spotlight on Markov Science Sc

Turning Student Activism into Votes



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Minority Serving Institutions include:

Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) Native American Serving Non Tribal Institutions (NASNTI) Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian Institutions (ANNH) Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs)

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) have long histories of civic engagement among their students and communities. For example, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were often at the center of civil rights protests and marches, including student-led sit-ins at various eating establishments in the 1960s (Williamson, 2004). This legacy remains active in students that attend these institutions today, including recent activism in Black Lives Matter and March for Our Lives. However, despite being civically active, many MSI students today continue to face barriers getting to the polls, with one recent study finding that HBCU students turned out at lower rates than students at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) (Thomas et al., 2017). Despite these barriers, many MSIs persist and advocate for student democratic engagement. This report serves to highlight some of those MSIs which are overcoming barriers to voting for their students—institutions that serve as role models for turning student activism into votes.



Contemporary Civic Engagement

According to Baum, Ma, & Payea (2010), citizens who are college-educated are more likely to vote in local and national elections. Given that MSIs enroll 20% of all students and 40% of students of color in the nation (Conrad & Gasman, 2015), they play a significant role in producing civically engaged graduates. Educating large numbers of students of color, a demographic that remains underrepresented in regards to voters in local and national elections. MSIs have a responsibility in educating their students on the importance of civic engagement and casting a vote during elections.

By their existence alone, MSIs have increased the civic engagement of the populations that they serve. HBCUs, in particular, have a well-documented record of their commitment to civic engagement, as seen by the efforts taken by students and institutions during the civil rights movements (Williamson, 2004). However, other MSI types have played significant roles in civic engagement—whether it is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) serving as a cultural hub for the community (Laden, 2001) or a Tribal College or University (TCU) where Native American students are taught in ways to preserve their language and culture while developing skills and knowledge to serve the interests of their community (Conrad & Gasman, 2015).

<u>Campus Compact</u> is a national coalition of higher education institutions dedicated to forming partnerships between schools and organizations to promote civic engagement. In their Annual Member Survey (2003), the coalition found that MSIs are more likely to require service for graduation, have a community service or service-learning office, and have an existing partnership with K-12 schools and/or faith-based organizations than non-MSIs. This commitment to civic engagement at MSIs can be seen in the more recent efforts to engage young voters to become politically active. As highlighted within this report, MSIs have led efforts to becoming polling sites for their campus and local community, partnered with local and national organizations to increase voter engagement, and adapted co-curricular experiences to incentivize civic engagement.

Barriers to Voting

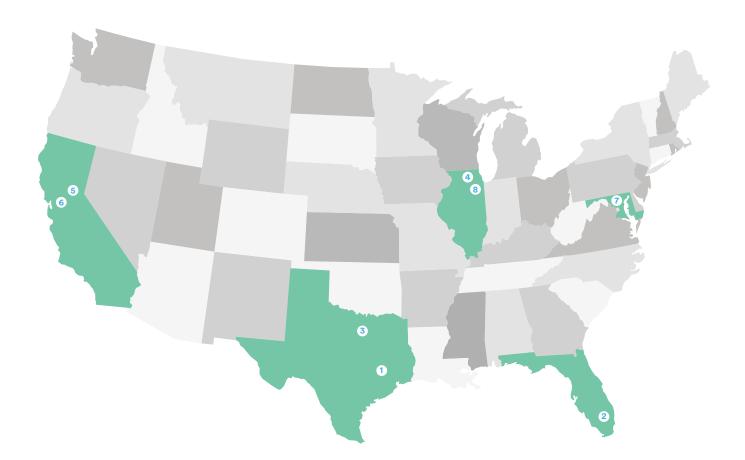
As highlighted in a <u>recent report</u> from the Center for Minority Serving Institutions, young people of color face numerous barriers to voting, including but not limited to: polling location barriers, policy restrictions, lack of information, miscommunication of information, and racism at the polls. In regard to polling location barriers, the authors found that many MSI campuses did not have polling sites available to students on campus (Hallmark & Martinez, 2017). Additionally, many MSIs may not have early voting locations, and some states such as North Carolina have worked to cut down on early voting days—a tactic that has been detrimental to voter turnout for young voters and people of color (Roth, 2016).

