive the news. Many found their data surprising because they assumed their students were civically engaged. Gauged by the most fundamental act of citizenship—voting—that assumption was incorrect. The tenor and outcome of the 2016 presidential election drew sharper attention to higher education's drift away from promoting engagement in democracy as a foundational educational outcome. In 2018, college student turnout rates jumped 21 percentage points, more than doubling 2014 rates. While these numbers reflect progress, they can be better.

Overall voting rates matter, but arguably it's more important whether participation is equitable. We urge institutional leaders to identify and address turnout gaps, with a distinct focus on students in demographic groups that have been historically marginalized or are currently underrepresented by the political system. At IDHE, we are committed to providing individual colleges and universities with tailored reports containing their students' voting rates so that leaders, faculty, staff, and students can strive for parity in participation between socio-economic groups as well as fields of study, vote method, and geography. With this information, real change is measurable and achievable.

We also urge educators to view voting as just one component of their responsibility to educate for the future and health of democracy. Student political participation is a matter of both student learning across disciplines and the campus climate for political learning. Beyond voting rates and turnout gaps, we study "all things political" on college campuses. Our research examines campus-wide learning environments and classroom practices, the state of political discussion, free speech and inclusion, state and local contexts for student voting, and student leadership and activism. Educators should increase their understanding of promising practices in all of these areas and replicate what works.

IDHE is an applied research institution, meaning we want our research to have practical impact. We are committed to open-source, accessible publications. For example, the findings from our case studies of highly politically engaged campuses, which we call Politics 365,[13] has been published in open-source books and Change magazine *(https://idhe. tufts.edu/research/politics-365).* Based on Politics 365 we wrote Election Imperatives,[14] recommendations for increasing voting and improving political learning *(https://idhe.tufts.edu/ electionimperatives.)*

For most of our research, we produce corresponding resources. For example, we have produced discussion guides for campus-wide conversations on understanding campus NSLVE reports *("Talking Politics" - https://idhe.tufts.edu/resource/talking-politics-guide-campus-conversations-about-nslve-reports)* and to help campuses examine tensions around free expression *("Free Speech and Inclusion on Campus: A Discussion Guide" - https:// idhe.tufts.edu/resource/free-speech-inclusion-campus-discussion-guide).* We also maintain interactive data portals and visuals that faculty can use as teaching tools *(https://idhe. tufts.edu/ public-data-portal-visualizations).*

We are proud of the role that we have played in revealing the facts around student and institutional political engagement. Looking ahead, the task for colleges and universities is to prioritize learning for democracy and to sustain the positive momentum documented here. We are optimistic, and happy to help.

Endnotes

1. Campuses in the NSLVE database are non-profit, degree-granting, accredited institutions that participate in reporting to the National Student Clearinghouse.

2. National benchmark rates are based on National Student Clearinghouse fall 2018 enrollment data; NSLVE does not include for-profit institutions: *https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CurrentTermEnrollmentReport-Fall-2018-3.pdf*

3. McDonald, Michael P. 2019. "Voter Turnout" United States Elections Project. Accessed 9/16/2019. www.ElectProject.org.

4. Based on the 2017 IPEDS fall enrollment estimate of 18,618,242 at public and not-for-profit private degree-granting institutions.

5. U.S. general population voting rates used with permission from www.ElectProject.org.

6. Primarily Black Institution and Historically Black Colleges and Universities are mutually exclusive categories; HBCUs are not a subset of the PBI category.

7. This scatterplot does not include states with fewer than 5 participating NSLVE institutions (ND,NM,WY,AK,DE,SD,ID,MS,NV,DC).

8. We use binary male and female sex categories and a limited set of racial categories because these are the data fields supplied by campuses.

Not all campuses provide these data; sex data are available for (46.7% of campuses in 2014 and 60.3% in 2018), and race data are available for (35.5% of campuses in 2014 and 52.8% in 2018).

