SUGGESTED READING MATERIALS

April 17, 2018

Please note: Much of the enclosed is abridged. If you're interested in reading a full report, please click through to the original document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AMERICA GOES TO THE POLLS

A Report on Voter Turnout

NonProfit Vote

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NATIONAL TURNOUT

Voter turnout exceeded 2012 at a level consistent with the last three presidential elections.

- 60.2% of the nation's 231 million eligible voters cast ballots, according to ballots counted and certified by state election boards, compared to 58.6% turnout in 2012.
- Four in ten eligible voters didn't vote. Among the most common reasons voters cite for not voting are a lack of competition and meaningful choices on the ballot or problems with their voter registration or getting to the polls.

STATE TURNOUT RANKINGS

The two factors that consistently correlate with higher voter participation are the ability to fix a registration issue when you vote and living in a battleground state.

Same Day Voter Registration
- **The six highest-ranking states offered same day voter registration (SDR),** which allows voters to register or fix a registration problem when they vote (In order – Minnesota, Maine, New Hampshire, Colorado, Wisconsin and Iowa).
- **Voter turnout in states with SDR was seven points higher** than states without the option, consistent with every election since the policy was first introduced in the 1970s.
- **The significant turnout advantage of SDR states has persisted** even as four new states (Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois and Maryland) implemented the policy since the 2012 election.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR)
- **Oregon, the first state to implement AVR, saw the highest turnout increase of any state** over 2012 – 4.1 percentage points. AVR pro-actively registers citizens at DMV transactions.

Battleground States

- **Five of the six highest-turnout states, and 12 of the top 20,** were battleground states.
- Voter turnout in contested battleground states has been **five to eight percentage points higher** than in non-battleground states in each of the last five presidential elections.
- **The campaigns dedicated 99% of their ad spending and 95% of campaign visits** to the 14 battleground states – well over half going to just four states – FL, NC, OH and PA.
- **The voices of 65% of the electorate – 147 million voters –** were left on the sidelines from determining the presidency – living in the 36 non-battlegrounds states whose electoral votes were pre-ordained. That, in fact, is largely what happened.
- **Latino (75%) and Asian American voters (81%) lived disproportionately outside swing states** and, as a result, experienced 10-16 percentage points less contact than their swing state counterparts and a reduced voice in the election of the president.

Lowest Ranking States

- **Hawaii, West Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, and Arkansas were at the bottom five** for the third consecutive presidential election. None were battleground states. All five cut off the ability to register or update a registration three to four weeks before Election Day.
- **National turnout was reduced by 1.5 percentage points,** due to low turnout in three of the four most populous states – California, New York and Texas.

RECORD LOW COMPETITION IN U.S. HOUSE RACES

The lack of competition in Congressional races compounds the lack of competition in non-battleground states in the presidential race.

- **Competition in House elections reached its lowest level** since Cook Political Report began rating competition in 1984. Cook rated 37 of the 435 U.S. House races as competitive on the eve of the 2016 election.
- In the end, even fewer House seats – 33 – ended up being competitive with a margin of victory between the top two candidates of 10% or less. **73% of House races were won by landslide margins of victory – over 20%.**

DEMOCRACY COUNTS

A Report on College and University Student Voting
2016 NSLVE National Report
Tufts University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement is a study of U.S. college and university student voting. At the time of this report, the database consists of deidentified records for 9,511,711 and 9,784,931 students enrolled at the time of the 2012 and 2016 elections, respectively. These students attended 1,023 higher education institutions in the U.S. across all 50 states. Participating institutions give NSLVE permission for their student enrollment records to be matched with public voting records, yielding precise data on their students' turnout. The demographics of the nearly 10 million students in NSLVE resemble those of the approximately 20 million college students in the U.S.

Turnout rose

Overall, NSLVE students voted at a higher rate in 2016 than 2012 by about three percentage points, rising from 45.1% to 48.3%. Relative to the turnout of the general U.S. population of 18 to 24-year-olds, NSLVE student turnout was somewhat higher in both election years and increased slightly more between elections. Registration rates rose only slightly among NSLVE students between 2012 and 2016, but voting rates among those who were registered increased by three percentage points.

Women voted more

In general, women tend to vote at higher rates than men, and this was true in 2016 among NSLVE students. However, the gender gap was not significantly larger in 2016 than in 2012. Women voted at rates nearly seven percentage points higher than men in both elections.

Hispanic and Asian turnout up; Black turnout down from a high baseline

Turnout increases between the two elections were especially large among Hispanic and Asian students, but Black student turnout decreased by five percentage points, albeit from a very high baseline. (African American students had the highest turnout among racial groups in 2012, and were only slightly below Whites in 2016.) Although the voting rate of White students increased in 2016, Whites comprised a smaller portion of all NSLVE voters, which can be attributed in part to Hispanic and Asian students comprising a larger portion of NSLVE voters.

5

Youngest students saw turnout increase

Although older NSLVE students were more likely to vote, the turnout rate of the youngest group of college student voters (those aged 18 to 21) increased notably by four percentage points from 2012 to 2016. Young students also made up a larger proportion of all NSLVE student voters in 2016 than in the previous presidential election. Students under 25 years old comprised 62% of NSLVE student voters in 2012 and 65% in 2016. In total, over 350,000 more students under 25 years old voted in 2016 than in 2012.

Social science majors voted at significantly higher rates than STEM majors

Voting rates increased from 2012 to 2016 in all academic fields of study. In both election years, students majoring in the social sciences voted at the highest rate, followed by those studying health professions, the humanities, and business. Students majoring in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) voted at the lowest rate in both election years. These differences could be due to many potential factors, including civically engaged students self-selecting into more civically oriented majors.

Turnout rose in private four-year institutions and women's colleges, fell at HBCUs

Turnout increased across public and private institutions as well as at four-year and two-year institutions; the increase was sharpest among students at private four-year institutions. NSLVE students at women's colleges appeared energized to vote in the 2016 election: 60% percent of students at women's colleges in NSLVE voted in 2016, compared to just over 50% in 2012. Turnout among students at Primarily Black Institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities decreased, and the decline among students at HBCUs was particularly sharp, a nearly 10 percentage point drop.

Institutions in New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania led the turnout increases

On average, at the state level, voting rates at institutions in New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania tended to increase the most, and institutions in Georgia, Wisconsin, and Mississippi had the largest decline. By region, students enrolled at institutions in the Rocky Mountains region voted at the highest rate in both 2012 and 2016, while students in the Southwest had the lowest regional turnout in both years.

The Report of the Commission on Youth Voting & Civic Knowledge
CIRCLE, Tufts University

A Call to Action

Each new generation must become active, informed, responsible, and effective citizens. As a teacher we surveyed for this report said, civic education "is essential if we are to continue as a free democratic society. Not to educate the next generation will ensure the destruction of our American way of life as we know it."

Data show that many young Americans are reasonably well informed and active. For instance, 45% of citizens between the ages of 18 and 29 voted in the 2012 election. In a national survey conducted for this Commission, 76% of people under the age of 25 who voted could correctly answer at least one (out of two) factual questions about where the presidential candidates stood on a campaign issue and state their own opinion on that issue.
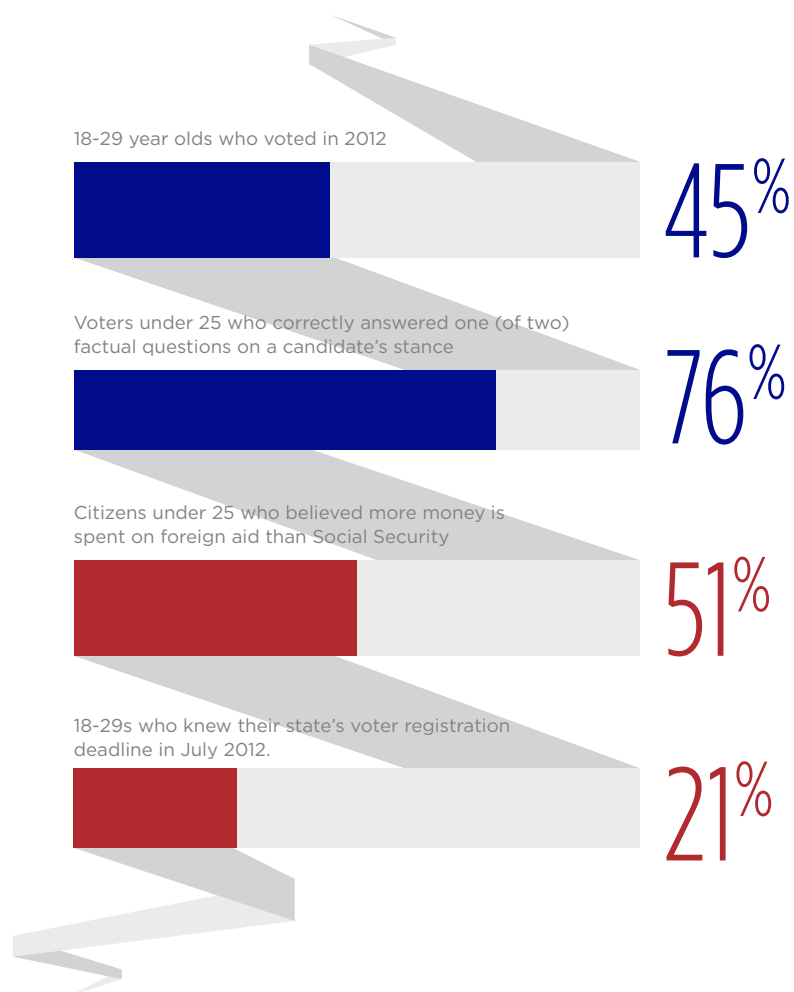
On the other hand, more than half of young people did *not* vote. And on some topics, most young people were misinformed. A majority (51.2%) of under 25-year-olds believed that the federal government spends more on foreign aid than on Social Security, when in fact Social Security costs about 20 times more. (Older adults have also been found to be misinformed on similar topics.) Our research, like many other studies, finds that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are far less likely to be informed and to vote.

