HARVARD Kennedy School
ASH CENTER
for Democratic Governance
and Innovation

Proceedings

Getting to Eighty Percent: A Symposium Advancing
Voter Participation

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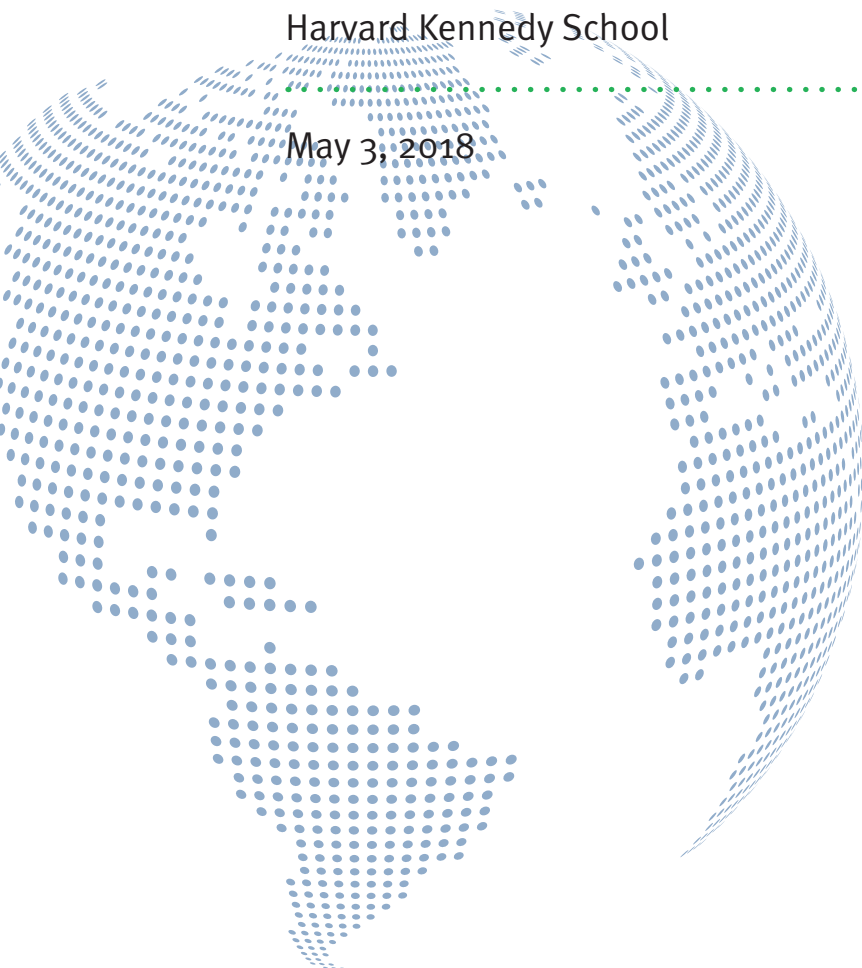and Innovation

Proceedings

Getting to Eighty Percent: A Symposium Advancing
Voter Participation

Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation,
Harvard Kennedy School

Institute of Politics, Harvard Kennedy School

Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy,
Harvard Kennedy School

May 3, 2018

CONTENTS

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The US ranks 28th out of 35 OECD countries in voting turnout—55 percent of the voting-age population voted in the 2016 general election. For decades the number of people not voting has outnumbered those supporting a winning candidate by a large margin. One of the only demographic groups exceeding an 80 percent turnout rate are those in households earning more than $150,000 per year—that income group comprises less than a fifth of the U.S. population. Looking at race, non-Hispanic whites have the highest turnout rate at 65%, while slightly less than 60% of African-Americans voted in 2016. Less than 50% of Asian and Hispanic Americans voted. On the dimension of age, older Americans (65+) have the highest participation rates—almost 74% in 2016, while only 43% of those who are 18–24 voted. This is not a very good showing for a country that should be a beacon of democracy for the world.

Why does full participation matter? First, political equality. Democracy requires equal opportunity for voice and influence in public decisions. Second, responsibility. Voting is a fundamental component of the duties of citizenship—we depend on each other to participate actively and responsibly in order to create a common democratic government and society. The third value is responsiveness. We need a government that is responsive to what the populace wants. Marty Gilens and Ben Page have found that the U.S. government has been particularly responsive to those who are at the very top of the income distribution and not very responsive to those lower down on a wide range of public policy issues. Broader political participation is a key to making government more responsive to everyone. And a fourth reason to favor greater participation is institutional trust. Trust in government to do the right thing was at a high point of 75% when Kennedy was president; today it is at an all-time low of 20%. We deserve a government in which trust is at high levels so that most people want to participate, and high levels of participation may produce a government that is more accountable, and so more trustworthy.

What would it take to increase voting participation to 80 percent of all American adults, or even higher? Better law and policy are important components, but we also need to build a political culture that demands civic responsibility and participation from each of us. Imagine, as part of that civic responsibility, that all of the

organizations in society—not just political parties and campaigns, but also primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, and companies—devoted themselves to encouraging their students, employees, customers, clients and other stakeholders to participate in the political process. They should do so not because they desire a specific Democratic or Republican outcome, but because they want American democracy to work well.

On May 3, 2018, at Getting to 80%: A Symposium Advancing Voting Participation, the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard's Institute of Politics, and the Shorenstein Center for Media and Public Policy convened over 100 journalists and media, technologists, business leaders, elected officials, scholars, and grassroots advocates and organizers, to focus attention on the need for broader political participation and understand how to spark policy and cultural shifts that would dramatically increase voter participation. We suspended our cynicism and dedicated our collective creativity to the goal of getting to 80% voter participation.

