

Motivation Builds Student Voters, Who Broaden Culture:  
Assessing the Impact of Increased 2018 Youth Voting Across Tennessee

by

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## Acknowledgments

To my friends and family who have supported me through this year-long endeavor, thank you. All the long hours and tears of frustration are worth it because of the people who believed in me. Thank you so much.

I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Mary Evins, for not only her patience and guidance throughout my project but also for her dedication to increasing voter participation. Her passion for civic engagement is powerful.

Also, the work being done nationally, at the state level, and locally by student voter organizations, is remarkable, and I want to acknowledge their efforts on college and university campuses across Tennessee and the country.

As I write this, spring 2020, my campus, our state, our country, and the world are in the middle of a global pandemic and an unprecedented social and economic shutdown. Finishing this thesis project in these uncertain times has been so challenging. When my children and grandchildren read these words years from now, hopefully Covid-19 will be ancient history, a vaccination for it will protect the entire world, and the virus will be as archaic to them as polio and diphtheria are to me.

Meanwhile, there is a 2020 national election just months away, which will be a test of student civic engagement. Student voters need to vote in unprecedented numbers in these unprecedented times. Students, be passionate about your civic duty to vote. Do it! The health and well-being of our country and the entire world depend on your vote this fall. This thesis research shows that you're making great progress, but you still need to up your game! 100% student voting is the objective! The future is yours to take.

## Abstract

The 2018 midterm election marked a turning point in student voter participation nationwide and in Tennessee. Civic engagement organizations, advocating for civic learning as integral to university curricula, contributed educational programming and motivational resources to college campuses to teach for citizenship. Nationally, student voters turned out in unprecedented numbers, which contributed to a congressional power shift in the U.S. House of Representatives. Younger voters were part of a “blue wave” that swept much of the country. Tennessee also experienced a marked increase in students participating in voting in 2018, yet in contrast to the national progressive trend, Tennesseans elected conservatives by landslides, in which outcome the state’s youngest voters actively participated. However, Tennessee’s conservative student voters, even though adhering to the party politics of their parents, are progressive by many measures. What will shifting values and broadening culture mean for the future of southern politics?

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## Chapter 1

### What We Know About Youth Voting

#### Introduction

Since the ratification of the 26th Amendment, which granted 18-year-old citizens the right to vote, youth voter turnout has never reached its full potential. From the Vietnam War era forward, youth voting has been on a steady decline that reached a low plateau of poor voter participation in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> To combat the disengagement of American youth and counteract the downward trend in young people's voting, numerous civic learning and democratic engagement (CLDE) organizations and projects were started nationally to emphasize, and educate for, the critical importance of voting by America's youngest citizens, to proactively embed citizenship into American educational curricula, and to promote, in colleges and universities, civic learning across academic disciplines.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the long-term decline in youth voting, and perhaps as a direct

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<sup>1</sup> "The Decline in American Voter Turnout," *Bureau of the Census Statistical Brief*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistical Administration, Bureau of the Census, Nov. 1991, <https://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/voting/SB91-23.pdf>, accessed July 11, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> All In Campus Democracy Challenge (All In), <https://www.allinchallenge.org/>; American Democracy Project (ADP), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), <http://www.aascu.org/programs/ADP/>; The Democracy Commitment (TDC), American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), <http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/democracycommitment/>; Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, Bonner Scholars, <http://www.bonner.org/>; Campus Compact, <https://compact.org/>; Community Colleges for Democracy (CC4D), Campus Compact, [https://compact.org/communitycolleges/#1530885882367\\_66de595b-37be](https://compact.org/communitycolleges/#1530885882367_66de595b-37be) (see also, "Introducing TDC Initiative for Community Colleges," Campus Compact,

result of the recent national initiatives promoting young-citizen engagement, in the 2018 midterm elections, exit polling data analyzed by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University show that youth voting increased by 15% nationwide in 2018, an unprecedented and encouraging rise in midterm election participation.<sup>3</sup> Tennessee, historically one of the lowest states for 18-25-year-old voter turnout, was speculated also to have a drastic increase.<sup>4</sup>

In the past 10-15 years, studies show a dramatic move to the left among youth voters.<sup>5</sup> With the increase in youth voting in the 2018 election, it was no surprise when the Democrats were able to retake the House of Representatives and gain seats in both branches of the United States Congress. However, Tennessee remained a thoroughly red state subsequent to November 2018, excluding the state's urban areas such as Davidson,

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<https://compact.org/campus-compact-launches-democracy-commitment/>); Campus Election Engagement Project (CEEP), <https://campuselect.org/>; Campus Vote Project, <http://campusvoteproject.org/> and its Voter Friendly Campus initiative (VFC), <https://www.voterfriendlycampus.org/>; Civic Nation, <https://civicionation.org/>; Fair Elections Center (FEC), <https://www.fairelectionscenter.org/>; Andrew Goodman Foundation, <https://andrewgoodman.org/>; NextGen America, <https://nextgenamerica.org/>; Project Pericles, <http://www.projectpericles.org/projectpericles/>; Rock the Vote, <https://www.rockthevote.org/>; Scholars Strategy Network (SSN), <https://scholars.org/>; Students Learn Students Vote (SLSV), <https://www.studentslearnstudentsvote.org/>; Young Invincibles (YI), <https://younginvincibles.org/>; accessed Feb. 12, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> "Youth Voting," Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University, <https://civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/>, accessed July 29, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> "Early and Absentee Voting," Target Smart, <https://targetearly.targetsmart.com>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Fred M. Shelley and Ashley M. Hitt, "The Millennial Vote in the 2016 Democratic Primary Elections," *Southeastern Geographer* 56, no. 3 (2016): 273-82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26233801>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019.

Knox, and Shelby counties.<sup>6</sup> Taking into account the significant increase in 18-25-year-old voting nationally and the national shift to the left among the younger demographics across the country, how can the continuation of Republican dominance in the state of Tennessee be explained?

Religious roots run deep in Tennessee, and the power of conservative rhetoric holds students tightly to their Republican allegiance and upbringing. However, students are surrounded by a more tolerant culture that has shifted normative social ideology both for young Democrats and for young Republicans. Despite their tendency to vote Republican, young Tennessee voters are creating a new vision for their party's future. Any political climate transforms with its constituency. When students are more engaged, their elected representatives better reflect their beliefs. Therefore, as civic engagement organizations accomplish their goals of motivating students to get to the polls, Tennessee will inevitably see a reconstruction of its political culture even without a marked leftward shift of its party politics.

## Youth Voting in the United States

### Background

The American political system, at its foundation, encourages civic participation of all voting-age citizens. However, the lack of civic learning from elementary through secondary education has discouraged the immersion of youth political engagement. Some

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<sup>6</sup> “Live Election Results from Tennessee for 2018 Midterm Elections,” *Tennessean*, Nov. 7, 2018, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/tn-elections/2018/11/06/live-voting-results-tennessee-election-2018-midterms/1734565002/>, accessed July 29, 2019.

political scientists claim that young people are still children, not yet mature enough to make informed or logical decisions, and so the implementation of civics and civic learning curricula at a young age is frivolous.<sup>7</sup> In the wake of ratifying the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment permitting voting at age 18, there was a call for schools to reexamine the way they taught civics and civic engagement. Once high school seniors were eligible to become voters, there was pressure on educators to change their curriculum.<sup>8</sup> For the first two decades in the 1900s, schools limited social science to exclusively European and American history. As the political climate changed into the middle 20<sup>th</sup> century, more civic concepts were adopted, and once students had a say in the electorate, civic education became a part of everyday curriculum.<sup>9</sup> Despite educational obstacles, young activists have always found a way to contribute to their communities. From the Bohemian youth of the early 1900s to the student activists of the Civil Rights movement,<sup>10</sup> from draft-card burning onto March for our Lives, youth activists have spearheaded social movements for a century.

At the end of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s, the Vietnam War was still in full conflict in southeast Asia, and young men of the United States were being drafted left

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<sup>7</sup> Maria de los Angeles Torres, Irene Rizzini, and Norma Del Río, “Civically Engaged Youth,” in *Citizens in the Present: Youth Civic Engagement in the Americas* (Champaign-Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2013), 1-28, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt2tt9qt.6>, accessed Aug. 20, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Jack R. Frymier, “This Issue,” *Theory Into Practice* 10, no. 5 (1971): 315, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476135>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Wayne C. Malone, “Civic Education,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 46, no. 2 (1968): 110-14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1491074>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Randolph Bourne, “Youth,” *Atlantic Monthly* (Apr. 1912); David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998).

and right to fight in a less-than-popular war. About sixty percent of the war's casualties were soldiers under the age of twenty-one, who held immense responsibilities overseas but had no say in the political climate back at home.<sup>11</sup> While young women were not directly involved in the war at that point in U.S. history, their everyday lives were affected as their husbands, brothers, and fathers were in the line of duty.<sup>12</sup> With this reality very much in the front of American minds, the U.S. Congress voted in March of 1971 to amend the national Constitution, lowering the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen and opening the polls to around twenty-five million potential new voters.<sup>13</sup> In 1972, the first younger-voter-inclusive national election received around fifty percent participation from youth voters.<sup>14</sup> After the Watergate scandal, however, lots of young voters lost confidence in the U.S. system of governance, and the percentage of young people who voted decreased by close to eight percent. While non-college youth voters have been the most reliable advocates for GOP policy, the post-Watergate political

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<sup>11</sup> "Sobering Statistics Concerning Vietnam Vets as of April 2016," <https://www.usna63.org/tradition/history/SoberingVietnamVets.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Lyons, "Vietnam," in *Class of '66: Living in Suburban Middle America* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1994), 72-102, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bsv09.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bsv09.7), accessed Apr. 20, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Dan Kubiak, "Youth and Their Vote: A New Day Is Coming," *Theory into Practice* 10, no. 5 (1971): 321-22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476137>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019; Amy Sayward, "Student and Veteran Leadership in the Fight for the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment," Honors Lecture Series, University Honors College, Middle Tennessee State University, Nov. 11, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Thom File, "Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964-2012," United States Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce (Apr. 2014), <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p20-573.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

climate took momentum away from the youth vote's expected high turnout.<sup>15</sup> The decrease in Republican-youth voting continued until the Reagan era, when youth voting attained a plateau of low voter participation that remained largely steady until 2018.<sup>16</sup>

### Ideology

In 2018, students across the country lined up at the polls to cast their votes for House and Senate representation. Their 2018 ballots verified an incredible and historic nationwide preference for Democratic candidates, with sixty-seven percent of the youth vote going to Democrats in the interim-year election.<sup>17</sup>

Youth voting and student voting are not synonymous. When those two categories are studied together, misleading generalizations can be incorrectly fronted. Within the demographic of 18-29 year olds lie multiple subcategories that separate youth voters by race, religion, economic standing, and other defining variables. For example, we know that there is a perceived leftward shift in the thinking of Millennials and Gen Z—some of

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<sup>15</sup> Seth Blumenthal, "From Watergate to Reagan," *Children of the Silent Majority: Young Voters and the Rise of the Republican Party, 1868-1972* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 2018), 218-62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv80ccsk.12>, accessed Oct. 23, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "Election Night 2018: Historically High Youth Turnout, Support for Democrats," Nov. 7, 2018, <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/election-night-2018-historically-high-youth-turnout-support-democrats>, accessed Mar. 20, 2020; File, "Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964–2012."

<sup>17</sup> "Youth Voting," Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), <https://civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/>; Alec Tyson, "The 2018 Midterm Vote: Division by Race, Gender, Education," Pew Research Center (Nov. 8, 2018), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/08/the-2018-midterm-vote-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019; "2018 Election Center," <http://circle.tufts.edu/2018-election-center>, accessed Mar. 21, 2020.

whom are still of student age, as the two generation-brackets include adults born between 1981-present<sup>18</sup>—in reaction to the current political climate. Youth voters represent a progressive movement that is apparent on many social media platforms and through participation in rallies such as the Women’s Marches and March for Our Lives that were highly supported by young activists. However, throughout history, attempts by both the left and the right to influence, capture, and motivate the youth vote have produced a continuous battle between the political parties and have caused great divides in the youth demographic. Hot-button issues like abortion sway white evangelical Christian youth away from alignment left with their age group and create a hub for student conservatives who focus their energy on issues and political objectives that advance their religious beliefs.<sup>19</sup> Evangelical conservative youth make apparent that generalizations that assume all Millennials and Gen Z’ers embrace the left are not consistent across young Americans.

However, in the same way a hub was created in recent years for evangelical youth to cluster around ideologically right-leaning objectives, hubs for immigrant voters and voters of color have also been identified.<sup>20</sup> If immigrant and nonwhite groups are only a

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<sup>18</sup> Michele Debczack, “Revised Guidelines Redefine Birth Years and Classifications for Gen X, Millennials, and Generation Z” (Dec. 6, 2019), <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/609811/age-ranges-millennials-and-generation-z>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Penny Edgell, “An Agenda for Research on American Religion in Light of the 2016 Election,” *Sociology of Religion* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 1-8, <https://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/78/1/1/3076869>, accessed July 29, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Hooghe and Ruth Dassonneville, “Explaining the Trump Vote: The Effect of Racist Resentment and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments,” *Political Science and Politics* 51, no. 3 (July 2018): 528-34, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science->

percentage of the youth voters, how markedly can they affect elections? Evangelicals, proselytizing Christians whose main objective is to bring salvation through Christ to nonbelievers, are a large group of youth voters. When looking at the map of the U.S., there is a high concentration of evangelical Christians located in the southern sector of the country. While the conservative youth vote may not heavily impact the large youth

### White evangelical Protestants (17 states)

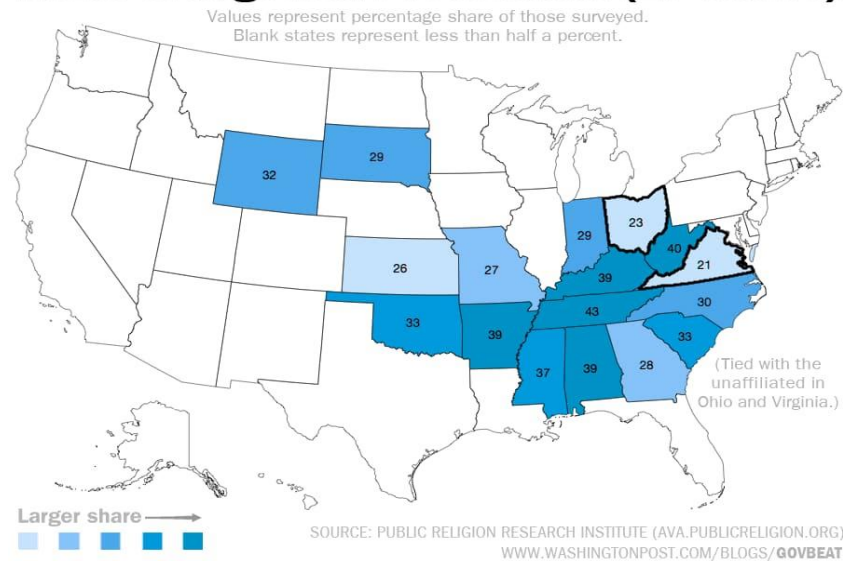


Figure 1. U.S. states with large evangelical populations. (Reprinted from Niraj Chokshi, “The Religious States of America, in 22 Maps,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 26, 2015.)

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[and-politics/article/explaining-the-trump-vote-the-effect-of-racist-resentment-and-antiimmigrant-sentiments/537A8ABA46783791BFF4E2E36B90C0BE](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/2019/07/29/and-politics/article/explaining-the-trump-vote-the-effect-of-racist-resentment-and-antiimmigrant-sentiments/537A8ABA46783791BFF4E2E36B90C0BE), accessed July 29, 2019.



vote nationally, it does affect voting outcomes in a significant portion of the United States—in southern and Midwestern states (see fig. 1).<sup>21</sup>

### Political Influences

The first and most important influences in a person’s life are one’s parents or guardians. Early childhood experiences lay the foundation for religious, political, and moral allegiance. When reaching adulthood, new voters have to consider all their foundational beliefs as well as the new social factors with which they are coming into contact when they leave home and begin lives on their own, such as going away to college. Social scientists have found that even during these changing times in a young person’s life, the instilled values of childhood rarely deviate very far.<sup>22</sup> Childhood experiences affect the potential political ideology of young adults. For example, southern students who grew up as conservative Christians will most likely continue to support the Republican party of their parents into adulthood because of the GOP ties to the conservative theology of their growing-up years.<sup>23</sup> Although this is not always the case, politically red southern states in the Bible belt generally support the tendency.

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<sup>21</sup> Niraj Chokshi, “The Religious States of America, in 22 Maps,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 26, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/the-religious-states-of-america-in-22-maps/?utm\\_term=.35ba4b8c8324](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/govbeat/wp/2015/02/26/the-religious-states-of-america-in-22-maps/?utm_term=.35ba4b8c8324), accessed July 29, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Kevin B. Smith, John R. Alford, John R. Hibbing, Nicholas G. Martin, and Peter K. Hatemi, “Intuitive Ethics and Political Orientations: Testing Moral Foundations as a Theory of Political Ideology,” *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2017): 424-37, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26384741>, accessed Aug. 22, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Angela Denker, “The Evangelical Intelligentsia: What about ‘Establishment’ Christians?,” in *Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters Who Elected Donald*

Reflexive morals, which represent generational views on society, also play a crucial role in youth voting. As more people immigrate into the United States and as social media become increasingly more popular, young adults have had to start searching in more modern places for understanding the multifaceted political climate.<sup>24</sup> Since the 1990s, media journalism has become a forum for political information. Before social media and the explosion of the internet, broadcast and print media provided most of the political knowledge obtained by Americans who were the readers and viewers of the previous era of news consumption. Television often receives blame for the apparent decline in political awareness. In the mid-1990s, some researchers attributed knowledgeable voters to newspaper reading, versus their lack of knowledge to television consumption.<sup>25</sup>

Now, TV skeptics have moved their focus to social media journalism. The purpose of the media is to be a bulwark between citizens and political power, a role that is an essential feature of a democratic society.<sup>26</sup> Critics are concerned that news outlets

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*Trump* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2019), 147-66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvcb59v0.10>, accessed Aug. 22, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> Marisa A. Abrajano and R. Michael Alvarez, "Political Knowledge, Efficacy, and Awareness," *New Faces, New Voices: The Hispanic Electorate in America* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 102-24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sdnj.8>, accessed Aug. 24, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Jeffery J. Mondak, "Newspapers and Political Awareness," *American Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 2 (1995): 513-27, [doi:10.2307/2111623](https://doi.org/10.2307/2111623), accessed Aug. 24, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Philip van Praag, "Politics and Media," in *Political Science and Changing Politics* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2017), 201-24, [doi:10.2307/j.ctt1zqrmq0.13](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zqrmq0.13), accessed Aug. 24, 2019; William H. McRaven, "There is nothing more important to a democracy than an active and engaged press," quoted in Kristine Phillips, "'Greatest Threat to Democracy': Commander of Bin Laden Raid

have stopped emphasizing traditional journalistic values and have replaced them with simply entertainment. Since the internet has become a powerful platform full of information, it can be challenging for average news consumers to decipher what is real and what is fabricated. For certain is that the internet has rallying capabilities and can contribute to political activism.<sup>27</sup>

### Turnout

Voting among young people is more complicated than just whether or not the age-range as a whole does or does not turn out to vote. Demographically, there are numerous variables to consider within the category of “student voters.” Tufts University provides an analysis of data on student voting across the United States in what is known as the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).<sup>28</sup> Tufts researchers analyze universities’ student populations, counting how many enrolled students within schools’ student bodies register to vote, how many actually do vote in any specific election, and how many do neither. In an anonymized meta-analysis, Tufts compares states’ Secretary of State public-record voting data, based on Social Security numbers, to National Student Clearinghouse higher education student enrollment data, also based on

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Slams Trump’s Anti-media Sentiment,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 24, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2017/02/23/greatest-threat-to-democracy-commander-of-bin-laden-raid-slams-trumps-anti-media-sentiment/>, accessed Mar. 11, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Clay Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change,” *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2011): 28-41, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800379>, accessed Aug. 24, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> “NSLVE Report,” Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, <https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve>, accessed July 29, 2019.

Social Security numbers, to determine exact counts of students registered to vote and exact counts of student voters for every university or college that signs up to participate in the NSLVE study (at no cost to the school). Tufts provides a unique NSLVE report to each participating institution of higher education, breaking down its students' voting behaviors, differentiating gender, age of voter, area of study, undergraduate v. graduate, and other variables and categories of assessment. And, overall, Tufts combines all the national data from every participating college and university into an overarching synthesis of U.S. student voting patterns, viewed as a whole. For the 2016 presidential election, this overall study is titled *Democracy Counts: A Report on U.S. College and University Student Voting*.<sup>29</sup>

Assessing 2016 voting, the national NSLVE meta-report *Democracy Counts* included a comparison to the previous presidential election in 2012, looking at numerous variables, as represented in figures 2-5:

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<sup>29</sup> Nancy Thomas, Inger Bergom, Ishara Casellas Connors, Prabhat Gautam, Adam Gismondi, and Alena Roshko, *Democracy Counts: A Report on U.S. College and University Student Voting* (Medford, Mass.: National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts Univ., 2017), <https://idhe.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/NSLVE%20Report%202012-2016-092117%5B3%5D.pdf>, accessed Aug. 26, 2019.

