

Research for Democracy: The Power of the Youth Vote

OCTOBER 2020



Jonathan M. Tisch
College of Civic Life



INSTITUTE FOR
DEMOCRACY &
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Excited to Join You Today!



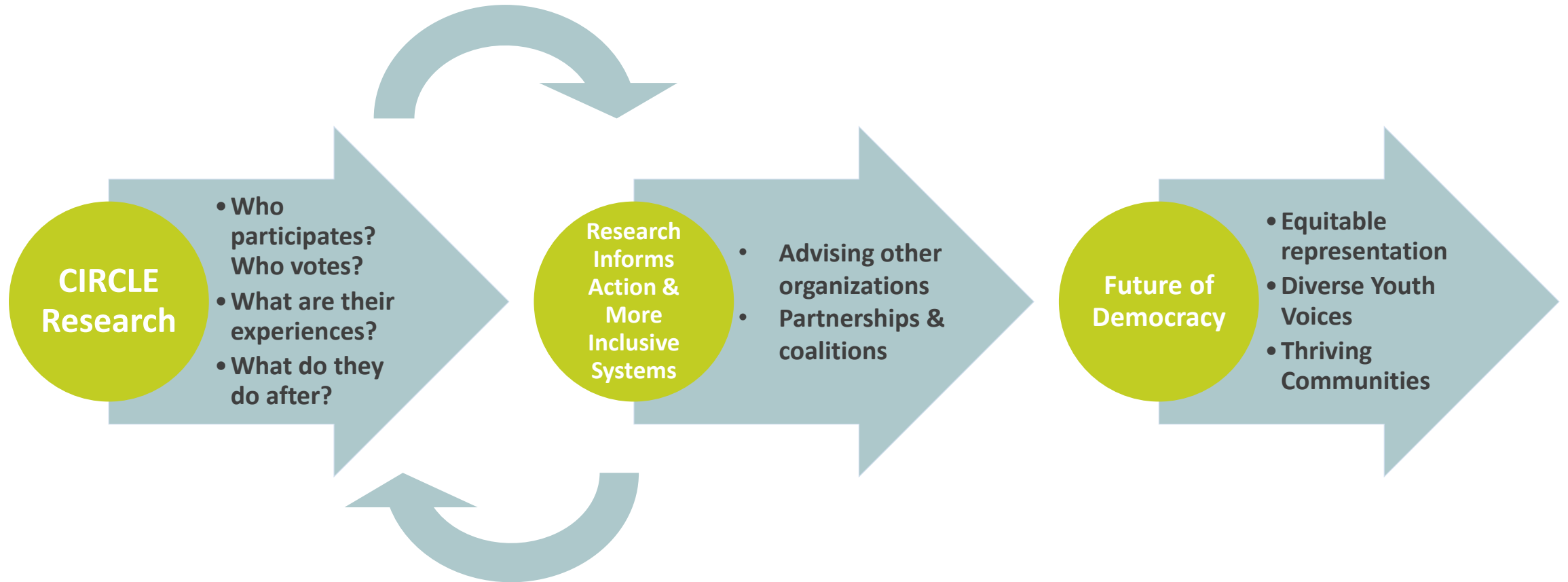
Noorya Hayat
Researcher, CIRCLE

Work of Tisch College + CIRCLE + IDHE

- Go-to source for data on young people
- Share new knowledge with the field
- Create usable tools for locating & mobilizing young voters



What CIRCLE Does



Go-To Source for Data: CIRCLE

- Largest repository of data on civic and political participation of young people
- Disseminate data to candidates, campaigns, GOTV organizations, media, others
 - Partner with local organizations focused on young voters
 - Focus on civic participation inequities by race/ethnicity, education, etc.



Teaching for Democracy Alliance
www.teachingfordemocracy.org

What Do You Tell People About Why Young Voters Matter?



Who Are Young People?

Young People Are Diverse



47 MILLION
ELIGIBLE VOTERS
AGES 18-29



15 MILLION HAVE
TURNED 18 SINCE
2020 ELECTION



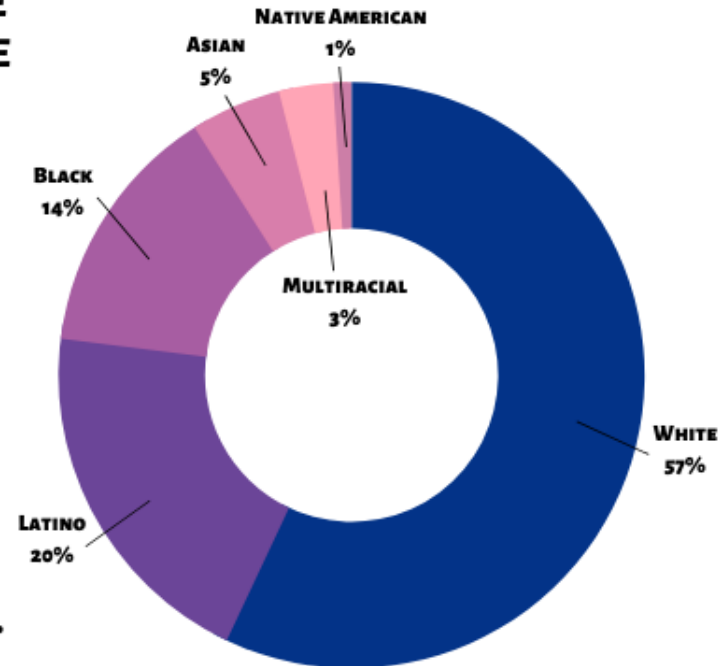
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25% COLLEGE GRADUATES



15% MARRIED
14% HAVE CHILDREN



5% BORN OUTSIDE U.S.
21% HAVE 1+ PARENTS BORN OUTSIDE U.S.



The Youth Vote Will Be Decisive in 2020

Student Union

Plenty of Signs Surging Youth Vote Will Play Major Role in 2020 US Election

By Kathleen Struck
June 22, 2020 06:22 AM

'We're tired of waiting': GenZ is ready for a revolution

By [Rachel Janfaza](#), CNN
Video by Mackenzie Happe, CNN
Updated 1449 GMT (2249 HKT) June 22, 2020

GENERATION
PROGRESS

Young People Are the Pathway to Victory in 2020

By Emily Leach and Brent J. Cohen

ELECTION 2020 YOUTH HIGHER EDUCATION

With Covid-19, We Need to Rethink the Youth Vote

It'll make or break the coming election.

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

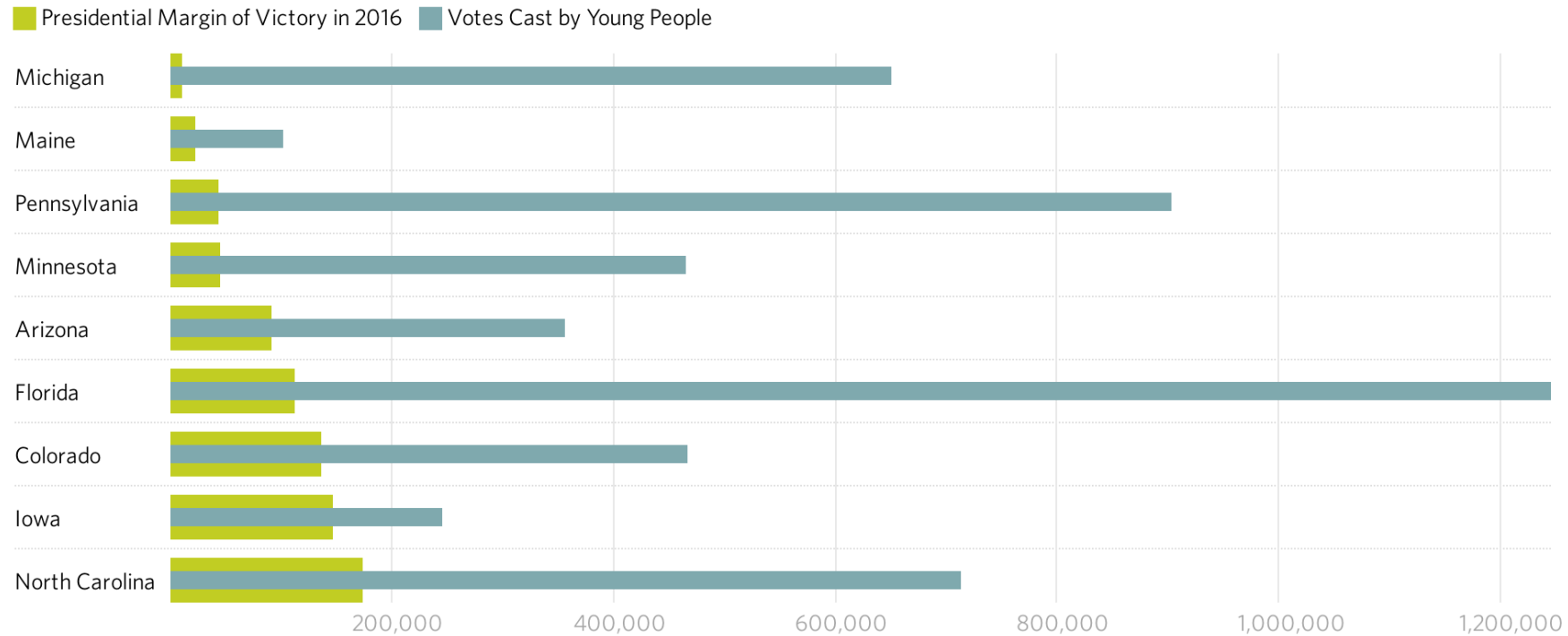
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The Power of the Youth Vote: 2016 Battlegrounds