The depth of discussion and ingenuity that we saw bringing these people together impressed me. I would like to extend my thanks to all of those who attended, your contributions were invaluable. Increasing voter participation can seem like a boundless and thankless task, but I left the day invigorated and hopeful about our efforts.

Now, I invite you to explore a summation of our discussion. In this report you will find key takeaways from the six discussions ranging from the role of states to youth participation and technology. The report concludes with our hopes for the future and next steps for our combined efforts.

I hope that this symposium will not be just an isolated event, but the start of a longer conversation about how we can reinvigorate American democracy and our democratic institutions. My colleagues and I would love to hear ideas and further thoughts about how we can reach this goal of 80% voter participation. We hope that you will contribute to a robust debate about how to meet this ambitious goal.

Sincerely,
Archon Fung
Winthrop Laflin McCormack Professor of Citizenship and Self-Government
Harvard Kennedy School

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the core of the work of the Ash Center and the Kennedy School is the effort to understand how citizens and institutions come together to make democracy work, and rarely before has the importance of this effort been more evident. Underlying the deceptively simple idea of making democracy work are a number of large themes: protecting the fundamental norms of democracy and democratic processes from challenges both in the United States and internationally; encouraging innovation in governance and public accountability; preventing the massive inequalities of our economic system from permeating our democracy and threatening its existence.

Indeed, one essential element of "making democracy work" in the United States is to have as close to full and inclusive participation of the people who comprise our democracy as we possibly can. The name of our May 3rd symposium, "Getting to 80 percent," was chosen with intent; while a goal of 80 percent participation is achievable, it will require a real stretch—not tinkering around the edges of the current system, but instead pursuing a major set of innovative ideas and practices.

Getting to 80 percent will require more than new laws or policies. While policy is important, achieving consistent 80 percent participation will require a broad-based shift in culture, in education, and in the behavior of institutions and individuals throughout American society. What policies could really work? What cultural shifts do we need to make? How can new technologies and platforms best be utilized? How can young people become a new civic generation? How can all sectors of American society be enlisted in this goal?

With these questions in mind, we invited 125 participants with a broad range of institutional backgrounds and perspectives—academics, elected officials, advocates and organizers, corporate leaders, tech entrepreneurs, journalists, and media executives—and asked them to set their sights high, suspend cynicism, shake off (just for a day) the current political limitations and battles over voting issues, and focus on creative ideas for the long term.

Understanding that there are multiple arenas in which we must make major strides, the day's discussions were broken down into six thematic sessions, each taking on one major area of the challenge. The six sessions (summaries to follow) were:

- Reimagining Participation: Creating a Culture Shift
- Closing the Participation Gap: Mobilizing Non-Voters
- States on the Cutting Edge
- Leading the Way: Technology & Social Media as Participation Innovators
- The Policy Landscape: Universal Registration, Universal Voting
- The Change Generation: Young Americans and Participation

After brief kickoff remarks by several participants, lively discussions ensued, the highlights of which are summarized here.

KEY THEMES AND TAKEAWAYS:

Policy
- We need to explore bolder and outside-the-box policies. Lowering the voting age to 16, universal registration, and even universal voting are policies that deserve real discussion.
- States can be true laboratories of democracy, leading with approaches unlikely to make headway at the federal level in the short term.
- Cities and towns are experimenting with creative ways to engage people in voting and in governance.

A commitment to engaging young people
- Habits of participation start early and need to be a major focus of the work.
- The restoration of civics education in schools is essential, along with other engagement opportunities.
- Registration of high-school students is a priority for policy and practice.
- Colleges and universities have begun to take student voter registration and participation more seriously, but they need to go much further.

A shift in culture across institutions

- Successful culture shifts, such as efforts to curb smoking and drunk driving, have involved multiple institutions.
- Corporations can play a critical role, and some have begun to do so.
- The major technology company platforms, in addition to restoring trust, can make a major difference in motivating people to become engaged.
- Media platforms need to expand their commitment to promoting a culture of participation.

Voting is not isolated, but part of a broader pattern of engagement

- Organizations working on community, workplace, and environmental issues should link their work consistently to the need for voter participation.
- Community institutions can use voting and elections as occasions for positive community events.
- Education on the link between voter participation and outcomes on issues needs to be continuous and ongoing.

A diverse culture requires commitment to diverse approaches

- Disparities in voter participation rates along racial, ethnic and cultural lines must be addressed.
- Campaigns and organizations must commit to understanding and investing resources in communities with historically low participation.
- Election officials and election processes must understand and encourage diverse voter participation.

Consistently seeking bipartisanship

- It is critical that the fundamental concept of encouraging participation not be allowed to be a partisan issue.
- All in public life should have a commitment to the participation of every American citizen.
- Finding language and messengers that can appeal to potential voters of all parties is key to sustaining participation over the long term.

Funding participation is critical

- Election administration and processes have been vastly underfunded, given the importance of our democratic process.
- Funding for school and university civic engagement is key.
- Election campaigns need to invest in expanding participation, not just persuading narrow slices of voters.
- Funding needs to be year-round and ongoing, not just election-cycle focused.

We are in a moment of real opportunity

- There is widespread engagement among young people and many other constituencies galvanized by important issues.
- There is a major opportunity for this current civic energy to be transformed into ongoing habits of participation.

