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CONNECTING, TALKING & VOTING TOGETHER
IN HYPER-POLARIZED TIMES

Nancy Thomas, Director

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April 6, 2019

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INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY & HIGHER EDUCATION

We study and work to improve ...

Political learning
Political discourse
Political equity
Political participation
Democracy

AGENDA FOR TODAY

- How strong is U.S. democracy?
- Data about colleges and universities: microcosms of democracy
  - Voting research
  - Campus climate ("what's in *their* water?") research
  - Recommendations
- Connecting discourse with voting
- Q & A

What are the attributes of a healthy democracy?

Toss out some adjectives...
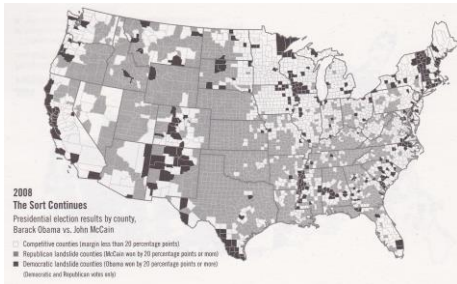
4/11/2019

IDHE ENVISIONS A DEMOCRACY THAT IS…

Participatory: people play a role in shaping the political and social systems that affect their lives

Equitable and representational: people have an equal opportunity for engagement in social and political systems, with equitable outcomes
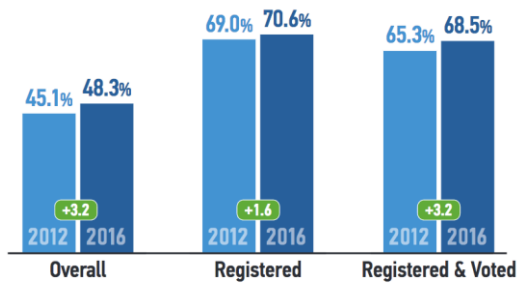
Educated and informed: people have equal access to quality public education and can distinguish facts from fiction

Effectively governed: government systems are just, ethical, transparent, accountable, and collaborative.
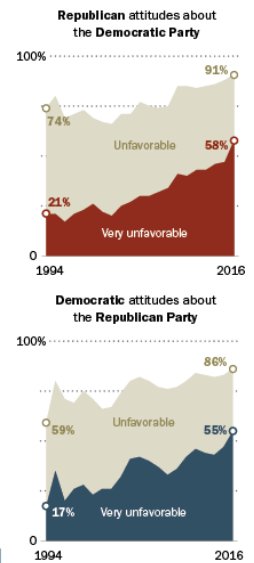
IS U.S. DEMOCRACY PARTICIPATORY?

Rising partisan antipathy

NSLVE STUDENT TURNOUT

	Overall	Registered	Registered & Voted
2012	45.1%	69.0%	65.3%
2016	48.3%	70.6%	68.5%
	+3.2	+1.6	+3.2

SOURCE: IDHE ANALYSIS OF NSLVE DATA, 2012 AND 2016

2008
The Sort Continues
Presidential election results by county,
Barack Obama vs. John McCain

☐ Competitive counties (margin less than 20 percentage points)
■ Republican landslide counties (McCain won by 20 percentage points or more)
■ Democratic landslide counties (Obama won by 20 percentage points or more)
(Democratic and Republican votes only)

Republican attitudes about
the Democratic Party
100%
91%
74%
Unfavorable
58%
21%
Very unfavorable
0
1994   2016

Democratic attitudes about
the Republican Party
100%
86%
59%
Unfavorable
55%
17%
Very unfavorable
0
1994   2016

Source: Survey conducted April 12-19, 2016.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

IS U.S. SOCIETY JUST, EQUITABLE, AND INCLUSIVE?

Voter turnout calculated as percent of voting-age citizens who voted
Data provided by Catalist and the U.S. Census Bureau

Wide partisan gap in views of racism as a 'big problem' grows even wider; racial differences persist

% who say racism is a 'big problem' in our society today
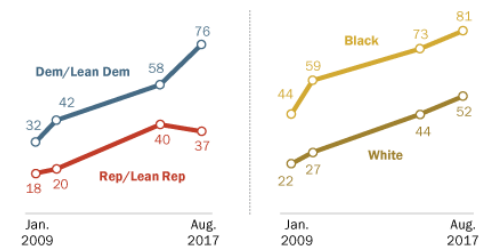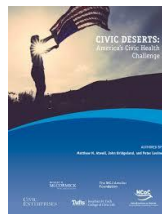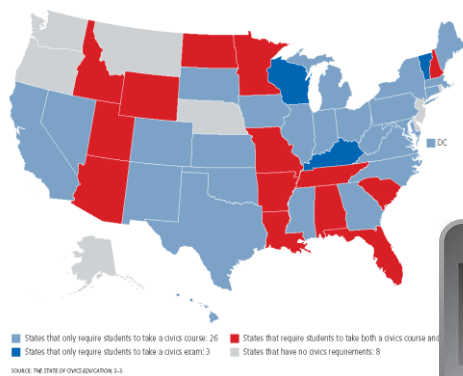

