

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™  
STUDENT ASSOCIATION



**SCHOLARS**  
STRATEGY NETWORK

# Empowering Young Student Voters: *Collaborations with Local Election Officials, Faculty, Student Leaders, and University Administrators*

Thessalia Merivaki, Ph.D.

APSA-NCAPSA: Connecting Communities and Classroom

GEORGETOWN  
UNIVERSITY

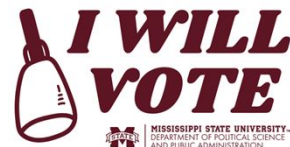
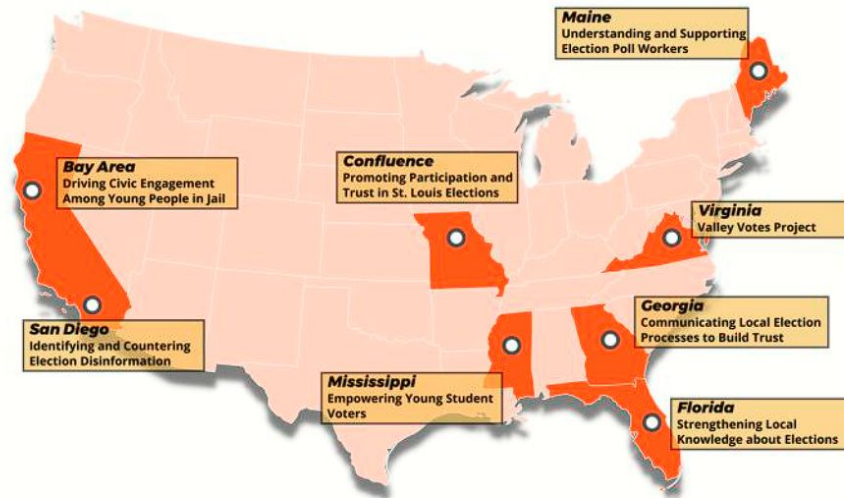
McCourt School  
*of Public Policy*

# SSN Election protection & Enhancement Program 2022-2023

## Pilot Year Summary and Evaluation

The SSN Election Protection Enhancement Program's Pilot Year Summary and Evaluation showcases the program's comprehensive efforts in safeguarding electoral processes and bolstering democratic integrity.

READ





Nonpartisan Education → Civic Engagement → Participation

# Background: Elections and Voting in Mississippi

- Red, non-battleground state
- Historically low turnout
  - Youth turnout even lower
- Limited institutional capacity
- Limited outreach to young voters
- Barriers to participation
  - Paper-based registration
  - Excuse-absentee with notary requirement