TOPIC DISCUSSIONS[*]

Reimagining Participation: Creating a Culture Shift

Culture shifts take time and effort. They do not happen overnight, and to be lasting, they must be nonpartisan and habitual. Therefore, to increase voter participation to 80 percent, there must be a long-term, continuous effort involving consistent year-round organization, broad civics education, and engagement of people in a commitment to democracy itself, not just to one candidate or issue. Critically important is creating a sense of community so that voting becomes a norm and a point of pride for all Americans.

Themes and Challenges Presenter: Trey Grayson, *Frost Brown Todd; CivicPoint; Former Secretary of State, Kentucky*

Facilitator/Organizer: Ashley Spillane, *Impactual; Harvard Kennedy School*

Kickoff Commenters: Noopur Agarwal, *VP for Social Impact, MTV*

Gara LaMarche, *President, Democracy Alliance*

Lisa Pike, *VP of Environmental Activism, Patagonia*

Stevie Valles, Executive Director, Chicago Votes

Reporter: Ashley Spillane, *Impactual; Harvard Kennedy School*

There is no silver bullet that will change the civic culture; education, motivation, and inspiration are all needed together. The effort must be nonpartisan, and the language used to communicate with various constituencies must be thoughtfully crafted. In addition, a change in culture will require many conversations, both one-on-one and in small groups, and must foster recognition that, even when you vote, you do not always get the candidate or the policy you want. Thus, both patience and commitment to democracy, not just to one candidate or issue, must be taught. There was consensus that civics education must be required at the high-school level in order to engage young voters early. And GOTV (get out the vote) efforts on college campuses can have broad positive effects not only for students but also for the community networks, such as parents and friends, emanating from that campus.

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* Note that data included in these summaries were presented by one or more participants and have not been cross-checked by the Ash Center.

By definition, creating a culture shift means fostering lifelong commitments to democratic participation, not just mobilizing voters one election at a time. To enable and encourage such a shift in the United States, many players need to engage, including corporations, nonprofits, and individuals of all backgrounds and political affinities. Popular corporate brands and trusted community leaders will be critical to creating a culture shift toward lifelong participation.

Outdoor-wear company Patagonia has set an example in its commitment to environmental issues and democracy. It is one of the few companies that shut down its stores nationwide on election day in 2016. This not only makes it easier for employees to vote, but also sends a strong message to employees and customers about the importance of voting.

Recent data has shown that people are sometimes put off by negative messages that aim to create outrage, and that positive messaging may be more effective. When Patagonia moved to a positive message regarding the importance of voting in 2012, they found it to be extremely effective, and the company has since committed to upbeat messaging.

People need to be engaged, feel that they are being heard, and believe that they are as central to our democracy as that term dictates they should be. For that to happen, activists need to do more listening and less preaching. MTV's mission as a youth brand has helped it speak to and listen to youth on a variety of topics. They have found that social issues—including political engagement—are an increasingly high priority. MTV is running a GOTV campaign in the midterm election cycle for the first time this year (as is Patagonia). In fact, most in the group agreed that these efforts need to be year-round, not just during election cycles, and that those organizing them should seek partnerships with full-time organizers and funders.

MTV's internal research has shown that the vast majority of 16–26 year-olds, despite feeling that the political system is corrupt, are now following politics more closely than they were 6 months ago. MTV is focused on trying to reframe and rebrand American politics in a more positive light, utilizing storytelling to reach its 200 million followers, with a focus on stories of what young people are doing to engage in our democratic process. While the company will develop original content, it will also, perhaps

more importantly, embed these messages in existing content. The goal is to position voting as a communal (and fun!) experience.

Building community is central to a lasting culture shift. Chicago Votes, an organization focused on getting young people more politically engaged, has had real success in efforts to go into neighborhoods and talk to individuals face to face, understand their problems and concerns, and help them to see that becoming politically engaged is the best route to fixing those problems and addressing those concerns. One critical "neighborhood" is the Cook County Jail, the largest jail in the country. Chicago Votes goes there every month to register detainees to vote, and has even initiated a process seeking to have Cook County Jail established as a polling location so that the 6,000–10,000 detainees could register and vote on the same day.

Chicago Votes also has a high-school initiative called "Parade to the Polls" where they assemble high-school students of voting age, make posters, get a band, and march down the street to the polls, making their first voting experience a celebratory one.

When one considers the big culture shifts in our lifetime—drunk driving, cigarette smoking, picking up after your dog, seat belts, littering—it is clear that these norms changed partly because of sanctions, law, or policy, but also thanks to community and social sanctions. Participants talked about "norming"—the idea that if your friends and neighbors vote, you are more likely to vote as well.

Other important factors in creating a culture of participation are the messages and behaviors of influencers (spiritual and moral leaders, celebrities, etc.), the behavior and expectations of families, early childhood experiences, and the language and framing used around the topic of voting and democratic participation.

In summary, establishing a strong sense of community as fellow Americans creates lifelong voters and civic participants. The work that organizations like Chicago Votes does not only creates more registered voters, but also recognizes the citizenship and humanity in each individual.

Closing the Participation Gap: Mobilizing Non-Voters

GOTV efforts to date have focused primarily on the "likely-to-vote" category of voter, which is mostly a category of white Americans. In order to attain a voter participation level of 80 percent, drastic changes are needed, including listening to citizens' issues, investing in civics education, securing funding for year-round efforts, and communicating in languages and with cultural sensitivity to reach those in communities of color and young people who are often reluctant to participate in the electoral process.