In Key States, Young People Cast Many More Votes than the Margin of Victory in the 2016 Presidential Race



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Source: Margin of victory from official election results; youth votes cast from Catalist voter file

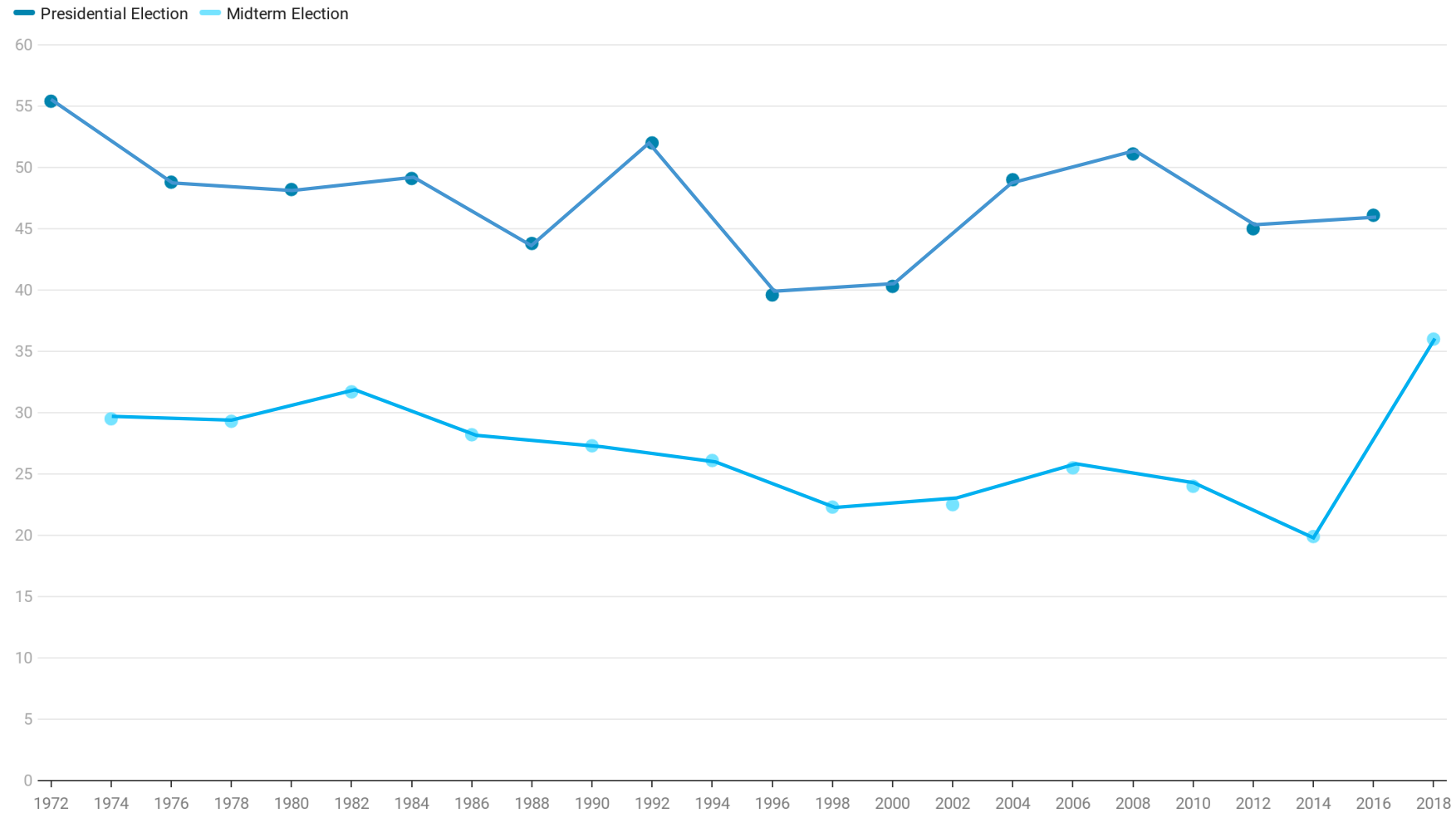
MYTHS #1 and #2

- Youth voting has been declining for decades.
- Young people are apathetic.

Presidential Elections Have Seen More Up and Down

Historical Youth Voter Turnout: 1972-2018

The estimated percentage of eligible young citizens, ages 18-29, who voted in each national election.



While Midterm Youth Turnout Had Been Fairly Static, It Surged in 2018

Youth Voter Turnout (Ages 18-24) in Midterm Elections, 1974-2018

Each highlighted year represents the first midterm in election in which members of each generation made up most or all of the age 18-24 voting eligible cohort:

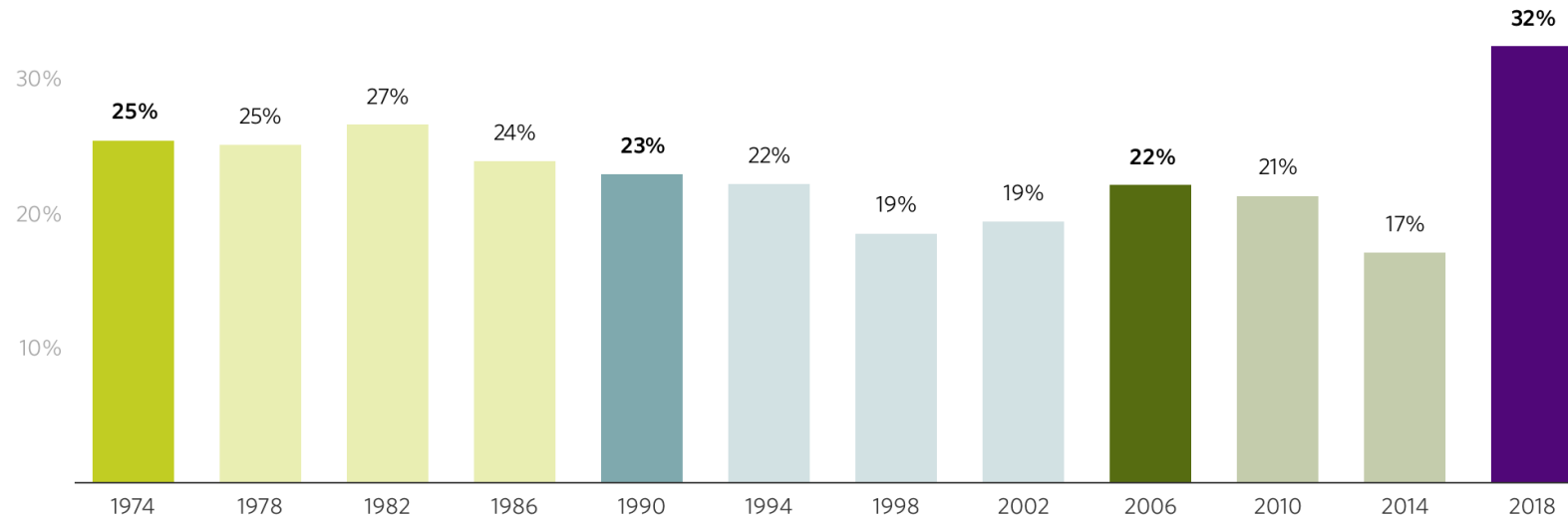
1974: Baby Boomers

1990: Generation X

2006: Millennials

2018: Generation Z

40%



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Source: CIRCLE analysis of Census Current Population Survey, 1974-2018