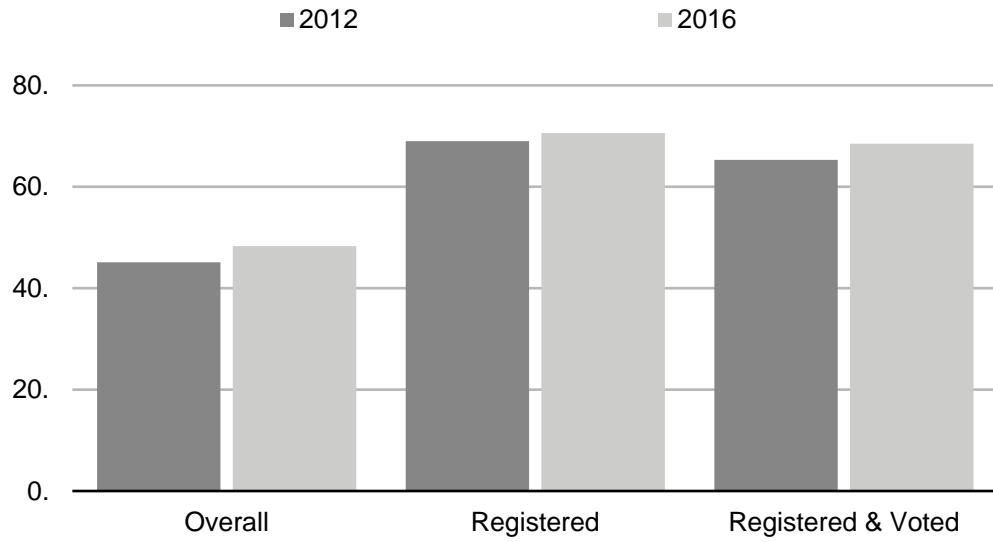


Figure 2. Student voting increased slightly in 2016 v. 2012  
(Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*, 6).

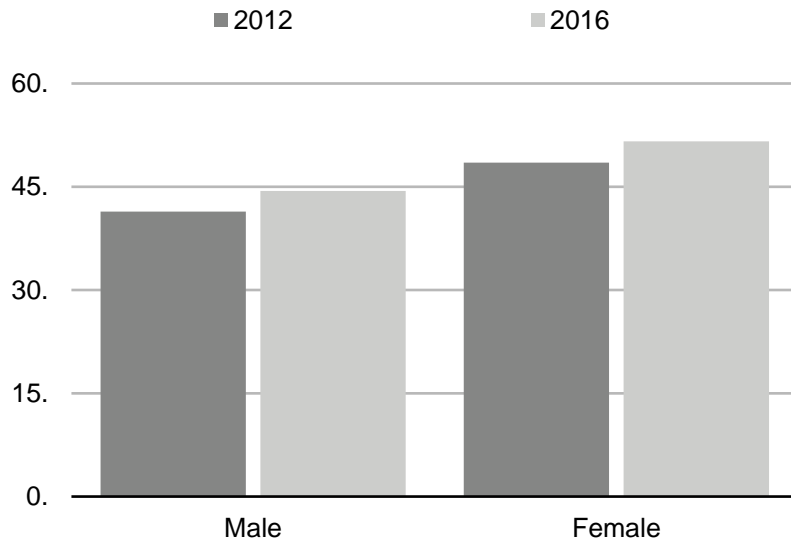


Figure 3. Both male and female student voting increased in 2016 by 3%  
(Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*, 7).

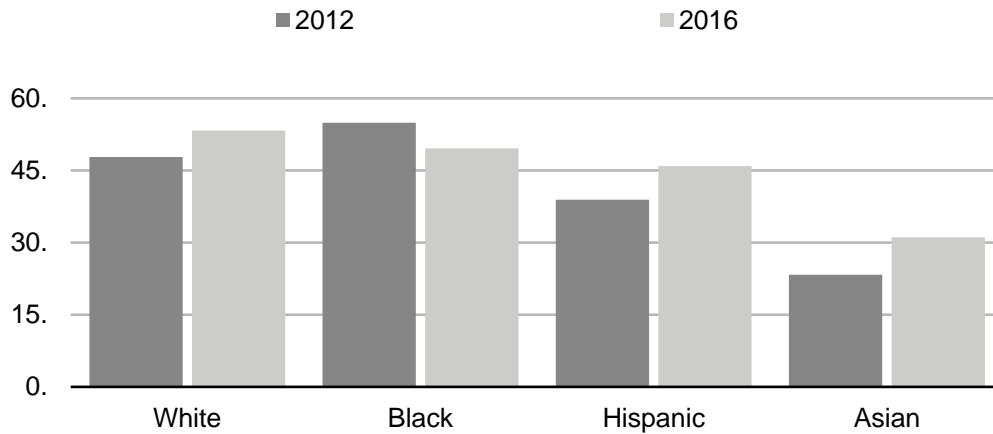


Figure 4. Student voting increased in all racial demographics in 2016, except for African American voters. While most racial groups (white, Hispanic, and Asian) saw an increase of 5-7%, African American voter turnout decreased by the same margin, likely due to overall dislike of both candidates in 2016 and less enthusiasm after Obama’s administration (Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*, 8).

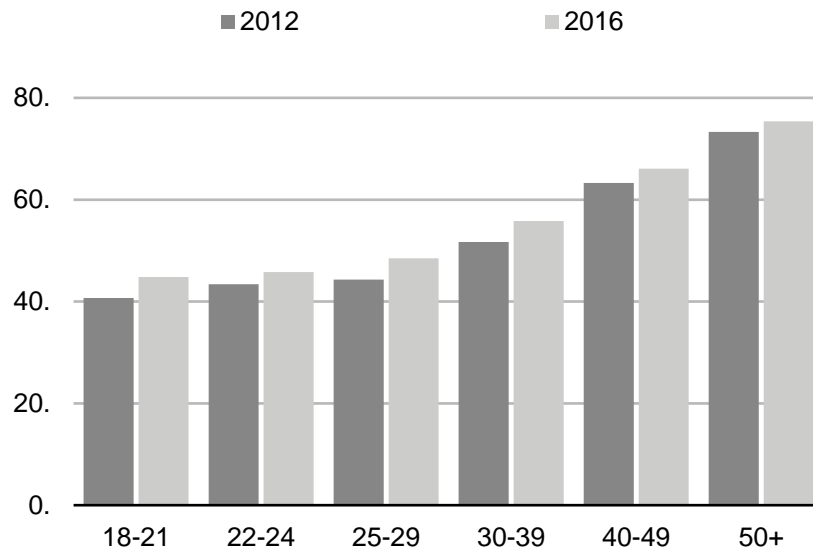


Figure 5. Student voting by age in 2016 v. 2012 presidential election data, in which youth voting consistently increased, headed in the right direction, but 18-29-year-old voting has never breached 55% (Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*, 9).

## Social Class

Socio-economic class and financial resources are two notable factors in voter participation. Young people from low-income backgrounds tend to be less inclined to participate in politics due to an absence of access to information.<sup>30</sup> In most places, public schools have struggled to establish basic civic engagement programs but the emphasis on civic learning remains largely non-existent.<sup>31</sup> Afterschool programs that encourage civic-minded behavior have also dwindled to a mere few.<sup>32</sup> Because of limited funding and low priority in marginalized communities, some individual districts are functionally left out of political conversations that directly affect their communities. In spite of being arguably some of the most politically impacted and needy areas, they are often overlooked in policy discussion. Affected youth are more worried about survival than civic activity.

All of this is in contrast to children with access to good afterschool programming. They are more likely to wind up more civically involved. Organizations ranging anywhere from faith-based affiliations to school teams to community-oriented clubs can help promote community engagement and have direct, positive impact on voter participation.<sup>33</sup> The class status of the family is another contributing factor. Young adults who come from more stable-income or well-off backgrounds have a higher chance of

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<sup>30</sup> Laura Wray-Lake and Daniel Hart, "Growing Social Inequalities in Youth Civic Engagement? Evidence from the National Election Study," *Political Science and Politics* 45, no. 3 (2012): 456-61, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41691361>, accessed Aug. 14, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Wray-Lake and Hart, "Growing Social Inequalities."

<sup>32</sup> Wray-Lake and Hart, "Growing Social Inequalities."

<sup>33</sup> Constance Flanagan and Peter Levine, "Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood," *The Future of Children* 20, no. 1 (2010): 159-79, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27795064>, accessed Aug. 20, 2019.

becoming socially and politically aware. In contrast, for those from households whose parents have to struggle every day to put food on the table, civic engagement is not a top priority. The discrepancy in socioeconomic well-being results in yet another divide in youth voting.<sup>34</sup>

### Mobility

Student voting organizations face multiple challenges that contribute to the lack of student voter participation. Initially, research done on participation was concerned with demographic discrepancies, i.e., race, gender, class affiliation, and socioeconomic disparities, but newer studies have found that the tendency of college students to vote is contingent on more than only biological and demographic variables. Most college students share similar circumstances of position in society relative to their education: they as a cohort have not finished their educations and most work relatively low-paying jobs. While demographic differences can and do affect students' voter participation, students are perhaps even more stifled by differing motivational factors, such as time, distance, and adequate knowledge.<sup>35</sup> Students have to want to get to the polls, and they have to override the obstacles that impede them in order to do so.

After observing the slight rise in student voting between the two most recent presidential elections, it is safe to say that the work of civic engagement organizations is

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<sup>34</sup> Flanagan and Levine, "Civic Engagement and the Transition to Adulthood."

<sup>35</sup> Richard G. Niemi and Michael J. Hanmer, "Voter Turnout Among College Students: New Data and a Rethinking of Traditional Theories," *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (2010): 301-23, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42956403>, accessed Aug. 22, 2019.



paying off. The initiative to get students out to vote has taken several different approaches based on the results of polling done across college campuses.<sup>36</sup> Commonly given excuses for not voting were students' struggles against time restraints, transportation limitations, and simply not knowing how to cast a vote.

*Not knowing how to vote*

In 2006, There was a controlled experiment conducted across 16 different college campuses: some campuses continued without voter registration seminars, some held professor-led workshops, and others undertook student-led initiatives.<sup>37</sup> In the end, the study found that universities with professor-led workshops had an increase of nearly 3% in election participation. Simple steps such as encouragement and education across different fields of study have shown to improve voter registration and turnout.<sup>38</sup> Organizations like the American Democracy Project, All in Challenge, Campus Election Engagement Project, Student Vote Students Learn, and many others have made it their

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<sup>36</sup> John Holbein, "Why So Many Young People Don't Vote—And How to Change That," Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia, [batten.virginia.edu/about/news/why-so-many-young-people-dont-vote-and-how-change](https://batten.virginia.edu/about/news/why-so-many-young-people-dont-vote-and-how-change), accessed Mar. 20, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth A. Bennion and David W. Nickerson, "I Will Register and Vote, If You Teach Me How: A Field Experiment Testing Voter Registration in College Classrooms," *Political Science and Politics* 49, no. 4 (Oct. 2016): 867-71, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/i-will-register-and-vote-if-you-teach-me-how-a-field-experiment-testing-voter-registration-in-college-classrooms/2752048B2D7F6E703553306C5EF8AB4D/core-reader>, accessed July 29, 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Bennion and Nickerson, "I Will Register and Vote, If You Teach Me How."

mission to educate and register student voters and to create a community filled with active voters.

*Time constraints*

Students have made it clear that iterating among class, jobs, family obligations, and their social lives leaves them little time to become properly informed about social and economic issues, which can be difficult for them. In most cases, scheduling is controlled by guardians for young people's first eighteen years. During the four years of college, students are learning firsthand about time management, but it's a learned skill that has to be practiced and most colleges find it to be one of the most difficult tasks for their students to learn.<sup>39</sup> They learn it as they mature; they learn it through failures; they learn it through trial and error. So properly allocating time for voting, which may seem like second nature to most adults, can be poorly handled by young citizens. Without an emphasis on these issues on their college campuses and in their studies, enthusiasm about participating in elections can fail to adequately filter into students' daily lives. To address this need, voting organizations have taken on "make voting fun" initiatives. Activities including block parties with voter registration booths, group hikes to the polls, and parties

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<sup>39</sup> Alexander Häfner, Armin Stock, Lydia Pinneker, and Sabine Ströhle, "Stress Prevention through a Time Management Training Intervention: An Experimental Study," *Educational Psychology* 34, no. 3 (2014): 403-16, [doi:10.1080/01443410.2013.785065](https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2013.785065), accessed Mar. 21, 2020.

at the polls have enticed students to learn more about the current political climate and become more directly involved.<sup>40</sup>

### *Travel difficulties*

One of the biggest obstacles for students can be the inconvenience of polling locations. The lack of transportation to and the distance away from polls deter student voters, many of whom live in dorms and do not have cars. Students who live out of state or hours away from their hometowns can find it almost impossible to make it back to their assigned voting locations in time to vote. Absentee ballots are an option but require multiple steps and are often confusing to obtain, carry out without error, and return in proper time. Since casting an absentee ballot has proven to be difficult, students tend to avoid them. Students may neither know they can register where they go to university nor how to vote in the county of the college where they reside. Activists all over the United States have been pushing state legislatures to provide polling places on college campuses.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Kalia Philo, "To Increase Voter Turnout, Make Voting Fun," *Washington Monthly*, Nov. 3, 2018, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2018/11/03/to-increase-voter-turnout-make-voting-fun/>, accessed Mar. 20, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel R. Biggers and Michael J. Hanmer, "Who Makes Voting Convenient? Explaining the Adoption of Early and No-Excuse Absentee Voting in the American States," *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2015): 192-210, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24643829>, accessed July 30, 2019; "Bringing the Voting Place to Students on 2 Rutgers Campuses," *New York Times*, Nov. 2, 1994, D23, [http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/apps/doc/A174482815/AONE?u=tel\\_middleten&sid=AONE&xid=5658c573](http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/apps/doc/A174482815/AONE?u=tel_middleten&sid=AONE&xid=5658c573), <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/02/us/bringing-the-voting-place-to-students-on-2-rutgers-campuses.html>, accessed Mar. 11, 2020.

The motivation to overcome these three types of recurring motivational obstacles is the focus of civic learning advocates and organizations nationwide, which has led them to create campus clubs that encourage students to become more educated, active citizens. By implementing voter registration booths across many campus locations, introducing civic engagement seminars in classes, and advertising voter participation around campus, college faculty, staff, administration, and fellow students are working to educate students about their civic responsibilities, to bridge the gap between students and voting.<sup>42</sup>

#### Non-student Voters

College-educated citizens are more likely to be civically engaged after graduation from university, but during youth voters' late-teens to early 20s, there is not much discrepancy or difference between student v. non-student voting turnout.<sup>43</sup> Outside of their pretty reliable support for Republicans in the 1970s, data on non-students' party affiliation are limited. Of whichever party, non-students vote about as often as their student counterparts, researchers have found. Non-students' reasons for not voting seem to follow trends similar to students' explanations. Non-student youth voters have a hard time obtaining transportation to the polls, they too find the times that polling locations are

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<sup>42</sup> Stacy G. Ulbig and Tamara Waggener, "Getting Registered and Getting to the Polls: The Impact of Voter Registration Strategy and Information Provision on Turnout of College Students," *Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 3 (2011): 544-51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41319769>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> "Why Youth Don't Vote—Differences by Race and Education," CIRCLE, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, Tufts University, Aug. 21, 2018, <https://civicyouth.org/why-youth-dont-vote-differences-by-race-and-education>, accessed July 30, 2019.

open to be inconvenient to their work schedules, and they too lack full knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

Motivational factors limit them as well as the college-going cohort.

Another reason, though, for lack of voter turnout among non-student youth is the absence of opportunity for civic engagement because they are outside of campus life.

While programs are popping up around college campuses to encourage and assist student voters in making it to the polls, fewer programs have targeted the working-class youth vote, so the support that college students have in being assisted by civic learning and civic engagement groups is largely not available to the off-campus youth cohort.<sup>45</sup>

#### Overview

Throughout history, students have stood at the front lines of social change. However, within the past 45 years, they have not really led the charge to the polls. Young voters have yet to be adequately mobilized to bring broad change to the electorate despite their overwhelming support for one party. Researchers have studied various biological and socioeconomic factors as explanations for this disparity, but in the end, it is situational issues that have proven the hardest to overcome. From a lack of civic education to a lack of political knowhow, it is fatal unawareness that has kept youth voting from reaching its full potential.

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<sup>44</sup> “Why Youth Don't Vote—Differences by Race and Education.”

<sup>45</sup> Michelle L. Frisco, Chandra Muller, and Kyle Dodson, “Participation in Voluntary Youth-Serving Associations and Early Adult Voting Behavior,” *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2004): 660-76, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42955966>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019.

By stationing themselves on campuses, at concerts, and in various other locations frequented by the targeted youth demographic, pro-voting advocates and organizations have heightened their chances for discussions with youth voters about youth voting. The opportunities to engage students about their civic responsibilities have to be taken advantage of by voting organizations in whatever capacities are presented to them. For example, HeadCount is an organization that sends volunteers to concerts to spend time registering concert-goers to vote. This organization has managed to register over 60,000 new voters in recent years through its location-focused voter registration drives.<sup>46</sup>

Encouraging civic responsibility by maximizing civic opportunities on campuses, at both colleges and high schools alike, is a fundamental part of the student voting movement. In order to mobilize youth and marginalized voters, civic education has to be prioritized in every area of the country, which is the proactive position taken by former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor who founded the organization iCivics for nationwide civics education advocacy.<sup>47</sup> When civics education and U.S. government courses are included in required curriculum, students at all levels of study show improvement in their basic understanding of the way democratic societies and processes function.<sup>48</sup> Also, “civic learning across the disciplines”—integrating some aspect of civic

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<sup>46</sup> HeadCount, <https://www.headcount.org>, accessed Aug. 24, 2019; “Voter Turnout Rates Among All Ages and Major Racial and Ethnic Groups Were Higher Than 2014,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html>, accessed Aug. 24, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> iCivics, <https://www.icivics.org/>, accessed Mar. 12, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Leonard Champney and Paul Edleman, “Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in United States Government Courses,” *Political Science and Politics* 43, no. 1 (2010): 127-31, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25699307>, accessed Aug. 24, 2019.

learning into all curricular materials, into every course, into every discipline—is the clear objective of the national civic learning movement.<sup>49</sup> The new, broad, expansive application of civic learning develops public understanding. The former days of just political science and just history majors getting civics education are over. In universities, civic learning must be for every student, from aerospace to animal science, entrepreneurship to elementary ed, French to fashion merchandising, theater to tourism management, math to mechatronics, accounting to nursing to video production and everything in between.

The results of the 2018 election show the power of youth voting. American youth come from a more tolerant culture than did their parents. As students become more civically involved, elected representation in Congress echoes the impact and influence of young people’s votes. Working toward greater engagement in civics education, civic organizations hope that more students will become more knowledgeable about voting, feel more empowered to fight against time and location restrictions, and increase their voter turnout, the way they did in the 2018 midterm election. Over time, with increased student engagement, election results will inevitably produce a significant change in the political climate.

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<sup>49</sup> Caryn McTighe Musil, *Civic Prompts: Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2015), <https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/CLDE/CivicPrompts.pdf>, accessed Aug. 24, 2019; National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy’s Future* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2012), [https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/crucible/Crucible\\_508F.pdf](https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/crucible/Crucible_508F.pdf), accessed Aug. 24, 2019.

## Chapter 2

### History of Voting in the South

Since the framers signed the U.S. Constitution in 1787, the ever-present fight for universal suffrage has maintained relevancy into the current political climate. From abolition of slavery to the women's suffrage movement to students' rights advocates, men and women have stood on the front lines using their voices to fight for democracy. The ceaseless battle resulted in the ratification of three key amendments: the Fifteenth, voting rights for African American men, 1870; the Nineteenth, voting rights to women, 1920; and the Twenty-sixth, voting age lowered to age eighteen, 1971.

Previous to the ratification of any of these amendments, white male suffrage—that had become, in state by state changes, available broadly to non-landholding white men in addition to the landed gentry—served the antebellum South with a booming economy and an abundance of political influence. In the wake of the formation of the Confederacy and southern shots fired on the federal naval base in Charleston in 1861, the entire country faced incredible challenges. Social changes of great magnitude spurred increased regional division across the United States. As the North and South separated, several border states, whose voters had split interests, found themselves in the middle of the political conflict.