Themes and Challenges Presenter: Chuck Rocha, *President/Founder,*
Solidarity Strategies
Facilitator/Organizer: David Becker, *Director, Center for Election Innovation*
and Research
Kick-off Commenters: Christine Chen, *Executive Director, API American Vote*
Daniel Garza, *President, LIBRE Initiative*
Andrea Hailey, *Civic Engagement Fund*
Kayla Reed, *Electoral Justice Project*
Reporter: David Becker, *Center for Election Innovation and Research*

Voter turnout rates appear to be dropping, in some places precipitously. Roughly 40 percent of eligible voters never participate, with only one-third of these even being registered to vote. Of the other 60 percent, one out of five votes only every four years. Only 10–20 percent vote consistently in all elections.

There are two types of voters who turn out: 1) those who are passionate about a particular issue or candidate and 2) those that have become baseline voters, who believe in our democratic system and will turn out even if they are not passionate about a candidate or issue. The key to the long-term health of our democracy is to create more of the latter type of voter.

What is the meaning of the goal of "getting to 80 percent"? It is certainly to increase the numerator, not decrease the denominator, but is it limited to participation in presidential elections? What are the goals for midterms and primaries? And, what is a non-voter? What about those who vote only every four years in presidential elections? Or those who vote only for the presidential race and skip the down-ballot races? What about those who vote in midterms, but not in primaries? There is a wide

spectrum of voting behavior that makes solutions difficult to determine, especially ones that are scalable and replicable.

In order to understand the non-voter and what motivates her/him, nothing can replace door knocking in effectiveness, because 1) one-on-one conversations can best reveal concerns and issues (and, thus, motivations) and 2) personal connections are made that can have lasting influence. Participants noted that we may stand at a unique point in history when those who have felt disconnected are beginning to feel empowered, including communities of color, new citizens, and young people. We must capitalize on this moment to increase lifelong engagement.

It appears that one of the main reasons people do not vote is that current communication strategies are not motivating them. Messages need to be tailored to the audience, taking culture, language, issues, and generation into consideration. Take, for example, the Asian Pacific Islander community, which is extremely diverse, speaks many different languages, and represents many different cultural backgrounds. Two-thirds of the API community are first-generation immigrants, and many come from countries where political involvement was viewed as risky. As a result, many are focused on jobs and family, not understanding the importance of civic engagement to a true democracy and its connection to achieving the "American dream." A related hurdle is that one-third of the Asian-American community are limited in English proficiency.

This kind of complexity may explain the lack of interest on the part of politicians and political parties in reaching this community and others. Recent polling found that 70 percent of Asian Americans who registered to vote in 2016 said no political party or campaign had contacted them.

We have a system that doesn't value outreach to low-propensity voters. Campaigns typically only make contact with the people who are most likely to vote. Over the last four congressional election cycles, the Civic Engagement Fund discovered that $800 million went to consultant fees, mostly meted out to a small DC inner circle, with only $80 million given to ground operations. The lion's share of campaign funds are thus flowing into the coffers of a political consultant class that is notably lacking in diversity and cultural competency.

Of course, communities of color are not monolithic in their political views. The median age of the Latino population, for example, is relatively young, and their

interests and views are just taking shape. Thirty-three percent of Latinos self-identify as conservative, 31 percent as independent, and 29 percent as liberal. In looking to increase turnout, activists must address disparate interests and priorities within ethnic and cultural groups. LIBRE is an organization promoting a "limited government," center-right outlook among Latinos. A key factor for LIBRE and other groups to consider is the influence of religious faith on political views in many African American and Latino communities.

Forty-five percent of those in the "millennial" demographic are from communities of color. Reaching this large and diverse demographic means exploring new technologies and seeking out funding sources for outreach efforts.

For the generation coming up behind millennials, many of whom are not college-bound, a high-school civics education strategy is crucial and needs to include the importance of local and primary elections. The Rhode Island Secretary of State's office offers one example of how to make this point to both current and future voters. It has embarked on an effort to engage citizens on issues they care about, and then to ask them to consider what level of government is best situated to address those concerns. This helps people recognize the importance of participating and voting in local and state as well as federal elections.

To engage the lifelong voter, multiple on-ramps to civic engagement must be visible and accessible, with more opportunities for people to feel that their voice truly matters. With party brands so low in approval, the focus should be on issue-based work. As the Parkland students and their allies have shown with their campaign to end gun violence, citizens can be galvanized around issues, and there is no shortage of issues with passionate and engaged constituencies.

Many campaign successes are the result of years of continuous organizing, talking with people face to face, educating communities on the issues, and teaching people how to hold their representatives accountable. This is where grassroots efforts can really make a difference. A healthy, thriving democracy is inherently American, not partisan, so time, effort, and money at the grassroots level are needed to reinforce this basic premise.

States on the Cutting Edge

While at the national level the positioning around voting seems hopelessly polarized, in many states (those laboratories of democracy), legislatures and officials are taking steps to make the process easier and more accessible. From voter education, to automated registration, to same-day registration, to improved election materials, the states are leading the way, and in a number of cases, doing so on a bipartisan basis. While there is no silver bullet to increase participation, there are many bronze ones that, taken together, can have a real impact. In this session, several states told their stories, and many additional ideas were put on the table.

Themes and Challenges Presenter: Doug Chapin, *University of Minnesota*
Facilitator/Organizer: Wendy Underhill, *National Conference of State Legislatures*
Kickoff Commenters: Sam Hunt, *Senator, Washington State*
　　　　　　　　　　　Greg Walker, *Senator, Indiana*
　　　　　　　　　　　Judd Choate, *Elections Director for Secretary of State, Colorado*
　　　　　　　　　　　Steve Simon, *Secretary of State, Minnesota*
　　　　　　　　　　　Nellie Gorbea, *Secretary of State, Rhode Island*
Reporter: 　　　　　Wendy Underhill, *National Conference of State Legislatures*

What Colorado has done to achieve its recent upswing in voter turnout is impressive. The state has: 1) adopted online registration; 2) enabled pre-registration for teenagers over 16; 3) instituted an automated registration process; 4) enacted same-day registration; and 5) done serious work on quality maintenance of voter registration lists through ERIC (The Electronic Registration Information Center). The state's new slogan for voting—"you can do it your way"—reflects the option to vote early or on election day, in person or by mail; with same-day registration, the process is simple.