These shortcomings cannot be attributed to the schools alone, since families, friends, political campaigns, election officials, the mass media, social media, and community-based organizations are among the other important influences on young people. In fact, our research shows that while

schools matter, civic education must be a shared responsibility. The outcomes are acceptable only when all the relevant institutions invite, support, and educate young people to engage in politics and civic life. Improving the quality and quantity of youth participation will require new collaborations; for example, state election officials and schools should work together to make voting

Breaking the pattern of the past forty years will require new ideas and the active support of all sectors of society.

This report is intended to engage Americans in a new discussion, leading to experiments, partnerships, and reforms.

18-29 year olds who voted in 2012

45%

Voters under 25 who correctly answered one (of two) factual questions on a candidate's stance

76%

Citizens under 25 who believed more money is spent on foreign aid than Social Security

51%

18-29s who knew their state's voter registration deadline in July 2012.

21%

procedures understandable and to educate students about voting rules.

Some of the existing strategies for civic education are strongly supported by research and deserve to be maintained and expanded. For instance, teaching young people explicitly about politics and elections is related to higher levels of political knowledge; thus schools should be encouraged and supported to cover politics in classes that reach all students. Young adults are also more civically engaged if they discussed

underlying social and political problems in conjunction with service projects in high school.

The effects of policies are more difficult to estimate than the effects of educational strategies and practices. There are only 50 states, and they differ in many ways. We find that some policies probably have detrimental consequences. For example, young people without college experience who lived in the states with photo ID requirements were less likely to vote in 2012 than those who lived in other states, even when

we accounted for other factors that are related to voting. States with many restrictive measures in place on Election Day also saw lower turnout by non-college youth.

Research conducted for this report does not by any means rule out the benefits of some existing policies, such as mandatory courses and tests or convenient means of voter registration. However, the data collected for the Commission and previous studies suggest that none of the existing state policies has an impressive

positive effect. Certainly, the current policies in states and major school districts do not come close to achieving the goals of civic education, which are to provide *all* young people with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to be active and responsible citizens. Either the policies are misconceived, the quality of implementation is inadequate, or both.

For example, we find that testing civics has no positive impact, but that could be because the tests are not well designed, teachers are not well prepared and supported to teach the material, or the curriculum is misaligned with the tests. The quality of implementation requires more attention, and there is an urgent need to experiment with wholly new strategies and policies, some of which are suggested in this report.

Despite enormous shifts in the nature of campaigns and political issues, news and electronic media, the demographics of the youth population, and education policy and voting law, changes in youth turnout and civic knowledge have been limited since 1972. The average youth turnout (for ages 18-24) in presidential years from 1972-2012 was 43.7%. The rate in 2012 was just a bit below the mean at 41.2%. Since 1972, the 50% threshold has never been breached. Meanwhile, the best national data on civic knowledge—from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Civics Assessment—show very small changes since the 1970s.[1]

Although levels of turnout and knowledge have not changed dramatically over time, the Commission believes that the present moment is a particularly challenging one for civic educators, whether they work in schools or other settings. Civic education is a low priority for most policymakers and private funders, and the very idea of trying to engage young people in politics has become controversial. Breaking the pattern of the past forty years will require new ideas and the active support of all sectors of society—including youth themselves. Just as we should teach young people to work together to address public problems—each contributing his or her assets and ideas— so people of all ages must collaborate to improve youth civic engagement. This report is intended to engage Americans in a new discussion about educating the next generation of voters, leading to experiments, partnerships, and reforms.

Main Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from the Commissioners' deliberations, which were informed by an in-depth analysis of prior research and extensive original research conducted during and after the 2012 election (see the next section for a summary of the new research). No single reform listed here is a panacea, but combining several of them would help build a supportive

YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP AS CITIZENS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF:

- Their own parents and family members;

- Schools and colleges;

- Peer groups, both in-person and online;

- Community groups and religious congregations;

- Neighborhood and community norms;

- National news and entertainment media;

- Social media; and

- The formal political system.

Civic education is best understood as a shared responsibility, requiring collaboration.

environment for youth civic learning and engagement. The main body of the report explains whether each of these recommendations is based on extensive experience and evaluation data or is a new idea that the Commissioners advocate on a pilot basis.

Selected recommendations for national, state, and local policymakers

- Make voting more accessible through reforms such as Same Day Registration; automatic registration of eligible high school students or pre-registration of 17-year-old students; and online registration with easy mobile updating.

- Implement state standards for civics that focus on developing advanced civic skills, such as deliberation and collaboration, rather than memorizing facts. Standards should be more challenging, more coherent, and more concerned with politics than the typical state standards in place today. Because these standards will be challenging, they will require both deep attention to civics within the social studies curriculum and support from other disciplines, such as English/language arts and the sciences.

- Experiment with assessments of civic skills that use portfolios of students' work instead of standardized tests. (This reform is currently being implemented in Tennessee, and the experience there will provide valuable lessons.)

- Enact state and district policies that support teachers' obligation to include discussions of current, controversial political issues in the curriculum.

- Lower the voting age to 17 in municipal or state elections so that students can be encouraged to vote while they are taking a required civics class.

- Increase the scale and quality of national and community service programs that involve elements of deliberation, collaboration, and work on social issues, and make sure they are open to youth who do not attend college.

Selected recommendations for school districts and educators

- Implement high school course requirements with valid assessments that measure higher-order skills and the application of knowledge. Courses should teach the registration and voting process explicitly and engage students in following the news and deliberating about issues.

- Adopt explicit policies that protect teachers' careers if they teach about controversial issues, as long as they encourage discussion of diverse perspectives on those issues.

- Provide professional development that goes well beyond one-day events and that is available to all teachers, including those serving disadvantaged students.[2]

- Use assessment systems that reward students' discussion and investigation of current events and issues.

- Assign students to read and discuss news in class and with their parents or other adults.

- Teach in detail the current voting laws that apply in the state, as many young people do not know the specifics of the laws that govern voting in their own jurisdictions.

- Emphasize youth conducting community research and producing local journalism, with the twin goals of enhancing students' communications skills and making a contribution to the community in light of the severe gap in professional reporting.

- Provide standards, curricular materials, and professional development that ensure students discuss the root causes of social problems when they participate in service-learning and ensure that student groups address social issues.

- Strengthen standards and curricula for digital media literacy and coordinate digital media literacy and civic education.

- Implement multi-player role-playing video games as tools for civic education.

Recommendations for families and communities

Families and caring adults contribute to the younger generation's civic development in many ways. Families cannot be required to teach civic education, and even advice should be offered cautiously out of respect for families' autonomy and diversity. But in general, families should:

- Discuss current events (including upcoming elections) and political issues.

- Obtain and discuss high-quality news, to the extent possible.

- Encourage children to form and express their own views on current controversial issues.

- Support the discussion of controversial issues in schools.

- If eligible, vote, and talk to children about why they vote.

- Involve their children in out-of-school groups and organizations that address political and social concerns.

Recommendations for collaboration

- Develop and support statewide coalitions that advocate for favorable policies and work to ensure that policies are well implemented. (For instance, as well as advocating a civics test, the coalition will help design a good test, align it with materials and curricula, and help provide professional development for teachers.)

- Award badges for excellence in civics. These portable, online certificates would demonstrate advanced civic skills, knowledge, and actual contributions. Badges could be designed and awarded by various institutions (e.g., schools and religious congregations), but the sectors should share ideas and set voluntary standards.

- Encourage parents to participate in civic activities within schools, e.g., by judging students' portfolios or by joining discussions of current events.

- Align states' high school civics curricula with voting reforms that encourage pre-registration in schools.

- Support the study of civics and government among college students who are headed for teaching careers.

- Hold contests and award certificates of civic achievement. Students enrolled in k-12 schools would be eligible, but community groups would participate in judging and awarding the prizes. Parents and other adults could also be eligible for awards.

Research for this Report

To investigate the full range of influences on informed youth voting, CIRCLE organized and staffed a scholarly, nonpartisan commission. Research for the Commission was funded by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, W.T. Grant Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Spencer Foundation and the Youth Engagement Fund. To inform the Commission's deliberations, CIRCLE conducted the following ambitious and original research projects in 2012-2013:

- **The Youth Engagement Fund polls:** CIRCLE conducted a nationally representative online survey of 1,695 youth (ages 18-29) in June/July 2012 and surveyed 1,109 of the same youth in October 2012 to track change during the campaign season.

- **The National Youth Survey:** Immediately after the election,

CIRCLE surveyed 4,483 representative individuals (ages 18-24) by cell phone and land-line phones. At least 75 participants came from each of the 50 states and Washington, DC (75-131 per state) to allow us to estimate the effects of state policies using a statistical model. Participants of Black and Hispanic backgrounds were slightly oversampled.

- **The Teacher Survey:** In May and June 2013, CIRCLE surveyed a national sample of high school government and social studies teachers. We collected 720 complete teacher responses.

- **Stakeholder interviews:** CIRCLE interviewed 15 stakeholders (nonprofit leaders and advocates, including young adults) and coded and summarized their ideas.

- **Analysis of national data:** CIRCLE analyzed National Exit Poll and the U.S. Census Current Population Survey, Voting and Registration Supplement (CPS Voting Supplement) data to calculate youth turnout and to examine relationships between turnout and laws at the state level.

