Who votes in college?  
Student voter turnout and implications for higher education's role in strengthening democracy

Inger Bergom  
Adam Gismondi  
Nancy Thomas

Institute for Democracy and Higher Education  
Tisch College of Civic Life  
Tufts University  
Medford, MA
We study and work to improve...

College student voting
Campus conditions for political learning
Student political agency, discourse and equity
Classroom teaching for democracy
What is NSLVE?

Service to colleges and universities interested in learning about their students’ voting habits

National database for research on college student political learning and engagement in democracy
Why care about college student voting?

Higher education has been widely viewed as not only vocational training but preparation for “citizenry,” including “voting and participation in the formulation of public policy.” (Miller, 1988)

Voting an indication of how well higher education is doing to prepare citizens for living in a democracy
National Student Clearinghouse

Catalist (public voting records)

IPEDS

• 2012, 2014, 2016 U.S. general elections
• ~10 million student records per election year
• 1000+ institutions
• All 50 states
NSLVE STUDENT TURNOUT

Overall

2012: 45.1%
2016: 48.3%

+3.2%

+3

REGISTERATION

Registered

2012: 69.0%
2016: 70.6%

+1.6%
A closer look at turnout rates by...

Gender
Age
Race and ethnicity
Field of study
Gender gap stayed same: women voted more by +7 points in BOTH elections
First time eligible to vote in presidential election

NSLVE STUDENT TURNOUT BY AGE GROUP
NSLVE STUDENT TURNOUT BY RACE/ETHNICITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>+5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>-5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>+7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>+7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NSLVE STUDENT VOTE SHARE BY RACE & ETHNICITY

2012

- 69.1% White
- 14.5% Black
- 10.7% Hispanic
- 1.9% Asian
- 3.8% Other Race/Ethnicity

2016

- 63.3% White
- 12.7% Black
- 14.7% Hispanic
- 3.8% Asian
- 5.3% Other Race/Ethnicity

NSLVE STUDENT TURNOUT BY FIELD OF STUDY

- **Social Sciences**: 2012 - 49.7%, 2016 - 53.2%, Increase: +3.5%
- **Health Professions**: 2012 - 46.9%, 2016 - 50.9%, Increase: +4.0%
- **Humanities**: 2012 - 45.3%, 2016 - 49.2%, Increase: +3.9%
- **Business**: 2012 - 43.2%, 2016 - 45.7%, Increase: +2.5%
- **STEM**: 2012 - 40.8%, 2016 - 43.6%, Increase: +2.8%

CHANGE IN INSTITUTIONAL VOTING RATE FROM 2012 TO 2016

Number of institutions

NOTE: Institutions in bins with fewer than three institutions are not included.

Interested in more data?
Full national report available on IDHE website: https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve/2016
NSLVE interactive data portal
https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve/nslve-data-portal
Voting and Registration Rates

2016 Voting Rate: 45.9%
Change from 2012: 0.9
2016 Voting Rate for All Institutions: 50.4%

Registration Rate
- 2012: 72.4%
- 2016: 71.8%

Voting Rate of Registered Students
- 2012: 62.1%
- 2016: 64.0%

Voting Rate
- 2012: 45.0%
- 2016: 45.9%

Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total student enrollment</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total enrollment</td>
<td>7,105</td>
<td>5,573</td>
<td>-1,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate</td>
<td>(71%)</td>
<td>(58%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why are some institutions more (or less) politically and electorally engaged?

Campus Climate Research

[Graph showing positive and negative outliers]
Sample: Outlier voting rates

What are we seeing on these campuses?

@TuftsIDHE
Politics 365: Campus climates for political learning and engagement at outlier campuses
Strong social cohesion among diverse student populations

- Student well-being, strong interpersonal relationships, particularly student-faculty
- A sense of shared responsibility among students for each other and for the institution
- Compositional diversity used as an educational asset; cohesion across social and ideological diversity

© The Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, 2017
Discussion-based teaching, political discussions across campus

Prepared faculty and students

Balanced free expression and inclusion; academic freedom is a “given”
Student agency, power, and shared responsibility

- Students with positional authority
- Students respected for their views, with or without positional authority
- Strong student government association
Active political engagement

- Traditional political participation, election season “buzz”
- Issue activism and organizing, with or w/o government
- Nimble institutions, supportive faculty
✓ Social cohesion, strong student faculty relations
✓ Diversity and equity as intentional practice
✓ Pervasive political discussions
✓ Student voice and agency, institutional decision-making
✓ Student activism and electoral engagement

© The Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, 2017
What can NSLVE do for us?

• Wake up call to improve student political learning and engagement

• Tool for catalyzing change
Questions to Consider:

• How can NSLVE-based research be used to:
  • Increase voting?
  • Increase learning?
• What are the challenges and opportunities unique to your campus?
Join NSLVE

Thank you for your interest in the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE), a signature initiative of the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE). Signing up is free, easy, and completely protective of student privacy.

Institutions may join the study at any time. We cannot, however, immediately provide new participating institutions with voting data. At this time, we anticipate the next round of data processing will be in February 2018, with reports sent about three months later. We will update the website with any changes to that timeline. Please submit your authorization form by February 1st, 2018 to be part of the next data release. Institutions that sign up now will receive data for the 2012, 2014, and 2016 elections.

How to Join

To join NSLVE you have to submit a 2-page authorization form. The document must be signed by an authorized signatory on behalf of your institution. Typically, the signatory for a campus is a President, Vice President, Dean of the College, Dean of Students, Provost, Registrar, or Institutional Research Director, other leaders may be more appropriate signatories on your campus.

idhe.tufts.edu/nslve/join
Where do I find a report on the campus climate studies? [Here].

Is my campus participating in NSLVE? Look [here].

How do I obtain a copy of my campus report? Go [here].

Where do I go for other resources? Go [here].

To sign up for our newsletter, go [here].

For other questions please contact: idhe@tufts.edu

@TuftsIDHE