Outreach has also been an important part of Colorado's plan. Upon joining ERIC, a state commits to sending out an invitation to register to all non-registered eligible voters. The Secretary of State's office is also door knocking in those neighborhoods where registration is low and has created an award for all high schools that can get 85 percent of their senior class registered to vote. Colorado's registration of eligible voters is now approaching 90 percent.

Minnesota, the state with the highest voter turnout in the country, at 74.7 percent in the 2016 election, has had same-day registration for decades (since 1974). In addition, Minnesota has automated registration, uses ERIC to cross-check data, and recently added both online voter registration and "no excuses" absentee voting. Secretary Simon emphasized that Minnesota culture is also key, that is, a deep-seated commitment to the process of democracy.

In 2016, Minnesota instituted a statewide mock election in public high schools, in which 281 schools and 96,000 students participated. This led to new curriculum, debates, extra credit for participation, and more. At the college level, Minnesota developed the Minnesota Ballot Bowl, with 68 colleges and universities participating in a competition to register the most students to vote.

On the technology side, Rhode Island modernized and changed all of its equipment for the 2016 election. The secretary of state's office also worked with Civics by Design to simplify the look and feel of the ballot and to make the voter handbook and other materials more user friendly.

Realizing only 61 percent of eligible voters were registered, Washington State recently adopted a wide-ranging election reform package called "Access to Democracy," which included a state-level voting rights act, same-day registration, vote by mail, automated registration, and online voter registration. In addition, the legislation mandates a civics course for all high-school students starting in 2020. Washington has also created postage-free drop boxes around the state, and in Thurston County (Olympia) last year, 73 percent of ballots were cast via drop box.

Not all states are encouraging participation, however. Indiana illustrates some of the challenges. Many Indiana legislators see most of the proposed changes as gimmicky and have suggested that voters who don't care enough to register in advance should not be voting anyway. Further, Indiana has done redistricting in the privacy of caucuses with no public participation, and with the goal of controlling the outcome. Districting is an important factor in turnout, as voters assess whether their vote is likely to make a difference. And while there has been some bipartisan support for changes like mail-in ballots and same-day registration, so far little progress has been made.

A key factor at the state level is bipartisanship. In general, it was acknowledged that there is more support among Democratic elected officials for expanding voter

participation than among Republicans. However, there are a number of states where there is bipartisan support for expanded participation, and that should be encouraged. In Colorado, a Republican secretary of state has supported many reforms. In Minnesota, the past two governors, Pawlenty and Dayton, refused to sign any election-related legislation that did not have strong bipartisan support. It was noted that in Colorado in 2016, 200,000 people utilized same-day registration, and slightly more of those voters registered as Republicans than Democrats. Online registration in Colorado has also narrowly registered more Republicans than Democrats.

Many voters and officials worry about voter fraud. Studies and examinations consistently show that this is not a significant issue. In Washington State's 2004 gubernatorial race, for example, each vote was combed, and fewer than 10 total votes were found to be illegal, of which none were deemed fraudulent.

Funding is another important issue. In Colorado, the secretary of state's office has a dedicated funding stream to pay staff for door-to-door outreach. This kind of funding, as well as funding for new equipment to ensure election security and build voters' confidence, is needed in many states. New federal funding, if made available, could allow more confidence-building improvements in the administration of elections.

Among legislators involved in NCSL (the National Conference of State Legislatures), there is a desire to know what really works and what does not. Election officials should view academics as partners and work together to collect meaningful data on the impact of various policies.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to boosting participation, either for states or for voters. Voters must have choices in how they can register and vote. States have differing civic cultures and histories, however, so determining which methods for increasing participation will work best requires real thought.

Leading the Way: Technology and Social Media as Participation Innovators

With the fast-moving social media and technology environment of today, it is critical that technology tools be utilized to reach, educate, and motivate voters of all ages, and young voters in particular. Our electoral process has been slow to adapt to these changes, but if we are to reach 80 percent voter participation, we must learn quickly. Major technology companies are taking action to encourage civic participation, and are eager to partner with others in those efforts.

Themes and Challenges Presenter: Todd Rogers, *Institute of Politics, Harvard Kennedy School*

Moderator/Organizer: Nicco Mele, *Shorenstein Center, Harvard Kennedy School*

Kick-off Commenters: Crystal Patterson, *Facebook*

Victoria McCullough, *Tumblr*

Jason Wheeler, *Google*

Reporter: Anjali Fernandes, *Lean Way: Technology and Social Media*

There are many ways for the tech sector to help move the country to 80 percent voter participation. Recommendations ranged from seeking more funding for civic technology, to forming partnerships with domain-specific organizations (tech companies cannot make progress alone), to building relationships with state and local officials in order to implement safe and effective technology innovations.

It was noted by some technology companies that they are losing the trust of the citizenry because they engage with voters on new election technology every four years, and then abandon the effort after election day. These companies have the potential to be great influencers and to partner with civic nonprofits if they can gain the trust of their customer constituency. To meet this goal, year-round efforts are needed.

Some tech companies are taking definitive steps to encourage participation. For example, Tumblr successfully drove calls to Congress on the net neutrality issue by sending push notifications to all users. And the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) recently did a study that showed that seeing on Facebook that your friends had voted increased turnout.