When the state government of Tennessee posed the secession question, Tennesseans had an important decision to make. Voters on the plains of West Tennessee and the rolling hills of Middle Tennessee were in favor of secession, while voters in the mountains of East Tennessee maintained loyalty to the Union. The geographical



distinction between Appalachian eastern Tennessee and the slave-holding Middle and West gave East Tennesseans a different perspective about the economic upsets involved in losing trade routes to the bigger cities in the wake of secession.<sup>50</sup> However, eventually the East conceded and Tennessee as a whole became the last state to join the Confederacy.

After the Civil War, Tennessee struggled to find its place in an economy torn between agriculture and industry. The state government scrambled to create a new system that included African American citizens and ratified a new constitution in the 1870s,<sup>51</sup> which was followed by a drastic change in political climate. While the combination of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments guaranteed citizenship and voting rights for African American men and prohibited any denial or abridgment of those rights, the Supreme Court picked away at the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment until the formerly Confederate states were allowed to pass legislation that instituted discriminatory practices and prohibited most African American citizens from casting their ballots. Capstoned by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* “separate but equal” U.S. Supreme Court decision, southern legislatures opened floodgates of *de jure* racist

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<sup>50</sup> John D. Fowler, “‘We Can Never Live in a Southern Confederacy’: The Civil War in East Tennessee,” in *Sister States, Enemy States: The Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee*, eds. Kent T. Dollar, Larry H. Whiteaker, and W. Calvin Dickinson (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2009), 97-120, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcnrc.9>, accessed Sept. 17, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> “Restoring White Supremacy in the Post-Civil War South,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 59 (2008): 87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25073912>, accessed Sept. 18, 2019; “1870 Constitution,” Tennessee Virtual Archive, <https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/tfd/id/584/>, accessed Oct. 1, 2019.

discriminatory legislation, including the passage of southern disenfranchisement laws all across southern states.<sup>52</sup>

The history of such laws began with the divide over political power. By the 1880s, Democrats were beginning to regain political dominance in many southern parts of the United States and in order to secure their lead, Democratic party operatives—former Confederates—pulled overt tricks on election night to rig the outcomes, such as not counting every vote or sending black voters home.<sup>53</sup> When these practices were eventually tried in court as voter fraud, Democratic party leaders began to visit the idea of preventative legislation to curtail the black vote.<sup>54</sup> These proactive, discriminatory laws aggressively targeted the African American vote but, in turn, also, limited the number of voters overall who could participate. Simultaneously, laws that reduced access to the ballot—such as literacy requirements and confusing ballot boxes—impacted many poor white voters as well, eliminating their ability to vote. Southern state legislatures then had

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<sup>52</sup> W.J.F, “The Disintegration of a Concept: State Action under the 14th and 15th Amendments,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 96, no. 3 (Feb. 1948): 402-14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3309475?seq=1>, accessed Mar. 12, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Virginia E. Hench, “The Death of Voting Rights: The Legal Disenfranchisement of Minority Voters,” *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 48, no. 4 (Summer 1998), 727-98, <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2224&context=caselrev>, accessed Oct. 2, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> *Dortch v. State*, Justia US Law, <https://law.justia.com/cases/tennessee/court-of-criminal-appeals/1985/705-s-w-2d-687-0.html>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019; Connie L. Lester, “Disenfranchising Laws,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/disfranchising-laws/>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019.

to pass even more pointed caveat laws to protect illiterate whites while blocking access by blacks.<sup>55</sup>

With the U.S. Supreme Court determined to keep racial voting laws under jurisdiction of the states, the national focus shifted to female suffrage in the early twentieth century. Toward the end of Reconstruction, Tennessee women had started to join woman suffrage associations, engaging in conversations about their denied rights. When southern conservatives with more traditional family values caught wind of the suffrage agenda, they adopted the “Home Rule, State’s Rights, and White Supremacy” slogan.<sup>56</sup> News publications across the state spread anti-women’s suffrage propaganda, calling it the end of the home, the end of whites as the supreme race, and the end of the feminine woman.<sup>57</sup> In reaction, Tennessee women's suffrage advocates turned away from the previous state’s-rights-based platform and joined the demand for a federal amendment to get the job done nationwide. Under years of pressure and activism and with President Woodrow Wilson’s reluctant backing, Congress proposed the Nineteenth Amendment in June of 1919, and the Nineteenth began its movement across the nation’s 48 states, needing ratification by three-quarters of them.

When thirty-five states had ratified it, and many had rejected it, by the spring of 1920, the National American Woman Suffrage Association began looking for a thirty-

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<sup>55</sup> J. Morgan Kousser, “Post-Reconstruction Suffrage Restrictions in Tennessee: A New Look at the V.O. Key Thesis,” *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (1973): 655-83, doi:10.2307/2148164, accessed Aug. 13, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Marirose Arendale, “Tennessee and Women's Rights,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1980): 62-78, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42626045>, accessed Aug. 13, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Bisland, “The Morals of the Modern Heroine,” *North American Review* 188, no. 633 (1908): 226-36, [www.jstor.org/stable/25106185](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25106185), accessed Feb. 4, 2020.

sixth state to ratify the amendment. Few states were left that might accomplish the objective. Tennessee was generally overlooked for ratification, for several reasons, but in part because of particular wording in the Tennessee state constitution that would appear to limit the state's ability to call a special session of the legislature as a constitutional convention. But pressures and incentives were put before then-Tennessee governor Albert Roberts to convene a special session of the General Assembly, in August 1920. Despite a vicious campaign by anti-suffragists to kill the bill, the vote passed relatively smoothly in the state Senate. The ultimate outcome fell to the Tennessee House of Representatives to make the decision for the entire nation on women's right to vote. A single man's changed vote in favor of women and the Nineteenth Amendment transformed American suffrage forever.<sup>58</sup>

In 1971, twenty-seven million additional citizens became potential voters with the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment. Eighteen year olds had been granted the right to vote in federal elections with the Voting Rights Act of 1970 but were not permitted to participate in local elections by numerous states until the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment.<sup>59</sup> This amendment marked the next phase of complete voter enfranchisement by stating that the right of an 18-year-old citizen to vote "shall not be

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<sup>58</sup> A. Elizabeth Taylor, "A Short History of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1943): 195-215, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42620797>, accessed Aug. 14, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> *Oregon v. Mitchell*, 400 US 122 (1970).

abridged and denied...on account of age.”<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, when the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed by Congress, March 23, 1971, five state legislatures ratified it that very day, Tennessee being one of the five first adopters.<sup>61</sup> When the amendment was confirmed, the status quo changed for the political elite. After opening up the vote to American youth, President Richard Nixon feared that his Democratic opponents would pull ahead in the 1972 national election. However, only 55% of youth voters showed up at the polls in November 1972, and youth voting subsequently remained low for years to come.<sup>62</sup>

In recent years, the fight for student voting has become much like the fight for women’s suffrage and racial equality: a party squabble.<sup>63</sup> In multiple states, Republican-dominated state legislatures placed legal barriers on student voters.<sup>64</sup> Texas faced attempted voter suppression when on-campus polling locations were outlawed by its

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<sup>60</sup> Eric S. Fish, “The Twenty-Sixth Amendment Enforcement Power,” *Yale Law Journal* 121, no. 5 (Mar. 2012): 1168-235, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41509914>, accessed Sept. 16, 2109.

<sup>61</sup> “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment,” U.S. Constitution, <https://www.usconstitution.net/constamrat.html#Am26>, accessed Mar. 13, 2020; “The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment,” History.com, <https://www.history.com/topics/united-states-constitution/the-26th-amendment>, Mar. 13, 2020.

<sup>62</sup> “Voter Turnout,” FairVote.org, [https://www.fairvote.org/voter\\_turnout#voter\\_turnout\\_101](https://www.fairvote.org/voter_turnout#voter_turnout_101), accessed July 11, 2019; Mark Hugo Lopez and Carrie Donovan, “Youth and Adult Voter Turnout from 1972-2000,” CIRCLE, [https://civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS\\_Youth%20turnout1972\\_2002.pdf](https://civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_Youth%20turnout1972_2002.pdf), accessed Sept. 16, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Phillip J. Ardoin, C. Scott Bell, and Michael Ragozzino, “The Partisan Battle Over College Student Voting: An Analysis of Student Voting Behavior in Federal, State, and Local Elections,” *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 5 (2015): 1178–95, doi:10.1111/ssqu.12167, accessed Aug. 14, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Candice Bernd, “More Students Are Voting—But Republicans Are Trying to Get in Their Way,” Truthout, Nov. 25, 2019, <https://truthout.org/articles/more-students-are-voting-but-republicans-are-trying-to-get-in-their-way/>, accessed Apr. 20, 2020.

legislature. New Hampshire, North Carolina, and Washington are examples of states that passed strict voter ID legislation.<sup>65</sup> Tennessee is also a victim of these efforts.

Whereas in many years of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Tennessee had reasonable ranges of voter participation, compared nationally,<sup>66</sup> since 2010, restrictive bills have been passed that have markedly reduced voter participation numbers in Tennessee. Since the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2013 *Shelby County v. Holder* decision, undermining the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the Tennessee General Assembly has been given a free hand to tighten and further tighten access to the ballot in the state. Currently, Tennessee has dropped to being the 49th state in voter participation in the nation.<sup>67</sup> The pathway to reduction in Tennessee’s voter participation has been the passage of a slew of new state laws to curtail voting, including strict voter ID laws, punishing third-party registration groups, and shortening Early Voting. All of these means, as well as not permitting Election Day registration, automatic voter registration, and voting by the formerly incarcerated, are all “voter security” programs<sup>68</sup> by the state legislature and the state’s Secretary of State to undermine active voter participation—which includes student

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<sup>65</sup> Bernd, “More Students Are Voting.”

<sup>66</sup> File, “Young-Adult Voting: An Analysis of Presidential Elections, 1964–2012.”

<sup>67</sup> Natalie Allison, “Tennessee is Ranked 49th in Voter Turnout: Why Aren’t Residents Voting Like They Should?,” *Tennessean*, Aug. 27, 2018, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2018/08/27/tennessee-voter-registration-turnout-panel/1115860002/>, accessed Mar. 20, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathon Hauenschild, “Ensuring a Paper Trail for Elections,” American Legislative Exchange Council, Jan. 9, 2018, <https://www.alec.org/article/ensuring-a-paper-trail-for-elections/>, access Mar. 20, 2020.

voting.<sup>69</sup> Restrictions to voting necessarily limit the number of student voters able to participate in Tennessee elections.

### Evolution of Party Politics in Tennessee

To subjugate black men's enfranchisement post-Civil War, Democrat "Redeemers" in the South began to take back control of their respective southern states from the radical reform Reconstruction Republicans with racial rhetoric. Their intent to corner the majority of white southerners and bring them together under one party and to segregate the South was quite successful.<sup>70</sup> Historically the Democratic party had been the party of the South, the party of slavery. After the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, southern African Americans rallied their votes behind the Republican party, the party of Lincoln. The expansion of the Republican party, with its late 19<sup>th</sup> century black support, made party politics in Tennessee complicated.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both black and white southern voters collided in their support of the New Deal coalition. The Great Depression began the shift of African American interests from the Republican party to the Democratic party, and because of racial

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<sup>69</sup> "New Voting Restrictions in America," Brennan Center for Justice, <https://www.brennancenter.org/new-voting-restrictions-america>, accessed Aug. 12, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Harold W. Stanley, "Reflections on Reading V.O. Key Jr.'s Southern Politics: Race, Politics, and Economics," in *Unlocking V.O. Key Jr.: "Southern Politics" for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Angie Maxwell and Todd G. Shields (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2011), 105-26, [doi:10.2307/j.ctt1ffjmn8.11](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ffjmn8.11), accessed Aug. 14, 2019.

undertones, a shift in the opposite direction for southern white men.<sup>71</sup> It was during the New Deal era that some Democrats began to embrace more liberal Roosevelt ideals, which was off-putting to other southern voters.<sup>72</sup> And some conservative southern Democrats would soon call themselves Dixiecrats, and some would support Republican voting positions.

Political realignment of Tennessee as a dominantly Republican state was not in the cards for Tennessee just yet, however; a few more dominoes had to fall into place. First, in the 1950s, a highly regarded Memphis political figure, E. H. Crump, gave up his alliance with East Tennessee Republicans, leading to the election of moderate Tennessee Democrats Albert Gore Sr. and Estes Kefauver to the U.S. Senate.<sup>73</sup> In the aftermath, Republicans were deemed noncompetitive in senatorial and gubernatorial elections, but they started to gain footing in smaller congressional seats. From 1901 to 1962 the state's General Assembly districts had ignored population growth and economic change and contributed to the inability of the Republican party to gain control until mid-century.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Merle Black, "The Transformation of the Southern Democratic Party," *Journal of Politics* 66, no. 4 (2004): 1001-17, [doi:10.1111/j.1468-2508.2004.00287.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2004.00287.x), accessed Aug. 17, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> John W. Jeffries, "Roosevelt and the Democrats in the 1930s: Triumph and Troubles," in *A Third Term for FDR: The Election of 1940* (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 2017), 6-38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1mmfszz.6>, accessed Sept. 23, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> David D. Lee, "Crump, E. H. (1914-1954) Politician," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Volume 10, Law and Politics*, eds. James W. Ely and Bradley G. Bond, by Charles Reagan Wilson (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 327-28, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742\\_ely.113](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742_ely.113), accessed Oct. 10, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> Michael W. Catalano, "Kidd v. McCannless: The Genesis of Reapportionment Litigation in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (1985): 72-91, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42626502>, accessed Oct. 10, 2019.



Then came the 1962 U.S. Supreme Court decision in the landmark Tennessee case *Baker v. Carr*. This decision paved the way for a party shift when it ruled Tennessee should uphold the apportionment laws outlined in its state constitution or be in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause.<sup>75</sup> Prior to *Baker v. Carr*, the Tennessee legislature had split up dominantly black Memphis into multiple Congressional districts to disperse Shelby County's black vote, denying voting dominance to the city's core African American population.

However, it was the departure of Strom Thurman from the Democratic party in the 1960s that sent conservative voters to cross historic party lines.<sup>76</sup> As the Democratic party increasingly stood in support of civil rights, conservative white southerners began to try to regain power amid the decline of their privilege, autonomy, and agricultural wealth. The class divide between the Democratic and Republican parties was also becoming more apparent. The Republican party held nearly seventy percent of the wealthy land-owning vote by the 1970s,<sup>77</sup> and these wealthy "New Republicans" then had opportunity to entice their poorer white counterparts to join them. In order to distract poor white voters from their conflicting class interests, Republican political figures pushed racially charged conservative rhetoric. Nixon's racist "southern strategy" and

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<sup>75</sup> *Baker v. Carr*, 369 US 186 (1962).

<sup>76</sup> Sid Bedingfield, "Color-Blind Conservatism and the Great White Switch," in *Newspaper Wars: Civil Rights and White Resistance in South Carolina* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2017), 200-12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt1t89km7.13>, accessed Sept. 23, 2019.

<sup>77</sup> Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, "Partisan Change in the Post-Key South," in *Unlocking V.O. Key Jr.: "Southern Politics" for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Angie Maxwell and Todd G. Shields (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2011), 161-84, [doi:10.2307/j.ctt1ffjmn8.13](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ffjmn8.13), accessed Aug. 16, 2019.

George H.W. Bush's "Willie Horton" campaign were very successful. In response, the habitually Democratic South underwent a slow but steady political realignment. Support for Democrats in higher governmental elected positions held firm in Tennessee until the election of Howard Baker to the U.S. Senate in 1966 (1967-1985). While considered a conservative politician, Baker had more moderate views on the future of the Republican party and shared many commonalities with Tennessee Democrats. It was his version of the party that started making progress in the state during the late 20th century.

Despite the fact that Phil Bredesen, a moderate Democrat, carried every county in the state during his 2006 race for governor, the early 2000s solidified a hardline conservative agenda in Tennessee. Religion has always been an integral part of southern culture and Tennessee has long been the buckle of the Bible belt, even though a moderate state compared with the Deep South, but over the past twenty years, Tennessee has become a hub of increasingly conservative Christian ideals. Tennessee State University professor emeritus Coleman McGinnis made the following assessment: "Tennessee is arguably one of the most anti-abortion states in the country...and one of the most pro-gun states in the country, and on all of the big deal social issues, very very conservative...."<sup>78</sup> Tennessee has emerged as one of the most rabidly right-wing red states in the U.S., and a change cannot be seen for the near future.

Modern southern politics is categorized by conservative beliefs, emphasis on low taxes, and suspicion of large federal government. The majority of southerners claim to support religious practice and open worship. It is the support of faith, combined with the

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<sup>78</sup> Coleman McGinnis, personal communication, Sept. 27, 2019.

belief in state governance, that secured the Deep South in its present one-party Republican system. Southern ideology combines free-market libertarians and conservative traditionalists to create an incredible blend of Tea Party supporters and evangelical Christians.<sup>79</sup> By trusting that the Republican party is the “party of God” and aligns with more traditional social views, the South unquestionably supported Republican candidates from George W. Bush to Donald Trump.<sup>80</sup>

### Voting in Tennessee Today

Tennessee is currently a majority Republican state by a ten percentage-point lead.<sup>81</sup> In the 2008 presidential election, John McCain beat Barack Obama in eleven southern states by a significant margin, however he was defeated by Obama in the national general election despite McCain’s southern support.<sup>82</sup> Cue the 2016 election: every viable Republican showed up to try to reclaim the White House. Donald Trump emerged from the pack of Republican candidates with his racially charged rhetoric and

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<sup>79</sup> Vaughn May, “Tennessee: From Crump to Trump,” in *The Future Ain’t What It Used to Be: The 2016 Presidential Election in the South*, eds. Branwell DuBose Kapeluck and Scott E. Buchanan (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2018), 197-212, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt201mpvp.15>, accessed Aug. 14, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> Tanya Marie Luhrmann, “Evangelical Voters,” in *Antidemocracy in America: Truth, Power, and the Republic at Risk*, eds. Eric Klinenberg, Caitlin Zaloom, and Sharon Marcus (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2019), 167-74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/klin19010.22>, accessed Aug. 15, 2019; David P. Gushee and Justin Phillips, “Moral Formation and the Evangelical Voter: A Report from the Red States,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 2 (2006): 23-60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23561813>, accessed Aug, 15, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> May, “Tennessee: From Crump to Trump.”

<sup>82</sup> May, “Tennessee: From Crump to Trump.”

allegiance to the nomination of conservative cabinet members and Supreme Court justices. His campaign was blatant with racial, misogynistic vocabulary that appealed to white racists in the South, and the North, and to the blatant evangelical support of conservative voters. The presidential race became less about Republicans' attraction to the candidate and more about which candidate could further their evangelical, pro-life, small government agenda.<sup>83</sup> Trump's rhetoric, aggressively anti-immigration, anti-big government, and anti-foreign-trade, won.<sup>84</sup> During the general election, Hillary Clinton fell short of President Obama's electoral-college wins in the preceding two presidential elections. Obama however had not won Tennessee in either 2008 or 2012. Trump's win in Tennessee continued the Republican pattern, holding firm in this notoriously red state, even increasing the voting percentage in Tennessee by about 1.5 percent of voters.<sup>85</sup>

Tennessee has faced major problems with lack of voter participation throughout the years. After the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, virtually all voting restrictions were lifted and the number of eligible voters rose drastically. However, turnout at the polls continued to be unimpressive. There are various theories about why

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<sup>83</sup> Luhrmann, "Evangelical Voters."

<sup>84</sup> H. Gibbs Knotts, "Conclusion: The Long-Term Pitfalls of Trump's Southern Strategy," in *The Future Ain't What It Used to Be: The 2016 Presidential Election in the South*, eds. Branwell DuBose Kapeluck and Scott E. Buchanan (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2018), 249-60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt201mpvp.18>, accessed Aug. 16, 2019; Luhrmann, "Evangelical Voters."

<sup>85</sup> Patrick R. Miller, "The 2016 Southern Electorate: Demographics, Issues, and Candidate Perceptions," in *The Future Ain't What It Used to Be: The 2016 Presidential Election in the South*, eds. Branwell DuBose Kapeluck and Scott E. Buchanan (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2018), 3-22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt201mpvp.15>, accessed Aug. 16, 2019.

the South has continued to lack full political participation. One assessment, from Mark Kornbluh, a professor at Michigan State University, associates the decline in voter turnout with the “inability of the parties to continue to integrate the American public into electoral politics.”<sup>86</sup> Progressive reforms have restricted campaigns from mobilizing their parties, and political participation dropped off in succession. Following the lack of strong party control in campaigns, Americans tended to stick to the party they knew best, and when, in the South, Republican dominance became evident, Democrats gave up and just stopped showing up at the voting booth.