Youth voter turnout in 2018 increased in EVERY STATE we looked at

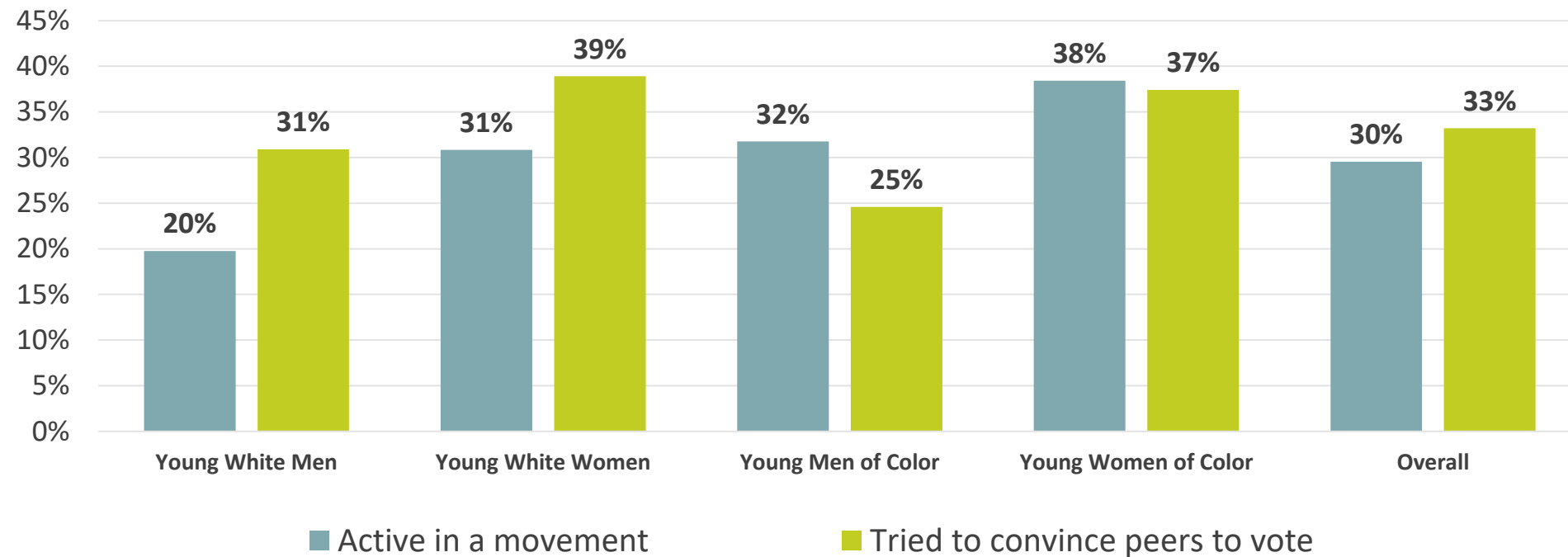
In 31 states, youth turnout increased by double digits

In 19 states it increased by 15 or more percentage points

In 5 states it increased by 20 or more percentage points

Young Women Were Very Engaged in the 2018 Election

Young Women Did the Work!



Source: CIRCLE/Tisch College Election Poll 2018

Millions of Youth Are Engaged, Seeking Ways to Make Change

Exclusive Poll: Young People and the 2020 Election

Youth Ready to Seize their Power

- 83% believe young people have the power to change the country
- 60% feel like they're part of a movement that will vote to express its views
- **79% say the COVID-19 pandemic has helped them realize that politics impacts their everyday lives**

Youth Take to the Streets

- **27% of young people say they have attended a march or demonstration in 2020**
- Big increase from the 2016 (5%) and 2018 elections (16%)
- Young women of color more likely to protest than other youth

Strong Preference for Biden

- By a staggering 34-point margin, 58% of youth support Biden, compared to 24% for Trump
- **Driven by youth of color; only 23 pt. margin among White youth**
- 18% of youth say they would prefer to vote for another candidate

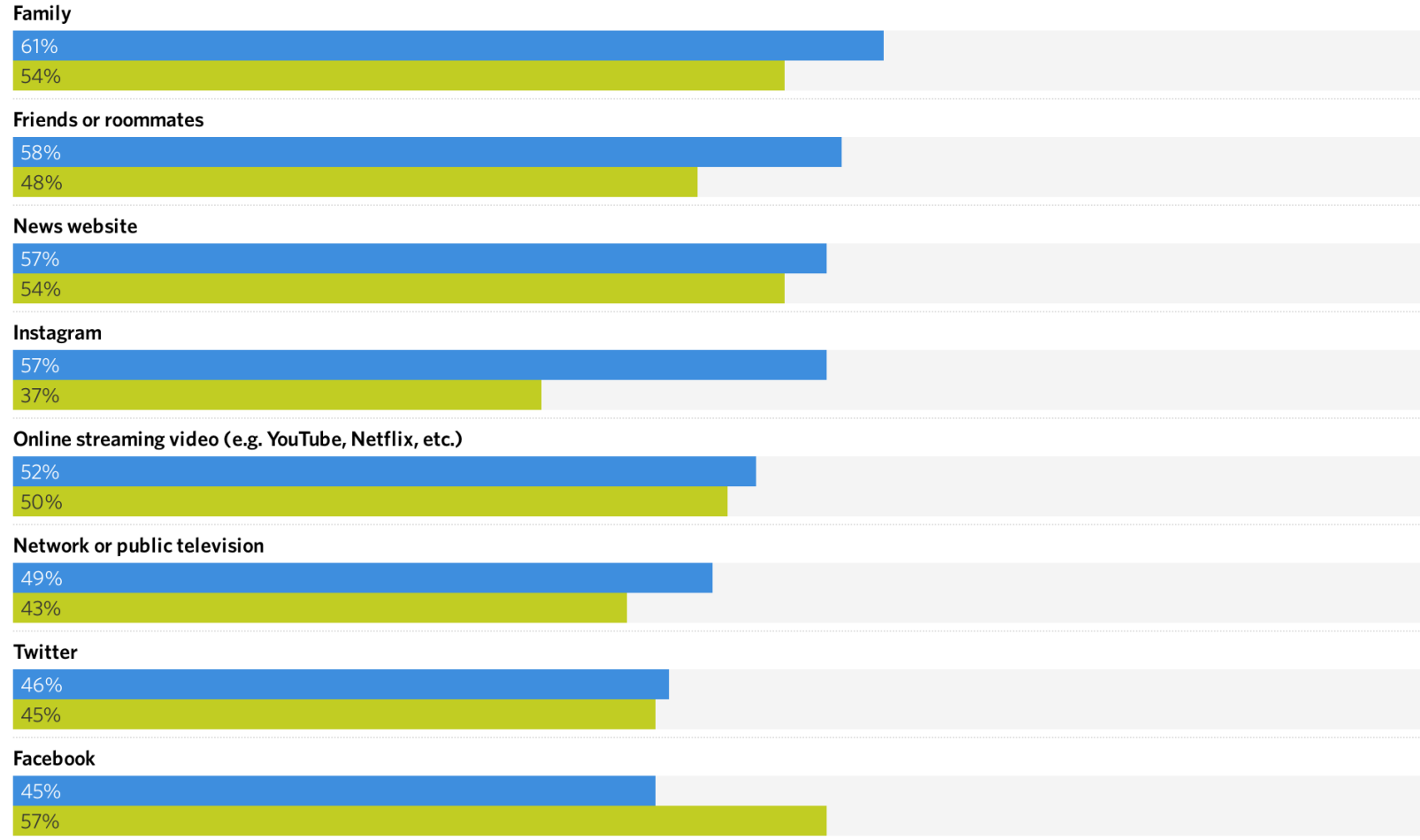
Myths #3 and #4

- Young people ignore ways to participate and find out about elections.
- Young people choose not to vote.

Top 8 Ways Youth Hear About the 2020 Election

The percentage of young people in each age group who said they have seen or heard information about the election from each source

■ Ages 18-21 ■ Ages 22-29



Note: Our survey asked about other sources of election information; a selection is shown here.

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Source: CIRCLE/Tisch College 2020 Pre-Election Youth Poll

Myth #3: Young people ignore ways to find out about elections

Young people hear about elections from a wide variety of sources

And trusted relationships matter a great deal

AND EVEN IN A YEAR WHEN YOUTH TURNOUT/ENGAGEMENT WAS HIGH

...YOUTH ARE UNDERMOBILIZED

...SOME YOUTH FACE MORE BARRIERS

WHO'S SYSTEMATICALLY LEFT OUT?

Contact Matters, but some are contacted more than others...

Campaigns didn't reach as many potential new or newly eligible voters in 2018

18-19 year olds were less likely to be reached and cast ballots, especially those in high school

Young people not on campuses or without college experience are less likely to be contacted

Young People are Undermobilized

In Midterm Elections:

2014	Youth Registered: 21.7 million
	Youth Who Voted: 9.2 million
	“Lost” Votes: 12.5 million

2010	Youth Registered: 22.3 million
	Youth Who Voted: 10.8 million
	“Lost” Votes: 11.5 million

In Presidential Elections:

2016	Youth Registered: 27.4 million
	Youth Who Voted: 21.6 million
	“Lost” Votes: 5.8 million

2012	Youth Registered: 26.4 million
	Youth Who Voted: 20.5 million
	“Lost” Votes: 5.8 million

Why are youth undermobilized?