Tech companies had various goals around democratic participation. Facebook is building a suite of tools to provide users with voter information, including ID requirements and other registration details, and highlighting its already existing product that provides easy connection to elected representatives. Facebook is also going to have a GOTV message during election season. Tumblr, which encourages users aged 14–24 (Generation Z) to join and "find their people," is looking for ways to encourage conversations about voting and other current issues. The company created online "I Voted" stickers, and is considering introducing more information around hot-button issues to learn whether that will motivate more young people to vote.

At Google, the goal is to organize voter information and make it easy to find and to act upon. They are also focused on building products beyond election cycles that inform users about elected representatives and political candidates, their views and records, and the issues at stake. In addition, Google is considering how the company might provide real-time information about polling lines and turnout on election day.

Several problems in the civic arena were pointed out as particularly in need of technology solutions. First, the cost of access to data is huge. Can voter files/analytics be made more available? Some is publicly available but hard to use. Can we develop tools that make it easier to use census data? Second, how do we promote access to voter registration and information technology across income status? Lower-income groups disproportionately use mobile operating systems, and most current voting-related technology is not optimized for it.

Analyst Institute in D.C. is using behavioral-science insights, methods, and randomized experiments to develop best practices in voter contact. The Institute is sharing this data with other organizations and also has set up a fund to help finance these best practices across the country. Data sharing on best practices is sorely needed in this effort, a concern echoed by many throughout the day.

Technology is a tool, not an intervention. For example, it can be used to communicate who is voting, and to motivate others to do the same. People respond not only to norms, but also to observability—i.e., they are more likely to vote if others will know that they voted, both to avoid shame and to get the satisfaction of being someone who voted. Facebook's "I voted" button magnified the sense that "everyone is doing it" and essentially allowed users to put a virtual sticker on their profile to boast when they'd

done it themselves. Another example of this phenomenon is the Gerber and Green "Social Pressure Mailing," where you receive both your and your neighbors' voting records and are asked to update after the election.

Many agreed that utilizing social media and tech tools that are already in broad use, getting young people to register at the earliest possible age, and providing civics education—all efforts that a number of tech companies are already helping to drive—could help create a generation of lifelong voters.

The question that remains is how to translate tech companies' work to educate and build community online into off-line action. Ease of registration, including online registration, is critical. Civics education is needed not only to ensure voter expertise but also to help individuals understand the connection between the issues they care about and voting. This group felt that technical literacy for elected officials and other decision-makers is important. Consensus also gelled around a proposal to create a common data format for information about elections, registration, deadlines, and other civic information.

Tech companies increasingly see themselves as partners in the effort to promote participation in democratic processes, and are focused on developing new tools to facilitate voting, civic education, and, ultimately, civic action.

The Policy Landscape: Universal Registration, Universal Voting

Reverend Brooks put the symposium's large vision in historical perspective, saying that addressing the questions of universal registration and universal voting is the next phase in an ongoing process of expanding the electorate that has been going on for 200 years: disassembling the architecture of exclusion. Citing Australia's experience, Brooks advocated treating the right to vote as a responsibility, just as we do serving on a jury—as an expected civic act. This session re-emphasized a number of the key themes of the other sessions, but also put two major new ideas on the table: universal voter registration, and universal voting as public policies that could have a transformative effect on getting to 80 percent voter participation.

Themes and Challenges Presenter: Rev. Cornell William Brooks, *Boston University*
Facilitator/Organizer: Miles Rapoport, *Ash Center*
Kickoff Commenters: Wendy Weiser, Director, *Democracy Program, The Brennan Center for Justice, NYU*

Clarissa Martinez de Castro, *Unidos US (previously National Council La Raza)*

Sayu Bhojwani, *Founder and Director, New American Leaders*

Thomas Hicks, *Chair, U.S. Election Assistance Commission*
Reporter: Sayu Bhojwani, *New American Leaders*

One of the themes that resonated in other sessions was the critical role of early cultural, community, and educational experiences in developing attitudes about voting. Providing early experiences for high-school students and young people in communities—particularly in places where fewer young people go to college—is critical, and several speakers emphasized this point. Voting, for young people and new citizens, can be a lonely and confusing experience, so encouragement and teaching from many quarters of the educational experience are key. Further, speakers noted that voting should be tied to civic engagement more generally, outside of election cycles.

A second recurring theme was the need for effective voter-centered election administration. Many voters say the largest reason they don't vote is that they are not asked, and others feel the system doesn't operate for the voters, but for the parties and politicians. Making the voting experience inviting rather than daunting, and

administering elections in a transparent and even-handed way are all important ways to encourage participation. And, of course, thwarting policies that make it more difficult to vote is essential to creating a voter-friendly culture.

A third theme was that connecting voting and civic participation more generally to front-burner issues that people care deeply about is critical. Peers and community organizations are effective messengers of the idea that what government does really matters in people's lives, and also that what people do or don't do really matters in the outcomes of government actions.

So, what about universal registration and universal voting? Universal registration could be an expanded version of automatic (or automated) voter registration, AVR, which has been adopted by a number of states in a relatively short period of time. AVR expands the electorate, and having state agencies process voter registrations during routine transactions and services, many of which require identification, adds some reassurance of accuracy as well. One way to expand AVR would be to tie registration to high-school graduations and/or to registration for Selective Service. Voter registration at all naturalization ceremonies would be another way to expand. The basic idea is to make voter registration a normal and organic part of citizen interactions with government at all levels. Canada has adopted universal registration, and participation (68 percent in the last election) rose 10 percent.