- **Policy scans:** CIRCLE conducted a full scan of all the states' civic education policies and a separate scan of their teacher certification requirements. We categorized these laws to incorporate them in statistical models of the effects of policies on youth outcomes.

- **A literature review:** CIRCLE completed a comprehensive literature review, highlights of which are briefly summarized as Appendix A.

In all, we surveyed or interviewed 6,913 people (some more than once, to detect changes over time) and scanned the relevant laws of all 50 states plus the District of Columbia for the purpose of producing this report. Additional details are available in Appendix B.

About the Commission

The members of the Commission are among the most distinguished scholarly experts on youth political engagement, representing diverse disciplines and institutions. They studied and discussed the findings from the new research and then jointly wrote this report.

- David Campbell, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Rooney Center for the Study of American Democracy, the University of Notre Dame

- Constance Flanagan, Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison

- Lisa García Bedolla, Professor, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley

- Trey Grayson, Director of the Institute of Politics at Harvard University and former Secretary of State of Kentucky

- Eitan Hersh, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale University

- Diana Hess, Senior Vice President, the Spencer Foundation and Professor of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison

- Joseph Kahne, Professor of Education at Mills College and Chair of the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics

- Alex Keyssar, Matthew W. Stirling Jr., Professor of History and Social Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University

- Michael McDevitt, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Colorado, Boulder

- Richard G. Niemi, Don Alonzo Watson Professor of Political Science, University of Rochester

- Eric Plutzer, Professor of Political Science, Penn State University

- Debra Satz, Marta Sutton Weeks Professor of Ethics in Society and Professor of Philosophy, Stanford University

- Ismail K. White, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Ohio State University

Staff: CIRCLE provided research and other forms of support for the Commission. CIRCLE Director Peter Levine was the Principal Investigator on all the research efforts and coordinated the Commission. Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, CIRCLE's Deputy Director, had primary responsibility for the research. Other key staff were: Surbhi Godsay, Researcher; Abby Kiesa, Youth Coordinator & Researcher; Kathy O'Connor, Program Assistant; Felicia Sullivan, Senior Researcher; and Nancy Thomas, Director of CIRCLE's Initiative for the Study of Higher Education and Public Life.

New Data on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge

Many of the statistics and specific findings presented in this report have previously been released publicly under the aegis of the Commission. But this report is the first-ever presentation of several findings, such as the following:

★ For young people without college experience, the existence of a photo ID law in their state predicted lower turnout in 2012, even after we included many other potential explanations in our statistical models. (Future elections may differ from 2012, when the photo ID laws were highly controversial and actively opposed.)

★ Allowing people to register to vote on the same day that they vote had a positive effect on youth turnout in 2012, and that finding is consistent with previous research.

★ About one in four high school civics or American government teachers believe that the parents of their students or other adults in their community would object if they brought discussion of politics into the classroom.

★ Ninety percent of teachers believe that their principal would support their decision to teach about an election (and 46% would expect strong support from principals). But only 38% of teachers think they would get strong support from their district, and only 28% think parents would strongly support them. If teachers perceive strong support, they are significantly more likely to provide an open climate for discussion in class and tend to prefer more deliberative forms of discussion. Teachers with more experience are more likely to perceive support.

★ Attending racially diverse high schools predicted lower electoral engagement and lower levels of informed voting, probably because it is more difficult to discuss controversial issues in diverse contexts, and individuals feel less encouragement to participate politically when others around them disagree.[3] On the other hand, discussion of controversial current issues in school and parental support for controversial discussions diminished the negative relationship between diversity and electoral engagement.

★ Only eight states (California, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia) include social studies in their assessments of schools' performance, usually as a very small proportion of the schools' scores.

★ Only ten states (Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, and Wisconsin) require teachers of government or civics to be certified in civics or government.

35TH SURVEY OF YOUNG AMERICANS ATTITUDES TOWARD POLITICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE

Spring 2018 National Youth Poll
*John Della Volpe, Director of Polling*
Institute of Politics, Harvard Kennedy School

Young Americans are deeply concerned about the state of our democracy and institutions. They blame politicians, big money and the media. The intensity is real. And in November, they will take out their frustrations in voting booths from coast to coast.
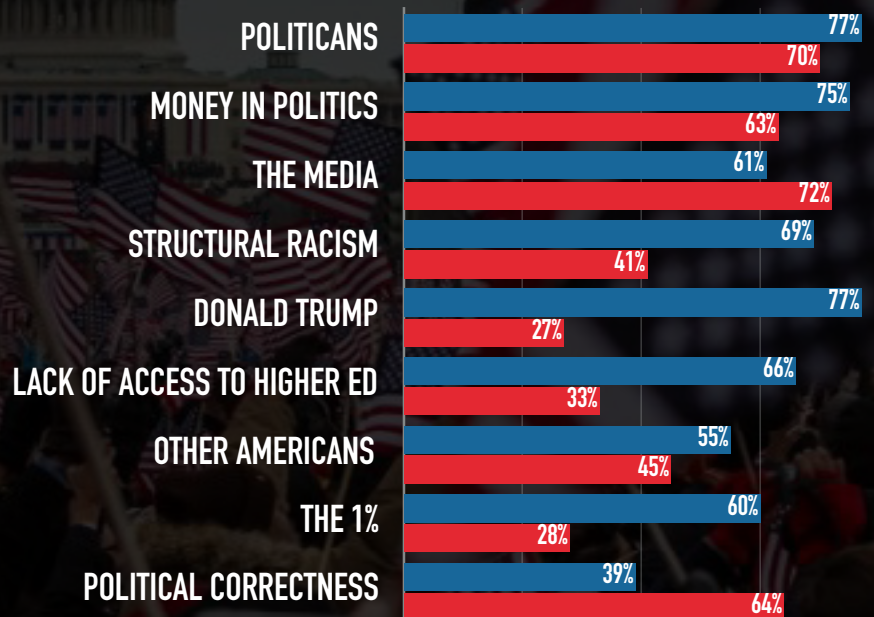
Incumbents beware.

Fear for America is real.
The cause is clear.

AT THIS MOMENT, WOULD YOU SAY YOU ARE MORE HOPEFUL OR FEARFUL ABOUT THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

Hopeful 34%

Fearful 64%
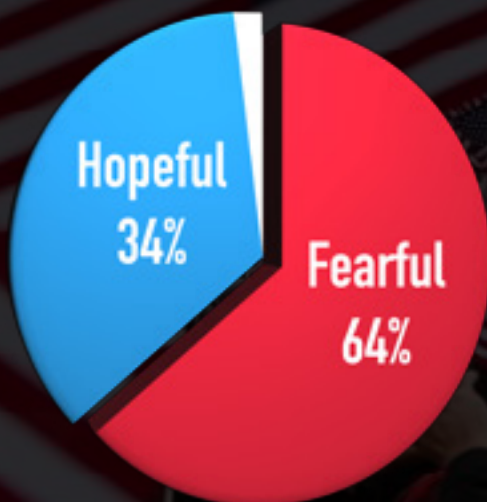
FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING, PLEASE RANK HOW MUCH YOU SEE THEM AS RESPONSIBLE FOR EXISTING PROBLEMS IN AMERICAN POLITICS AND SOCIETY TODAY:
[% VERY OR SOMEWHAT RESPONSIBLE]

|	Democrats	Republicans
POLITICANS	77%	70%
MONEY IN POLITICS	75%	63%
THE MEDIA	61%	72%
STRUCTURAL RACISM	69%	41%
DONALD TRUMP	77%	27%
LACK OF ACCESS TO HIGHER ED	66%	33%
OTHER AMERICANS	55%	45%
THE 1%	60%	28%
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS	39%	64%

Youth vote will play a much more significant role in 2018 midterms.

Interest in **voting** in the upcoming midterms outpacing 2014 and the 2010 wave.

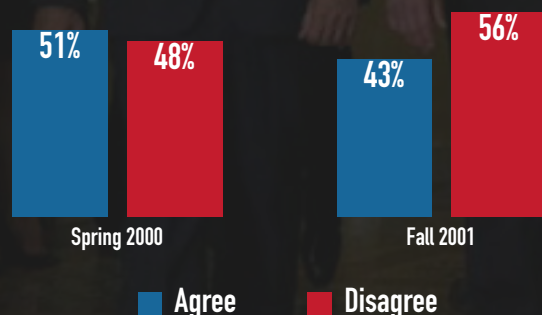% who say they will "definitely" vote in 2018 midterms

R 41%
D 35%

31%
28%

51%
36%

I 13%

15%

24%

Spring 2010   Spring 2014   Spring 2018
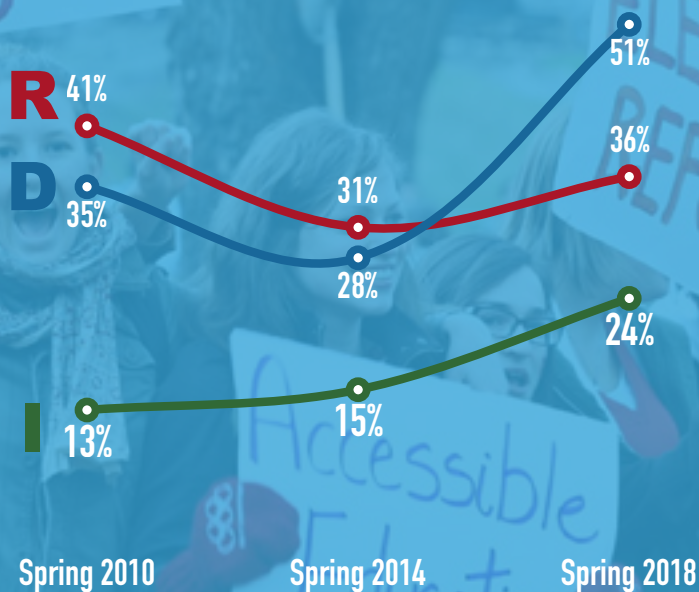
Once in a generation attitudinal shifts about efficacy of political engagement now underway.