There are many barriers to voting that may start before age 18

Lack of consistent & positive representation of youth engagement in media

Negative Perception of Political Leaders

Low Exposure to Opportunities Where Voice is Heard

Clear Information and Accessible Opportunities Needed in 2020

Exclusive Poll: Young People and the 2020 Election

Inequities in Information about Online Voter Registration

- 32% of youth said they did not know if online voter registration was available in their state
- Of those who ventured a guess, 25% of youth were incorrect.
- **In effect, only half of youth could correctly identify whether online voter registration was available in their state**

Lack of Information about Mail-In Voting

- Only 24% of respondents reported having voted by mail in a previous elections
- Only 78% have seen information about how to cast an absentee ballot
- 73% report that they would know where to go to find absentee ballot info

Black Youth and Youth of Color Hit Hardest

- Two-thirds of youth report that the pandemic has had a moderate or significant impact on them
- 37% said it has increased their daily responsibilities. Black youth more likely to say so
- **Increased news attention during the pandemic and economic impacts are related to increased interest in political engagement**

Opinions of State Responses to COVID-19 are Mixed

- **35 percent of young people said that they now viewed their state government more favorably, and the same percentage said they view it more negatively**
- On balance, young people living in Southern and Midwestern states viewed their state governments' responses more negatively

Among youth in low-income communities...

These are some of the logistical barriers to voting that many youth face.

These barriers disproportionately affect low-income youth and youth of color. Read [CIRCLE analysis here](#)

BARRIERS TO VOTING

Irrespective of voter registration status, young voters reported the following barriers to vote:



52%

need to rearrange their work or school schedule



26%

need help discerning truth vs. fake news



39%

did not know where to vote



25%

need to arrange a ride to the polls



26%

need help with their questions about candidates, ballots and polls



16%

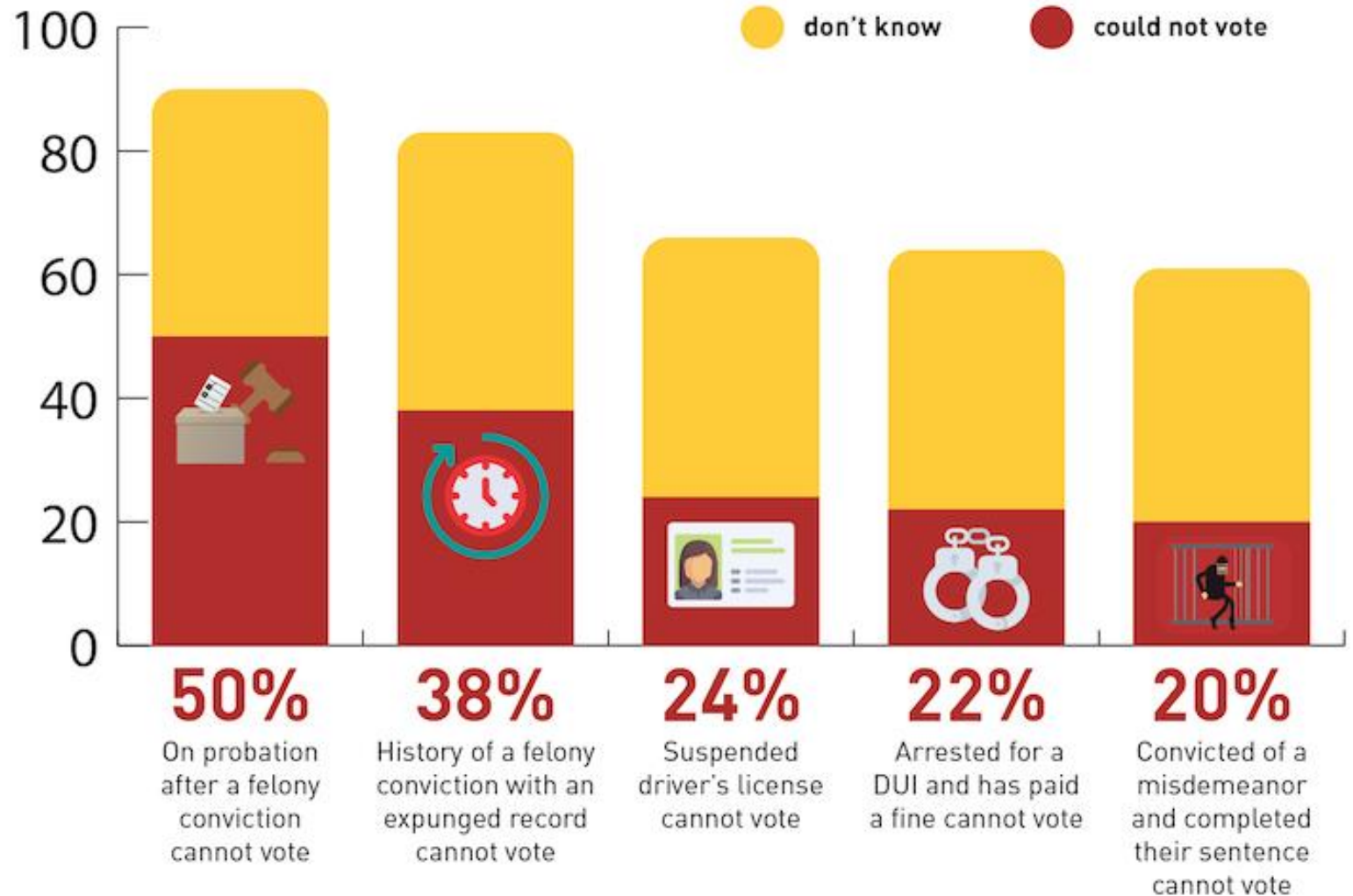
need to find someone to cover their shift

Among youth in low-income communities...

Another barrier to voting is that youth often don't know the eligibility requirements for voting in their state

The red on the graph represent the percentage of youth who thought people lose the right to vote in these five situations. But in all situations, people can legally vote in most states

Most youth are uncertain about voter ID laws in their states and do not have a clear understanding about what documents are needed at the polls.