Another possible reason turnout is low is that those who feel most affected by the vote will always show up. However, this cannot be said for those in lower income or lower education brackets; they feel their vote will not make a difference at all anyway. These factors heavily impact the electorate and the election outcomes. Voters typically go to the polls when they feel inspired to do so, but most political elites are not making trips out to rural Tennessee to rally the vote. Instead, they focus on the demographics with more money, resources, prestige, and swing voters. Low-income voters feel overlooked, disregarded, and as if their vote does not make a difference in the long term.<sup>87</sup> Since the Republican party is credited as the party of the rich and has for the past twenty years

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<sup>86</sup> Mark Lawrence Kornbluh, *Why America Stopped Voting: The Decline of Participatory Democracy and the Emergence of Modern American Politics* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2000), 118.

<sup>87</sup> Andrew S. Fullerton and Casey Borch, “Reconsidering Explanations for Regional Convergence in Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States, 1956-2000,” *Sociological Forum* 23, no. 4 (2008): 755-85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40210389>, accessed Aug. 16, 2019.

dominated southern political identity, poor and middle-class southern Democrats see themselves as showing up at the polls only to cast a losing vote.<sup>88</sup>

While money is an essential factor on the campaign trail, education is also a variable that impacts election outcomes. Non-college-educated voters tend to be less informed about and engaged in civic happenings, and, in general, the American South has shown less educational progress than much of the rest of the country. The number of educated voters is not as vast as in other parts of the nation, and therefore southern voters have a disconnect from enthusiastic political participation.<sup>89</sup>

### Tennessee Voting Demographics

Now that Tennessee has established itself as a majority Republican state, it is essential to understand voting demographics that correlate with this shift. Tennessee is a state with a population of about 6 million people. These 6 million citizens account for 11 electoral votes. Overall the demographics of Tennessee are as follows:<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Andrew Gelman, Lane Kenworthy, and Yu-Sung Su, "Income Inequality and Partisan Voting in the United States," *Social Science Quarterly* 91, no. 5 (2010): 1203-19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42956457>, accessed Aug. 17, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Eric A. Houck and Meredith Ross, "Introduction to the Special Issue on Education in the American South: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Conditions," *Peabody Journal of Education* 85, no. 1 (2010): 1-3, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20720791>, accessed Sept. 23, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> "Population Demographics for Tennessee 2019, 2018," <https://suburbanstats.org/population/how-many-people-live-in-tennessee>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019; United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Tennessee," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TN>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019.

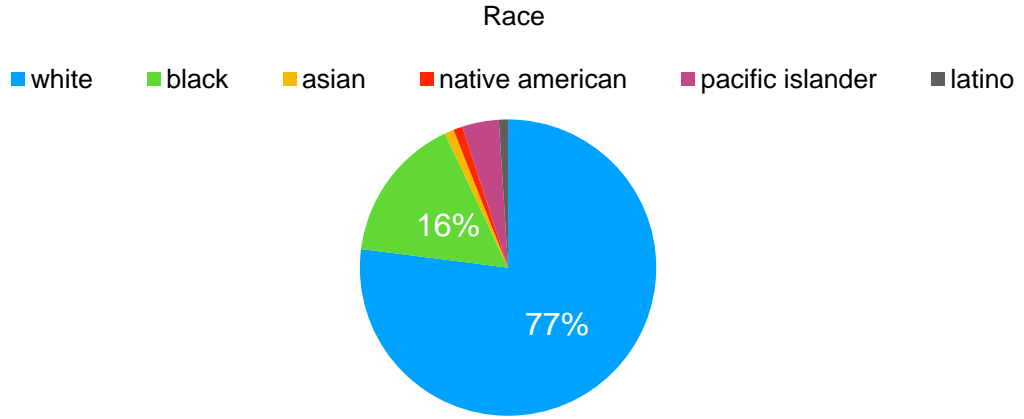


Figure 6. Tennesseans by race.

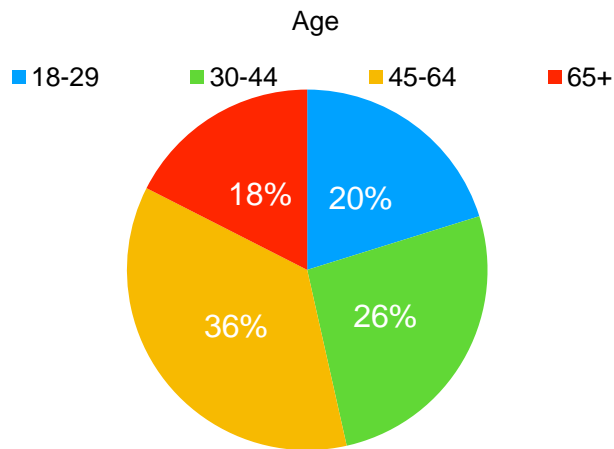


Figure 7. Tennesseans by age.

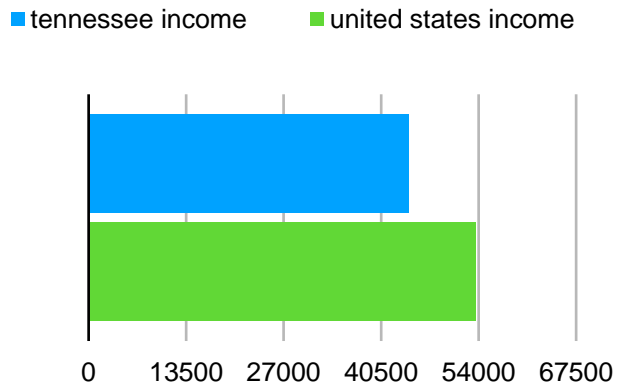


Figure 8. Income of Tennesseans compared to the U.S. as a whole.

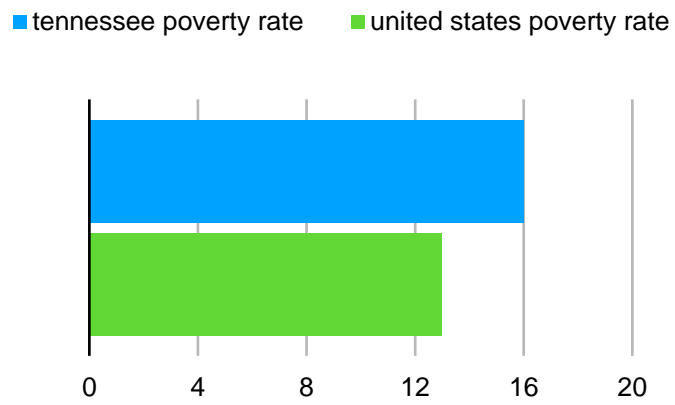


Figure 9. Poverty in Tennessee compared to the rest of the nation.



According to the information derived from census data, the majority of Tennessee voters are white men and women between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five who make an average of \$45,000 a year.<sup>91</sup> Compared nationally, Tennesseans earn about \$10,000 less than the average American. This is where party affiliation meets economic tension: one could argue that the Republican party, known for its historic and continuing protection of businesses and the upper-class citizens who own them, does not truly stand in favor of the South's economic needs. However, the South's historical support for states' rights constitutionalism,<sup>92</sup> which became an important part of Republican ideology in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as southerners shifted to the Republican party, allows protection of conservative social values against some progressive agendas. Therefore, southern allegiance to the Republican party has little to do with fiscal policy and much more to do with the party's anti-liberal promises.<sup>93</sup>

#### Speed Bumps for Tennessee Voters

In 2011, Tennessee passed a law requiring that all eligible voters produce a government-issued ID in order to be eligible to vote. State voter photo ID laws are the

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<sup>91</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts: Tennessee."

<sup>92</sup> Kermit L. Hall, "States' Rights Constitutionalism," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 10: Law and Politics*, eds. James W. Ely and Bradley G. Bond, by Charles Reagan Wilson (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 71-73, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742\\_ely.20](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742_ely.20), accessed Apr. 15, 2020.

<sup>93</sup> Marvin P. King, "Republican Party," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Volume 10, Law and Politics*, eds. James W. Ely and Bradley G. Bond, by Charles Reagan Wilson (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2008), 278-84, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742\\_ely.93](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469616742_ely.93), accessed Aug. 22, 2019.

result of a nationwide push by conservative think tank ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, a Koch-funded organization that drafts and pushes conservative legislation for easy adoption by state legislatures across the country.<sup>94</sup> If Tennesseans are not in possession of a proper ID for voting, the state will provide them one as long as they produce their birth certificate and proofs of Tennessee residency.<sup>95</sup> Requiring federal or state ID, but by not allowing students to use student university IDs—even an ID from a state of Tennessee public institution of higher education—the state legislation has directly impacted youth voter participants.

Democratic state representative and senator, respectively, G.A. Hardaway and Sara Kyle challenged the law with an amendment, House Bill 2457 in 2018, that would add a student’s college and university ID to the list of recognized, approved identification for voting. Students gathered to testify before the state legislature on behalf of House Bill 2457 but were shut down before the committee could hear their testimony.<sup>96</sup> ID law, one that narrowly restricts what type of ID is acceptable, negatively impacts not only student voters but also poor and minority communities and the elderly, disfranchising those who

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<sup>94</sup> Nancy Scola, “Exposing ALEC: How Conservative-Backed State Laws are All Connected,” *The Atlantic*, Apr. 14, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/04/exposing-alec-how-conservative-backed-state-laws-are-all-connected/255869/>, accessed Mar. 13, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> “Voter Photo ID,” TN Department of Homeland Security, <https://www.tn.gov/safety/driver-services/photoids.html>, accessed Aug. 20, 2019.

<sup>96</sup> Rebekah Barber, “Tennessee Students Continue Their Fight Against a Discriminatory Voter ID Law,” *Facing South*, Institute for Southern Studies, Mar. 30, 2018, <https://www.facingsouth.org/2018/03/tennessee-students-continue-their-fight-against-discriminatory-voter-id-law>, accessed Aug. 20, 2019.

have no need for a driver's license or passport.<sup>97</sup> In 2015, Tennessee State University students sued the state of Tennessee over the ID law, but federal district court upheld the law, requiring voting ID and making student IDs non-permissible.<sup>98</sup>

In 2018, voters were able to overcome some of these obstacles to some degree, and student voter turnout increased by fifteen percent,<sup>99</sup> however more obstacles began to be put in place. During the 2019 session of the Tennessee General Assembly, the legislature passed a bill that put extraneous penalties on voter registration groups that operate on a volunteer basis. The bill required all volunteers to complete formal training modules before assisting fellow citizens in voter registration, disclose personal information to the Secretary of State's office, provide disclaimers on voter registration websites, submit completed forms within narrowly proscribed deadlines, and be subject to significant fines and civil penalties if voter registration forms were "deficient," had errors, or were in any way incomplete. Fined deficiencies, in the penalization of voter registration legislation, included minor errors, such as a missing information field and a misspelling. The law was challenged in court in 2019 by the League of Women Voters

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<sup>97</sup> Denise Lieberman, "Barriers to the Ballot Box: New Restrictions Underscore the Need for Voting Laws Enforcement," *Human Rights* 39, no. 1 (2012): 2-14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23375633>, accessed Aug. 20, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Stacey Barchenger, "Judge Dismisses TN Students' Voting Rights Case, *Tennessean*, Dec. 22, 2015, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2015/12/22/judge-dismisses-tn-students-voting-rights-case/77769958/>, accessed Mar. 13, 2020.

<sup>99</sup> "2018 Youth Voter Turnout Increased in Every State for Which We Have Data," CIRCLE, Apr. 2, 2019, <https://civicyouth.org/2018-youth-turnout-increased-in-every-state-for-which-we-have-data/>, accessed Aug. 20, 2019.

and the Tennessee Equity Alliance, and blocked from taking effect on October 1, 2019, by federal district court, citing the law as a “punitive regulatory scheme.”<sup>100</sup>

## Overview

The fight for universal suffrage has affected adults of every socioeconomic status, race, gender, and age since the signing of the Constitution. Through the constant battles, border states like Tennessee have played a role and, in some cases, made decisions that pushed the country in the right direction. As the economy turned and demographics changed, so did politics in the South. From completely blue to thoroughly red, Tennessee has been no stranger to political discontentment, and its voters have been affected in the process. Now voting demographics face a divide between voters’ economic status and religious obligations, and entrenched attitudes are being passed on to the youth, who adopt their parents’ views initially without question.

Yet as children become adults and move into their roles as citizens, they must develop their own opinions and think for themselves. The state’s youngest voters are struggling to find their place in the political sphere while being met head-on by multiple voting restrictions. Differentiating between religious and social pressures, compromising between their beliefs and their parents’, and overcoming legislation intent on keeping

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<sup>100</sup> Jonathan Mattise, “Federal Judge Blocks Tennessee Voter Registration Law, Citing Harm to ‘Constitutional Rights,’” *Tennessean*, Sept. 12, 2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2019/09/12/tennessee-voter-registration-law-blocked-judge-citing-harm/2300293001/>, accessed Mar. 13, 2020; “Groups Challenge New Tennessee Law that Undermines Voter Registration,” American Civil Liberties Union, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/groups-challenge-new-tennessee-law-undermines-voter-registration>, accessed Aug. 21, 2019.

them away from the polls—all of these challenges are incredibly taxing responsibilities that define being a young voter in the South.

## Chapter 3

### Student Voting Data Collection

The initiative to collect and report student voting data made incredible strides with the creation in 2012 of NSLVE, the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement,<sup>101</sup> but interest in political data collection existed for decades before. Initially, political scientists disagreed on the way to conduct these investigations and what to do with the information once it was retrieved.<sup>102</sup> The only consensus was that no matter the method, all data conducted in the field should be public knowledge since empirical data collection and the statistical analysis of all previous research are imperative for the analyses on which political science has its foundations. For many years, such research was presented in one of four ways: reanalysis, verification, secondary analysis, and reiteration.<sup>103</sup>

Reanalysis is a reinterpretation of already existing research. This process involves retrieving already published data and reusing it within the framework of another study. Lots of reanalyses are backed by commercial support in order to contradict or revise the interpretation of the previously expressed data. Verification, on the other hand, is the

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<sup>101</sup> See also chap. 1, p. 11.

<sup>102</sup> Christine L. Borgman, "Data Scholarship in the Social Sciences," in *Big Data, Little Data, No Data: Scholarship in the Networked World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 125-60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt17kk8n8.12>, accessed Nov. 4, 2019, doi:10.2307/j.ctt17kk8n8.12, accessed Mar. 4, 2020.

<sup>103</sup> Paul S. Herrnson, "Replication, Verification, Secondary Analysis, and Data Collection in Political Science," *Political Science and Politics* 28, no. 3 (1995): 452-55, doi:10.2307/420302, accessed Nov. 4, 2019.

confirmation of previously assessed data in order to reaffirm some specific understanding. Secondary analysis uses a set of already established data for an interpretation of a completely separate subject. This category of research relies pretty heavily on the use of multipurpose data. Finally, replication is the newest form of political science research. Replication ultimately reiterates a set of empirical data in order to increase understanding of the topic being investigated.<sup>104</sup> All four of these types of research led to the creation of data atlases.<sup>105</sup>

Before digitized databases, data collectors had atlases full of voting/voter information. Starting in the 1700s, the census became the first recorded instance of mass data collaboration.<sup>106</sup> Alongside the census, survey information was catalogued from precinct to precinct. Therefore, most research was done through comparisons of major cities, counties, and even states being broken down by precinct. For example, a 2010 report was done by the Department of Political Science at Harvard together with Yale University's Department of Government.<sup>107</sup> Analysts pulled voter registration

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<sup>104</sup> Raymond Richard Neutra, Aaron Cohen, Tony Fletcher, David Michaels, Elihu D. Richter, and Colin L. Soskolne, "Toward Guidelines for the Ethical Reanalysis and Reinterpretation of Another's Research," *Epidemiology* 17, no. 3 (2006): 335-38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20486223>, accessed Nov. 4, 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Giancarlo Sadoti, Benjamin Zuckerberg, Marta A. Jarzyna, and William F. Porter, "Applying Occupancy Estimation and Modelling to the Analysis of Atlas Data," *Diversity and Distributions* 19, no. 7/8 (2013): 804-14, [www.jstor.org/stable/23479801](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479801), accessed Mar. 4, 2020.

<sup>106</sup> Borgman, "Data Scholarship in the Social Sciences."

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Ansolabehere, Eitan Hersh, Alan Gerber, and David Doherty, "Voter Registration List Quality Pilot Studies: Report on Detailed Results," Pew Charitable Trusts, June 8, 2010, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.194.23&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, accessed Nov. 4, 2019.

information from the state of Florida and from Los Angeles County, California, and then evaluated the rate of registration in these areas. The same political science department at Harvard also participated in a state-by-state analysis of voter registration tactics across the United States. The scholars wanted to compare how different states carried out registration, what processes worked best and opened registration to the most citizens in each state, and which were the most restrictive. In order to retrieve the information needed for their study, Harvard researchers accessed data from Catalist, a database used by most political campaigns, and from other similar commercial vendors. In addition, the political scientists conducted audits of public records from local and state offices. They catalogued voter registration intake and survey information on Election Day. Such research processes were standard approaches to the collection of voting data that contributed to most research projects into the early 2000s.<sup>108</sup>

#### Development of NSLVE

Reported by the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Education in *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future*, the United States ranked 139th in voter participation out of the 172 world democracies in 2007.<sup>109</sup> In

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<sup>108</sup> Stephen Ansolabehere and Eitan Hersh, "The Quality of Voter Registration Records: A State-by-State Analysis," Caltech/MIT Voting Technology Project, Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University, Department of Government, Report No. 6, July 14, 2010, <http://vote.caltech.edu/reports/6>, accessed Nov. 4, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> National Task Force, *A Crucible Moment*, 1.



order to create more democratically engaged voters, higher education decided to institute programs to assess and correct the lack of young voters.<sup>110</sup>

As part of that effort, Tufts University's Tisch College of Civic Life established a new research body called the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education (IDHE). The program works to encourage stronger democracy and equality through social and political advancements. Its foundational initiative is the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE).<sup>111</sup> Established in 2013, NSLVE became a resource for colleges and universities, to provide them information about their students' voting patterns. NSLVE collects an array of data from both local and state voting records and from university enrollment information and then combines those records to create an easily accessible database for each institution.

NSLVE was not created overnight. First, associates recruited colleges and universities to authorize access to their enrollment information for the study. IDHE partnered with multiple data-sharing and research organizations like the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) and the Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium (HEDS) that compile records from degree-bestowing, non-profit, public and private institutions in

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<sup>110</sup> Ishara Casella Connors, "How the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement Can Help Your Campus," NASPA, <https://www.naspa.org/course/how-the-national-study-of-learning-voting-and-engagement-can-help-your-campus>, accessed Nov. 5, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Nancy Thomas and Jodi Benenson, "Creating and Maintaining the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement Database," Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, July 2017, [https://idhe.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/NSLVE Database Report.pdf](https://idhe.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/NSLVE%20Database%20Report.pdf), accessed Nov. 4, 2019.

the United States. Once recruited, participating NSLVE institutions allow use of their data through the National Student Clearinghouse.<sup>112</sup>

The National Student Clearinghouse, created as a way to inform universities and their lenders about which students using their loan programs were still enrolled and qualified for repayment, has become an essential partner to IDHE. The Clearinghouse contains personal information of enrolled students, so by partnering with them, NSLVE researchers and statisticians have access to certain personal details about students such as race, ethnicity, age, and the specific educational program, major, or discipline in which students are enrolled. NSLVE then receives the state and local voting records from Catalist, which collects and cleans voter data from millions of voters across all fifty states, taking into account public records of who is and who is not registered to vote and who did and who did not vote, providing IDHE with scrubbed information to compile for their NSLVE reports.<sup>113</sup>

IDHE then takes all the data collected and merges them, calculating each participating institution's voting rates. The reports compare campuses' changed voting behaviors over time, examining age, race, and field of study. Election data processed to date have been the 2012 and 2016 presidential elections and the 2014 and 2018 interim elections. The study is committed to carrying out analyses for enrolled institutions

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<sup>112</sup> Thomas and Benenson, "Creating and Maintaining the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement Database."

<sup>113</sup> Thomas and Benenson, "Creating and Maintaining the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement Database."

through the 2020 and 2022 elections still ahead.<sup>114</sup> The NSLVE database now contains millions of records about students from over 1,000 institutions and continues to recruit new universities for analysis.<sup>115</sup>

### Student Voter Education

With access from all the previously mentioned databases, NSLVE is able to locate certain trends across universities and compile those in its analyses of demographic factors and descriptive categories. Since, in general, mobilization of student voters has proven difficult, the work done by NSLVE encourages educational institutions to provide programs in civic learning for targeted audiences of identified less-engaged students.<sup>116</sup> In NSLVE's 2017 combined-data overview of institutions that participated in the study during the 2016 election, the institutions ranged from two-year colleges to four-year universities, both public and private. Comparing student voter turnout in 2012 to voting in 2016, the majority of these institutions saw a 3% to 6% increase in voting by students.<sup>117</sup> In terms of general turnout, four-year public institutions took the lead.