Note: Don't know responses not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Aug. 15-21, 2017. 2009 and 2010 surveys from ABC News/Washington Post.
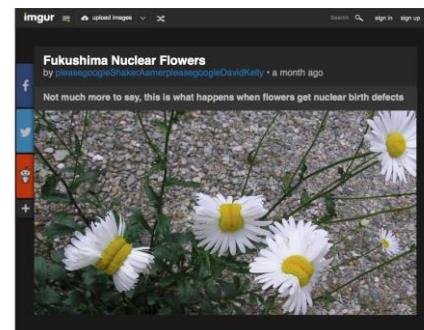
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

ARE AMERICANS EDUCATED AND INFORMED?

State-by-State Look at Civics Learning in High School

States that only require students to take a civics course: 26
States that only require students to take a civics exam: 3
States that require students to take both a civics course and
States that have no civics requirements: 8

SOURCE: THE STATE OF CIVICS EDUCATION, 2-3.

CIVIC DESERTS:
America's Civic Health
Challenge

On March 11, 2011, there was a large nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. This image was posted on Imgur, a photo sharing website, in July 2015.

Fukushima Nuclear Flowers
by pleasegoogleShakerAamerpleasegoogleDavidKelly • a month ago

Not much more to say, this is what happens when flowers get nuclear birth defects

Does this post provide strong evidence about the conditions near the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant? Explain your reasoning.

TRUE

POLITIFACT
TRUTH-O-METER™

INTEGRITY IN GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS & DECISIONS

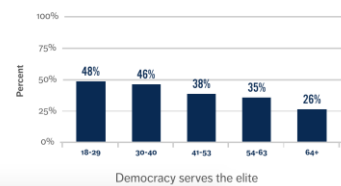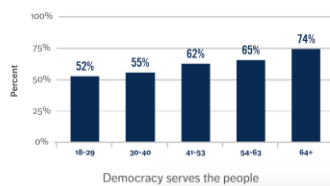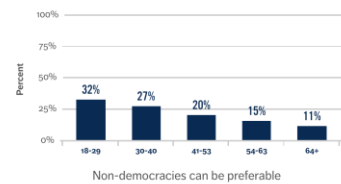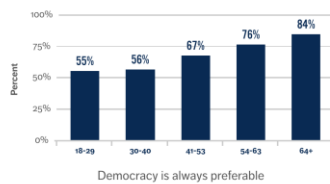### No partisan gap in anger at government

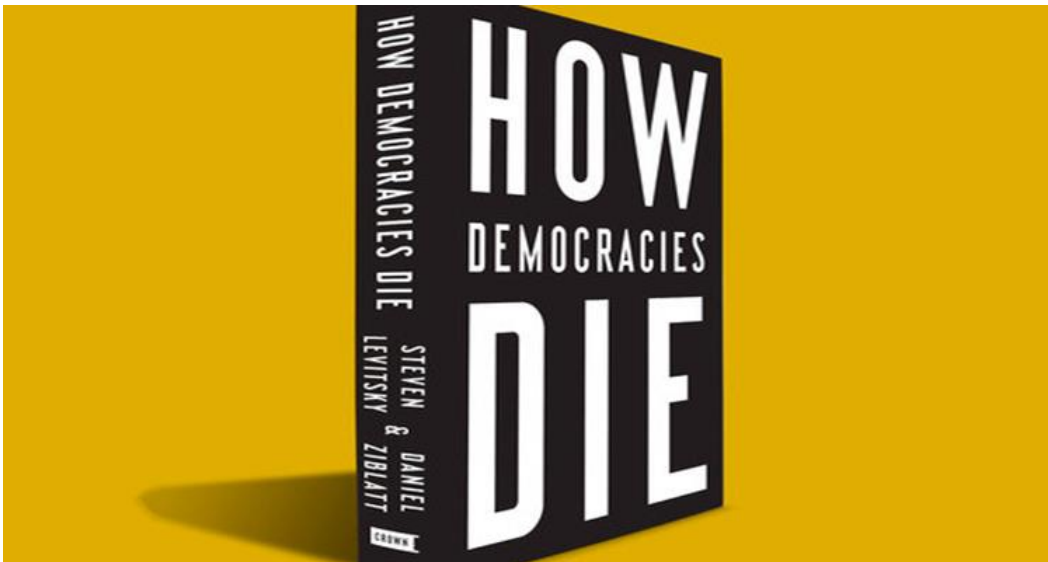*% saying anger best describes their feelings toward the federal government...*
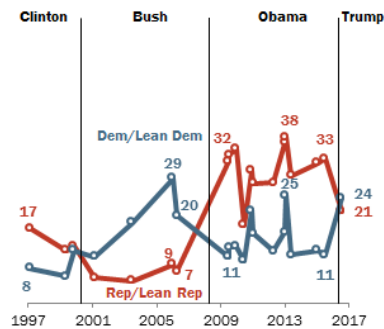
Source: Survey conducted April 5-11, 2017.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVES BY AGE