3

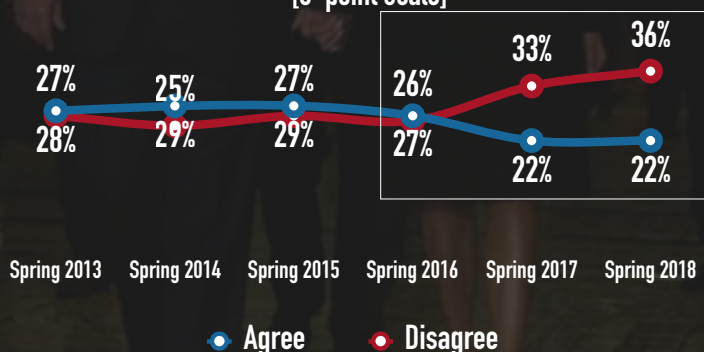# Young Americans vote when they believe their efforts have <u>tangible results.</u>

Engagement after 9/11, which eventually led to the nomination and election of President Obama, was driven largely by this change in attitude.

After the Obama election, recession and gridlock, young Americans began again to question the efficacy of political involvement. 2016 was a game-changer. Politics matters again.

Political involvement rarely has any tangible results.
[4-point scale]

	Spring 2000		Fall 2001
Agree	51%		43%
Disagree	48%		56%

■ Agree   ■ Disagree

Political involvement rarely has any tangible results.
[5-point scale]

	Spring 2013	Spring 2014	Spring 2015	Spring 2016	Spring 2017	Spring 2018
Agree	27%	25%	27%	26%	22%	22%
Disagree	28%	29%	29%	27%	33%	36%

● Agree   ● Disagree

Democratic control now preferred by +41.
Margin was +32 in our Fall poll.

Job Approval 25%

Highest:
Economy, 34%
Tax reform, 31%

Lowest:
Gun violence, 24%
Race relations, 21%

DEMOCRATIC CONTROL
of Congress preferred 69%-28%.

(but Democrats should not celebrate too soon, despite alignment on many issues, in our Fall poll only 1/3 believed the party cared about "people like them")

5

College administrators and the military top list of most trusted institutions.

Before Cambridge Analytica news broke, 26% trusted Facebook to do the right thing all or most of the time.

Top 5 (of 22) most trusted: Your college administration (61%), the military, Amazon, Google and SCOTUS.

Bottom 5: POTUS (22%), Federal government, Congress, media, Wall Street.

INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

14

In the post-Parkland reality, the gun debate symbolizes many of the ills plaguing Washington. Current signs point to it further accelerating youth activism and voting.

6

INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

15

SPRING 2013 POLL / POST-NEWTOWN

49% SUPPORT STRICTER GUN LAWS
41% SUPPORT ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN
38% FAVORABLE – 38% UNFAV. OF NRA

SPRING 2018 POLL/ POST-PARKLAND

64% SUPPORT STRICTER GUN LAWS
58% SUPPORT ASSAULT WEAPONS BAN
31% FAVORABLE – 53% UNFAV. OF NRA

77% OF LV'S CONSIDER GUNS MOST/IMPORTANT
47% SUPPORT AMENDING 2ND AMENDMENT

INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

16

7

A majority believe that military conflict across multiple fronts, on the ground and in cyberspace, is likely in the next five years.

INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

17

64% see U.S. military engaging directly with North Korea, 61% with cyber-terrorists, 54% with Iran, 43% with Russia in the next 5 years.

10% say there's a good chance they'd join the military under these conditions.

THE CASE FOR UNIVERSAL VOTING

Why making voting a duty would enhance our elections and improve our government

William A. Galston and E.J. Dionne, Brookings

William A. Galston is a senior fellow and the Ezra K. Zilkha Chair in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

E.J. Dionne Jr. is a senior fellow and the W. Averell Harriman Chair in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

INTRODUCTION

When we receive a summons for jury duty, we are required to present ourselves at the court. Should we treat showing up at the polls in elections the same way? Although the idea seems vaguely un-American, it is neither unusual, nor undemocratic, nor unconstitutional. And it would ease the intense partisan polarization that weakens both our capacity for self-government and public trust in our governing institutions.

It is easy to dismiss this idea as rooted in a form of coercion that is incompatible with our individualistic and often libertarian political culture. But consider Australia, whose political culture may be as similar to that of the United States as the culture of any other democracy in the world.

THE AUSTRALIAN SOLUTION

Alarmed by a decline in voter turnout to less than 60 percent in the early 1920s,[1] Australia adopted a law in 1924 requiring all citizens to present themselves at the polling place on Election Day.[2] (This is often referred to as mandatory voting, although Australian voters are not required to cast marked ballots.)[3] Enforcing the law were small fines (roughly the same as for routine traffic tickets), which increased with repeated acts of nonparticipation. The law established permissible reasons for not voting, such as illness and foreign travel, and procedures allowing citizens facing fines for not voting

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1 Tim Evans, "Compulsory Voting in Australia," *Australian Electoral Commission*, Jan. 16, 2006, updated Feb. 14, 2006, http://www.aec.gov.au/about_aec/Publications/voting/files/compulsory-voting.pdf. p.5.

2 Scott Bennett, "Compulsory Voting is Australian National Elections," *Department of Parliamentary Services*, Nov. 31, 2005, http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/06rb06.pdf. p. 6.

3 Under the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* of 1918, the actual duty of the elector is to attend a polling place, have their name marked off a certified list, receive a ballot paper and take it to an individual voting booth, where they must mark ballot paper, fold it, and place it in the ballot box. Due to the secrecy of the ballot, however, it is not possible to determine whether a person has completed their ballot prior to placing it in the ballot box (Evans, 4)

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to defend themselves in court.[4] It also required citizens to register to vote (much as the United States has draft registration) and the Australian authorities have created systems to make registration easy.[5]

The results were remarkable. In the 1925 election, the first held under the new law, turnout soared to 91 percent.[6] In the 27 elections since World War Two, turnout in Australia has averaged 95 percent.[7]

It is hard to doubt that there is a causal connection between the law and the large change in Australians' voting behavior. And there is additional evidence from the Netherlands, which operated under similar legislation from 1946 to 1967. During that time, turnout averaged 95 percent. After the Netherlands repealed this law, turnout has fallen to an average of 80 percent.[8]

The impact of such laws can extend well beyond the act of voting. In Australia, citizens are more likely than they were before the law was passed to view voting as a civic obligation.[9] This norm helps explain why the negative side effects that many feared did not materialize. For example, the percentage of ballots intentionally spoiled, left blank, or randomly completed as acts of resistance has remained quite low.[10] The Australian experience suggests that when citizens know that they are required to vote, they take this obligation seriously. Their sense of civic duty makes them reluctant to cast uninformed ballots and inclines them to learn at least the basics about issues, parties and candidates.

WHY THE AUSTRALIAN MODEL MAKES SENSE FOR DEMOCRACIES—INCLUDING OURS

The most straightforward argument for near-universal voting is democratic. Ideally, a democracy will take into account the interests and views of all citizens so that its decisions represent the will of the entire people. If some regularly vote while others do not, elected officials are likely to give less weight to the interests and views of non-participants.

In practice, this might not matter much if non-voters were evenly distributed through the population, so that voters were a microcosm of the people. But that is not the case: in the United States, citizens with lower levels of income and education are less likely to vote, as are young adults[11] and recent immigrants.[12]

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4 Bennett, p. 7.

5 Katie Beck, "Australia election: Why is voting compulsory," *BBC News,* Aug. 27, 2013, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23810381.

6 Evans, p. 5

7 "Voter Turnout Data for Australia (Parliamentary)," *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, Oct. 5, 2013, http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=15.

8 "Voter Turnout Data for Netherlands (Parliamentary)," *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, Jan. 21, 2013, http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=164.

9 Bennett, p. 1.

10 Ibid, pp. 19-20.

11 "Nonvoters: Who They Are, What They Think," *Pew Research Center for the People and the Press*, Nov. 1, 2012, http://www.people-press.org/2012/11/01/nonvoters-who-they-are-what-they-think/. p. 2.

12 Tova Andrea Wang, "Expanding Citizenship: Immigrants and the vote," *Journal of Democracy* (Spring 2013): http://www.democracyjournal.org/28/expanding-citizenship-immigrants-and-the-vote.php?page=all.

Changes in our political system have magnified these disparities. The decline of formal political organizations, including political machines, has reduced mobilizing efforts that were often year-round propositions and frequently gave life to political clubs that served as centers of sociability as well as electoral action. The sharp drop in union membership since the 1950s[13] has further eroded connections between citizens of modest means and lower levels of formal education to electoral politics. In their heyday, national civic institutions organized along federal lines performed these functions as well, but they too have undergone a relentless decline. [14]

These factors were partly offset by a democratization of the electorate through the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that empowered African Americans, particularly in the South, and by the 26th Amendment to the Constitution that lowered the voting age to 18 throughout the country in 1971. But with the exception of a few states that provided for registration on Election Day itself, the inclusion of younger voters into the electorate was not matched by changes in voter registration laws to make it easier for younger Americans, who tend to change residencies more frequently than their elders, to be included on the voter rolls.[15] As it is, registration rules are biased in favor of those with relatively stable residential patterns.