## The Barriers Of My Mississippi Student Voter Experience



Dakota Sullivan Brand Contributor  
Civic Nation **BRANDVOICE** | Paid Program

**YOUR STUDENTS' VOTING DATA | MIDTERM ELECTIONS**

# Voting and Registration Rates

2018 Voting Rate

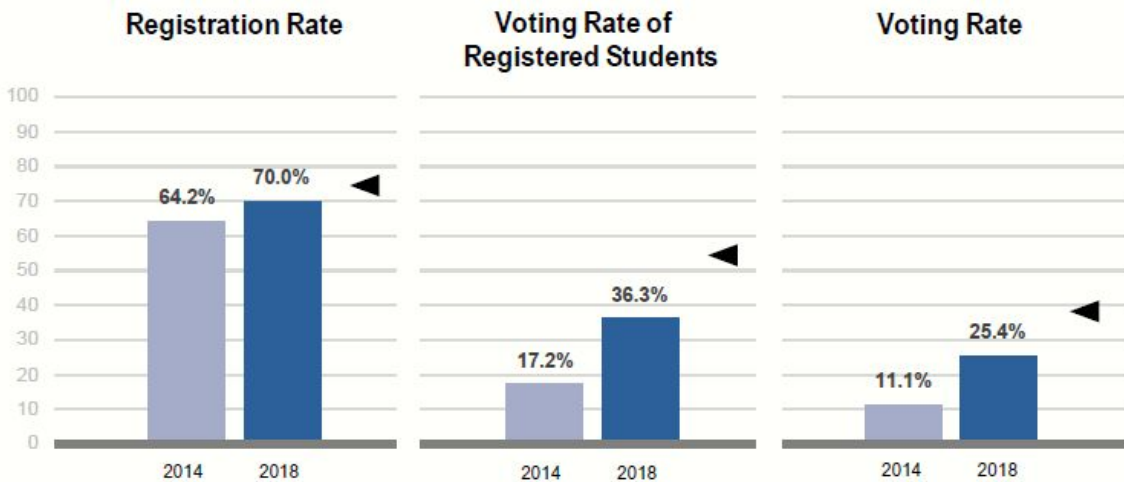
**25.4%**

CHANGE FROM 2014

**+14.3**

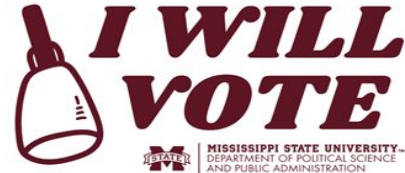
2018 VOTING RATE FOR ALL INSTITUTIONS

**39.1%**



# Goal: Building Capacity for Student Engagement and Participation

Core Team	MSU Partners	Local Partners	State partners	National Partners
Political Science & Public Administration	Student Association	Oktibbeha County Circuit Clerk	Mississippi Secretary of State	National Voter Registration Day
Faculty	College GOP	Oktibbeha County Election Commission	Mississippi Votes	All In Campus Democracy Challenge
Student Assistants	College Dems			Civic Nation
	Stennis-Montgomery Association			
	Student Affairs			
	Center for Civically Engaged Learning			
	The Reflector			



# Initiatives for Fall 2022/Spring 2023 @ Msstate

## i. Nonpartisan Voter Education/Registration

### ✓ Pre-Fall

- New Maroon Org Fair (Aug 12) – Tabling/Voter Reg.
- Move-In Days (Aug. 13-15) – Welcome packet/MS SoS materials
- Dawg Days Welcome (Aug. 15) – Tabling/Voter Reg.

### ✓ Fall

- Panhellenic New Member Camp (Sept. 12-15) – Class visits
- NVRD (Sept. 20) – Tabling/Voter Reg./MS SoS Visit/County Circuit Clerk Visit

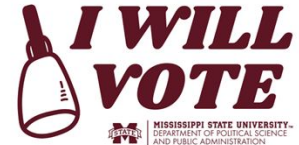
### ➤ Spring

- “No Time to Fail” Documentary Online Screening
- Student reflections

## ii. Online & Print Media

✗ “How elections work” series in The Reflector

➤ Sponsored Article; Thematic article; NVRD coverage(Sept. 19-21)



# Initiatives for Fall 2022/Spring 2023 @ Msstate

## iii. GOTV

- X “March to the Polls” event
- “I Will Vote” T-shirt distribution (Nov. 2)

## iv. Observation

- ✓ Mock Logic & Accuracy Testing
- ✓ Student poll interns
- X Student poll workers

## v. Public Facing Work

- ✓ Students’ reflections in school/local/state/national media
  - Op-Ed in the Reflector
  - Op-Ed in Forbes Civic Nation
- ✓ Report to MSState; SSN
- ✓ Faculty Op-Ed in Mississippi Free Press

# Highlights

- Peer-to-peer outreach & engagement
- Student-led public facing work
- Student-election officials' interaction
- Foundations for institutional buy in & resources

# Young Mississippi Voters Are Left Out Without Online Voter Registration



THESSALIA MERIVAKI, LESLIE BAKER AND JAMES CHAMBERLAIN

MAY 26, 2023

“You should have hand-delivered these forms, instead of relying on USPS to deliver them on time.”

- Limited interest from EOs to engage locally
- Limited interest from MSU to invest
- Inter-partner competition to “claim” success
- Institutional barriers hard to overcome
  - USPS delays for mailed registration forms
  - Providing assistance to students to request absentee ballots

# Lessons for the classroom

- Integrating civic engagement into your class:
  - Is fun
  - Is empowering
  - It enhances student learning
  - It builds norms about what a civically engaged campus should look like
- Combining academic - reflection assignments builds better skills:
  - Connects abstract with applied