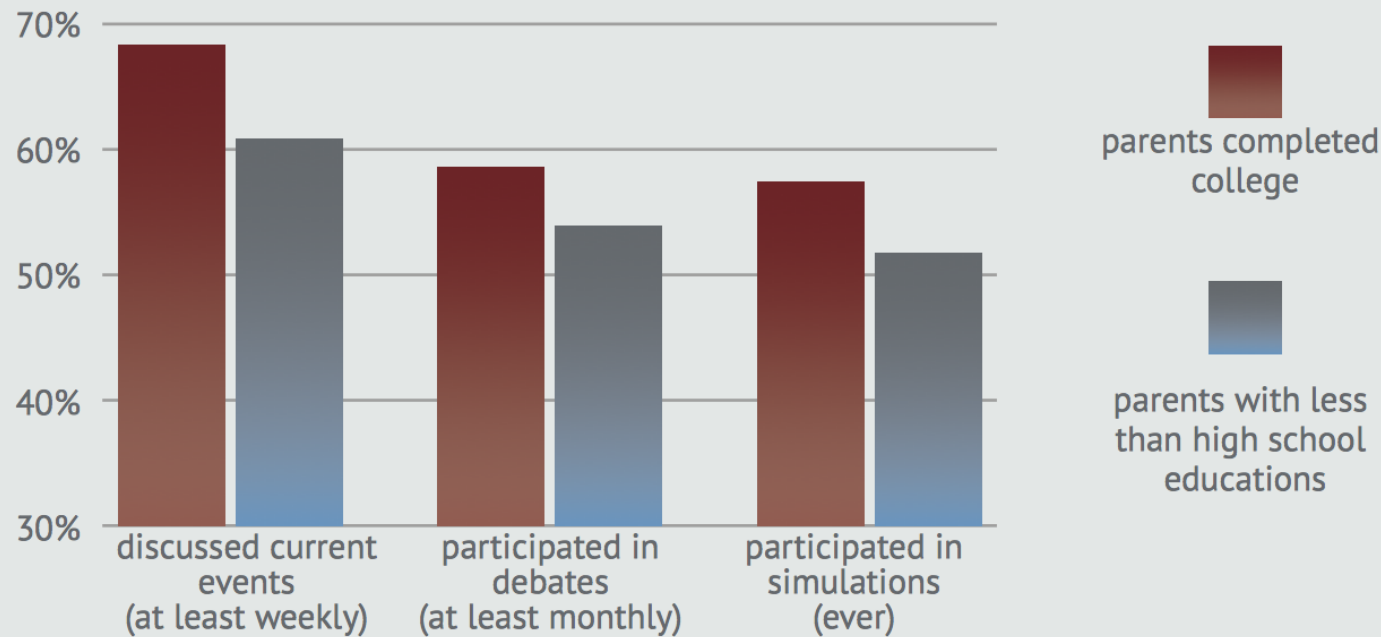


Disparities in Exposure to High Quality Civic Education

Chances of receiving promising practices by parents' education level

NAEP Civics 2010, 12th grade data, analyzed by CIRCLE

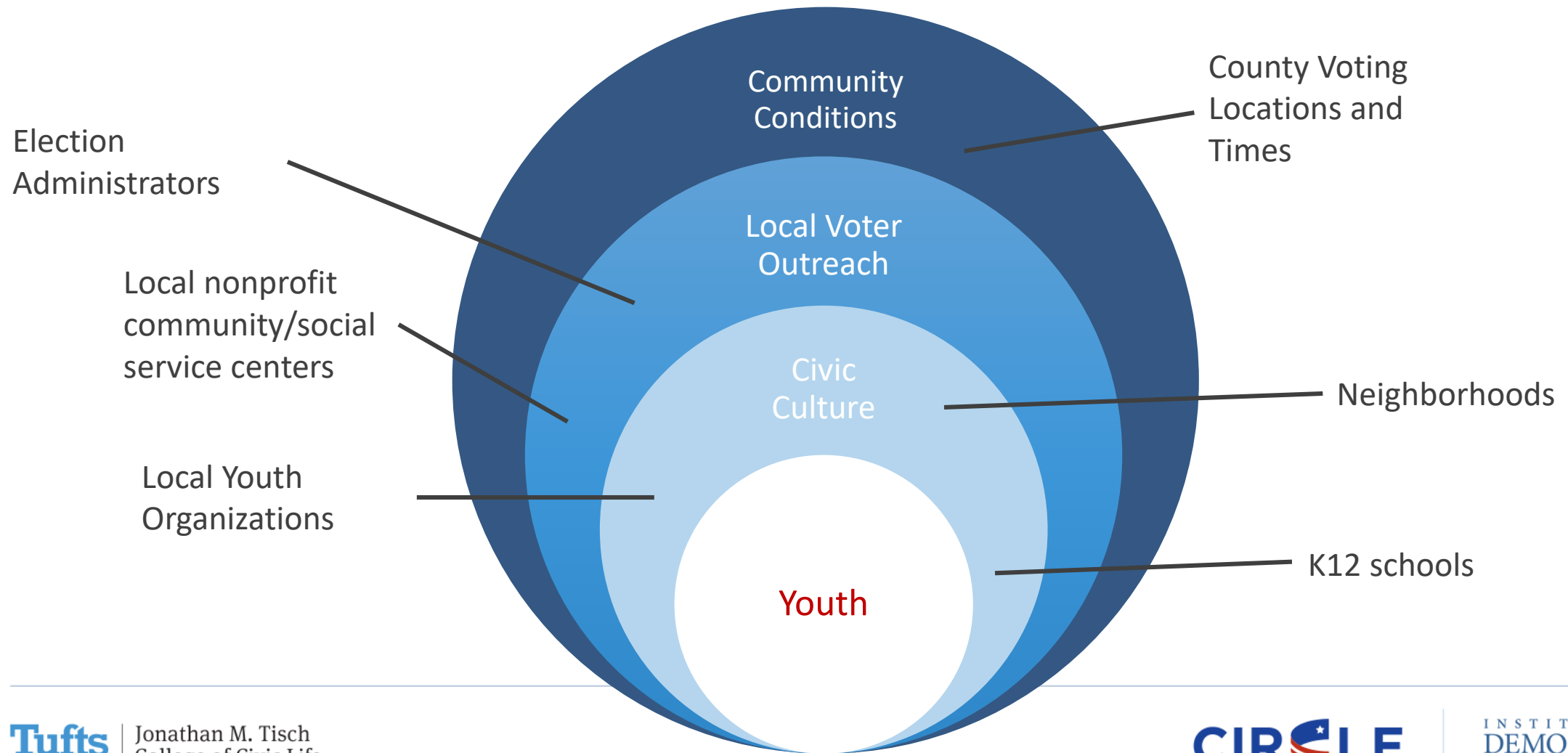
FIGURE 4



Youth with less formal education experience are also less likely to get voting information from family and friends

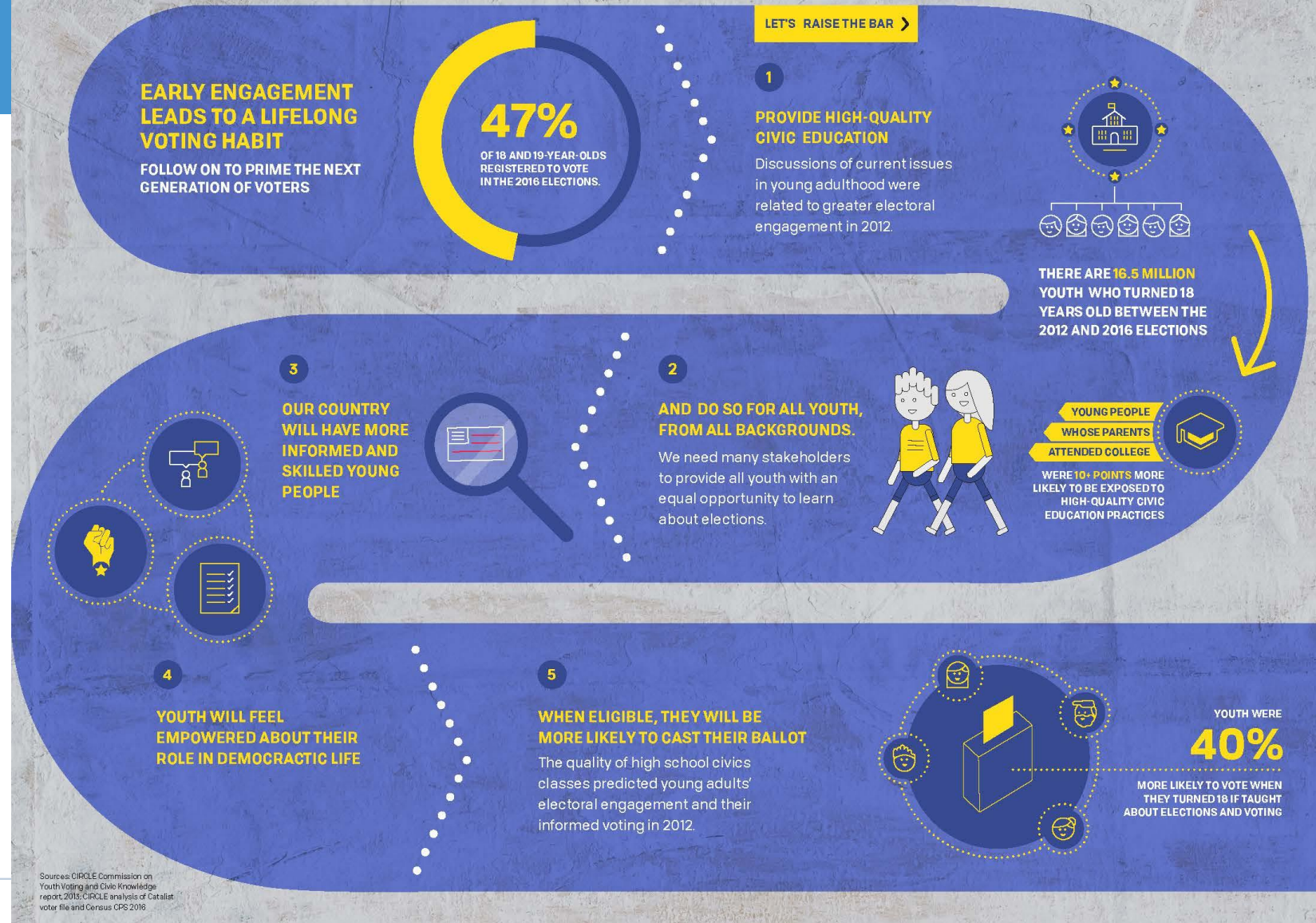
How can we address youth undermobilization?

Many stakeholders can influence youth voting, both positively and negatively...



AND WE NEED MANY STAKEHOLDERS TO SUPPORT A DIVERSITY OF PATHWAYS

Systemic shifts are needed
to better encourage/inform
youth so they can
participate.
Potential supports can
come from schools,
nonprofits, households.