> If some regularly vote while others do not, elected officials are likely to give less weight to the interests and views of non-participants. In practice, this might not matter much if non-voters were evenly distributed through the population, so that voters were a microcosm of the people. But that is not the case: in the United States, citizens with lower levels of income and education are less likely to vote, as are young adults and recent immigrants.

The combination of the decline in political mobilization and the rise of a younger electorate mean that turnout in presidential elections has fallen off since the 1950s. As measured against the voting age population, turnout in 1952 hit 63.3 percent, fell slightly to 60.6 percent in 1956 and rebounded to 62.77 percent in the Kennedy-Nixon election of 1960. The last time turnout topped 60 percent was 1968. The drop between 1968 and 1972, after the enfranchisement of all 18 year olds, was especially sharp—from 60.84 percent to 55.21 percent. The highest turnout since then (58.23 percent) came with the Obama mobilization efforts in 2008, but even this number was lower than the turnout figures between 1952 and 1964. And turnout fell off again in 2012, to 54.87 percent.[16]

Universal voting would help fill the vacuum in participation by evening out disparities stemming from income, education, and age. It would enhance our system's ability to represent all our citizens and give states and localities incentives to lower, not raise, procedural barriers to the full and equal participation of each citizen in the electoral process. If citizens had a legal obligation to vote, managers of our electoral process would in turn have an obligation to make it as simple as possible for voters to discharge this duty. The weakening of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court has allowed many states to impose new requirements on voters and to cut back on early and

13 Steven Greenhouse, "Union Membership in U.S. Fell to a 70-Year Low Last Year," *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/22/business/22union.html?_r=0.

14 Martin P. Wattenberg, *Where Have all the Voters Gone?* (Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 55-56.

15 Erin Ferns Lee, "Enfranchising America's Youth," *Project Vote*, May 2014, http://www.projectvote.org/images/publications/Youth%20Voting/POLICY-PAPER-Enfranchising-Americas-Youth-May-9-2014.pdf, p.3.

16 "Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections: 1828-2012," *The American Presidency Project,* http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php .

Sunday voting. Universal voting would change the presumptions in favor of broad democratic participation and put states on the side of promoting that goal.

It would also improve electoral competition. Campaigns could devote far less money to costly, labor-intensive get-out-the-vote efforts. Media consultants would not have an incentive to drive down turnout with negative advertising (even though such advertising would no doubt remain part of their repertoire).[17] Candidates would know that they had to do more than appeal to their respective bases with harshly divisive rhetoric and an emphasis on hot-button issues.

This brings us to a benefit of universal voting that goes to the heart of our current ills. Along with many other factors, our low turnout rate pushes American politics toward hyper-polarization. Intense partisans are more likely to participate in lower-turnout elections while those who are less ideologically committed and less fervent about specific issues are more likely to stay home.[18] Although responding to strong sentiments is an important feature of sustainable democratic institutions, our elections tilt much too far in that direction.

> Intense partisans are more likely to participate in lower-turnout elections while those who are less ideologically committed and less fervent about specific issues are more likely to stay home.

A structural feature of our system—elections that are quadrennial for president but biennial for the House of Representatives—magnifies these ills. It is bad enough less than three-fifths of the electorate turns out to determine the next president, much worse that roughly two-fifths participate in midterm elections two years later.[19] As Republicans found in 2006 and Democrats in 2010 and 2014, when intervening events energize one part of the political spectrum while disheartening the other, a relatively small portion of the electorate can shift the balance of power out of proportion to its numbers. And with the rise of the Obama Coalition, the midterm electorate is decidedly older and less diverse than the electorate in Presidential years.[20] The vast difference between these two electorates has enshrined new forms of conflict in an already polarized political system.

Bringing less partisan voters into the electorate would reduce this instability, and it would offer parties and candidates new challenges and opportunities. The balance of electoral activities would shift from the mobilization of highly committed voters toward the persuasion of the less committed. Candidates unwilling or unable to engage in persuasion would be more likely to lose. If political rhetoric cooled a bit, the intensity of polarization would diminish, improving the prospects for post-election compromise. Rather than focusing on symbolic gestures whose principal purpose is to agitate partisans, Congress might have much stronger incentives to take on serious issues and solve problems. To pick up a term of the moment, universal voting might combat the "Trumpification" of politics.

The electorate that turns out is not representative of the country as a whole. After the election of 2014, the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) re-interviewed 1,339 respondents who had been contacted in a pre-election

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17 Jonathan W. Moody, "Nature vs. Nurture in Negative Campaigning: Examining the Role of Candidate Traits and the Campaign Environment in Negative Advertising," *American Political Science Association*, 2012, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=poh&AN=94796745&site=ehost-live. pp. 1-25.

18 "The Party of Nonvoters," *Pew Research Center*, Oct. 31, 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/10/31/the-party-of-nonvoters-2/.

19 "Voter Turnout," *Fairvote*, http://www.fairvote.org/research-and-analysis/voter-turnout/.

20 Ronald Brownstein, "The Great Midterm Divide," *The Atlantic*. Oct. 14, 2014. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/11/the-great-midterm-divide/380784/.

survey. The post-election poll found that Hispanic voters comprised 8 percent of midterm voters but 22 percent of non-voters.[21] Millennials, those of ages 18-to-34, made up 17 percent of voters – and 47 percent of non-voters. Those earning less than $30,000 a year accounted for 26 percent of voters and 44 percent of non-voters.[22]

And the underrepresentation of middle-of-the-road voters was brought home by both the PRRI survey and a Pew Research Center study of the 2012 electorate. In the PRRI study, independents accounted for 33 percent of voters but 42 percent of non-voters. Moderates accounted for 31 percent of voters but 38 percent of non-voters.[23] Based on the turnout model of the 2012 Pew pre-election study, independents made up 27 percent of likely voters but 44 percent of non-voters; moderates accounted for 34 percent of likely voters but 38 percent of non-voters.[24] A republic governed under a Constitution that begins with the words "We the people" should want an electorate as broadly representative of the people as possible.

> There is a final reason for the country to embrace universal voting, and it may be the most compelling: democracy cannot be strong if citizenship is weak. And right now, citizenship in America is radically unbalanced: it is strong on rights but weak on responsibilities.

There is a final reason for the country to embrace universal voting, and it may be the most compelling: democracy cannot be strong if citizenship is weak. And right now, citizenship in America is radically unbalanced: it is strong on rights but weak on responsibilities. With the abolition of the universal draft, citizens are asked to pay their taxes and obey the law— and show up for jury duty when summoned. That's about it. Making voting universal would begin to right the balance. And it would send an important message: we all have the duty to help shape the country that has given us so much.

William F. Buckley Jr., who can fairly be thought of as the founder of contemporary American conservatism, wrote a book in 1990 called *Gratitude: Reflections on What We Owe to Our Country*. Gratitude is personal, but as Buckley made clear, it is also civic, and it is a disposition that transcends ideology. Participation in self-rule is an expression of gratitude for the freedom we have to govern ourselves.[25]

A NOTE ON "UNIVERSAL" VERSUS "COMPULSORY"

We use the phrase "universal voting" rather than "compulsory voting" not as a verbal dodge but as an expression of the purpose of our proposal. The standard word used for the Australian voting requirement and others like it is "compulsory" and we certainly do not deny the fact that enshrining the obligation to vote into law and levying a modest fine against those who do not is a form of compulsion. But it is much closer to a nudge than to rank coercion. Voters can accept the fine without disrupting their lives.

21   Daniel Cox, Robert P. Jones, and Juhem Navarro-Rivera, "What Motivated Voters during the Midterm Elections? 2014 Post-election American Values Survey," *Public Religion Research Institute*, Nov. 12, 2014, http://publicreligion.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Post-Election-AVS-FINAL-no-bleeds.pdf. p. 3.

22   E.J. Dionne, Jr. and Elizabeth Thom, "What the Non-Voters Decided," *The Brookings Institution*, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/fixgov/posts/2014/12/01-non-voters-decide-midterm-elections-dionne-thom.

23   Ibid.

24   "Nonvoters: Who They Are, What They Think," p. 1.

25   William F. Buckley Jr., *Gratitude: Reflections on What We Owe to Our Country* (New York: Random House, 1990).

> We use the phrase "universal voting" rather than "compulsory voting" not as a verbal dodge but as an expression of the purpose of our proposal.

We would also note the flaw in the phrase "compulsory voting." If the word "compulsory" is to be used, the Australian system is more properly described as "compulsory attendance at the polls." Voters do not have to pick any of the candidates on the ballot. They can cast a blank ballot, or draw Mickey Mouse on their ballot paper. The vast majority of Australian voters do none of these things because they want to participate in the selection of their government. But their freedom to abstain from selecting a candidate is not abridged.

"Compulsory voting" is *the means to the end of universal voting, not the end itself.* We are well aware that few jurisdictions in the United States are likely to adopt our proposal, so we describe later in this paper steps short of a voting requirement that could lead to much broader participation. Whether states and the Congress adopt a system modeled after Australia's, or enact more modest reforms to facilitate participation, universal voting should become a national goal.

WHY UNIVERSAL VOTING IS NOT UNCONSTITUTIONAL

After President Obama recently praised the idea of universal voting,[26] critics immediately raised constitutional objections. Said the Heritage Foundation's Hans von Spakovsky, "The president apparently does not believe that the right to speak, which is protected under the First Amendment, includes the right not to speak."[27] We agree that the First Amendment prohibits most compelled speech, but we do not agree that universal voting falls into this category.