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<sup>114</sup> Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, "Participating NSLVE Campuses," <https://idhe.tufts.edu/nslve/participating-campuses>, accessed Mar. 14, 2020.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas and Benenson, "Creating and Maintaining the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement Database"; Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, "Participating NSLVE Campuses."

<sup>116</sup> Cynthia J. Bogard, Ian Sheinheit, and Reneé P. Clarke, "Information They Can Trust: Increasing Youth Voter Turnout at the University," *Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 3 (2008): 541-46, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20452246>, accessed Aug. 26, 2019.

<sup>117</sup> Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*.

Approximately 50% of students in four-year public universities voted in the 2016 presidential election.<sup>118</sup>

Subcategories within student voting in 2016 show varying levels of voter participation. For example, the difference in graduate and undergraduate turnout is slight but still present.<sup>119</sup> In 2016, about 54% of the nation's graduate students turned out to vote versus only 47% of undergraduates. In undergraduate study programs, upper-level students are also more likely to vote at the polls than are freshman and sophomores.

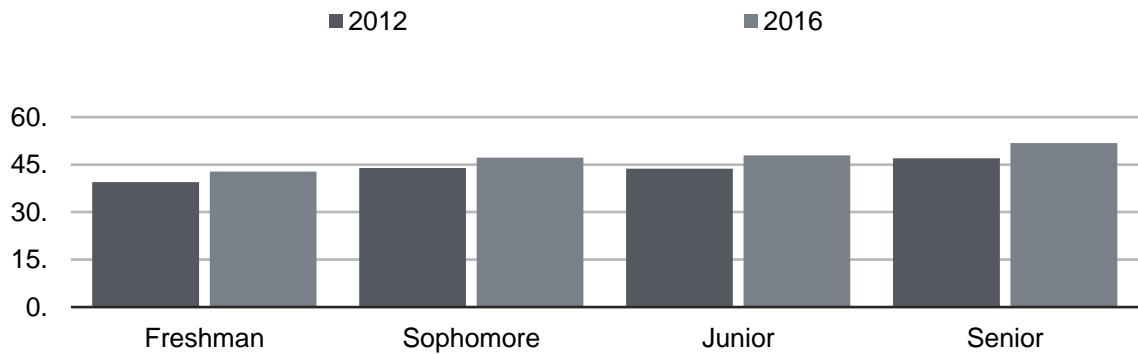


Figure 10. Student voting increased nationwide in 2016 v. 2012. All college class cohorts increased c. 3%-5%. About 43% of college freshmen voted in 2016, as did over 50% percent of college seniors (Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*).

<sup>118</sup> Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*.

<sup>119</sup> Thomas, et al., *Democracy Counts*.

Student voting trends were also apparent in field of study comparisons. Social sciences tend to have the highest voter turnout, while students in STEM majors are less voting-enthusiastic. STEM programs in the studied institutions consisted in 2016 of about two million students, only 40% of whom turned out at the polls. Reports show that it is not only voting that STEM students do not contribute to; they also tend not to discuss or engage in any activities that relate to politics or civic engagement, including community volunteer work.<sup>120</sup> NSLVE results support earlier assessments of STEM's civic problems, pointing to needs that should be addressed within university communities.

#### Student Voting Data in Midterm Elections

Midterm elections years are congressional, state, and local elections, not during a presidential election year, that tend to have a significantly smaller voter turnout. In 2014, only about 18% of student voters made an appearance at the polls nationwide, despite the percentage of registered student voters being upward of 60%.<sup>121</sup> However, student voting patterns in midterm elections looks generally similar to student-voting behavior during presidential-election voting: four-year public schools still produce the most voters, and graduate students beat out undergrads by over 10%. Field of study has the same results as

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<sup>120</sup> Linda J. Sax, "Citizenship Development and the American College Student, Assessing Character Outcomes in College," *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2004, no. 122 (Summer 2004): 65-80, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ir.110>, accessed Aug. 26, 2019.

<sup>121</sup> National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, "2014 Student Level Voter Turnout," <https://idhe.tufts.edu/2014-student-voter-turnout>, accessed Aug. 26, 2019.

well, with only 15% of STEM majors casting a ballot in the 2014 midterm election, and biology at the bottom of the STEM voters with only 13% participation.<sup>122</sup>

The weaker turnout in midterm years is not limited to student voters. The general electorate also decreases by a substantial percentage as well. Some of the blame can be placed on the lack of media coverage provided for smaller candidates.<sup>123</sup> Gerrymandered district lines can demoralize voters who feel elections are rigged against them.<sup>124</sup> The emphasis on one party in certain regions during local and state elections causes speculation about how much state governments reflect their general population. Since two-thirds of the voting population choose not to participate in midterm elections, local and state elections have the potential to underrepresent their regional demographics.<sup>125</sup>

### Student Voting in the Southeast

The South has historically maintained low voter turnout, but for the first time in decades young voters are vocalizing their political beliefs all across the nation, and southern students also made their presence known in the 2018 midterm elections.<sup>126</sup> The

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<sup>122</sup> National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, “2014 Student Level Voter Turnout.”

<sup>123</sup> Franklin D. Gilliam, “Influences on Voter Turnout for U.S. House Elections in Non-Presidential Years,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (1985): 339-51, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/440035>, accessed Aug. 26, 2019.

<sup>124</sup> Caroline Fredrickson, *The Democracy Fix* (New York: New Press, 2019).

<sup>125</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg and Craig Leonard Brians, “Partisan Turnout Bias in Midterm Legislative Elections,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2002): 407-21, [www.jstor.org/stable/3598570](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3598570), accessed Mar. 4, 2020.

<sup>126</sup> “2018 Youth Voter Turnout Increased in Every State for Which We Have Data.”

region has been accused of backward politics and slow progress,<sup>127</sup> but after the last election, there is finally hope that southern regional youth are joining the national conversation. Since the early 2000s, students have had a hard time finding their footing in southern politics. But they were not always so docile.

In the 1970s, multiple southern universities held protests against the Vietnam War. Parents of students from conservative white families were shocked at how open their children were to what they considered a “radical” platform. Students’ families shunned them for taking part in progressive politics, and students were called communists and traitors by the media.<sup>128</sup> Southern students returned to their conservative roots when Ronald Reagan’s campaign moved evangelical Christian students out to vote. Before Reagan, evangelical voters were not thoroughly politicized to the right, evident in initial backing of born-again Democrat Jimmy Carter in 1976. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, evangelicals who identified as Democratic decreased to only 30 percent.<sup>129</sup> Determined to end immoral liberalism, southern students were officially divided between two staunchly different groupings—the waning Evangelical Left and the rising Religious

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<sup>127</sup> Andrew S. Fullerton and Casey Borch, “Reconsidering Explanations for Regional Convergence in Voter Registration and Turnout in the United States, 1956-2000,” *Sociological Forum* 23, no. 4 (2008): 755-85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40210389>, accessed Aug. 27, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Joseph A. Fry, “Southern College Students,” in *The American South and the Vietnam War: Belligerence, Protest, and Agony in Dixie* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2015), 285-322, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14qrzhm.12>, accessed Aug. 27, 2019.

<sup>129</sup> David R. Swartz, “The Evangelical Left and the Politicization of Evangelicalism,” in *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*, eds. Darren Dochuk, Thomas S. Kidd, and Kurt W. Peterson (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 442-67, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpg85v2.24](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpg85v2.24), accessed Apr. 17, 2020.

Right.<sup>130</sup> Ultimately, the joining of evangelical youth with older conservative support threw the South into a solid one-party stranglehold that eventually led to the decline of voter participation by the opposition, the more progressive youth.<sup>131</sup>

Student voting in the 1990s and into the 2000s continued to be devastatingly low. To no one's surprise, Donald Trump had thorough southern backing in 2016.<sup>132</sup> But in 2018, Democrats succeeded in becoming the majority party in the United States House of Representatives, and they took several Senate seats as well, with overwhelming support by young voters.<sup>133</sup> From HBCUs, historically black colleges and universities, to PWIs, predominantly white institutions, students have been doing their best to encourage their peers' participation, and their hard work has shown results.<sup>134</sup> In places like the southeastern United States where Republicans maintain a solid voting block, mobilization

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<sup>130</sup> David Farber, "Ronald Reagan: The Conservative Hero," in *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010), 159-208, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sz87.10>, accessed Aug. 27, 2019; Swartz, "The Evangelical Left and the Politicization of Evangelicalism."

<sup>131</sup> Shannon L. Bridgmon, "Alabama: Republican Dominance and Democrats Fighting to Survive," in *Second Verse, Same as the First: The 2012 Presidential Election in the South*, eds. Scott E. Buchanan and Kapeluck Branwell DuBose (Fayetteville: Univ. of Arkansas Press, 2014), 37-50, [doi:10.2307/j.ctt1ffjhxz.9](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ffjhxz.9), accessed Aug. 29, 2019.

<sup>132</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg and Craig Leonard Brians, "Partisan Turnout Bias in Midterm Legislative Elections," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2002): 407-21, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3598570>, accessed Aug. 27, 2019.

<sup>133</sup> John K. Wilson, "Careless Trump," in *President Trump Unveiled: Exposing the Bigoted Billionaire* (New York: OR Books, 2016), 235-54, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt20bbwkk.11>, accessed Aug. 27, 2019.

<sup>134</sup> Ginnie Logan, Brian A. Lightfoot, and Ana Contreras, "Black and Brown Millennial Activism on a PWI Campus in the Era of Trump," *Journal of Negro Education* 86, no. 3 (2017): 252-68, [doi:10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.3.0252](https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.86.3.0252), accessed Aug. 27, 2019.



of youth voters yielded a different result than in the majority of the country, however.<sup>135</sup>

It was no surprise in the 2018 elections when Republicans retained majority control in southern states' elected offices.<sup>136</sup>

### Student Voting in Tennessee

According to calculations done by CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), thirty-two states had an increase in student voting by seven-plus percentage points in 2018, the most recent election.<sup>137</sup> In twenty-six of these states, the increase in youth voters outscored the increase in the general electorate overall. Tennessee was no exception. Only 9.2% of young voters voted in Tennessee in 2014 but participation increased to 22.3% percent in 2018, a 13% increase.<sup>138</sup> The number of youth voters more than doubled, but that increase was not able to override the vote by the general electorate, which itself increased by 15%.<sup>139</sup>

Urban areas like Davidson and Shelby counties continue their Democratic support to today, but smaller, more rural counties remain solidly Republican in Tennessee (with the exception of Haywood County, the only majority African American rural county in the state).

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<sup>135</sup> Megan Garber, "The Real Metaphor of the 'Blue Wave,'" *The Atlantic*, Nov. 8, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/11/the-blue-wave-midterms-the-limits-of-metaphor/575257/>, accessed Mar. 14, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> "United States Congress Elections, 2018," Ballotpedia, [https://ballotpedia.org/United\\_States\\_Congress\\_elections,\\_2018](https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Congress_elections,_2018), accessed Aug. 29, 2019.

<sup>137</sup> "2018 Youth Voter Turnout Increased in Every State for Which We Have Data."

<sup>138</sup> "2018 Youth Voter Turnout Increased in Every State for Which We Have Data."

<sup>139</sup> "2018 Youth Voter Turnout Increased in Every State for Which We Have Data."

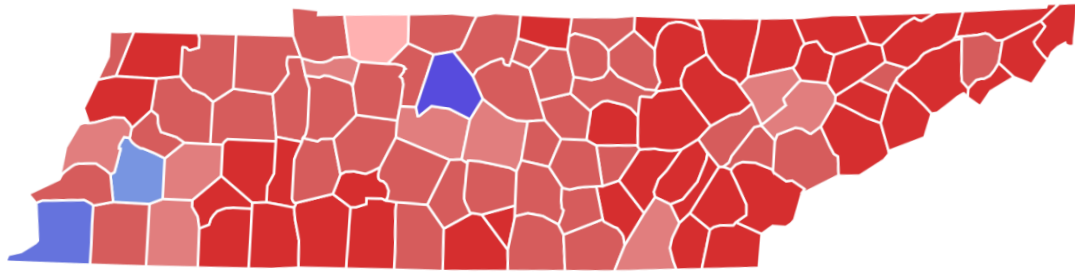


Figure 11. Voting outcome by county in Tennessee in 2018 (map from “Tennessee Election Results 2018,” *Politico*).<sup>140</sup>

In 2006, Democrat Phil Bredesen carried all counties across Tennessee in a landslide election for governor. However, in the 2018 midterm election for retiring Senator Bob Corker’s Senate seat, Bredesen was only able to win the most liberal counties in the state. Coleman McGinnis, who specializes in Tennessee politics, speculates that it was the lack of East Tennessee Republican support, those who had formerly backed Bredesen, that ended up being the downfall of Bredesen’s Senate bid.<sup>141</sup> While Bredesen is a well-liked Tennessee Democrat, the midterm election was less about electing a moderate candidate and more about guaranteeing continued Republican control in the United States Senate.

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<sup>140</sup> “Tennessee Election Results 2018,” *Politico*, <https://www.politico.com/election-results/2018/tennessee/>, accessed Aug. 27, 2019; Tennessee Secretary of State, Division of Elections, “United States Senate,” *State of Tennessee, November 6, 2018, State General* (Nashville 2018), <https://sos-tn-gov-files.tnsosfiles.com/Nov%202018%20General%20by%20County.pdf>, accessed Mar. 21, 2020.

<sup>141</sup> Coleman McGinnis, personal communication, Sept. 27, 2019.

The party preferences of Tennessee students is up for debate. McGinnis speculates that “university students in Tennessee, probably come from middle-class to well-off families that aren’t exactly hotbeds of liberalism. These people want a job,”<sup>142</sup> and for them, economic success is a primary driver. After studying the behavior of his own students, McGinnis thinks that political affiliation and the need to accomplish societal objectives are simply not at the forefront of their minds. Religion is a more influential part of their daily lives. The probability is high that when voting they stick to their conservative roots instead of joining the ideological shift to the left.

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<sup>142</sup> Coleman McGinnis, personal communication, Sept. 27, 2019.

College Data

Tennessee Institutions Enrolled in NSLVE	Participate in All in Challenge
Bethel	No
Cleveland State	No
Columbia State	No
<b>Dyersburg State</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>East Tennessee State University</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Lane	No
<b>Maryville</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Martin Methodist	No
<b>Middle Tennessee State University</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Sewanee</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Tennessee State University</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>University of Tennessee, Knoxville</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>University of Tennessee, Chattanooga</b>	<b>Yes</b>
University of Tennessee, Martin	No
Tusculum	No
<b>University of Memphis</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Vanderbilt</b>	<b>Yes</b>

Figure 12. Tennessee colleges and universities enrolled in the NSLVE study presently number 17, and of those, 10 also participate in the Civic Nation “All In Challenge” that publishes institutions’ student voting data for research access.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, “Participating NSLVE Campuses”; All in Campus Democracy Challenge, “Participating Campuses,” <https://www.allinchallenge.org/participating-campuses/>, Mar. 14, 2020.

Multiple Tennessee institutions of higher education participate in data-collecting initiatives that track the voting progress of their students in November general elections across multiple years. Focusing on the six Tennessee public four-year universities enrolled in NSLVE and with accessible data published through All In Challenge, what follows is a comparison of those schools' 2018 midterm election student voter turnout, compared to their turnout in the previous midterm election of 2014.

### *Tennessee State University*

Tennessee State University (TSU) is an HBCU located in the heart of Nashville. In between the midterm elections of 2014 and 2018, enrollment decreased by around fifteen hundred students, but total voting rate increased by 16.3%.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> All data that follow are taken from or adapted from university NSLVE reports as published on the All In Challenge website.

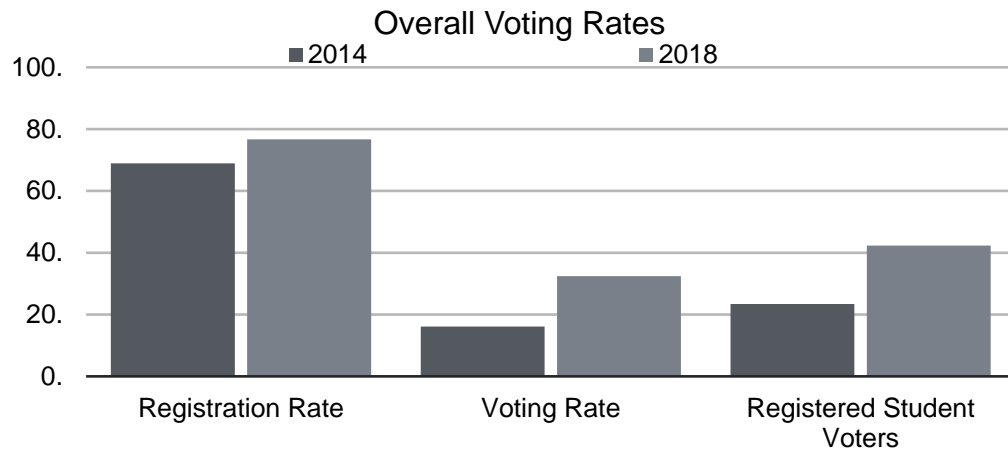


Figure 13. Overall voting rates for Tennessee State University in 2018 v. 2014.<sup>145</sup>

- Voting rate 2018: 32.4%
- Change from 2014: +16.3%

The overall voting rate increased at TSU between the two elections, possibly as a reaction to White House political power. Strangely enough, as voter participation increased, the number of voters who turned up on Election Day decreased. Early Voting became the norm for TSU students in 2018.

<sup>145</sup> NSLVE Report, Tennessee State University, “2014 and 2018 Campus Report, Student Voting Rates for Tennessee State University,” National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University (Sept. 2019), 3, <https://www.allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/Tennessee-State-University-NSLVE-2018.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

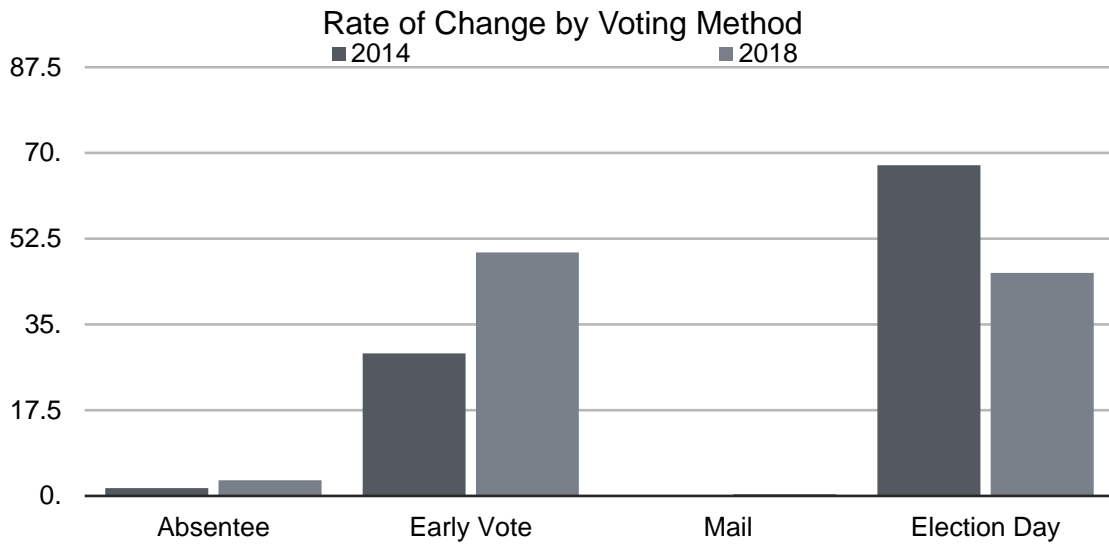


Figure 14. Rate of change by voting method for Tennessee State University.<sup>146</sup>

- Change in Absentee: +1.6%<sup>147</sup>
- Change in Early Vote: +20.6%
- Change in Mail: n/a
- Change in Election Day: -22.0%

The percentage of Election Day voters decreased by 22%, and the Early Vote increased significantly, by 20%. This trend could speak to the accessibility of polls during Early Voting, which are open on weekends, versus Election Day, which is only a weekday event. Since the majority of students at TSU are between the ages of 18-21 who

<sup>146</sup> NSLVE Report, Tennessee State University, 5.

<sup>147</sup> Note that in Tennessee, absentee voting and by-mail voting are the same; Tennessee does not offer voting by mail as an alternative to voting at the polls, without extenuating circumstances. Whereas absentee voting is important to examine for Tennessee student voting, NSLVE’s “Mail” category is not a beneficial variable for study of Tennessee.

have very little flexibility in their class and work schedule, weekend accessibility has contributed to the rise in voter participation.