Democracy is always preferable

Non-democracies can be preferable

Democracy serves the people

Democracy serves the elite

NSLVE — NATIONAL STUDY OF LEARNING, VOTING, AND ENGAGEMENT

- The first objective measure of college student voting
- A free service to campuses
- A database for research
- Around 1,100 institutions
- All states
- 10 million+ college student records for each election year
- Data for 2012, 2014, and 2016 elections; 2018 soon!

NSLVE STUDENT TURNOUT
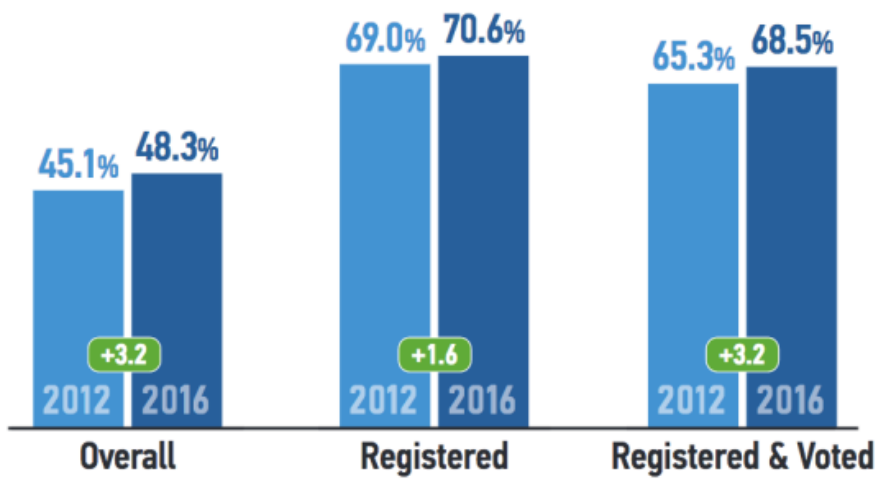
SOURCE: IDHE ANALYSIS OF NSLVE DATA, 2012 AND 2016

What % of college students voted in the 2014 midterm?

All NSLVE voters nationally: 18%

Traditional 18-24 year old voters: 13%

See: https://idhe.tufts.edu/2014-student-voter-turnout

WHAT DO STUDENTS SAY ABOUT WHY THEY OR THEIR FRIENDS DO NOT VOTE?

Not registered, and don't know how to register

Lack the right identification

Can't decide whether to vote here or at home

Distrust of government or candidates

Don't think their vote counts

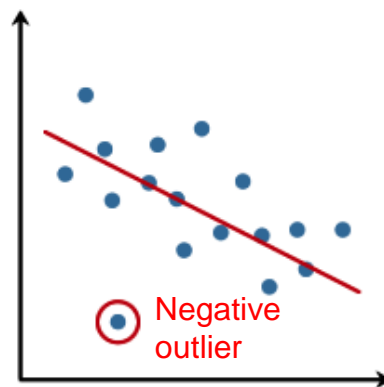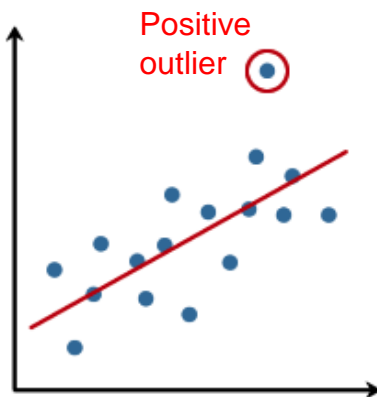Feel uninformed

Just not that into it

WHAT PREDICTS VOTING?