While requiring some form of universal registration seems to have widespread support, the concept of universal voting generates strong reactions on many fronts. From one perspective, since we already accept mandatory jury service as part of our civic duty, why not accept voting the same way? Would that not bolster a commitment to solid civics education? Would that not engage many more in the electoral process? In addition, a voting requirement could virtually eliminate registration obstacles and hurdles as jurisdictions put systems in place to accommodate a mandatory approach. Seemingly outlandish ideas can, and have in the past, become mainstream, and universal voting may be such an issue that warrants significant public discussion.

However, in considering mandatory voting, it is key to understand whether a carrot or stick approach works better. Australia provides public civics education but also issues small fines to people who do not vote. Would such a penalty-based system be right for the United States? Our country penalizes so many, one view was that an

incentive approach might be more successful, while reinforcing lifelong voting habits and commitment to our democracy. Current federal and state election laws prohibit most penalties and incentives, so any proposed carrot or stick would likely require new legislation.

Overall, the consensus was that universal voting is an intriguing idea with some clear advantages as well as challenges. Since thinking "big" is necessary to create the conditions for getting to 80 percent participation or beyond, however, the issue warrants further study and consideration.

The Change Generation: Young Americans and Participation

Throughout the past two decades, participation by young people has swung on an approximate 15-point pendulum, with events like the September 11, 2001 attack and the campaign of Barack Obama spurring increased voter participation and engagement. However, these gains tend to dissipate rapidly once the catalyst has receded. In recent years, the outcome of the 2016 election as well as the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, have reignited the engagement and passion of our young people. There seems to be an increasing understanding that one's vote does in fact matter and a boldness in confronting sitting politicians to "do something" to end the gridlock and enact solutions.

Themes and Challenges Presenter: Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, *Tisch College Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Tufts*

Facilitator/Organizer: John Della Volpe, *Institute of Politics, Harvard Kennedy School*

Kickoff Commenters: Sarah Audelo, *Executive Director, Alliance for Youth Action*

Charlene Carruthers, *Community Activist, Writer; National Director, Black Youth Project 100*

Ian Simmons, *Co-founder and Executive, Blue Haven Investments*

Reporter: John Della Volpe

There are tens of millions of young Americans on college campuses and around the country who understand that politics matter, and who are looking both to be inspired from the top down and to help organize from the bottom up. The opportunity to create lifetime habits of voting and engagement in the electoral process is now.

Data from Tufts shows four key trends to consider in efforts to increase youth engagement. First, young people, now numbering in the tens of millions and constituting approximately one-third of the electorate, represent a formidable force for potential social change. Second, young people are now leading major social movements; however, we cannot count on their energy continuing unless we work to ensure they remain passionate and engaged. Third, college presidents and college students are becoming much more civically engaged. And fourth, young people are diverse, both in background and ideology.

Colorado, Texas, and other states have seen dramatic increases in voter turnout among those under 34. Alliance for Youth Action, which has affiliates in 20 states, is a network of young people building political power across the country through expanded electronic participation as well as issue engagement. Successes at the local level are inspiring continued youth engagement and more young candidacies.

Young voters have been instrumental in advancing automatic/automated voter registration (AVR) across the country. The gap between whites voters and people of color was reduced by half after Oregon passed AVR. Engaging young people in these issues early in life is laying the foundation for a lifelong voting commitment. However, engaging youth from minority populations is complex.

When 80 percent of African Americans feel under siege in America today (according to a number of participants), exercising the rights and fulfilling the duties of citizenship may raise conflicting feelings. The longstanding tenuous relationship between African Americans and the U.S. government makes engagement of black youth particularly complicated. In order to engage African-American youth, there must be candidates who support issues that affect them—for example, spending less on incarceration and more on creating strong schools. And the messaging needs to be positive in focus. Moreover, mobilizing more young African-American citizens to vote means running more African-American candidates. Culturally sensitive GOTV efforts and education on issues should encourage more young African Americans to run for office.

In motivating young voters, focusing on issues they care about is vital, and often these are local, not national issues. At this level, tangible results are usually more visible and much quicker, which builds confidence in participation.

One prime area for engaging and organizing young people is on college campuses. The colleges and universities having the most success have a few things in common: 1) extensive voter registration efforts that include experiential learning; 2) an institution-wide strategy; 3) a nonpartisan approach; and 4) a focus on high-quality civic learning as key to sustaining interest and creating lifelong voting habits. One influential factor is the public commitment of many college presidents from both political parties to take on the challenge to increase voter registration and voting on their campuses. This encourages other college presidents to get on board. Increasing a

school's position in the college rankings for their successes in student participation can also be a powerful campus motivator.

Not to be forgotten is the high-school population. Far more young people attend high schools than colleges, so the effort to create a culture of voting and democratic participation must emphasize high-school civics education. Some even advocate lowering the voting age to 16 so that politicians will take the concerns of young Americans seriously. All of these efforts need to be year-round with consistent ongoing funding in order to have staying power.

In closing, it was reported that a recent Institute of Politics poll, its 35th, shows that this midterm election has generated the highest level of interest since this poll began. We may be seeing a potential "once in a generation" shift, and youth are turning out to be a big part of that.

MOVING FORWARD

Reaching full participation will not happen with one single effort, organization, or strategy, but instead will require collective work across sectors and communities. A goal of the symposium was to assemble a group of experienced people in the field, including academics, elected officials, and practitioners from all sectors, to think through the myriad issues the participation goal presents and to foster connections to help build on the day's energy. We hope these connections serve as a start for future collaborations and resources in our individual work.