Hallmark & Martinez (2017) also called attention to other policies that prevent young voters and people of color from fully participating in democracy. Voter ID policies, such as requiring photo ID at the polls and banning student IDs as proper forms of photo ID, have been shown to have a more substantial impact among young voters (18-23) and African Americans than any other comparison group (GAO, 2014). Other policy-related barriers may arise when students are attempting to register to vote under a campus address or attempting to vote via mail-in ballot (Hallmark & Martinez, 2017).

Perhaps some of the biggest obstacles to increasing voter turnout among young voters lie in general voting information. Many college students are first-time voters and uninformed about the voter registration process, especially as voter registration laws vary from state-to-state. This lack of information about the process may be further compounded by miscommunication of information, such as in 2016 when some Connecticut poll workers improperly insisted that voters show a photo ID (Iversen, 2016).

Cases of MSIs Overcoming the Hurdle and Getting Students to the Polls

While there are many barriers that keep students away from the polls, there are also various success stories of overcoming these barriers. In some cases, it is through state and local policy changes, such as in the cases of voter registration and identification laws. In other cases, MSIs are rising to the challenge, advocating for their students and communities, and increasing voter turnout in places where barriers loom largest. This report serves to highlight some of these MSIs and the work that they do in increasing democratic engagement.



MSIs THAT TURNED STUDENT ACTIVISM INTO VOTES

- 1 Prairie View A&M University | PRAIRIE VIEW, TX
- 2 Miami Dade College | MIAMI, FL
- 3 Paul Quinn College | DALLAS, TX
- 4 Northeastern Illinois University | CHICAGO, IL
- 5 California State University, Sacramento | SACRAMENTO, CA
- 6 Saint Mary's College of California | MORAGA, CA
- University of Maryland, College Park | COLLEGE PARK, MD
- 8 University of Illinois at Chicago | CHICAGO, IL

Prairie View A&M University

HBCU | Prairie View, TX

Prairie View A&M stands out as their civic engagement among students in 1972 has empowered the institution and its students to remain vigilant in ensuring that students have the opportunity to vote. Prior to *Ballas and Symm* (1974), students were denied access to the polls in Waller County for not being residents. Waller County, at the time, was the only county in Texas that had not yet allowed students to register and vote (Server, 2008). With the *Ballas v. Symm* (1974) ruling, the county could no longer prevent students from voting. Despite this ruling, the county has made several attempts to challenge the ability of students to vote including indicting 19 students in 1992 for voter fraud (known as the PV 19), not processing student voter registrations in 2006, and attempting to limit early voting sites in 2008 (Server, 2008).

In 2008, students challenged these barriers, leading marches and putting pressure on the city to place an early voting site at a community center within walking distance from Prairie View's campus (Server, 2008). This activism continued throughout the 2012 election cycle, until finally ensuring an early voting polling site in 2016—an outcome that demonstrates how students at HBCUs may influence an election. In 2017, students turned out to the polls and elected their student body president to City Council—the youngest such member in Texas. The civic engagement at Prairie View not only rests on student activism, but the university also holds voter registration drives and orientation sessions featuring administrators and city politicians encouraging students to use their voting rights to change their world.

Prairie View A&M exemplifies the power of student voices: both in overcoming barriers and in impacting election results. Furthermore, Prairie View demonstrates how an institution's history can influence its culture. According to Server (2008), "Because of this history, a legacy of political activism has been created at Prairie View. From their first day on campus until graduation, students are constantly reminded of the struggle for equal voting rights at Prairie View. Through their history and political science classes, they are exposed to the history of the civil rights era in this country, but also to the struggles that have taken place on our campus." The civil rights activism towards voter rights at this HBCU has not only left a lasting impression on the student body, but the institution made its history part of the curriculum, encouraging civic engagement within it courses and cultivating an environment where student groups commemorate their history by continuing the activism that has occurred since the 1970s.

Miami Dade College

HSI | Miami, FL

Miami Dade College (MDC) demonstrates how institutionalized processes can truly uplift student civic engagement. Through the institutional decisions to participate in both the TurboVote program and National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE), the campuses have achieved the number one spot on the TurboVote higher education leaderboard and saw half the student population voting in presidential elections (NSLVE, 2017; Riera, 2016).

Miami Dade's Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy (iCED) also plays a large role in increasing civic engagement on campus, as it operates across all eight Miami Dade campuses, hosts an election calendar for the year, and assists in registering students to vote and helping students understand ballots. iCED has recently partnered with the Engage Miami Civic Fund to develop a democratic engagement action plan for the entire institution, as well as individual action plans for each individual campus. This partnership will help promote the South Florida Student Voter Summit, including meetings with 12 department heads and 36 professors across all MDC campuses that are in departments which had less than 50% of students turnout in 2016.