- Education
- Affluence
- Gender: Women
- Favorable voting conditions

_____

- Age: Young voters
- Inexperience: First-time voters
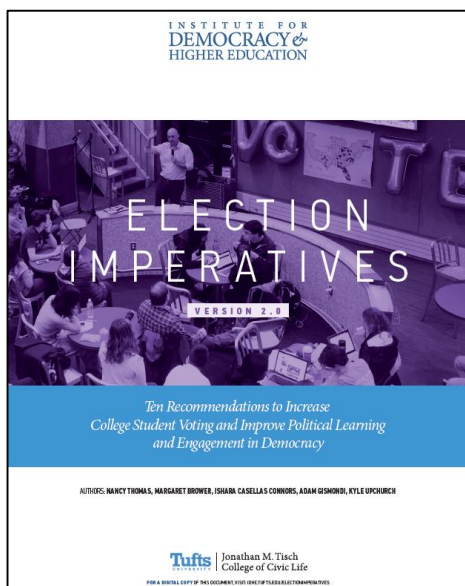- Race: Some historically underrepresented groups
- STEM majors

Why are some institutions more (or less) politically and electorally engaged?

POLITICS 365

- Social cohesion, strong student-student and student-faculty relationships, sense of shared responsibility
- Diversity and equity as intentional practice, strong intergroup relationships
- Pervasive and skillful political discussions in and beyond the classroom
- Student voice and agency, institutional decision-making, activism
- Creating a buzz on campus, voting as what we do around here, friendships

INSTITUTE FOR
DEMOCRACY &
HIGHER EDUCATION

ELECTION
IMPERATIVES
VERSION 2.0

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

AUTHORS: NANCY THOMAS, MARGARET BROWER, ISHARA CASELLAS CONNORS, ADAM GISMONDI, KYLE UPCHURCH

Tufts | Jonathan M. Tisch
College of Civic Life

FOR A DIGITAL COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT, VISIT IDHE.TUFTS.EDU/ELECTIONIMPERATIVES

Connects usually disconnected learning goals:
- **Political learning** across the curriculum, which includes civil rights and *how* to vote
- **Better discussion** and breaking down polarization, including **free speech** and **academic freedom**,
- **Diversity and inclusion**, social cohesion and welcoming campus climates,
- **Student activism**, leadership, decision-making, political agency, and
- **Voting** and voting conditions.

https://idhe.tufts.edu/electionimperatives

2. *Remove barriers to student voting.*
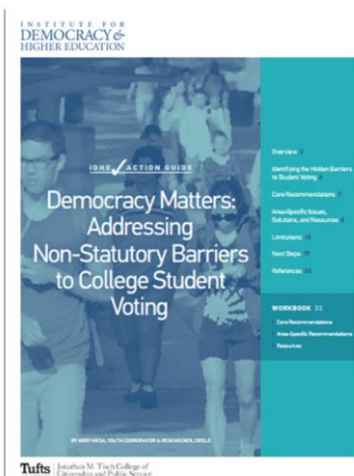
Use the power of the presidency to identify and remove technical barriers to voting caused by local conditions (polling locations, status of required ID, ease of registration).

Call for help if needed: Fair Elections, ACLU, League of Women Voters, or the Brennan Center.

Support online registration.

Remove non-statutory barriers to voting.

3. *Develop informed voters.*

Offer courses, teach-ins, forums, and modules to teach the history and current status of voting rights in this country. Follow Supreme Court rulings relevant to voting.
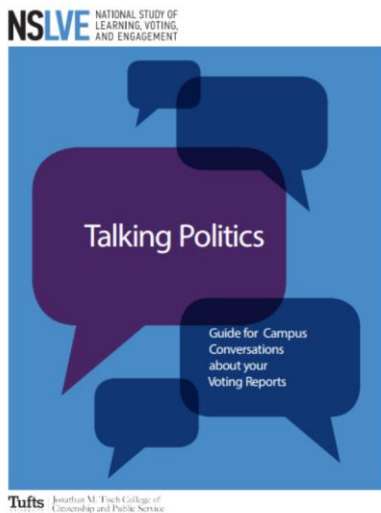
Use elections to teach students to fact check and distinguish facts from mis- and disinformation.

Teach students *how to vote.*

Help students learn where their vote might make the biggest difference, if they have the option of where to vote.

6. *Talk politics across campus.*

Talk about your institution's NSLVE data, policy issues, and social conflicts.

Use elections to increase and improve discussion skills.

Reinforce norms of shared responsibility; discuss the tensions around free speech and inclusion.

Cultivate a cadre of trained facilitators and structures for campus-wide discussions.

NORMS OF SOCIAL COHESION AND CARING ACROSS DIVERSITY

https://www.ruok.org.au/

PERVASIVE AND SKILLED POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

RESOURCES: https://idhe.tufts.edu/

DISCUSSION