The reason is simple: as we have noted, in Australia as well as other countries (including at least seven members of the OECD) that have adopted versions of this voting system, the law requires citizens to present themselves at the polling booths.[28] It does not compel them to fill out their ballot. We do not believe that the courts would regard this as an instance of compulsory speech; nor should they. We can consistently advocate universal voting while holding fast—as we do—to *West Virginia v. Barnette*, which shielded the children of Jehovah's Witnesses parents from the mandatory recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.[29]

THE POLITICAL STATE OF PLAY: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY OPTIONS

We are well aware that the American people are far from ready to endorse our proposal. On the one hand, according to a recent YouGov survey, 75 percent of Americans—including 87 percent of Democrats and 84 percent of

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26 "Remarks by the President to the City Club of Cleveland," *The White House: Office of the Press Secretary,* Mar. 3, 2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/18/remarks-president-city-club-cleveland.

27 Hans A. Von Spakovsky, "Compulsory Voting Is Unconstitutional," *The Heritage Foundation*, Apr. 1, 2015. http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2015/4/compulsory-voting-is-unconstitutional.

28 Given constant changes to voting law at the national and precinct level, it is surprisingly difficult to determine the number of countries with compulsory voting. This number was determined using "Compulsory Voting," *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, May 13, 2015, http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm.

29 *West Virginia State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette* 319 U.S. 624 (1943).

Republicans—regard the failure of eligible voters to participate in elections as a problem.[30] On the other hand, more than 70 percent of Americans regard the decision whether or not to vote as an individual responsibility, and only 26 percent favor mandatory voting.[31]

Neither our traditions nor the Constitution inclines toward a single national approach to this issue (although, as the Voting Rights Act itself shows, insisting on federal standards for federal elections is a principle at the heart of the post-Civil War Constitution). In the absence of broad national support for this concept, we suggest that a few states whose civic culture might welcome universal voting should take the lead and conduct an electoral experiment in full view of the American people. If the negative consequences critics predict do in fact come to pass, that would be the end of the matter. If not, and if the advantages we have posited predominate, other states may follow. In any event, the Constitution will have been respected, and federalism will have been enlisted in the service of evidence-based reform.

> It should go without saying, but needs to be said: Congress should also pass an updated Voting Rights Act that gives the federal government the 21st century authority needed to vindicate the right of all Americans to participate in elections—a right guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

It may be some time before even one brave state steps forward. In the interim, we favor many long-discussed policies that would lower barriers to participation and make voting easier. These would include automatic voter registration when a citizen turns 18. The task of election officials should be to enable Americans to carry out their civic responsibilities, not to place burdens on what is both a right and a duty. The nation should update its cumbersome registration procedures, making online registration standard throughout the country. Voters who move should have their registrations transfer automatically to their new addresses. These reforms could build on existing systems to provide for automatic registration when citizens obtain drivers licenses and other licenses, permits, and government benefits. Restoring voting rights to felons who have paid their debt to society would end a longstanding discriminatory practice. Allowing eligible citizens to register on Election Day would expand participation substantially (as the experience of states that do so shows) and reduce the burdens our registration system places on our more mobile citizens, particularly the young.[32] Making Election Day a national holiday would ease the burdens of participation on millions of Americans whose work schedules make voting difficult. In the absence of such a holiday, states should consider building on the successes of early voting systems.

Election administration in the United States is not only a patchwork, but also typically ranks very low in the list of funding priorities for local officials.[33] The Australian system works well not only because it requires citizens to

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30 The breakdown of 75% of Americans is as follows: 34% of total voters regard the failure of eligible voters as a big problem, 27% think this is a moderate problem, and 14% think this is a little bit of a problem. For 87% of Democrats, the breakdown is 46%, 26%, and 15%; for Republicans it is 31%, 39%, and 14%.

31 "YouGov March 24-25 2015," *YouGov,* Mar. 2015, http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/q9bn5kxe80/tabs_HP_voting_20150325.pdf.

32 Emmanuel Caicedo and Estelle H. Rogers, "What is Same Day Registration? Where is it available?" *Demo*s and *Project Vote.org*, http://www.demos.org/publication/what-same-day-registration-where-it-available.

33 Robert F. Bauer and Benjamin F. Ginsberg, "The American Voting Experience: Report and Recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration," *The Presidential Commission on Election Administration,* January 2014, http://www.nased.org/PCEA_FINAL_REPORT_JAN_2014.pdf. pp. 9-10.

register, but also because a national system of election administration provides for a professional election officer in each constituency to make registration easy and convenient for citizens.[34]

The United States, with its long tradition of decentralized voting administration, will not move any time soon toward a national system in this area. But Congress should provide funding and national impetus for states, counties and localities to act on the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration. Headed by Benjamin L. Ginsberg and Robert F. Bauer—respectively the top lawyers of the 2012 Romney and Obama campaigns—the Commission provided a long list of highly practical recommendations with the purpose of improving how elections are run and enhancing participation.[35] Its core principle, that no voter in the United States should have to wait more than a half hour before casting a ballot, is fundamental to creating a system of fair and widespread participation.

It should go without saying, but needs to be said: Congress should also pass an updated Voting Rights Act that gives the federal government the 21st century authority needed to vindicate the right of all Americans to participate in elections—a right guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

CONCLUSION

As the ills of our political system have intensified in recent decades, we have lost the habit of thinking institutionally about potential remedies. We acknowledge that civic culture and public opinion help define the realm of the possible — and that political divisions often restrict it. But as a nation, we have far more room for creativity and maneuver than is usually recognized.

In this spirit, we have advanced a proposal that stands outside the perimeter of what is now likely. We hope that doing so will enrich the public debate—in the short term, by advancing the cause of more modest reforms that would increase participation; in the long term, by expanding our understanding of what is worth trying. For as recent events have demonstrated, ideas can sometimes move from the impossible to the inevitable at a pace that once seemed unimaginable. Universal voting could do so as well, for it is as deeply American an idea as Lincoln's promise of a government "of the people, by the people, for the people."

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34 "AEC Organisational Structure," *Australian Electoral Commission,* Aug. 18, 2015, http://www.aec.gov.au/about_aec/structure.htm.

35 Bauer and Ginsberg, "The American Voting Experience."

A NEW APPROACH TO REVERSING THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF LOW TURNOUT

David Becker, Stanford Social Innovation Review

To increase voter turnout, other approaches are needed—ones intended not to inflame passions about what may be at stake in a particular election but instead to connect more voters to the process of voting and to the value of participating in our democracy.

Thanks to technological advances, it's never been easier for the majority of US voters to get election information and cast their ballots. Most Americans can now go online to register to vote, choose to vote early, and vote by mail—millions have ballots automatically mailed to their homes for each election—and, thanks to the Voting Information Project, Google, and other partners, receive polling place and ballot information with a simple swipe on their smartphones.

Although critical work remains to be done to extend the reach of these advances, they represent dramatic steps toward modernizing the field of election administration. But we cannot stop here. In spite of this progress, voter turnout across the United States declined last year to levels not seen since World War II.

Data from the United States Election Project indicate that national turnout in November 2014 was less than 37 percent. That means that nearly 2 in 3 eligible voters, or approximately 144 million American citizens—more than the population of Russia—chose to sit out that election. Put another way, more than 47 million Americans who navigated the system and cared enough to cast ballots in November 2012 decided not to vote two years later. The nation hasn't recorded turnout this low in a federal general election since 1942.

California, Nevada, and New Mexico illustrate the trend: Despite high-profile statewide races at several levels (governor, lieutenant governor, and secretary of state, as well as a US Senate race in New Mexico), all of these states saw their lowest turnout in a federal election since before 1980. Turnout in California and Nevada plummeted to less than 32 percent, falling 15 and almost 10 percentage points, respectively, compared with 2010. And it's important to note that in all three states, voting is widely accessible, with few ID requirements and multiple options to conveniently vote early or by mail.

So although many of us have worked to strengthen democracy's foundations and reduce the costs of participating in elections, more must be done to build on that foundation by better demonstrating the benefits of voting. In the past, campaigns and those encouraging civic engagement have focused on placing hot-button issues or charismatic candidates on the ballot to increase voter enthusiasm; at times, this approach has yielded short-term gains. Barack Obama's campaign in particular was adept at turning out voters for a single race—the presidential contest of 2008. But these increases have not been maintained through other election cycles, or even in legislative and local contests on the same ballot in the same election. After the increase in turnout in 2008, turnout in 2012 was lower nationally than in 2004.

One challenge in getting more citizens to vote is that the analysis of the nonvoting population is often oversimplified. Approximately 40 percent of eligible voters never vote, and no one reason can explain why. About another 20 percent of the eligible electorate only votes once every four years, in presidential elections. These individuals are a complex and diverse lot, and their reasons for not voting, or voting very rarely, vary widely: Some need only a nudge to vote, while others are dead set against voting. Research indicates, however, that barriers to voting are not holding back the vast majority of nonvoters. Rather, a mix of dissatisfaction with the political system, a lack of understanding of government and elections, and other factors seem to depress the perceived benefit of voting for many of these non-voters.

To increase voter turnout, other approaches are needed—ones intended not to inflame passions about what may be at stake in a particular election but instead to connect more voters to the process of voting and to the value of participating in our democracy. Identifying promising strategies will require new research, data, and experimentation designed to increase baseline turnout for Americans in all elections. Tools and methods need to be developed to allow nonpartisan civic engagement groups and voter outreach campaigns—at all levels, including state legislative and local races—to efficiently marshal their resources to use the best messages and modes of contact to connect a variety of citizens with the act of voting.