The institution goes beyond just action plans by providing on-theground opportunities for students, such as being able to volunteer on campaigns with state representatives or at the polls on election days. With hopes to make civic engagement fun, Miami Dade also hosts an event for National Voter Registration Day and participates in Election Extravaganza, an event established by a non-profit to increase voter turnout in local elections. It is easy to see how Miami Dade has reached an overwhelmingly engaged student population through these intentional efforts made by the institution's leadership.



Paul Quinn College

HBCU | Dallas, TX

Paul Quinn is an exemplary institution in its approach to increasing voter turnout. The HBCU, thrust back into the national spotlight due to the incredible leadership of its president, continued to push forward innovative ideas as the campus approached the 2016 election. While not the only institution to do so in the area, for the first time in the school's 144-year history, the campus became an early polling site in 2016.

These actions were combined with student-led initiatives to increase voter registration on campus for a more engaged student body in local, state, and national elections. Furthermore, the traditionally closed-campus institution opened itself up to the community during the early voting period. This showcased to students the importance of civic engagement and being a community member means exercising your right to vote. Founded in 2015, the Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE), part of the <u>Jonathan</u> <u>M. Tisch College of Civic Life</u> at Tufts University, serves as a leading venue for research, resources, and advocacy on college student political learning and engagement in democratic practice. The Institute's signature initiative, the <u>National Study</u> <u>of Learning, Voting, and Engagement</u> (NSLVE), offers colleges and universities an opportunity to learn their student registration and voting rates. More than 1,100 campuses across the country are enrolled in this first-of-its-kind study which provides a research database that includes roughly half of all college students in the United States.

You may learn more about joining NSLVE here.





Northeastern Illinois University

HSI | Chicago, IL

Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) is a campus growing their civic engagement across the student body in several creative ways. Firstly, the administration assembled a team to participate in the ALL IN Challenge campus planning process selecting key members to lead initiatives and partner with additional organizations in the community. The vision of civic engagement outlined in the plan goes so far as providing supplementary events that focus on voter education. Through lectures, sending students to conventions, and distributing information to sites for political campaigns, the campus emphasizes that education happens beyond the classroom. Secondly, NEIU strives to connect civic and community engagement. Beyond having a Civic and Community Engagement office, NEIU has also provided community service opportunities for their students by encouraging them to become poll workers/election judges. Of course, these two methods are complemented with traditional outreach through increasing the campus conversation in classrooms, registering students throughout the fall semester (starting during move-in), establishing campus early voting centers, and more.

NEIU's initiatives demonstrate how a multipronged approach to voter engagement can create a culture of civic engagement. By leveraging their strategic partnerships to enhance their on-campus programming and educational efforts, this MSI provides countless opportunities to educate and empower their students and local community to be informed and encourages them to go out and vote. With a team encompassing students, staff, and faculty, and a detailed plan to assess their efforts, NEIU is taking the appropriate steps to increase voter engagement on their campus and can help many other institutions learn to improve through their example.

The ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge (also known simply as the ALL IN Challenge) is a national, nonpartisan initiative that supports and recognizes colleges and universities working to improve civic learning, political engagement, and voter participation rates. The Challenge encourages institutions to help students form the habits of active and informed citizenship, as well as institutionalize democratic engagement activities and programs - making them a defining feature of campus life.

Launched in June 2016 at Civic Nation, the initiative has grown to include more than 400 campuses, in 48 states and D.C. These institutions enroll more than 5.1 million students Ninety-three of the campuses are MSIs, seven of those are HBCUs, four are PBIs, 21 are AANAPISIs, 54 are HSIs, 2 are ANNHs, 4 are NASNTI, and 1 is a TCU.

Participating campuses complete a set of steps, are recognized for their commitment and are presented with seals and awards for exemplary efforts. Any accredited, degree-granting, post-secondary institution may participate in the Challenge.

For more information or to join the Challenge, please visit here.