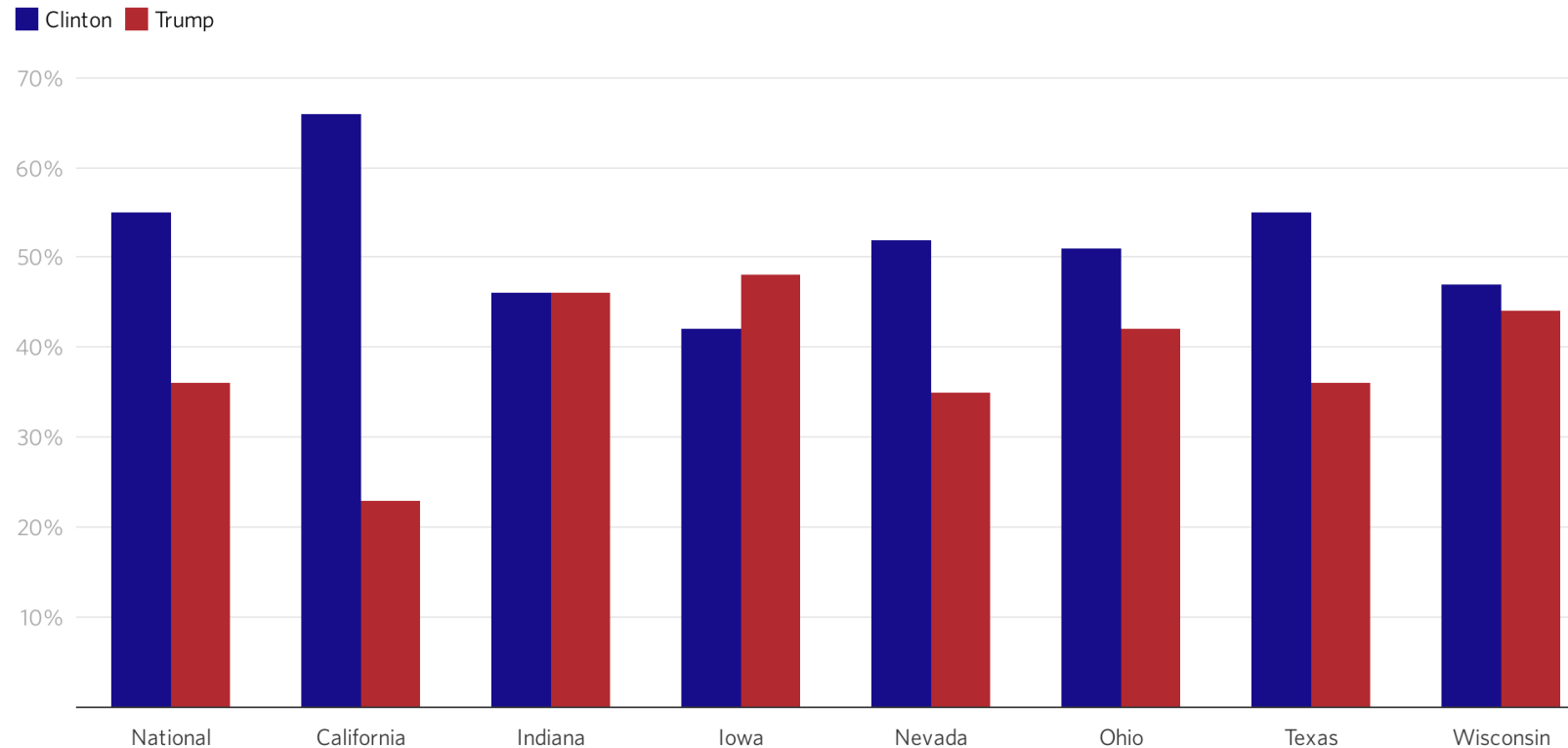
Myth #5

- Young people are politically similar and mostly liberal.

Youth Vote Choice in 2016

Not as homogenous as the myth assumes but differs by state

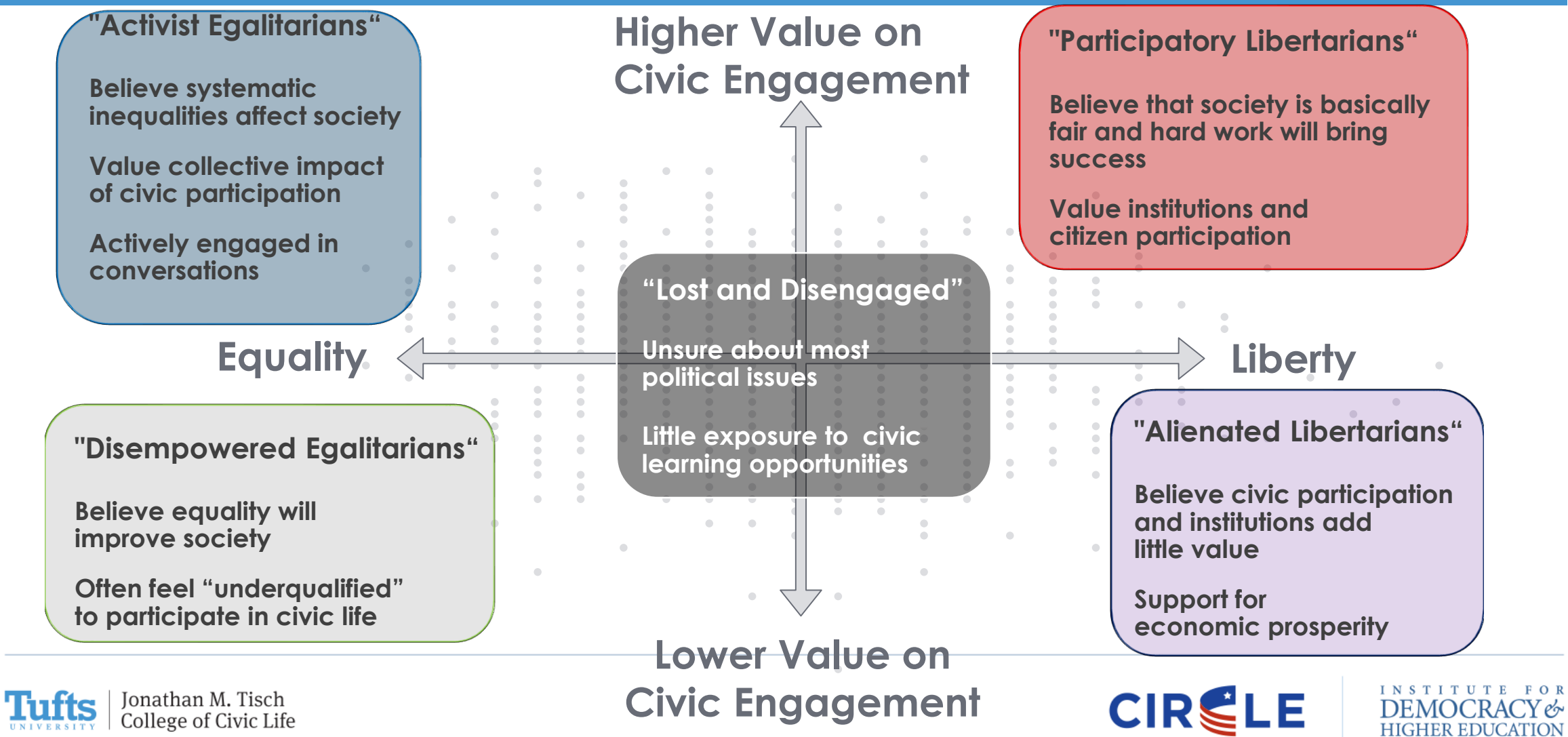
Youth Vote Choice in 2016



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Distribution of Youth Political Typology on Two Core Beliefs

Adolescent years are exactly when youth are figuring out what they believe and what they want to stand for



Myths #6 and #7

- Most young people old enough to vote are 4-year college students.
- The two issues that are of most interest to young people are student debt and marijuana legalization.