Additional Slides

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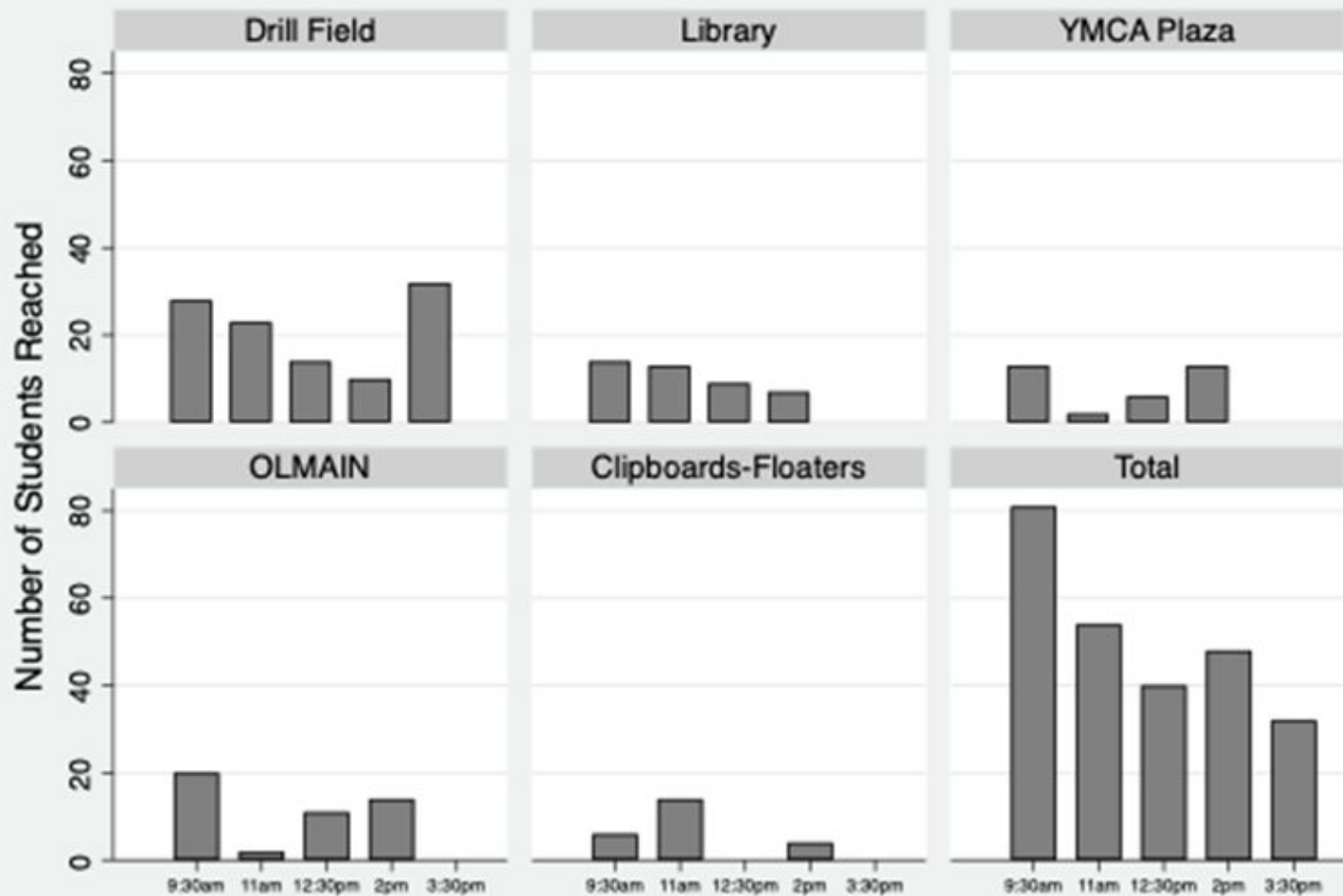


Dakota Sullivan Brand Contributor

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## • *Takeaways:*

- Year-Long Voter Education-Registration-GOTV campaign is hard without:
  - Institutional support
  - Reliable partners/team-members
  - Volunteers
- Things go wrong. ALL THE TIME – Have Plan B ready.
- For restrictive voter access states:
  - Heavy emphasis on voter registration.
  - *Mail voting requires additional support.*



National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) 2022 Events by PSPA

### MISSISSIPPI MAIL-IN VOTER REGISTRATION APPLICATION

- You can use this form to: register to vote in Mississippi or change your name and/or address.
- If you are registering for the first time in Mississippi and DO NOT have a Mississippi driver's license or social security number, you must send with this application a copy of a current and valid photo ID or a copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document that shows your name and address in this county.
- An application for voter registration must be postmarked or hand delivered to the Circuit Clerk's Office located in the county of your voting residence no later than 30 days before an election.

Dear County Circuit Clerk,

My name is Dr. Lia Merivaki and I am a professor of Political Science at Mississippi State University. We are conducting voter registration drives on campus, and I am mailing them on behalf of new registrant.

I am writing to explain why you are receiving more than one form. Some forms may be missing information, such as SSN, which is why we asked students to include a phone number for you to contact them.

Thank you very much.

Lia Merivaki

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Political  
Miss



## Raising awareness about what happens on the backend of elections

Briefly reflect on the biggest take away you got from watching "No Time to Fail," as it relates to the U.S. electoral process and Presidential elections.

Your Answer:

The biggest takeaway I got was how important and taxing jobs as election officials can be, especially if there is a distrust of the system. They were yelled at and seen as the problem when the ballot machines broke. The scene of the man who was angry that his voting registration had expired stuck with me. It is not the election worker's fault that his registration expired, but he does not know who to blame. Voters do not have a good understanding of the electoral system, which can cause frustration and confusion regularly. However, these negative emotions toward voting only worsen when political leaders stir up distrust and division on top of the new regulations around the pandemic. Election workers take the brunt of those reactions on Election Day.