At the Harvard Kennedy School, we look forward to undertaking several projects in the months ahead, and we are excited for the development of the broader Moonshot efforts conducted by our colleagues at Democracy Works, TurboVote, and Common Cause.

Harvard Votes Challenge

The issue of low voter participation on college campuses across the country was discussed at length at the symposium. To address Harvard's low participation rate,

Professor Fung announced the Kennedy School's efforts to get students registered and voting in the next election. This fall, the Harvard Kennedy School will participate in the Harvard Votes Challenge, a university-wide competition between participating schools that seeks to increase voter registration among eligible students.

As a school devoted to public service and good governance, HKS will aim high when it comes to democracy. HKS aspires to sign up 90 percent of eligible students to register through the TurboVote platform this fall.

The efforts will be a hybrid of student organizing and efforts made by the Ash Center to change the way the school informs students about elections. Programming and events held around campus will explore the importance of political participation, elections, and democracy in societies around the world.

HKS aims to strengthen the culture of political participation on campus and everywhere by creating case studies on how HKS approached the challenge. It hopes to encourage other public policy schools around the country to commit to registering 90 percent of their eligible students, as the Ford School at the University of Michigan has.

Exploring Universal Voting

Universal voting is gaining momentum for future exploration as a way to advance voter participation in a major way. In Australia and 26 other countries or major subdivisions, voting is considered a civic duty, much like serving on a jury in the United States. In Australia, the policy was adopted in 1924, and the turnout in elections is consistently over 90 percent, without any real debate over its "mandatory" nature. In the United States, many different variants might be possible, but the whole question of universal voting has received almost no public attention and debate, despite several papers, including from the Brookings Institution, advocating for it.

Starting in Fall 2018, the Ash Center will launch a working group on universal voting composed of scholars, journalists, election officials, advocates, and organizers. The working group will collect information, publish articles and reports, and explore how universal voting might be possible in the American democratic system.

Compendium of Voter Participation Efforts

The symposium convened over 100 individuals and organizations doing important work on voter participation. While the event served as a first glance into the work for many, it did not deliver a comprehensive view of all the activities that exist among this group. As a follow-up to these proceedings, the Ash Center is collecting accounts of voter participation activities conducted by the symposium's attendees. The resulting compendium will summarize each organization or individual's activities and learning around best practices in the voter participation space. The information will be shared as a resource and to encourage symposium participants and others to coordinate efforts and collaborate on an ongoing basis.

In order to be featured in the compendium of voter participation efforts, all participants are asked to submit a short description of current activities and best practices to Miles Rapoport by December 1.

There are two major participant efforts we want to highlight:

Moonshot Efforts

Democracy Works, the Democracy Fund, and Common Cause are bringing a bold approach to the "moonshot" goal of 80 percent voter participation. The goal is to develop a representative leadership and strategy to be ready to launch the moonshot goal (getting to 80 percent participation by 2024) publicly by the end of 2018. Leading the effort is Kate Krontiris, who explained that their work is "around civic capacity building and civic power building between elections, in terms of deep and broad participation, in a transformative way. . . . Part of this 'moonshot' goal is to have a representative electorate—one that reflects the population demographics; getting to 80 percent with just more white voters does not meet the goal. So, the impetus is to reach into those underrepresented communities, which include: young people, those from low-economic or low-education backgrounds, people of color, people serving our country, those with disabilities, and those with language-access needs." The idea is that voting is centered around equity for all people. The Ash Center will contribute academic energy to the "moonshot" effort and follow the leadership of the principal organizations.

ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge

The symposium inspired critical dialogue between academics, researchers, and practitioners about achieving 80 percent participation and striving for full participation in the United States of America. Over the past few years, the Foundation for Civic Leadership (FCL) has partnered with Civic Nation and Young Invincibles to establish the ALL IN Campus Democracy Network, cultivating support for leaders in higher education to improve student participation within their institutions. These platforms have grown at extraordinary speed and inspired almost 400 higher education institutions and over 300 nonprofit organizations to make shared commitments to improving voting rates among the more than 4.5 million students they serve, and their impact continues to grow.

But, as Ian Simmons, president of the Foundation for Civic Leadership noted: "we know that reaching full participation means engaging local leaders from all sectors. That's why, this fall, FCL is exploring how to support the leaders in business and local government, including cities, counties, and states, already striving for full civic participation. Together, through thoughtful collaboration sustained by convenings like the 2018 symposium, we can develop ways to research best practices, recognize real success, and redesign for continuous improvement. This is a long road—one worth walking together."

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The Roy and Lila Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence and innovation in governance and public policy through research, education, and public discussion. By training the very best leaders, developing powerful new ideas, and disseminating innovative solutions and institutional reforms, the Center's goal is to meet the profound challenges facing the world's citizens.

The Institute of Politics at Harvard Kennedy School (IOP) was established in 1966 as a memorial to President Kennedy. The IOP's mission is to unite and engage students, particularly undergraduates, with academics, politicians, activists, and policymakers on a non-partisan basis to inspire them to consider careers in politics and

public service. The Institute strives to promote greater understanding and cooperation between the academic world and the world of politics and public affairs.

The Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy is a Harvard University research center dedicated to exploring and illuminating the intersection of press, politics and public policy in theory and practice. The Center strives to bridge the gap between journalists and scholars, and between them and the public. Through teaching and research at the Kennedy School of Government and its program of visiting fellows, conferences and initiatives, the Center is at the forefront of its area of inquiry.

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For more research and upcoming events on voter participation and issues of democratic governance, please visit ash.harvard.edu or follow the Ash Center on social media @HarvardAsh.