Young People Are Diverse



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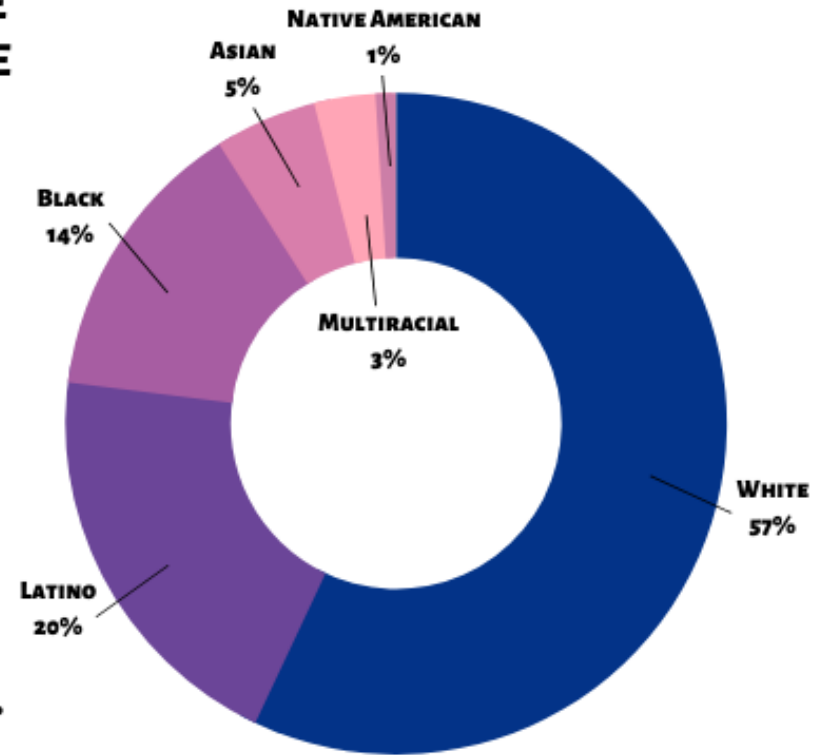
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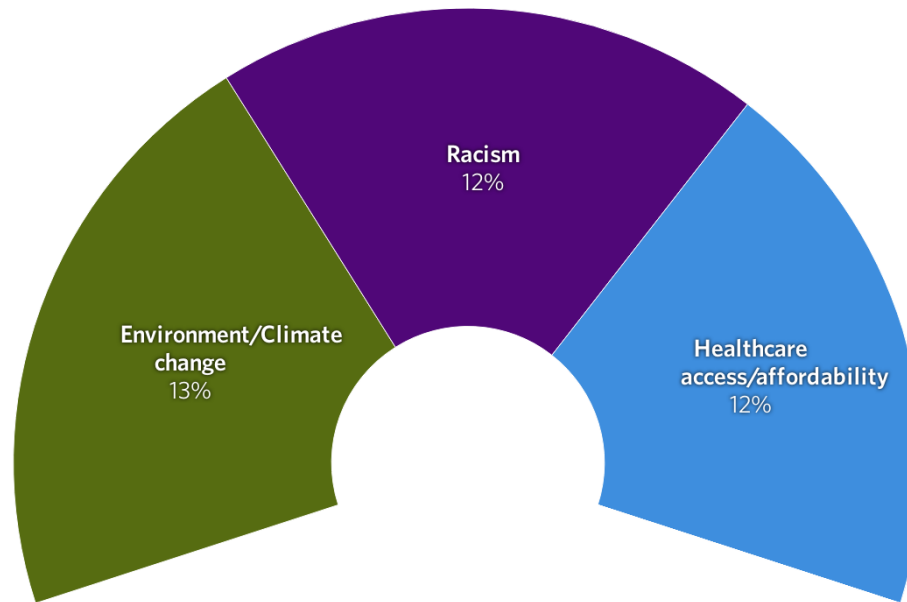
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Racism a Top Issue for Youth of Color; Environment and Healthcare Also Top Priorities

The percentage of young people, ages 18-29, who identified each as the top issue in determining their vote in the 2020 election. Click each group below to cycle through top issues by race/ethnicity.

All Youth Asian Youth Black Youth Latino Youth White Youth



Only top three issues included; not to scale and will not add up to 100%

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Source: CIRCLE/Tisch College 2020 Pre-Election Youth Poll

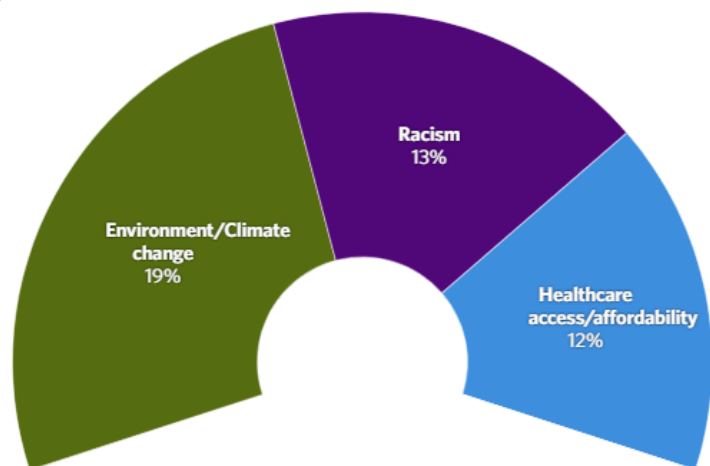
In 2020, most youth identified racism, climate change, and healthcare as the issues of highest interest to them.

See [here](#) for full CIRCLE analysis of this data and to interact with the graphic

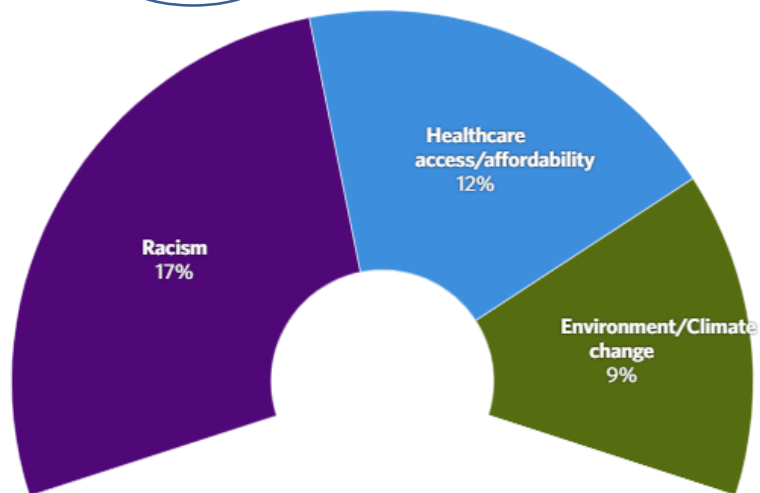
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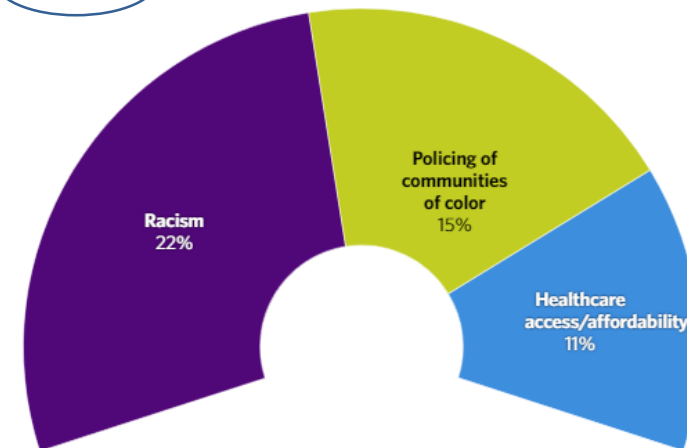
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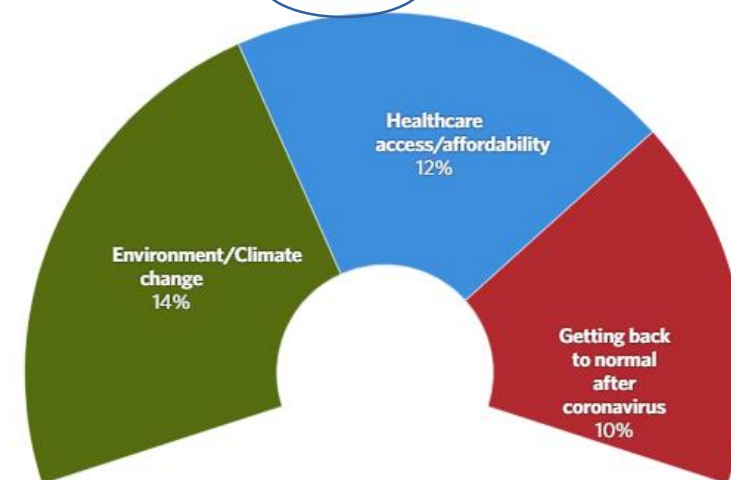
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What to Suggest Campuses Can Do (That's Non-Partisan)

SUMMARY

Drawing from our research on college student voting and the campus climates of highly politically engaged institutions, this report offers ten recommendations to increase student voting and to improve campus conditions for political learning, discourse, and agency during the election season and beyond.

We view increasing voting and civic learning/participation in democracy as related and symbiotic goals. An election offers the proverbial "teachable moment" for reinforcing or introducing important principles and practices of shared responsibility, inclusion and equity, respect for dissenting viewpoints, skilled controversial issue discussions, student voice and agency, transparency and collaborative decision-making, and standards of evidence and truth. Political learning and engagement should be pervasive, and it should happen year-round, and every year, which is why we refer to this work as "Politics 365."