California State University, Sacramento

HSI & AANAPISI | Sacramento, CA

Few MSIs are located in their respective state capitals, so it is not surprising that California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State) is taking advantage of their location. Civic engagement among students particularly shows in volunteering opportunities within the community. In an effort to make a larger push, the university administration expanded their Constitution Day celebration to a full week. This action encouraged students to think about civic engagement through a variety of activities such as a Constitution (state & national) Quiz, speaker series, and volunteer opportunities in the city. While these activities showcase the immense possibilities to increase civic engagement, the administration admits that these events can no longer be just a week long. Going forward the school hopes to grow programming into a co-curricular experience, leading students to engage with the importance of speaking up and exercising their rights. One way the university is going about this is by offering an alternative spring break opportunity to canvas cities—an opportunity that allows students to simultaneously increase voter registration numbers while also receiving course credit after critical reflection on these experiences. Sacramento State has made progress in building an engaged student population while showcasing that there is always room for growth.

Beyond increasing student voter participation during elections, Sacramento State demonstrates the possibilities MSIs can have with engaging their local community. Given their location in the state capitol, the attention to their local engagement may be heightened. Opportunities to register local voters, with an intent to focus on communities that are underrepresented in the state, may yield unprecedented outcomes. Given the state capitol's demographics, with underrepresented minorities representing 55% of its population (U.S. Census, 2018), engaging the students at Sacramento State *and* voters in the community further solidifies its place as an institution that successfully promotes civic engagement on campus and in its surrounding community.

Saint Mary's College of California

HSI & AANAPISI | Moraga, CA

If one is looking for a quick how-to guide on increasing student civic engagement, then look no further than Saint Mary's College. The administration first assembled a committee of faculty, staff, and students under the direction of a professor in the political science department. This committee set forth 12 action items for the year. This list included activities like having the provost send communication to all students around civic engagement, having the student government train students to register voters, using library staff to assist students looking for information on candidates/ballot issues, and publicizing all events across campus. These activities, combined with additional actions, such as partnering with TurboVote to make an online voter engagement tool available to students, have been crucial to St. Mary's work on campus. These straightforward steps by Saint Mary's administration appear to be paying off with a higher than average rate of registration and voting on campus (NSLVE, 2017).

The initiatives at Saint Mary's further demonstrate how other MSIs can increase their student engagement in elections by layering their efforts to promote voting engagement. Through public acknowledgment of their initiatives by the president, a programmatic commitment to engage the campus on voting, and involvement of students in these initiatives, this institution stands out with their commitment to elevate their student's participation rates with voting. By ensuring that students encounter opportunities to become informed outside the classroom, such as in the libraries or throughout campus with hosted election talks, it is clear that the school is providing its campus community a convenient way to become engaged in elections.

Young Invincibles (YI) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to amplifying the voices of young adults in the political process and expanding economic opportunity for 18-34-yearolds. We do this through building a community of young leaders to take action for social change, sharing the stories of young adults, cutting-edge policy research and analysis, and, providing tools for our generation to make smart economic choices. Find out more about YI here.

University of Maryland, College Park

AANAPISI | College Park, MD

The University System of Maryland has a lot to be proud of as one of the highest voter participation rates among not only MSIs, but the nation; earning the College Park campus a Silver Medal from the ALL IN Challenge. One of the signature highlights from the Maryland strategic plans is the TerpsVote Coalition. The TerpsVote Coalition is a collection of students groups – some political (i.e. College Democrats and College Republicans) and some high impact (i.e. Student Government and Greek Life) - who drive the voter registration throughout the campus and within their own networks. This approach was not as grassroots as other student efforts showcased above, but it incorporates the student voice in an innovative way, avoiding a top-down approach to achieve civic engagement goals. This effort is in addition to the myriad of voter education and civic engagement planning actions occurring on campus. Furthermore, the administration is working to incorporate civic engagement as one of the core values that students should have upon graduation. A commitment to this at the highest level demonstrates the importance of civic engagement for all students.

TurboVote is a product of Democracy Works, a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the idea that voting should fit the way we live. TurboVote is an online tool that helps voters get registered, update voter registration, request absentee ballots, and receive election reminders and notifications. More than 300 colleges and universities across the country have used TurboVote to support voter engagement on campus. Visit <u>here</u> to learn more about TurboVote.