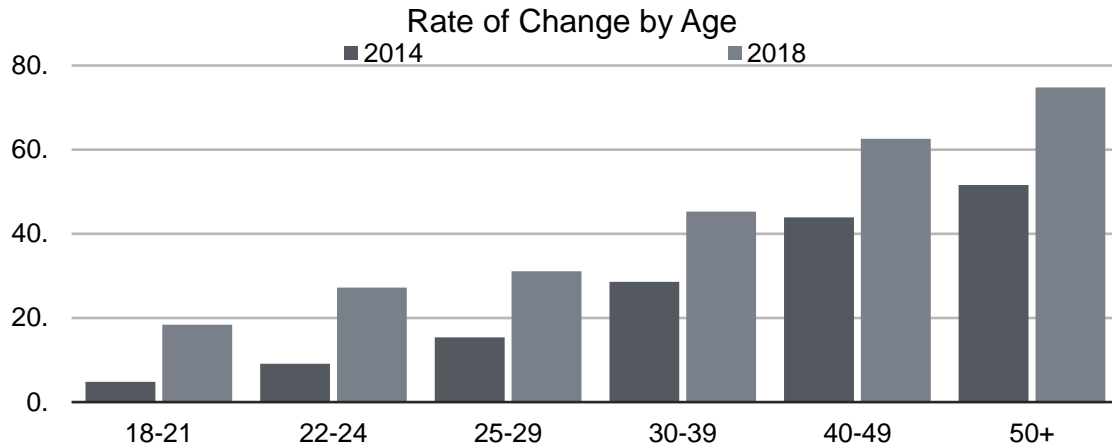


Figure 15. Rate of change by age of voters for Tennessee State University.<sup>148</sup>

- Change in 18-21: +13.6%
- Change in 22-24: +18.2%
- Change in 25-29: +15.7%
- Change in 30-39: +16.7%
- Change in 40-49: +18.8%
- Change in 50+: +23.1%

The number of enrolled TSU students between the ages of 18-21 contrasts significantly with the number of TSU students who participate in elections. In 2014 there were 3,692 students within this age range enrolled at TSU, but only 178 of them cast a

<sup>148</sup> NSLVE Report, Tennessee State University, 6.



ballot. The number of 18-21-year-old voters increased significantly during the 2018 election but still failed to come close to the university's enrollment.

Class year of student voters is also an essential comparison in analysis of voter participation. As discussed in terms of improvement of voting with age, the parallel trend is that the farther along students are in their education, the more likely they are to vote, and the Tennessee State University student data hold this to be true. Juniors and seniors vote in greater numbers than do freshmen and sophomores.

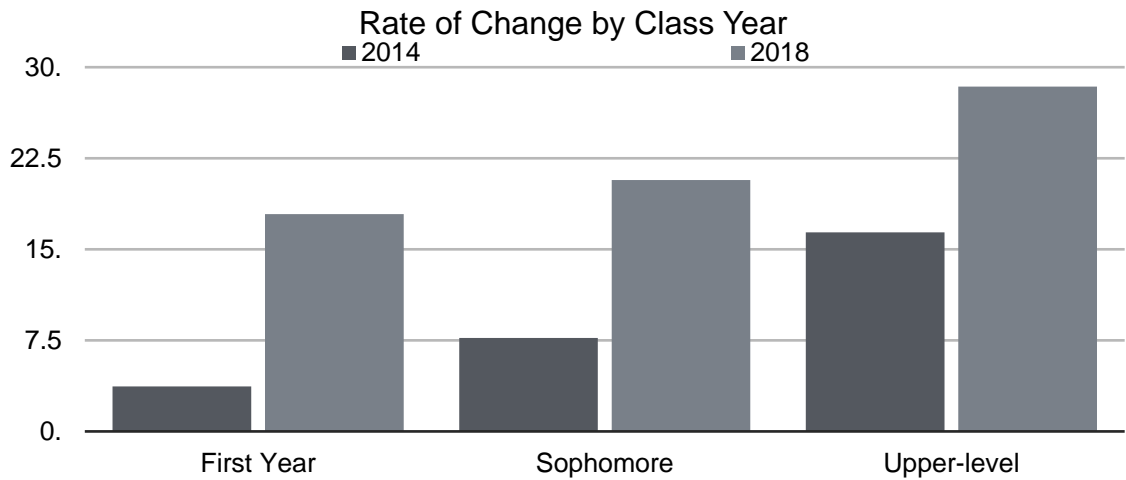


Figure 16. Rate of change by class year of Tennessee State University voters.<sup>149</sup>

- Change in First Year: +14.2%
- Change in Sophomore: +13.0%
- Change in Upper-level: +11.9%

<sup>149</sup> NSLVE Report, Tennessee State University, 8.

*Middle Tennessee State University*

Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), located at the geographical center of the state of Tennessee, is a four-year public university with around 20,000 students. In 2018, whereas enrollment decreased by about twelve hundred students, the voting rate increased by 23%.

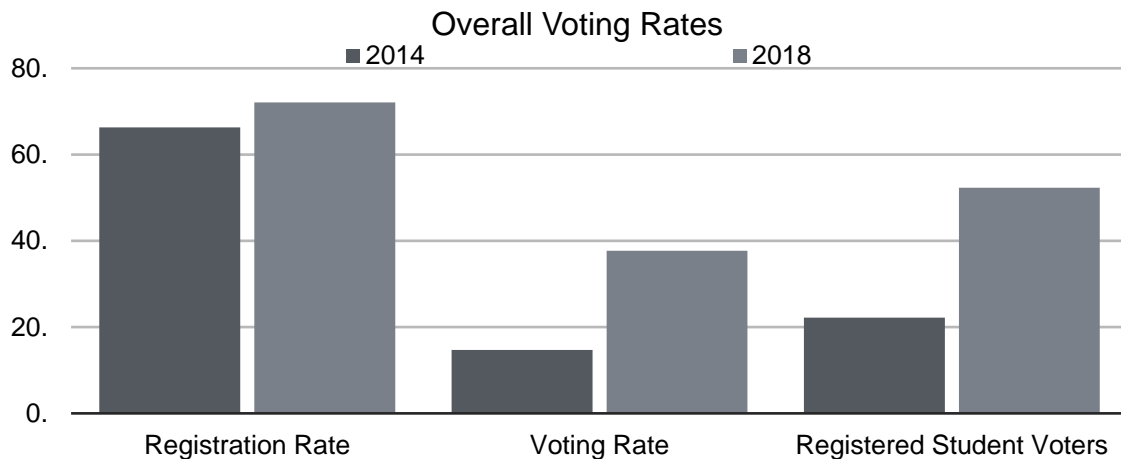


Figure 17. Overall voting rates for Middle Tennessee State University in 2018 v. 2014.<sup>150</sup>

- Voting Rate 2018: 37.7%
- Change from 2014: +23.0%

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<sup>150</sup> NSLVE Report, Middle Tennessee State University, “2014 and 2018 Campus Report, Student Voting Rates for Middle Tennessee State University,” National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University (Sept. 2019), 3, <https://mtsu.edu/amerdem/nslve.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

Middle Tennessee has more than double the number of enrolled students than does Tennessee State, however the two schools' data show the same voting trends. For example, the decrease in Election Day participation is similar for both schools' students.

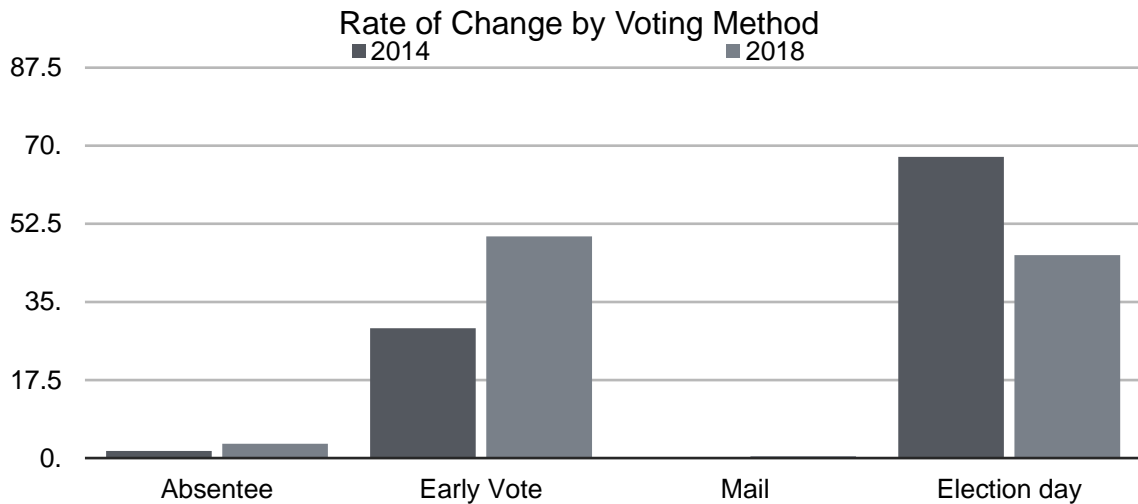


Figure 18. Rate of change by voting method for Middle Tennessee State University.<sup>151</sup>

- Change in Absentee: +1.6%
- Change in Early Vote: +20.6%
- Change in Mail: n/a
- Change in Election Day: -22.0%

The similarity between the two universities' student voters is maintained in age range of voters as well. The most concentrated group of students at MTSU in 2018, 10,800 of the university's students, was between 18 and 21, which was also the group

<sup>151</sup> NSLVE Report, Middle Tennessee State University, 5.

with the lowest rate of voter turnout, with only 3,500 student voters (which however was a marked increase over 2014).

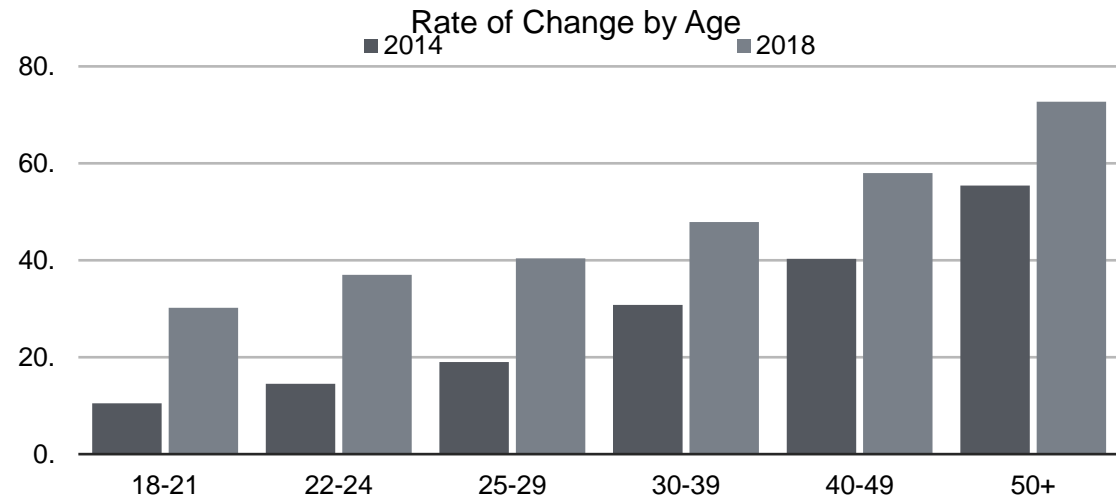


Figure 19. Rate of change by age of voters for Middle Tennessee State University.<sup>152</sup>

- Change in 18-21: +22.9%
- Change in 22-24: +23.0%
- Change in 25-29: +22.1%
- Change in 30-39: +20.6 %
- Change in 40-49: +22.4%
- Change in 50+: +18.8%

Middle Tennessee student voting patterns parallel TSU in other trends as well.

For example, MTSU upper-level students turn out to vote in greater numbers than do its lower-level students.

<sup>152</sup> NSLVE Report, Middle Tennessee State University, 6.

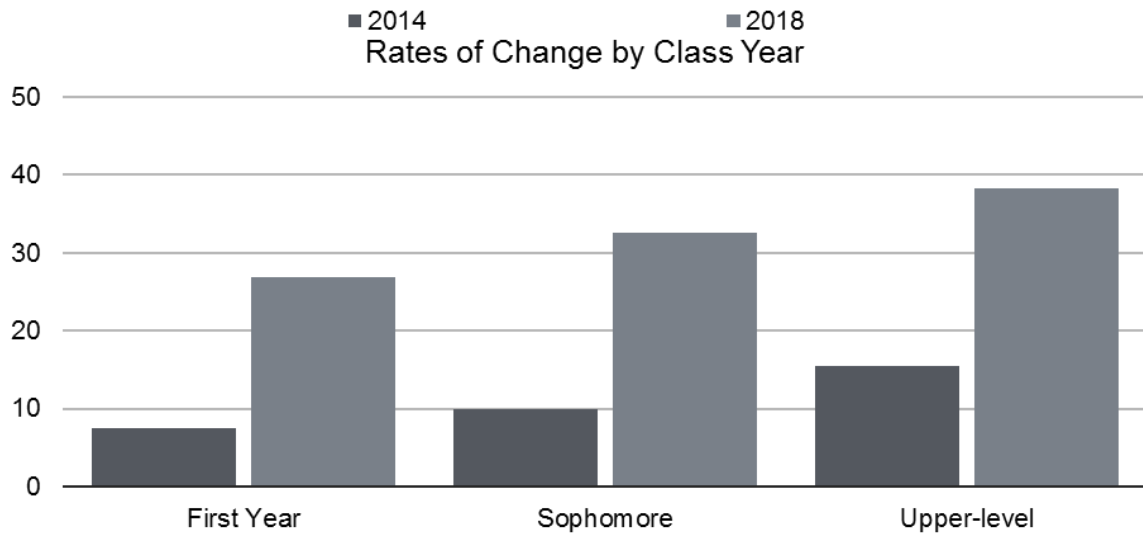


Figure 20. Rate of change by class year of Middle Tennessee State University voters.<sup>153</sup>

- Change in First Year: 19.5%
- Change in Sophomore: 22.6%
- Change in Upper-level: 22.8%

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<sup>153</sup> NSLVE Report, Middle Tennessee State University, 8.

*University of Tennessee, Knoxville*

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville (UTK), a four-year public institution, is a large SEC school located in East Tennessee. It is considered Tennessee’s flagship public research university. It vies with Middle Tennessee State University for greatest number of undergraduate students. Similar with MTSU and TSU, UTK’s student enrollment went down between 2014 and 2018, but its percentage of student voters actually increased in 2018.

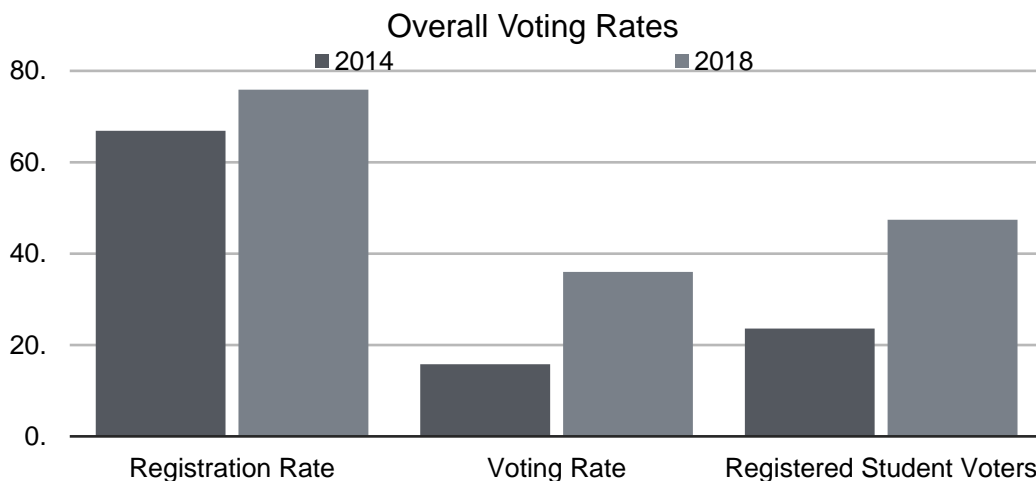


Figure 21. Overall voting rates for University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 2018 v. 2014.<sup>154</sup>

- Voting Rate 2018: 36.0%
- Change from 2014: +20.2%

<sup>154</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, “2014 and 2018 Campus Report, Student Voting Rates for University of Tennessee-Knoxville,” National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University (Sept. 2019), 3, <https://www.allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/University-of-Tennessee-at-Knoxville-NSLVE-2018.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

When comparing Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, there are similar numbers, and their trends follow suit. The decrease in Election Day turnout at UTK was also around 20%.

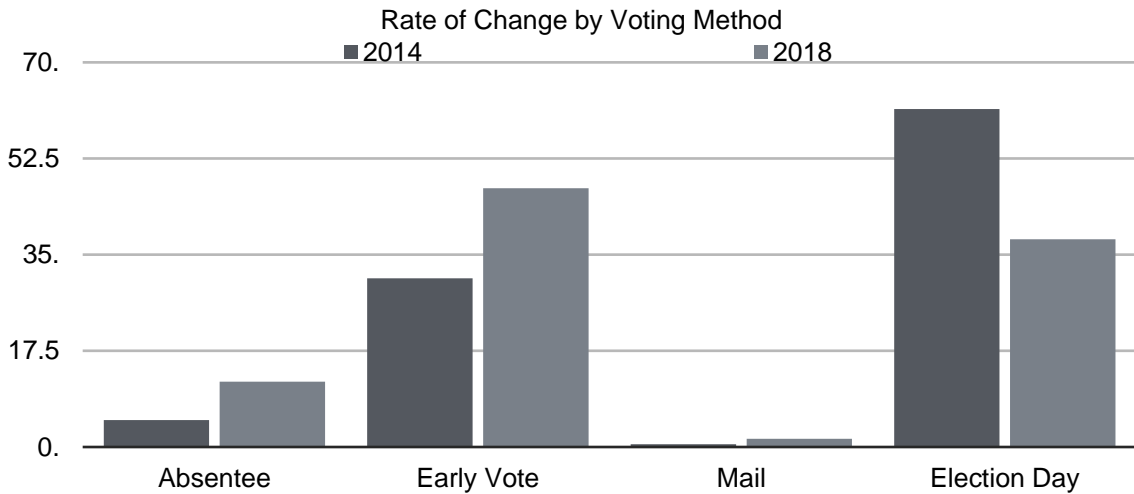


Figure 22. Rate of change by voting method for University of Tennessee, Knoxville.<sup>155</sup>

- Change in Absentee: +7.0%
  - Change in Early Vote: +16.3%
  - Change in Mail: +1.0%
  - Change in Election Day: -23.8%
- (Combining Absentee and Mail: +8.0% for Absentee voting; Mail here is likely reflective of UTK out-of-state students' state categories.)

<sup>155</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 5.

By a significant margin, 18-21 year olds are the largest age group enrolled in Knoxville, but they also showed up at the polls the least.

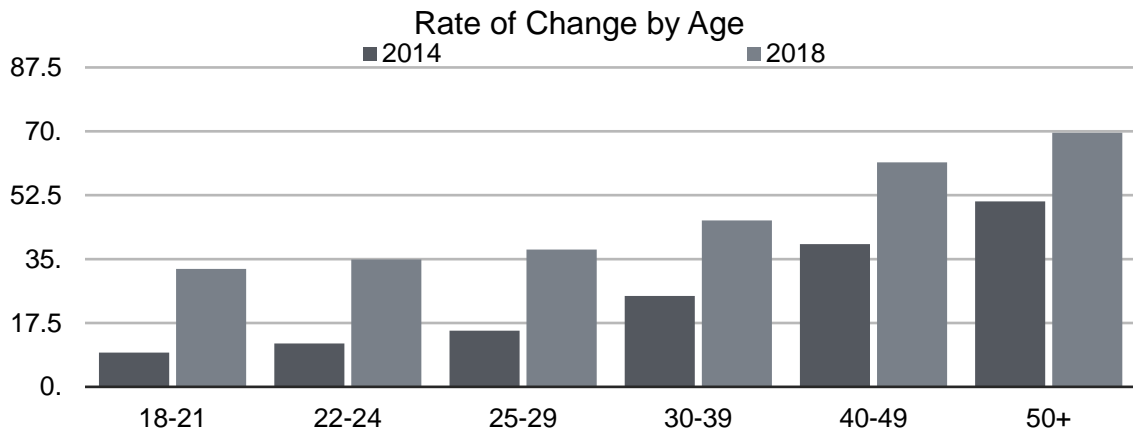


Figure 23. Rate of change by age of voters for University of Tennessee, Knoxville.<sup>156</sup>

- Change in 18-21: 19.7%
- Change in 22-24: 22.5%
- Change in 25-29: 21.4%
- Change in 30-39: 17.1 %
- Change in 40-49: 17.7%
- Change in 50+: 17.3%

<sup>156</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 6.



The same trends are concurrent in education level as well at UTK.