1. Reflect on past elections and reimagine political learning and participation, year-round.

Start at the top and convene a small group of administrative, faculty, and student leaders. Reflect on the campus' political climate and activities in past elections. Reimagine election seasons as opportunities to bridge differences; strengthen community and inclusion; improve political discourse; cultivate student activism, leadership, and collaboration; make political learning more pervasive; and encourage informed participation in democracy.

2. Remove barriers to student voting.

Link voter registration to existing structures on campus, including orientation programming, registering for classes, and obtaining student IDs. Work with local officials to facilitate student voting processes. Establish an on-campus polling location. Seek legal support if students face barriers to voting due to restrictive voter identification laws or cumbersome residency requirements.

3. Develop informed voters.

Offer courses, teach-ins, short modules in classes, and stand-alone opportunities to teach the history and current state of voting—including rules regarding domicile—in the United States. Purchase or borrow voting machines and create sample ballots and set up opportunities for students to learn the process. Use policy issues to teach fact-checking and online media literacy year-round.

4. Establish a permanent and inclusive coalition to improve the climate for learning and participation.

Shift the paradigm away from focusing solely on voting. Instead, pursue deeper improvements to the underlying culture, structures, and behaviors on campus to cultivate students who identify themselves as active and informed stewards of a stronger democracy. Recruit a group that reflects diversity in terms of position on campus, tenure at the institution, field or expertise, social identity, political perspective, and lived experience. Maintain the coalition beyond the election season.

5. Invest in the right kind of training.

Invest time and resources to train coalition members, students, and staff that typically come together to work on election activities on behalf of the institution in the arts of intergroup communications, controversial issue discussions, and collaboration. In the lead up to election seasons, rethink common tasks such as setting up voter registration tables so that they are intentionally staffed by volunteers who reflect the diversity of the campus. Encourage students to work collaboratively across differences of social identity, political perspective, and lived experiences; strategically cluster trained volunteers.

6. Talk politics across campus.

Use NSLVE data, electoral controversies, policy issues, social conflicts, and campus concerns to increase and improve skills in intergroup and controversial issue discussions, and to reinforce norms of shared responsibility, inclusion, and free expression. Public issues provide countless opportunities to engage the entire campus community in well-organized and facilitated discussions. Cultivate a cadre of trained facilitators and structures for supporting campus-wide discussions.

7. Involve faculty across disciplines in policy questions and elections.

Bolster faculty-student relationships and interactions by encouraging faculty across all academic departments to work with students on policy questions and elections, in the classroom and beyond. Use clubs connected to the disciplines, such as the Engineering Society or the Chemistry Club, as venues for discussion. Have faculty in class remind students to register and vote.

8. Increase and improve classroom politics and policy discussions across disciplines.

Every discipline has public relevance, and faculty members across academic fields can embed learning about salient political, policy, and controversial issues into a course. Overcome barriers to this kind of teaching by supporting departmental leadership and faculty development efforts.

9. Support student activism and leadership.

Be encouraging, nimble, and responsive to student activism. Use activism as an opportunity to involve more students and to rethink the purpose of student learning as they develop into leaders and active members of communities and a diverse democracy.

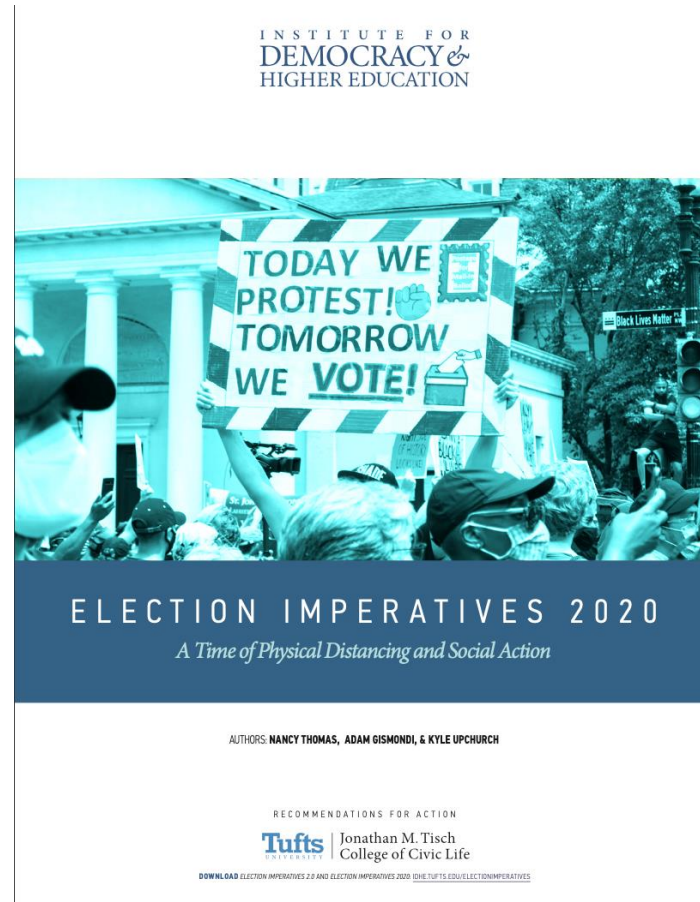
10. Empower students to create a buzz around the election.

Election season offers innumerable opportunities through voter mobilization and co-curricular activities for student leadership, fostering peer-to-peer interactions, and "creating a buzz" around the election. Use these opportunities to teach students important leadership skills such as how to develop an action plan, how to reach diverse groups on campus, and how to manage conflict.



*Ten Recommendations to Increase
College Student Voting and Improve Political Learning
and Engagement in Democracy*

Recommendations for Specific Campus Audiences



ELECTION IMPERATIVES 2020: A TIME OF PHYSICAL DISTANCING AND SOCIAL ACTION

For Presidents/Chancellors and other Senior Leaders

Presidents and chancellors can provide essential leadership in establishing priorities, setting a tone, and advocating for action on and off campus. Reflect on what role you want to play: activist, cheerleader, messenger, community organizer, convener...

You don't need to run everything, of course, but you need to play a visible role by reminding the campus community of the importance of political learning and electoral engagement.

1 DEFEND DEMOCRACY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM.

How we adapt to this year's election conditions will be a reflection on the state of U.S. democracy. Colleges and universities have the academic freedom to examine and draw attention to the threats facing democracy around racial injustice, structural inequality, unequal opportunities to vote, underrepresentation of historically marginalized groups in our political system, and other equity matters. Institutional leaders need to frame electoral engagement around democratic principles and practices to set the tone, expectations, and goals. Be ready and willing to defend faculty who talk politics.

2 READ YOUR NSLVE REPORT(S) for turnout gaps and top-line rates. Check your registration and yield (the percent of registered students who voted) rates. For example, if 75% of your eligible student voters registered and only 55% of those who were registered turned out (what we call the yield rate), then only 41% of your students voted. Aim higher this year. Look at age, class-level, demographic groups, and fields of study. Flag turnout gaps and address them. Remember that NSLVE reports flag gaps, but only by working with students and understanding your institutional context will you understand what's behind them.

3 NURTURE STUDENT ACTIVISM AND STUDENT VOICE.

Think ahead about your stance on student activism on campus. We recommend a position of support, education, and active listening, not regulation. That said, we also understand the need to continue normal operations in the educational process and institutional governance. Identify work already being done by student activists and work to amplify their efforts. Learn about

the student experience over the previous months through open forums, surveys, and peer-to-peer conversations. What has changed for them? What are they most concerned about, and what role (if any) can the institution play in helping advance educationally centered and equitable goals? Education and discussion will be better received than regulation, so consider an online series of conversations (not lectures or info sessions) that invite student perspectives on their health and safety during the pandemic.

4 IDENTIFY OR RECONSTITUTE A SMALL CIRCLE OF ADVISORS.

Building on the *Election Imperatives* (EI) Recommendations 1 and 4, select 4–6 colleagues and students to form a small working group that will coordinate a larger, permanent coalition responsible for year-round, continuous efforts. Include someone with positional authority in academic affairs or with a high level of trust among faculty. Address public issues and include advisors with experience in racial equity and intergroup community building, as well as an expert in online teaching and/or communications.

5 REBOOT OR RECRUIT A COALITION, as suggested in EI

Recommendation 4, that is truly inclusive in terms of members' roles, tenure on campus, social identity, lived experience, political ideology, and the constituents they reach. Involve groups that might not normally talk with each other and some "unusual suspects." Provide enough oversight to ensure the recommendations below are followed and implemented.

6 REFRAME THE COALITION'S CHARGE. Task them with the responsibility of overseeing not just voter mobilization, but

DOWNLOAD ELECTION IMPERATIVES 2.0 AND ELECTION IMPERATIVES 2020: [WWW.TUFTS.EDU/ELECTIONIMPERATIVES](https://www.tufts.edu/electionimperatives)

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