The Students Learn Students Vote Coalition (SLSV), run by Young Invincibles, is made up of more than 300 nonpartisan organizations, faculty members, campus administrators, and local election officials across the country that are trained on increasing voter engagement on college campuses. With a focus on working with MSIs and community colleges, we support our coalition partners by giving them access to best practices as they work to engage administrators, integrate voting programs into established systems and processes, and increase participation. We connect them to a nationwide network of leaders doing similar work, and we provide funding to organizations as they conduct outreach, identify leaders, build cross-campus

coalitions, measure their registration and voting rates, and establish and implement action plans that chart improvement. Find out more about the SLSV Coalition and how to plug in here.



"At the University of Illinois at Chicago, as we have no cultural or racial majority on campus, we have found tremendous value in partnering with a wide variety of civic organizations and our cultural centers on campus in order to reach different segments of our student population. We all share different life experiences, and it's important for students to be encouraged to vote from people who look like them."

 Spencer Long, Associate Director of Student Development Services
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

It may come as no surprise that the most voter-engaged campus is also located in one of the more voter-innovative states: Illinois. In recent years, the state of Illinois has implemented multiple policies to help get students to the polls. In 2016, the state passed SB0172, requiring that public universities host an early voting site in high traffic areas on their campuses. And in 2017, the state signed SB1933 into action, which provides automatic voter registration for its residents when they receive and/or renew their driver's license, permit, or identification card.

University of Illinois at Chicago

AANAPISI | Chicago, IL

University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) was chosen as Most Engaged Campus of 2017 by the ALL IN Challenge. The institution has hosted numerous events and provided a vast amount of resources to inform and engage students in the voting process, including but not limited to: space for issue debates and forums, voter registration drives, and marches to the polls. However, perhaps no bigger lesson may be learned from UIC than that of diverse outreach. UIC has been a model institution in terms of its various cultural centers and their active approaches to engage students across campus. One particular example has been the Annual Voter Registration Day that is hosted by the Rafael Cintrón Ortiz Latino Cultural Center, providing specialized outreach to Latinx students on campus. Other cultural centers have hosted similar events, such as Get Out The Vote phone banking held by the Asian American Resource and Cultural Center.

However, democratic engagement goes beyond simply registering students to vote or getting out to vote, it includes getting students engaged with the issues that impact them and their families. The various cultural centers at UIC have done this by hosting numerous events throughout the year. In February, the Rafael Cintrón Ortiz Latino Cultural Center hosted a postcard campaign supporting DACA and TPS, issues of particular interest to the Latinx community. The Asian American Resource and Cultural Center held a special lunchbox event on Asian Americans and the election. And throughout the year, the Arab American Cultural Center held events which pertained to the Muslim ban and cultures of racism and surveillance in the United States.

Institutions may learn from these events in engaging with cultural centers on their own campus in order to implement culturally relevant programs around democratic engagement. Furthermore, institutions may explore potential collaborations with voter organizations across the nation, organizations that may better connect with various sub-groups within the broader campus community. <u>Voto Latino¹</u> is one example of an organization that serves to "engage, educate, and empower Latinos to be agents of change." <u>APIAVote²</u> is also active among college campuses, with a mission that works to "mobilize Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in electoral and civic participation."

¹ Although Voto Latino does not have a chapter at UIC, the organization does currently have chapters at 10 colleges around the nation, which you can read more about here

² Although APIAVote does not have an ambassador at UIC, the organization does currently have ambassadors located at more than 40 institutions across the nation, which you can read more about <u>here</u>.

Recommendations

Collectively, the MSIs highlighted in this report demonstrate intentional, innovative, and effective practices to increase voter engagement on their campus and in their respective communities. Following their example, here are a list of recommendations for other MSIs to consider:

- Reach out to those MSIs that are already doing great work pertaining to voting and ask for their expertise.
- 2 Introduce voter registration and discuss voting with new students during orientation.
- 3 Participate in the <u>ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge</u>, which guides colleges and universities through the steps needed to be fully engaged.
- Partner with <u>TurboVote</u> to help your students get registered, request absentee ballots, and receive election reminders and notifications.
- 5 Ask local, regional, and national candidates to come to campus to debate issues and register students to vote at these events.
- 6 Encourage faculty and staff on your campus to have information about voting readily available in their offices.
- 7 Work with student organizations engaged in volunteerism to drive the local elderly to the polls.
- 8 Make sure that your students are fully aware and educated of their rights as students to vote in the local community.
- 9 If you are not already a polling site or are still in the process of becoming one during an election, post information throughout campus and online about where students can vote.
- 10 Track voting on your campus and learn what efforts are most effective in getting students to vote.

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