9. Observant readers will notice that the male and female voting rates do not plausibly average to the National Student Voting Rate; this is related to the NRA adjustments for student subsets, as explained in the Technical Appendix. All student subgroup voting rate estimates are underestimates, but the gap between them is accurate because NRAs are evenly split by sex (45% female in 2018, according to IPEDS).

10. Thomas, N., Bergom, I., Casellas Connors, I., Gautam, P., Gismondi, A., & Roshko, A. (2017). Democracy counts: A report on U.S. college and university student voting. Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life

11. Unweighted average; i.e. the average of the group voting rates for Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White students.

12. For an interesting discussion on the nuances of race and field of study, see *https://theconversation.com/why-dont-stem-majors-vote-as-much-as-others-89015*

13. *https://idhe.tufts.edu*

14. *https://idhe.tufts.edu/electionimperatives*

Technical Appendix

How is the NSLVE database constructed?

Students in the NSLVE database are those who were on National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) enrollment lists of participating institutions on a date closest to but before the November elections in 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018. The enrollment records include specific information for each student: name, date of birth, and last known permanent address. Institutions have the option of providing major field of study, class level (e.g., sophomore, graduate student), race/ethnicity, sex, whether the student is seeking a degree, and part-time or full-time enrollment status. IDHE does not receive student names, and the NSLVE database contains no student names or data that would allow researchers to identify any student. Voting information comes from publicly available state and local voting records collected by Catalist, a widely respected service used by academic researchers. Voter files contain information such as student registration date and location, voting status (did vote/did not vote), voting location, and voting method. The voting records do not contain information on how students voted (e.g., for a particular candidate or party). The NSC performs the task of running the algorithm created by Catalist to match enrollment and voting records using a student's name, date of birth, home (earliest known) address, and campus address. For

more detail on our data sources and database procedures, see our full report at *https://idhe.tufts.edu/research/creating-and-maintaining-nslve-database.*

What are the NSVR and AIVR, and why are they different?

In this report, we share two voting rates, the National Student Voting Rate (NSVR) and the Average Institutional Voting Rate (AIVR). To calculate the NSVR, we divide the total number of student voters in the NSLVE database by the estimated number of voting-eligible students (see below). For the 2018 AIVR, we average the voting rates of the 1,031 participating NSLVE campuses. (Campus voting rates are calculated by dividing the number of student voters at that institution by an estimated number of eligible voters at the institution.) Each institution has an equal weight for the AIVR calculation. The institutional average answers the question "what is the central tendency of the voting rates at U.S. colleges and universities?" Here is an example to illustrate the difference: School A has 100 students and 20 voters (a rate of 20%) and School B has 50 students and 40 voters (a rate of 80%); the AIVR is 50% (20+80/2), and the NSVR is 40% (60/150).

In our real data, these numbers are much closer, which suggests that institutional size is not a major differentiator of voting patterns.

How do you identify ineligible students?

The NSC provides each student's age at the time of the election, so we remove students under 18 from the database. We also remove students identified as older than 100, which we assume is a data error. Some students are identified by the NSC as "nonresident aliens" (NRAs), the technical term for individuals living in the U.S. who are not U.S. citizens, or lawful permanent residents. Unfortunately, not all institutions report NRAs, and those that report the NRA indicator do not always provide this information for every student record.

Another source of NRA data is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which is managed by the National Center for Education Statistics *(nces.ed.gov/ipeds)*. This database has complete NRA data for U.S. colleges and universities at the institutional level, but not at the individual student level. We use IPEDS NRA information to adjust voting rates at the institutional level by calculating a percentage of NRAs (IPEDS number of NRAs divided by the IPEDS total enrollment) and applying that percentage to the NSCenrollment number, which we then deduct from the student enrollment number supplied by the NSC. This approach partially corrects for discrepancies between enrollment counts in IPEDS and NSC records. Building on the example above, if we estimate from IPEDS that 10% of the 100 School A students are NRA students, then the voting rate would be 20/90 or 22%. However, because this method is only applicable to entire institutional units, we use the NSC NRA data to adjust subsets (see section below: How do you calculate voting rates for subsets of students?).