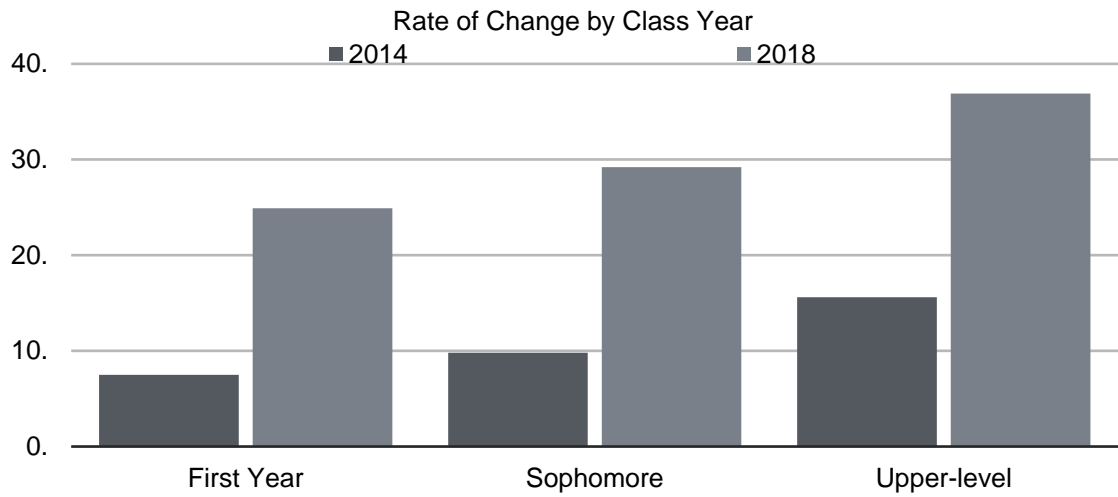


Figure 24. Rate of change by class year of University of Tennessee, Knoxville, voters.<sup>157</sup>

- Change in First Year: 17.4%
- Change in Sophomore: 19.4%
- Change in Upper-level: 21.4%

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<sup>157</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 8.

*East Tennessee State University*

East Tennessee State University (ETSU), located in Johnson City, is a smaller university in the far eastern region of the state, very close to the North Carolina border. In terms of the growth of its student body from 2014 to 2018, ETSU differs from the previously discussed three universities: enrollment increased at ETSU in 2018, along with its student voting rates in the 2018 election.

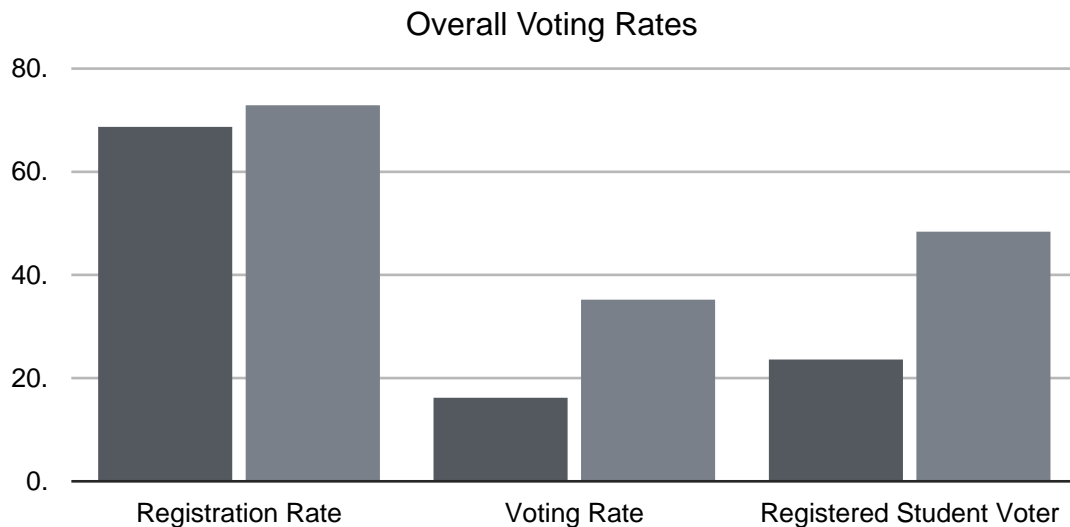


Figure 25. Overall voting rates for East Tennessee State University in 2018 v. 2014.<sup>158</sup>

- Voting Rate in 2018: 35.2%
- Change from 2014: 19.0%

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<sup>158</sup> NSLVE Report, East Tennessee State University, “2014 and 2018 Campus Report, Student Voting Rates for East Tennessee State University,” National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University (Sept. 2019), 3, <https://www.allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/East-Tennessee-State-University-NSLVE-2018.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

Election Day participation by ETSU students decreased by 22%, as their Early Voting increased, as was true for the three universities above, but Election Day voting at ETSU still attracted the greatest number of student voters.

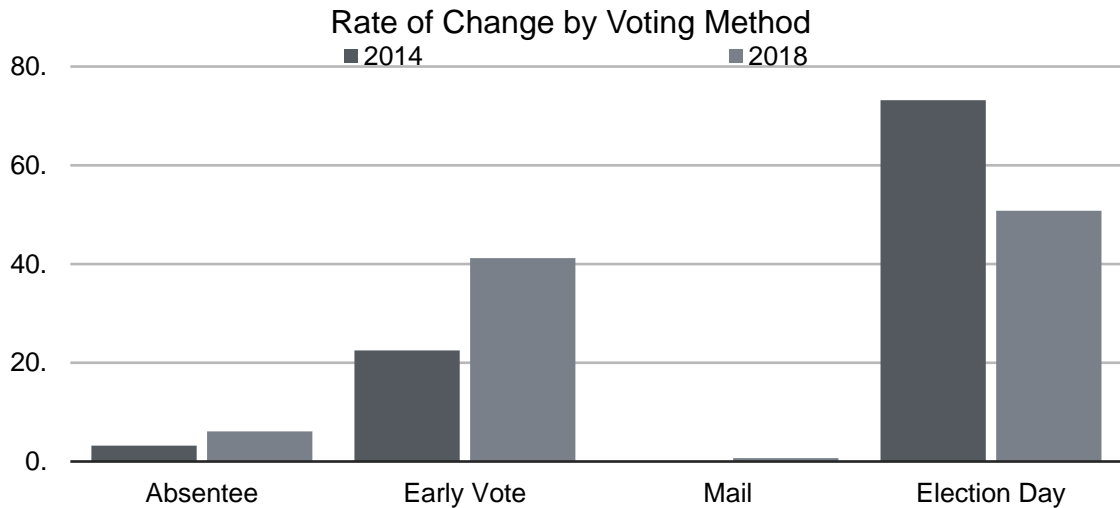


Figure 26. Rate of change by voting method for East Tennessee State University.<sup>159</sup>

- Change in Absentee: +3.0%
- Change in Early Vote: +18.7%
- Change in Mail: n/a
- Change in Election Day: -22.4%

While actual student enrollment numbers at East Tennessee State University are significantly lower than at Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 18-21 year olds at ETSU are still the most significant age group in attendance, and, as with the other schools' younger students, they are the smallest percentage of voter participants.

<sup>159</sup> NSLVE Report, East Tennessee State University, 5.

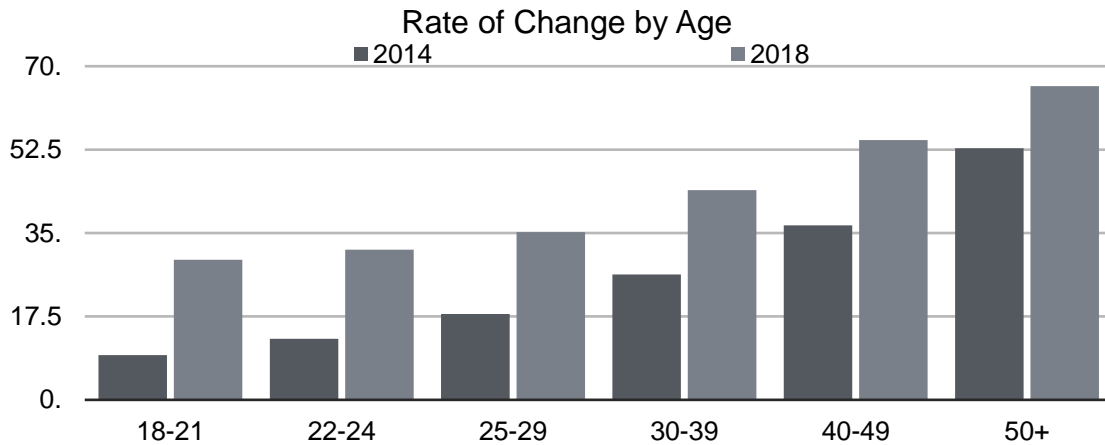


Figure 27. Rate of change by age of voters for East Tennessee State University.<sup>160</sup>

- Change in 18-21: +20%
- Change in 22-24: +18.7%
- Change in 25-29: +17.2%
- Change in 30-39: +17.7%
- Change in 40-49: +18.0%
- Change in 50+: +13.0%

Education level vis-à-vis voting at East Tennessee State University also follows the pattern observed in the academic year divisions of student voters at the other public universities: the higher their year in school, the greater students' participation in voting.

<sup>160</sup> NSLVE Report, East Tennessee State University, 6.

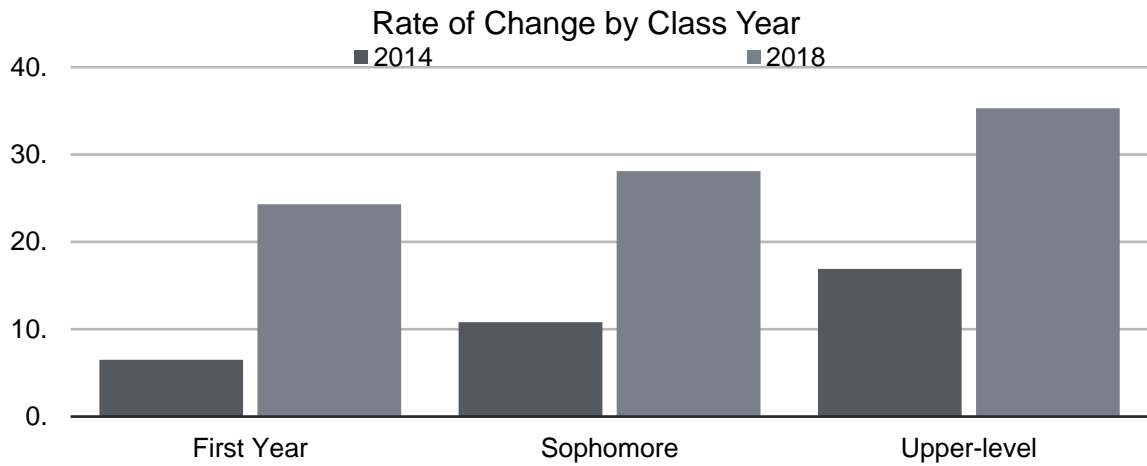


Figure 28. Rate of change by class year of East Tennessee State University voters.<sup>161</sup>

- Change in First Year: +17.8%
- Change in Sophomore: +17.2%
- Change in Upper-level: +18.3%

### *University of Memphis*

The University of Memphis (UMemphis), in the far southwestern corner of the state of Tennessee, is the West Tennessee large public university representation of the trends in student voting observed among the large public university students across Tennessee from east to west.

As with ETSU in the east, but in contrast to TSU, MTSU, and UTK, UMemphis' student enrollment increased in 2018 over 2014. And, with all four of the other universities examined (and with student voters all across the country), University of Memphis' voting rate increased and its percentage of student voters grew in 2018.

<sup>161</sup> NSLVE Report, East Tennessee State University, 8.

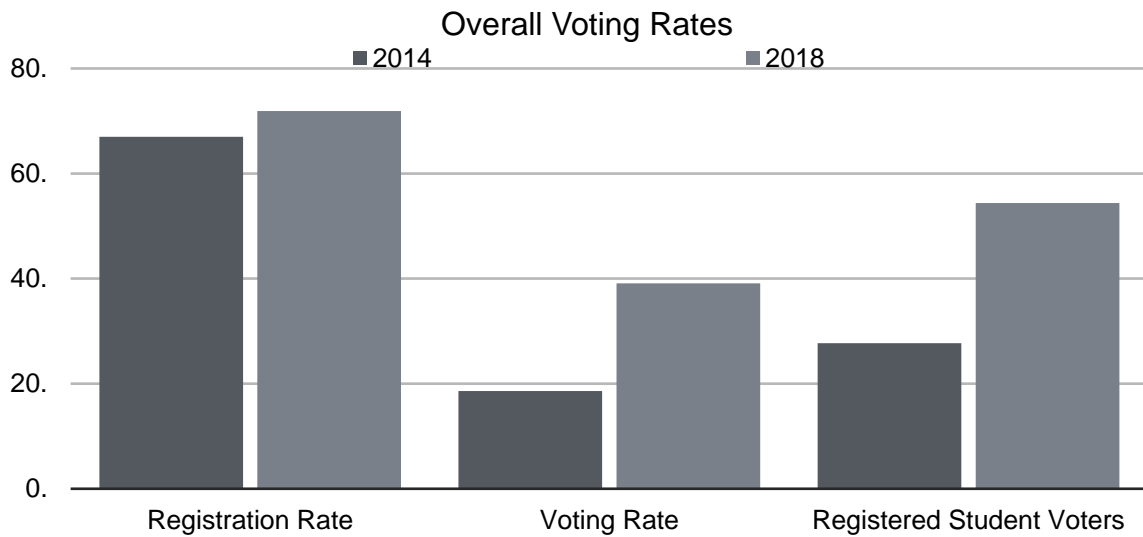


Figure 29. Overall voting rates for University of Memphis in 2018 v. 2014.<sup>162</sup>

- Voting Rate in 2018: 39.1%
- Change from 2014: +20.5%

Election Day voter participation decreased for University of Memphis students in 2018, in the 20% range, as the utility and ease of Early Voting increased for them.

<sup>162</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Memphis, “2014 and 2018 Campus Report, Student Voting Rates for University of Memphis,” National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University (Sept. 2019), 3, <https://www.allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/University-of-Memphis-NSLVE-2018.pdf>, accessed Jan. 27, 2020.

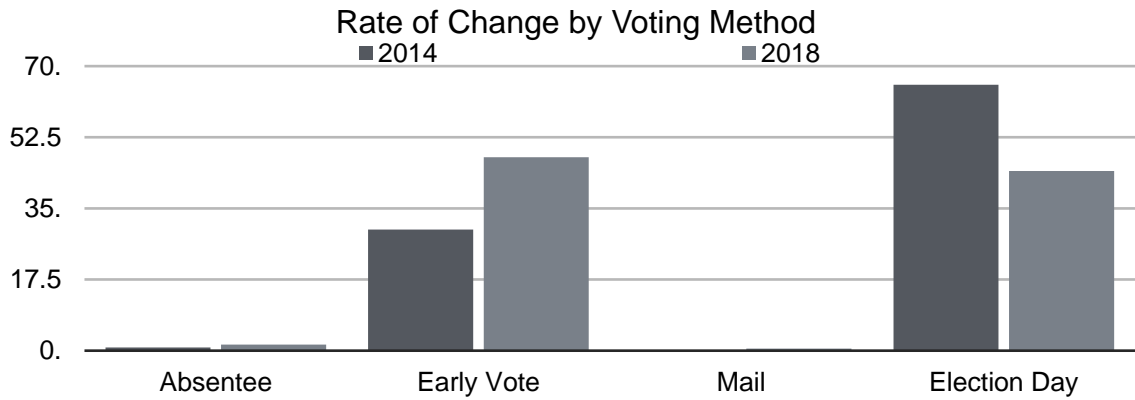


Figure 30. Rate of change by voting method for University of Memphis.<sup>163</sup>

- Change in Absentee: +.8%
- Change in Early Vote: +17.8%
- Change in Mail: n/a
- Change in Election Day: -21.2%

The 18-21 age group continues to be the highest percentage of enrolled students and the lowest percentage of voters, also at UMemphis.

<sup>163</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Memphis, 5.

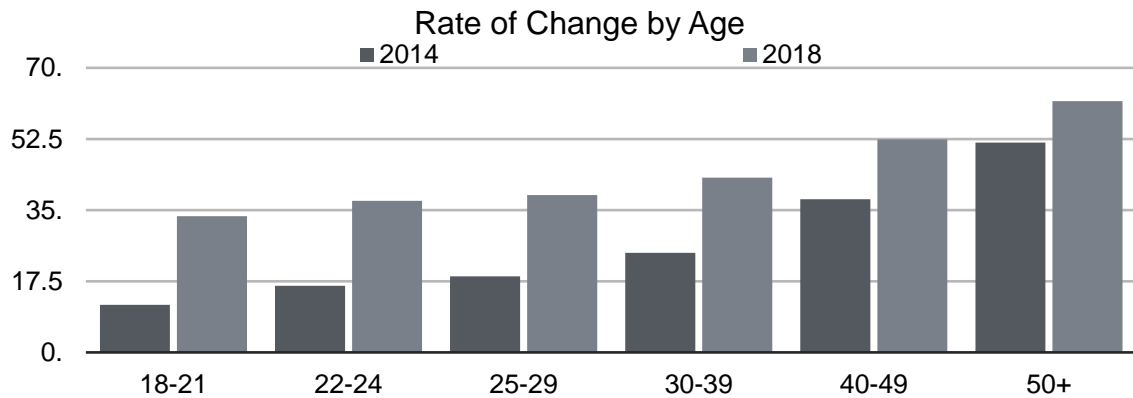


Figure 31. Rate of change by age for University of Memphis.<sup>164</sup>

- Change in 18-21: +21.8%
- Change in 22-24: +20.9%
- Change in 25-29: +19.9%
- Change in 30-39: +18.4%
- Change in 40-49: +14.7%
- Change in 50+: +10.2%

Finally, upper-level students at University of Memphis continue to participate in voting more often than do the younger students, a pattern that is fully consistent with all the other universities examined.

<sup>164</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Memphis, 6.



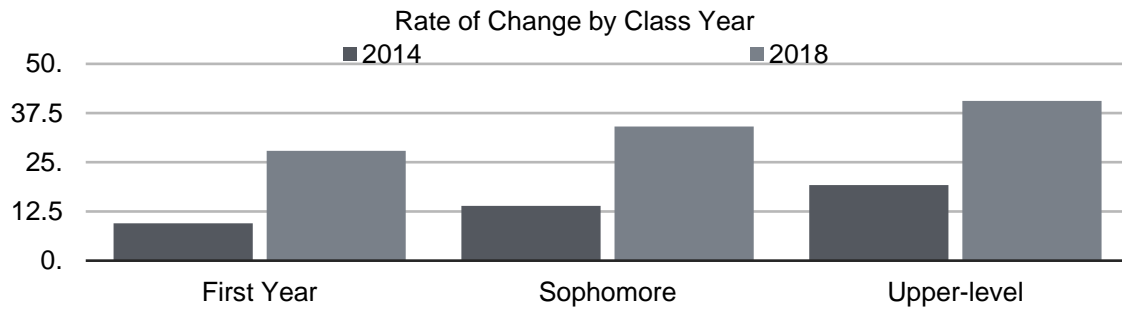


Figure 32. Rate of change by class year of University of Memphis voters.<sup>165</sup>

- Change in First Year: +18.4%
- Change in Sophomore: +20.1%
- Change in Upper-level: +21.5%

*University of Tennessee, Chattanooga*

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC) is a popular public institution located in the southeastern part of Tennessee. Between 2014 and 2018 its enrollment level decreased by fewer than 50 students. Along with all the other examined universities, UTC’s voting rate increased in 2018 and its percentage of student voters grew.

<sup>165</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Memphis, 8.