Here are two things that can be done to increase voter turnout:

> 1. Begin with research—most importantly, comprehensive surveys of the eligible electorate that never or rarely votes to assess the attitudes and behaviors of these potential voters. Data would then be used to attempt to create a segmentation of these individuals, grouping the nonvoting population by the factors that depress the perceived value of voting, and to develop messages and modes of contact (in-person, phone, email, text, and social media, alone, or in combination) that would be most likely to resonate with each segment of the nonvoting citizenry. 2. Then, using the information gained from the research and surveys, create field experiments that test the effectiveness of various messages and modes of contact on nonvoters, maintaining a randomized control group that would receive no encouragement to vote. Experiments could also test specific hypotheses, such as whether it is possible to move individuals who have previously voted only in presidential elections toward voting more regularly.

The result of this could be a toolkit for those seeking to engage citizens in the democratic process to reach potential voters in a highly efficient, cost-effective way.

The toolkit could be further used efficiently to target potential voters to move them into the next level of engagement: those that never vote could be persuaded to vote in a presidential election, while those who only vote in presidential elections could be targeted to vote in midterms, etc. The results could be dramatic. If only 1 in 10 nonvoters became routine voters, baseline turnout in presidential elections would grow by 4 percentage points. The impacts could be even more keenly felt in midterm and primary elections, in which most eligible voters don't participate. Persuading 1 in 10 nonvoters to vote in these contests could increase turnout by 6 to 8 percentage points.

A healthy democracy requires that elected representatives be responsive and accountable to their constituents. However, when a small minority of Americans is electing our officials and an even smaller proportion is nominating candidates through the primary process, accountability and democracy suffer. State and local election offices need to continue improving the nuts and bolts of our election system, but it is a shared responsibility of all those who aspire to contribute to our civic life to reverse the troubling decline in voter turnout. To do so will require a new research approach to fill the gaps in

our knowledge of why citizens fail to cast ballots—and what can be done to reverse this downward spiral.

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INTELLIGENT MACHINES

OBAMA'S DATA TECHNIQUES WILL RULE FUTURE ELECTIONS

Sasha Issenberg, MIT Tech Review

The March

In the summer of 2011, Carol Davidsen received a message from Dan Wagner. Already the Obama campaign was known for its relentless e-mails beseeching supporters to give their money or time, but this one offered something that intrigued Davidsen: a job. Wagner had sorted the campaign's list of donors, stretching back to 2008, to find those who described their occupation with terms like "data" and "analytics" and sent them all invitations to apply for work in his new analytics department.

Davidsen was working at Navic Networks, a Microsoft-owned company that wrote code for set-top cable boxes to create a record of a user's DVR or tuner history, when she heeded Wagner's call. One year before Election Day, she started work in the campaign's technology department to serve as product manager for Narwhal. That was the code name, borrowed from a tusked whale, for an ambitious effort to match records from previously unconnected databases so that a user's online interactions with the campaign could be synchronized. With Narwhal, e-mail blasts asking people to volunteer could take their past donation history into consideration, and the algorithms determining how much a supporter would be asked to contribute could be shaped by knowledge about his or her reaction to previous solicitations. This integration enriched a technique, common in website development, that Obama's online fund-raising efforts had used to good effect in 2008: the A/B test, in which users are randomly directed to different versions of a thing and their responses are compared. Now analysts could leverage personal data to identify the attributes of those who responded, and use that knowledge to refine subsequent appeals. "You can cite people's other types of engagement," says Amelia Showalter, Obama's director of digital analytics. "We discovered that there were a lot of things that built goodwill, like signing the president's birthday card or getting a free bumper sticker, that led them to become more engaged with the campaign in other ways."

If online communication had been the aspect of the 2008 campaign subjected to the most rigorous empirical examination—it's easy to randomly assign e-mails in an A/B test and compare click-through rates or donation levels—mass-media strategy was among those that received the least. Television and radio ads had to be purchased by geographic zone, and the available data on who watches which channels or shows, collected by research firms like Nielsen and Scarborough, often included little more than viewer age and gender. That might be good enough to guide buys for Schick or Foot Locker, but it's of limited value for advertisers looking to define audiences in political terms.

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As campaign manager Jim Messina prepared to spend as much as half a billion dollars on mass media for Obama's reëlection, he set out to reinvent the process for allocating resources across broadcast, cable, satellite, and online channels. "If you think about the universe of possible places for an advertiser, it's almost infinite," says Amy Gershkoff, who was hired as the campaign's media-planning director on the strength of her successful negotiations, while at her firm Changing Targets in 2009, to link the information from cable systems to individual microtargeting profiles. "There are tens of millions of opportunities where a campaign can put its next dollar. You have all this great, robust voter data that doesn't fit together with the media data. How you knit that together is a challenge."

By the start of 2012, Wagner had deftly wrested command of media planning into his own department. As he expanded the scope of analytics, he defined his purview as "the study and practice of resource optimization for the purpose of improving programs and earning votes more efficiently." That usually meant calculating, for any campaign activity, the number of votes gained through a given amount of contact at a given cost.

But when it came to buying media, such calculations had been simply impossible, because campaigns were unable to link what they knew about voters to what cable providers knew about their customers. Obama's advisors decided that the data made available in the private sector had long led political advertisers to ask the wrong questions. Walsh says of the effort to reimagine the media-targeting process: "It was not to get a better understanding of what 35-plus women watch on TV. It was to find out how many of our persuadable voters were watching those dayparts."

Davidsen, whose previous work had left her intimately familiar with the rich data sets held in set-top boxes, understood that a lot of that data was available in the form of tuner and DVR histories collected by cable providers and then aggregated by research firms. For privacy reasons, however, the information was not available at the individual level. "The hardest thing in media buying right now is the lack of information," she says.

Davidsen began negotiating to have research firms repackage their data in a form that would permit the campaign to access the individual histories without violating the cable providers' privacy standards. Under a $350,000 deal she worked out with one company, Rentrak, the campaign provided a list of persuadable voters and their addresses, derived from its microtargeting models, and the company looked for them in the cable providers' billing files. When a record matched, Rentrak would issue it a unique household ID that identified viewing data from a single set-top box but masked any personally identifiable information.

The Obama campaign had created its own television ratings system, a kind of Nielsen in which the only viewers who mattered were those not yet fully committed to a presidential candidate. But Davidsen had to get the information into a practical form by early May, when Obama strategists planned to start running their anti-Romney ads. She oversaw the development of a software platform the Obama staff called the Optimizer, which broke the day into 96 quarter-hour segments and assessed which time slots across 60 channels offered the greatest number of persuadable targets per dollar. (By September, she had unlocked an even

richer trove of data: a cable system in Toledo, Ohio, that tracked viewers' tuner histories by the second.) "The revolution of media buying in this campaign," says Terry Walsh, who coördinated the campaign's polling and advertising spending, "was to turn what was a broadcast medium into something that looks a lot more like a narrowcast medium."

When the Obama campaign did use television as a mass medium, it was because the Optimizer had concluded it would be a more efficient way of reaching persuadable targets. Sometimes a national cable ad was a better bargain than a large number of local buys in the 66 media markets reaching battleground states. But the occasional national buy also had other benefits. It could boost fund-raising and motivate volunteers in states that weren't essential to Obama's Electoral College arithmetic. And, says Davidsen, "it helps hide some of the strategy of your buying."

Even without that tactic, Obama's buys perplexed the Romney analysts in Boston. They had invested in their own media-intelligence platform, called Centraforce. It used some of the same aggregated data sources that were feeding into the Optimizer, and at times both seemed to send the campaigns to the same unlikely ad blocks—for example, in reruns on TV Land. But there was a lot more to what Alex Lundry, who created Romney's data science unit, called Obama's "highly variable" media strategy. Many of the Democrats' ads were placed in fringe markets, on marginal stations, and at odd times where few political candidates had ever seen value. Romney's data scientists simply could not decode those decisions without the voter models or persuasion experiments that helped Obama pick out individual targets. "We were never able to figure out the level of advertising and what they were trying to do," says Romney data analyst Brent McGoldrick. "It wasn't worth reverse-engineering, because what are you going to do?"

The Community

Although the voter opinion tables that emerged from the Cave looked a lot like polls, the analysts who produced them were disinclined to call them polls. The campaign had plenty of those, generated by a public-opinion team of eight outside firms, and new arrivals at the Chicago headquarters were shocked by the variegated breadth of the research that arrived on their desks daily. "We believed in combining the qual, which we did more than any campaign ever, with the quant, which we [also] did more than any other campaign, to make sure all communication for every level of the campaign was informed by what they found," says David Simas, the director of opinion research.

Simas considered himself the "air-traffic controller" for such research, which was guided by a series of voter diaries that Obama's team commissioned as it prepared for the reëlection campaign. "We needed to do something almost divorced from politics and get to the way they're seeing their lives," he says. The lead pollster, Joel Benenson, had respondents write about their experiences. The entries frequently used the word "disappointment," which helped explain attitudes toward Obama's administration but also spoke to a broader dissatisfaction with economic conditions. "That became the foundation for our entire research program," says Simas.

Carol Davidsen matched Obama 2012's lists of persuadable voters with cable providers' billing information.

Obama's advisors used those diaries to develop messages that contrasted Obama with Romney as a fighter for the middle class. Benenson's national polls tested language to see which affected voters' responses in survey experiments and direct questioning. A quartet of polling firms were assigned specific states and asked to figure out which national themes fit best with local concerns. Eventually, Obama's media advisors created more than 500 ads and tested them before an online sample of viewers selected by focus-group director David Binder.