How do you calculate voting rates for subsets of students?

IPEDS NRAs are not consistently broken down by class level, field of study, or other subgroups in this report. For those institutions that provide race/ethnicity data (which includes NRAs) at the student level, we can remove NRAs. The NSVR and the AIVR are IPEDS adjusted, as are the voting rates on the *Institutional Turnout Rates: A Closer Look* page. The voting rates on the *Examining Turnout Gaps, Equity-Gap Insights from 2018, and Civics across the Curriculum* pages are adjusted based on the NRA information from NSC. Because the NRA adjustment based on NSC is incomplete data, these calculation in these pages are underestimates, but they are more accurate than unadjusted calculations.

Do you remove other students who are ineligible to vote, such as undocumented students or students who have been disenfranchised due to a felony conviction?

No. There is no database that provides that information at the college student level. For more detail on this, please refer to IDHE's piece on the matter in a recent newsletter for the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) *(https://www.airweb.org/collaborate-learn/reports-publications/eair-newsletter/special-features)*.

Who Participates in NSLVE?

To participate in the study, institutions must be degree-granting, not-for-profit public or private institutions in the U.S. (excluding all U.S. territories) and they must provide enrollment records to the NSC. Participation is free, and each participating institution receives a tailored report containing that institution's student voter registration and voting rate. Participation in NSLVE is not automatic, and colleges and universities must opt in to the study by specifically authorizing that their enrollment records be used for NSLVE.

What are the strengths and limitations of the NSLVE database?

Our estimates are based on actual student enrollment records. That removes a large source of error inherent to most voting research; estimating how many people could have voted. However, several sources of error still exist. (1) Some students block their records from any use, including for research, pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), in which case they were removed from the student enrollment records before the process of matching enrollment and voting records. About 4% of all students exercise this right. If those students voted at much lower or higher rates, that could slightly affect the voting rate. For that reason, we did not include institutions with more than 30% FERPA-blocked records. (2) The matching process is not perfect. For instance, a student's name in an enrollment record may not match the way it is written in a voting record. Enrollment records that do not match voting records, are probably nonvoters but there is some chance the matching process failed to link the files. (3) For students who are non-resident aliens the number we use is an estimate, and we do not have any way to remove resident aliens or undocumented students from the eligible voter count. Colleges and universities can correct the problem of not being able to adjust for non-resident aliens by providing NRA data to the NSC.

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The IDHE Team (left to right):
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About IDHE

Part of Tufts University's Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) is an applied research center focused on college and university student political learning and engagement in democracy. IDHE researchers study student voting, equity, campus conditions for political learning, discourse, participation, and agency for underrepresented and marginalized students. We accomplish our goals by conducting research, producing practical resources, supporting institutions and the higher education community, and advocacy.

IDHE's signature initiative, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), is a service to colleges and universities that provides participating institutions with tailored reports of their students' voting rates. Launched in 2013 with 250 campuses, the study now serves more than 1,000 institutions in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. In addition to NSLVE, IDHE researches learning environments and practices of politically engaged campuses. From this line of study came Election Imperatives, a 2018 national report that offered practical reccommendations for campus civic learning. IDHE is now higher education's leading source of data and support for college student political learning and participation.

Learn more at *idhe.tufts.edu*.

About Tisch College

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life offers transformational student learning and service opportunities, conducts groundbreaking research on young people's civic and political participation, and forges innovative community partnerships at Tufts University and beyond. Tisch College's scholarship, which helps shape the national conversation on the role of young people in democracy, is spearheaded by two distinct but complementary research organizations, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE), and the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE).

Learn more at tischcollege.tufts.edu

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