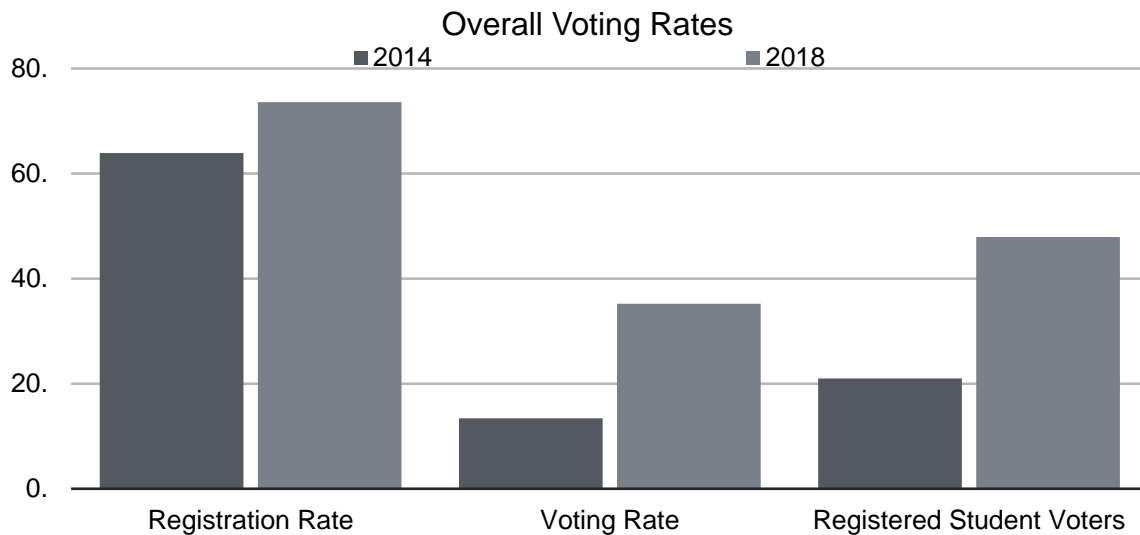


Figure 33. Overall voting rates for UTC in 2018 v. 2014.<sup>166</sup>

- Voting Rate in 2018: 35.2%
- Change from 2014: +21.8%

<sup>166</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, “2014 and 2018 Campus Report, Student Voting Rates for University of Tennessee-Chattanooga,” National Study of Learning Voting and Engagement, Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University (Sept. 2019), 3, <https://www.allinchallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/University-of-Memphis-NSLVE-2018.pdf>, accessed Mar. 21, 2020.

Election Day voter participation decreased for UTC students in 2018 and Early Voting increased, but Election Day voting was still more popular.

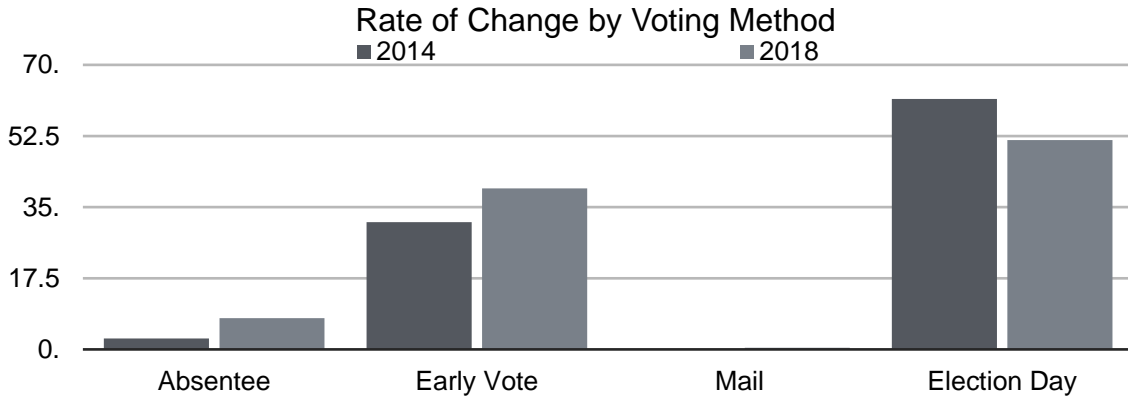


Figure 34. Rate of change by voting method for UTC.<sup>167</sup>

- Change in Absentee: +5.1%
- Change in Early Vote: +8.3%
- Change in Mail: n/a
- Change in Election Day: -10.1%

The 18-21 age group continues to be the highest percentage of enrolled students and the lowest percentage of voters for all reported schools, including UTC.

<sup>167</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 5.

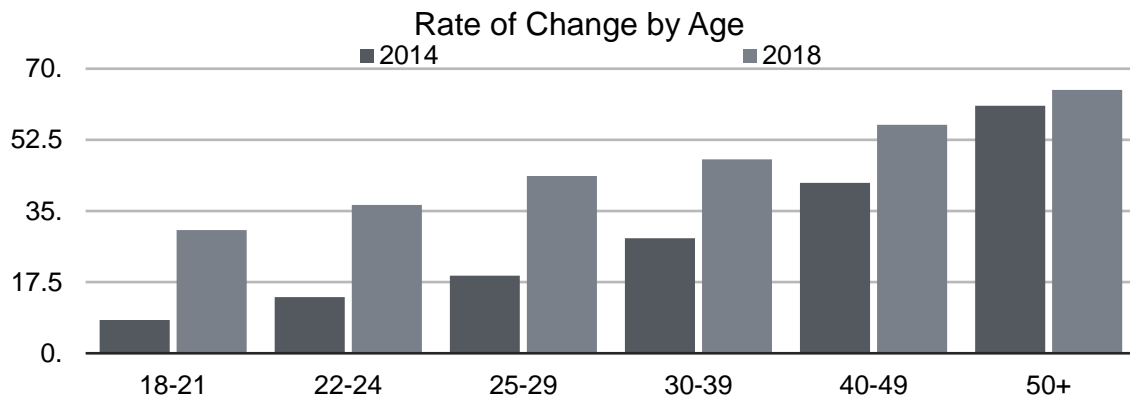


Figure 35. Rate of change by age for UTC.<sup>168</sup>

- Change in 18-21: +22.0%
- Change in 22-24: +22.7%
- Change in 25-29: +24.5%
- Change in 30-39: +19.4%
- Change in 40-49: +14.2%
- Change in 50+: +3.9%

Upper-level students at UTC continue to participate more often than do younger students, a pattern that is fully consistent with all the other universities examined.

<sup>168</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 6.

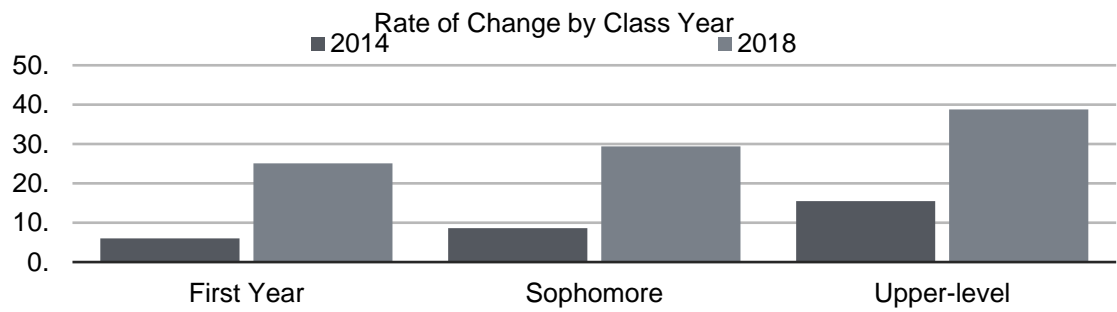


Figure 36. Rate of change by class year of UTC voters.<sup>169</sup>

- Change in First Year: +19.1%
- Change in Sophomore: +20.8%
- Change in Upper-level: +23.3%

<sup>169</sup> NSLVE Report, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 8.

## Chapter 4

### Assessing Tennessee Student Voting

#### Conclusions

Even though 18 year olds have had the right to vote for more than 50 years, student voting has still never reached the level necessary to harness its potential. Young people could seriously impact and change the national political landscape were they to understand their capability to do so, and come out and vote in numbers. Red-state political leaders, interested in maintaining tight reins on government and holding onto their majorities, understand full well the true potential of youth voting, which truly could shift national and state balances of power. Conservative legislators, therefore, under the guidance of ALEC and other conservative think tanks, proactively work to repress the student vote and curb any attempts to make student voting—and broader voting by all American citizens—more accessible.

The most recent Tennessee example was on March 11, 2020, when the Tennessee House of Representatives Subcommittee on Elections and Campaign Finance voted against, strictly along party lines, HB1674, which would have permitted polling places on Tennessee public university campuses. The subcommittee ended the bill before it could even reach the larger Local Committee or the Tennessee House floor for discussion.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, at the national level, U.S. House Resolution 1, HR1, which would have

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<sup>170</sup> Tennessee General Assembly, “HB1674 Actions, Failed,” Mar. 11, 2020, <http://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/BillInfo/Default.aspx?BillNumber=HB1674>, accessed Mar. 15, 2020.

increased voter access across the entire country, was passed the United States House of Representatives, March 8, 2019, but U.S. Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell blocked the bill from further Congressional progress by stopping its pathway through the U.S. Senate, March 14, 2019.<sup>171</sup>

Throughout time, youth voting has maintained its status as one of the most critical yet unobtainable voting blocks. Despite some passionate stances on social issues by American citizens between the ages of 18 to 29, their showing up to the polls has not become a real priority. With its vast numbers, this “social demographic” block could rise above its current political status quo and make serious changes to American society if ever the willpower could be generated.

In response to this challenge, multiple organizations have sprung up across the country to promote increased civic engagement. Some have the backing of progressive billionaires like Ian Simmons and Seth Flaxman. For example, the Foundation for Civic Leadership organization is a hub of left-leaning advocates that puts out programs to increase voter engagement; billionaire Ian Simmons is its founder and president.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, Democracy Works has ties to Seth Flaxman, its co-founder and executive director.<sup>173</sup> Both programs have similar agendas behind them. From encouraging civic

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<sup>171</sup> “H.R.1—For the People Act of 2019,” Congress.gov, Mar. 8, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/1/all-actions?overview=closed&KWICView=false>, accessed Mar. 15, 2020; Tim Lau, “House Passes Historic Democracy Reform Bill,” Brennan Center for Justice, Mar. 8, 2019, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/house-passes-historic-democracy-reform-bill>, accessed Mar. 15, 2020.

<sup>172</sup> FCL, Foundation for Civic Leadership, <http://fcleadership.org>, accessed Mar. 16, 2020.

<sup>173</sup> “Democracy Works,” <https://www.democracy.works>, accessed Mar. 16, 2020.

learning in all majors to creating fun voting-related incentives, such programs' get-out-the-vote projects were, without a doubt, contributing factors in the influx of youth voter participation in the 2018 midterm elections. In the fall of 2018, students arrived at the polls in unprecedented hordes, and with that increase in student participation came a significant blue shift in the outcome of elections across the country.

However, in the South, the outcome continued to be thoroughly red. Possibly, the lack of leftward shift could be a ramification of disproportionately older voters who voted in southern states. Nevertheless, the South was not excluded from a rise in young voting in 2018. Tennessee specifically saw student-voter numbers that doubled from the previous midterm election in 2014. Republican Marsha Blackburn, who won her race for the U.S. Senate in 2018, was overwhelmingly supported across the state of Tennessee. Multiple theories about her victory give credit to the faith-based social politics of the area, the ultra-conservatism that emerged in Tennessee in the 2000s, and the youth voters who are susceptible to conservative rhetoric. So, although the youth of the country as a whole is experiencing a leftward shift, this research understands that youth voters in the South feel a deeper connection to their religious beliefs than to progressive political affiliation.

Since dedication to evangelical Christianity in southern culture runs so deeply into southern roots, separation between church and state is a fragile line that is often crossed in the South. From early childhood, lots of southerners have heard that conservative values are in direct alignment with holding to a strong conservative political ideology and voting tradition. Thus the evangelical movement has clung to the



Republican party without any hesitancy, and scholars, such as Dr. Coleman McGinnis, who have studied political dynamics in Tennessee for years do not predict a shift away from Republican dominion over Tennessee any time soon.

In addition to rallying student voting across the country, the activist progressive student-voting organizations are present throughout college campuses in the South as well, and they are not without a southern following. But if so, why are southern election results not showing an influx of more progressive voters? In truth, they are, but on a smaller scale than nationally. Throughout the South, Democrats have been able to gain unprecedented control in local elections in urban areas—from Birmingham, Alabama, to Jackson, Mississippi, to Richmond, Virginia<sup>174</sup>—which have seen more Democratic representation in their electorate than in previous years and had Bernie Sanders winning their primary votes. Predictions of a “New South Rising” have been tantalizingly on the ascendancy, with some near-misses and some successes in the big coastal southern states, but states of the “interior South” like Tennessee did not experience transformative progressive outcomes in the 2018 election.<sup>175</sup>

Other efforts to increase student voting on Tennessee campuses derive from Republican outreach efforts. The current Tennessee Secretary of State, Tre Hargett, elected to his position by the Tennessee General Assembly, is a Republican public figure who has made concerted efforts to encourage student voting across the state. He created a

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<sup>174</sup> Bob Moser, “A New South Rising: This Time for Real,” *American Prospect* (Dec. 20, 2018), <https://prospect.org/power/new-south-rising-time-real/>, accessed Mar. 16, 2020.

<sup>175</sup> Moser, “A New South Rising.”

civic engagement division within his office a number of years ago and in recent elections has developed a student competition across Tennessee campuses, public and private, to increase voter registration.<sup>176</sup> Despite both red and blue encouragement of student voter turnout, upward ticks in voting by youth voters have honestly been only small increases, as seen in the above histograms about public university student voting patterns in Tennessee. Student voting may be on the rise, but it is not yet in sufficient numbers to shape a difference: students do not currently vote at rates capable of making any sweeping political changes; student voting is nowhere near the level of participation to bring about progressive outcomes that could be achieved by left-leaning voters. Even if students were to reach the civic potential of 100% student voter participation, it is naive to assume that Tennessee would see a real shift in political ideology in the state.

### What Does This Say About Youth Voting?

Democrat or Republican, the inability to motivate student voters is concerning for many civic engagement organizations. While some organizations are politically motivated, the majority are nonpartisan and strictly civically minded. The Andrew Goodman Foundation is a program that was founded to educate and encourage a renewing citizenry of ordinary Americans who will engage in civic action to work toward a more perfect union through their vote.<sup>177</sup> Rooted in the civil rights movement, the

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<sup>176</sup> “Civic Engagement,” Tennessee Secretary of State, <https://sos.tn.gov/civics>, accessed Apr. 14, 2020.

<sup>177</sup> “Who We Are,” Andrew Goodman Foundation, <https://andrewgoodman.org/who-we-are/>, accessed Mar. 17, 2020.

foundation was inspired by the young activist Andrew Goodman who was murdered while registering African American voters in Mississippi in 1964. Since then, for over fifty years, the foundation established in his honor by his family has continued Goodman's legacy by attempting to incubate the next generations of civic-minded youth. Organizations with similar agendas are the reason there has been a significant push in civic learning across disciplines.

The Bonner Scholars program provides scholarship money to higher education students in exchange for their commitment to local community service during the students' four years of undergraduate study.<sup>178</sup> The goal of the Bonner program is to create educated community leaders with the drive to participate in local community-based civic work. By providing financial support to students across every major disciplinary field, they are encouraging civic engagement within academic programs that have underperformed. STEM is an area that needs such support, which NSLVE data confirm: students studying in STEM programs are least likely to engage in civic activity because of their lack of exposure to civic learning in their classes.<sup>179</sup>

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) started its *Diversity and Democracy* initiative in 2007, to reiterate that general education requires not only education in and understanding of the liberal arts and sciences for success in life but also a developed realization that citizenship for the common good must be central to

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<sup>178</sup> “The Bonner Program: Access to Education, Opportunity to Serve,” Corella and Bertram E. Bonner Foundation, <http://www.bonner.org/apply>, accessed Mar. 17, 2020.

<sup>179</sup> Sax, “Citizenship Development and the American College Student.”

the thinking and perception of human beings in order to enhance the well-being of society. The AAC&U seeks to integrate social justice, cultural humility, and experiential learning programs into all college curricula in order to achieve these goals.<sup>180</sup> Similarly, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching strives to “prepare undergraduates for responsible political engagements” and to proactively advance education for democracy.<sup>181</sup> AAC&U’s initiative, as with all of these civic engagement academic organizations and programs, wants to educate for democracy, promoting the elevation of learning, understanding, and empathy required to solve problems in today’s “independent but unequal world.”<sup>182</sup>

When retired former U.S. District Court Judge James Dannenberg resigned his membership in the U.S. Supreme Court Bar in March of 2020, he wrote a letter to Chief Justice John Roberts, chief justice of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), in which Judge Dannenberg outlined his inability to continue serving on the bench in a judicial climate that has become exceedingly politicized and is making rulings that deviate markedly from the highest legal standards long respected and adhered to over the course of his many decades in the federal court system. He believes the courts have become a platform for legal activism that advances the political ideology of an extremist

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<sup>180</sup> “Undergraduate Global Health Education: Innovation and Evolving Practices,” *Diversity and Democracy* 22, no. 2-3 (Spring/Summer 2019), <https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/2019/spring-summer>, accessed Mar. 17, 2020.

<sup>181</sup> Anne Colby, Elizabeth Beaumont, Thomas Ehrlich, and Josh Corngold, *Educating for Democracy* (Stanford, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2007).

<sup>182</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities, “About Diversity and Democracy,” <https://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/about>, accessed Mar. 17, 2020.

Republican regime. He believes that the courts have stopped representing the law but now advocate for an express political agenda, “cynically undermin[ing] basic freedoms by hypocritically weaponizing others[,]...officially sanction[ing] bigotry and discrimination, [and]...elevating the grossest forms of political bribery....”<sup>183</sup> An implication from Judge Dannenberg’s letter is that a better informed electorate is necessary in order to be able to improve the composition of and culture of the national judiciary system.

In the constant battle by civic education organizations to integrate their cause into accepted academic curriculum, the learned behavior of apathy is their main opponent. In the book *The Good Citizen*, Russell Dalton discusses how American youth are challenging the political status quo of the U.S.<sup>184</sup> In the past, Americans based their sense of citizenship on a duty-based agenda of voting, paying taxes, and serving in the armed forces, a strategy that brought a relative amount of justice. But it may have neglected other forms of civic work, civic engagement, and civic opportunities. From such omissions, the new generation’s interpretations of civic responsibilities are being born.

The younger generation, if less active in duty-based citizenship, is more engaged in “soft news” rhetoric,<sup>185</sup> active associations, and volunteering. In the age of technology,

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<sup>183</sup> James Dannenberg, letter to Chief Justice John Roberts, Mar. 11, 2020, in Dahlia Lithwick, “Former Judge Resigns from the Supreme Court Bar,” *Slate*, Mar. 13, 2020, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/03/judge-james-dannenberg-supreme-court-bar-roberts-letter.html>, accessed Mar. 17, 2020.

<sup>184</sup> Russell J. Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*, 2d ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2016), chaps. 8-9.

<sup>185</sup> Erin Merriman, “Soft News, the Rise of Critical Journalism, and How to Preserve Democracy,” *Edge*, June 6, 2003, <https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297a/Soft%20News.htm>, accessed Mar. 23, 2020.

there is a culture of hyper-aware students but without drive to participate in formal institutions such as elections because of their apathy, lack of resources, and complacency. Civic education organizations can be a strong liaison to connect these young nonvoters to those who are more civically active. It is the civic education organizations' charge to harness the awareness of students and help find ways to teach them, inspire them, and motivate them on the importance of showing up at the ballot box. Today's students may be sacrificing their knowledge, in a state of closed regression, and therefore the civic education organizations' influence and support within universities are important in assisting in addressing the civic learning needs of college youth.

In light of the current political climate of polarization and party line politics, the drive to get students to the polls is just in time. Voters from ages 18 to 29 have seen the world through difficult times in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and in response have developed an attitude of indifference to and distrust of government. On social media platforms, members of this youth social demographic are in a constant rant about the outcomes their parents and predecessors created. Inevitably, if people genuinely desire to change the climate that brought them to the frustrations and impasses they experience in the present day, they must allow themselves to engage their full civic potential.

What can be thoroughly gathered through this research is that student voting is much more complex than just whether or not young people are more liberal or conservative. The social atmosphere is changing around the world, and while more open, more progressive, less traditional views by the youth of today may suggest that the world can look different than it did before, present-day society is not without its hubs of student

conservatives. The U.S. South is a prominent example, and Tennessee fits the mold. The incredible persuasions of evangelical influences throughout Tennessee have caused a battle between the possible and the comfortable.

According to the Pew Research Center, Millennial and Generation Z voters are more likely to hold more socially progressive views than any generation that has come before them. Whether identifying as Democrat or Republican, they have grown up in a new social climate that has led them to be open to more progressive agendas across party lines.<sup>186</sup> While conservative values might be ingrained in the lives of southern students and they may be more inclined to vote red, the views of young Republicans still look quite different than the views of their Republican elders. Pushing students to become more informed on the policies and outcomes of the people for whom they intend to vote is essential if change is to happen. In a time of great divide, students need accessibility, motivation, and inspiration to get out and create the political climate in which they are eager to take part.

Among youth voters in the South, party affiliation will likely not shift leftward in the same way that has been seen across the nation, but even within the conservative party of most southern youth, social ideology is evolving. A new social climate, once harnessed, will develop a new political culture but one without an overt leftward shift necessarily in winning-party outcomes. With help from student voting organizations and

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<sup>186</sup> Kim Parker, Nikki Graf, and Ruth Igielnik, "Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues," Pew Research Center, Jan. 17, 2019, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>, accessed Mar. 19, 2020.

civic education advocates, an increase in student voters, which began in 2018, has the potential to shift the political climate in the South and in Tennessee.



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