But the campaign had to play defense, too. When something potentially damaging popped up in the news, like Democratic consultant Hilary Rosen's declaration that Ann Romney had "never worked a day in her life," Simas checked in with the Community, a private online bulletin board populated by 100 undecided voters Binder had recruited. Simas would monitor Community conversations to see which news events penetrated voter consciousness. Sometimes he had Binder show its members controversial material—like a video clip of Obama's "You didn't build that" comment—and ask if it changed their views of the candidate. "For me, it was a very quick way to draw back and determine whether something was a problem or not a problem," says Simas.

When Wagner started packaging his department's research into something that campaign leadership could read like a poll, a pattern became apparent. Obama's numbers in key battleground states were low in the analytic tables, but Romney's were too. There were simply more undecided voters in such states—sometimes nearly twice as many as the traditional pollsters found. A basic methodological distinction explained this discrepancy: microtargeting models required interviewing a lot of unlikely voters to give shape to a profile of what a nonvoter looked like, while pollsters tracking the horse race wanted to screen more rigorously for those likely to cast a ballot. The rivalry between the two units trying to measure public opinion grew intense: the analytic polls were a threat to the pollsters' primacy and, potentially, to their business model. "I spent a lot of time within the campaign explaining to people that the numbers we get from analytics and the numbers we get from external pollsters did not need strictly to be reconciled," says Walsh. "They were different."

The scope of the analytic research enabled it to pick up movements too small for traditional polls to perceive. As Simas reviewed Wagner's analytic tables in mid-October, he was alarmed to see that what had been a Romney lead of one to two points in Green Bay, Wisconsin, had grown into an advantage of between six and nine. Green Bay was the only media market in the state to experience such a shift, and there was no obvious explanation. But it was hard to discount. Whereas a standard 800-person statewide poll might have reached 100 respondents in the Green Bay area, analytics was placing 5,000 calls in Wisconsin in each five-day cycle—and benefiting from tens of thousands of other field contacts—to produce microtargeting scores. Analytics was talking to as many people in the Green Bay media market as traditional pollsters were talking to across Wisconsin every week. "We could have the confidence level to say, 'This isn't noise,'" says Simas. So the campaign's media buyers aired an ad attacking Romney on outsourcing and beseeched Messina to send former president Bill

Clinton and Obama himself to rallies there. (In the end, Romney took the county 50.3 to 48.5 percent.)

For the most part, however, the analytic tables demonstrated how stable the electorate was, and how predictable individual voters could be. Polls from the media and academic institutions may have fluctuated by the hour, but drawing on hundreds of data points to judge whether someone was a likely voter proved more reliable than using a seven-question battery like Gallup's to do the same. "When you see this Pogo stick happening with the public data—the electorate is just not that volatile," says Mitch Stewart, director of the Democratic campaign group Organizing for America. The analytic data offered a source of calm.

Romney's advisors were similarly sanguine, but they were losing. They, too, believed it possible to project the composition of the electorate, relying on a method similar to Gallup's: pollster Neil Newhouse asked respondents how likely they were to cast a ballot. Those who answered that question with a seven or below on a 10-point scale were disregarded as not inclined to vote. But that ignored the experimental methods that made it possible to measure individual behavior and the impact that a campaign itself could have on a citizen's motivation. As a result, the Republicans failed to account for voters that the Obama campaign could be mobilizing even if they looked to Election Day without enthusiasm or intensity.

On the last day of the race, Wagner and his analytics staff left the Cave and rode the elevator up one floor in the campaign's Chicago skyscraper to join members of other departments in a boiler room established to help track votes as they came in. Already, for over a month, Obama's analysts had been counting ballots from states that allowed citizens to vote early. Each day, the campaign overlaid the lists of early voters released by election authorities with its modeling scores to project how many votes they could claim as their own.

By Election Day, Wagner's analytic tables turned into predictions. Before the polls opened in Ohio, authorities in Hamilton County, the state's third-largest and home to Cincinnati, released the names of 103,508 voters who had cast early ballots over the previous month. Wagner sorted them by microtargeting projections and found that 58,379 had individual support scores over 50.1—that is, the campaign's models predicted that they were more likely than not to have voted for Obama. That amounted to 56.4 percent of the county's votes, or a raw lead of 13,249 votes over Romney. Early ballots were the first to be counted after Ohio's polls closed, and Obama's senior staff gathered around screens in the boiler room to see the initial tally. The numbers settled almost exactly where Wagner had said they would: Obama got 56.6 percent of the votes in Hamilton County. In Florida, he was as close to the mark; Obama's margin was only two-tenths of a percent off. "After those first two numbers, we knew," says Bird. "It was dead-on."

When Obama was reëlected, and by a far larger Electoral College margin than most outsiders had anticipated, his staff was exhilarated but not surprised. The next morning, Mitch Stewart sat in the boiler room, alone, monitoring the lagging votes as they came into Obama's servers from election authorities in Florida, the last state to name a winner. The presidency was no longer at stake; the only thing that still hung in the balance was the accuracy of the analytics department's predictions.

38

The Legacy

A few days after the election, as Florida authorities continued to count provisional ballots, a few staff members were directed, as four years before, to remain in Chicago. Their instructions were to produce another post-mortem report summing up the lessons of the past year and a half. The undertaking was called the Legacy Project, a grandiose title inspired by the idea that the innovations of Obama 2012 should be translated not only to the campaign of the next Democratic candidate for president but also to governance. Obama had succeeded in convincing some citizens that a modest adjustment to their behavior would affect, however marginally, the result of an election. Could he make them feel the same way about Congress?

Simas, who had served in the White House before joining the team, marveled at the intimacy of the campaign. Perhaps more than anyone else at headquarters, he appreciated the human aspect of politics. This had been his first presidential election, but before he became a political operative, Simas had been a politician himself, serving on the city council and school board in his hometown of Taunton, Massachusetts. He ran for office by knocking on doors and interacting individually with constituents (or those he hoped would become constituents), trying to track their moods and expectations.

In many respects, analytics had made it possible for the Obama campaign to recapture that style of politics. Though the old guard may have viewed such techniques as a disruptive force in campaigns, they enabled a presidential candidate to view the electorate the way local candidates do: as a collection of people who make up a more perfect union, each of them approachable on his or her terms, their changing levels of support and enthusiasm open to measurement and, thus, to respect. "What that gave us was the ability to run a national presidential campaign the way you'd do a local ward campaign," Simas says. "You know the people on your block. People have relationships with one another, and you leverage them so you know the way they talk about issues, what they're discussing at the coffee shop."

Few events in American life other than a presidential election touch 126 million adults, or even a significant fraction that many, on a single day. Certainly no corporation, no civic institution, and very few government agencies ever do. Obama did so by reducing every American to a series of numbers. Yet those numbers somehow captured the individuality of each voter, and they were not demographic classifications. The scores measured the ability of people to change politics—and to be changed by it.

IT'S ON YOU, CORPORATE AMERICA, TO SOLVE THE MILLENNIAL ENGAGEMENT CRISIS

Matt Singer and Ashley Spillane, Independent Journal Review

In the 1980s, a Harvard professor by the name of Jay Winsten determined that drunk driving was a cultural problem that required a cultural solution. Winsten launched the designated driver campaign in partnership with Hollywood, the media, and corporate America, while building on and working with grassroots organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving. He says it worked because, "It was a positive message, lent social legitimacy to the option of refraining from drinking, and created social pressure to conform."

An active, engaged citizenry is as necessary for our democracy as sobriety is for our roads. We need to act. And quickly.

The Millennial generation – our country's largest and most diverse generation ever – is disconnected from elections and government. In 2014, only one in five Millennials showed up at the polls – many indicated that they did not even know the mid-term election was happening. If you're not already on big data's micro-targeted lists that predict you as a likely voter, it is less and less likely that you will hear from any candidates or their campaigns. In turn, it is less and less likely that you will cast a ballot.

We cannot afford a culture of non-participation take hold among our country's largest generation; it has serious implications for this election and for the future of the country.

We need to make voting the cultural norm. We need voting to be seen as a positive, small thing you can do as an individual to make a difference – just as serving in that role as designated driver is. And we need an element of social pressure to bring everyone into the process.

We all have a role to play – whether as an individual, as an employee, as a business owner, as a member of the media, as a cultural influencer. Before this election, there are three easy things you can do:

Tell people you're voting.
You don't have to tell anyone who you are voting for; but studies show simply telling others that you're going to the polls and think they should too goes a long way. Do it online, on social media. Do it offline – at the dinner table, the coffee shop, the bar, or the office.

Remind others to register to vote.
Six million Americans didn't vote in 2008 because of registration challenges. You can provide

40

a public service to your friends, employees, consumers by celebrating National Voter Registration Day on September 27th. Recognized by the bipartisan National Association of Secretaries of State, celebrating is simple: Simply remind people of the holiday and share a link to a voter registration tool like the one on VoterRegistrationDay.org.

Share information about voting.
Despite having more access to information than any generation prior, Millennials are nervous that they don't know enough to vote. In fairness, our elections system isn't the easiest to navigate because the rules are different in all 50 states. You can make it easy by helping them find their polling places, request an absentee ballot, or learn about how you vote in each state.

When you take action this year, you won't be alone. From technology platforms like Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter to media giants like MTV and Univision to major businesses like Starbucks and Patagonia to major nonprofit organizations like United Way Worldwide, the League of Women Voters, APIAVote, and the National Council of Nonprofits, as well as mobilizations by thousands of musicians, actors, directors, athletes, and volunteers, you'll be in good company.

But for almost everyone, there's no validator more powerful than their own family and friends. It's on all of us to help change the culture around voting in this country. It doesn't matter what sector you're in, how political you believe yourself or your company to be – there are no excuses. Do whatever you can to leverage your networks in 2016 so that everyone in this country knows how important it is that they vote. The future of our country depends on it.