



# The Urgency of Now and Always: Electoral Activism and Civic Engagement!

National Association of Deans and Directors at CSWE  
Atlanta, GA  
October 2023



# Introductions



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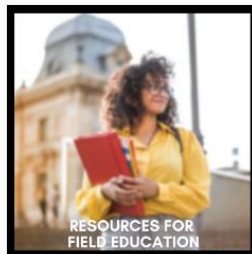
## National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign





Nancy A. Humphreys Institute for Political Social Work

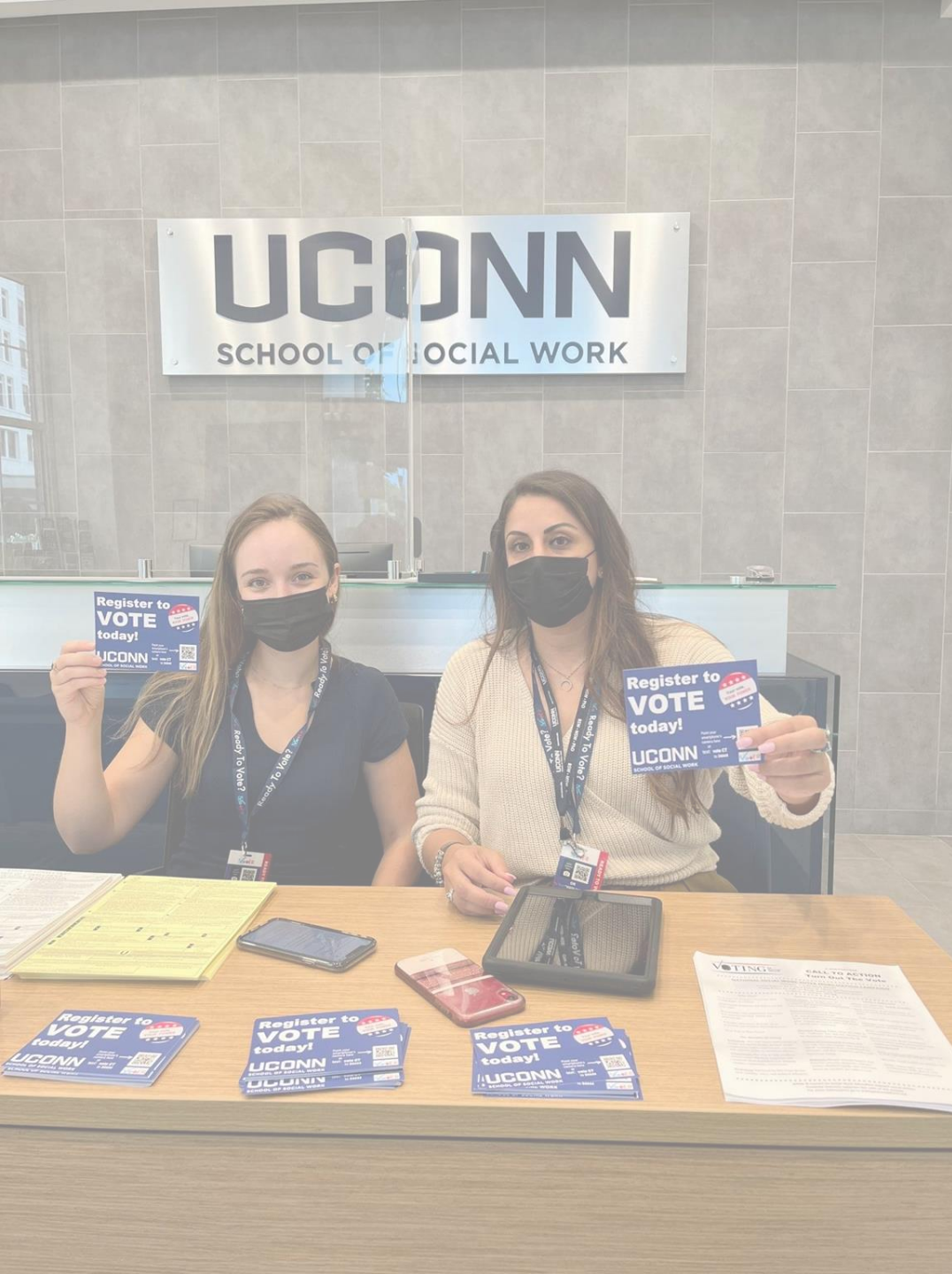
## The National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign



# What Is *Voting is Social Work* (VISW)?

## Voter Mobilization & Civic Engagement

- We mobilize faculty, students, field work directors, and field instructors to register clients and constituents to vote, especially those targeted by voter suppression and gerrymandering laws.
- We promote voting as a social work intervention and ongoing civic engagement in social work education and practice.



# Today's Objectives

1. Today's troublesome context:  
Democracy at Risk
2. The importance of civic engagement to Social Work's mission, ethical mandate and IMPACT
3. Why Deans and Directors are essential leaders in giving students the information they need to vote and empower clients.
4. Suggested strategies to engage your school community

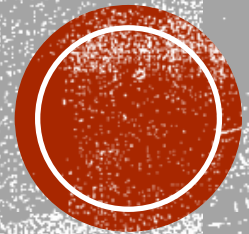
Social work's history in expanding  
voting rights and access

# Overview: Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaigns

- **1985: Human Serve Campaign** asked Social Service Agencies to register clients and constituents.
- **1993: The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA)**, also known as the “Motor Voter” Act requires federal agencies and some state agencies to offer opportunities to register to vote. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (social worker) along with thousands of social workers and allies across the country led the campaign for the legislation, signed by President Clinton.
- **2016: National Social Work Voter Mobilization Campaign (VISW)**, mobilizes faculty, students, field work directors, and field instructors to register clients and constituents to vote. Ensure that people get to the polls and cast their votes, especially those targeted by voter suppression.



President Bill Clinton signing the national voter registration act of 1993 ("Motor Voter Act") as Richard Cloward and Frances Fox Piven stood behind him.



Voting is the right on  
which all others sit.



Social movements played a key  
role.



*The health of society depends  
on a healthy Democracy.  
Social work cannot sit on the  
sidelines.*





## The importance of WHY voting matters: One student's reflection

*“Yeah. When I was a senior, we had people come and register us. We filled out the registration form and everything. But they didn't really, from what I remember in our US Government class, they didn't really go into like why voting's important. So I didn't. Back then I was like, "Yeah, I'll register, whatever." Like, "It's cool." But like, I can remember I went back home and was like, "Oh, Mom, I can register to vote." And she's like, "Oh, okay, whatever." But you know, now it's, ... six, seven years later, I'm like, "No." Like, "I can vote now." ... I wish that I had this knowledge back then as a 17, as a 18 year old. Like... did I understand my, the importance of voting? Probably not. Do I think that if we--if I--had this presentation back then, would that change my mind? Maybe. You know, I was younger, and maybe like, "Oh, whatever, it's just voting." I probably would've been bored. But now it's like, it's important. So I think that's something like a conversation that we could also have, that like, how can we get the younger people like to understand? 'Cause we recognize the importance of it now. I didn't realize how important it was until I was 21, you know, in my Policy class. Like, how can we encourage this? And this is a conversation that like, you know, I, I don't know where it could happen, in schools, or anything, but I think it's important to.. know. We all walked away from this project and the presentation from Tanya, like all very informed. Like, how do we continue this conversation to get the younger people who are gonna vote, who are ready to vote, you know, to have to understand.*”

Democracy at Risk



Our Democracy, institutions,  
and rights are in crisis



It's not just Congress, state and local elections are the new battle ground for rights and policy.

# The Risks are Growing and Spreading

- **Election subversion:** Intentionally Interferes with the administration of elections and overrides the will of the voters
- **Election deniers** on the ballot and leading in Congress
- **Gerrymandering** /redistricting
- **Banning books** and censoring education curriculum and access
- **Less independent and underfunded press** – especially locally
- **Less trust in government**

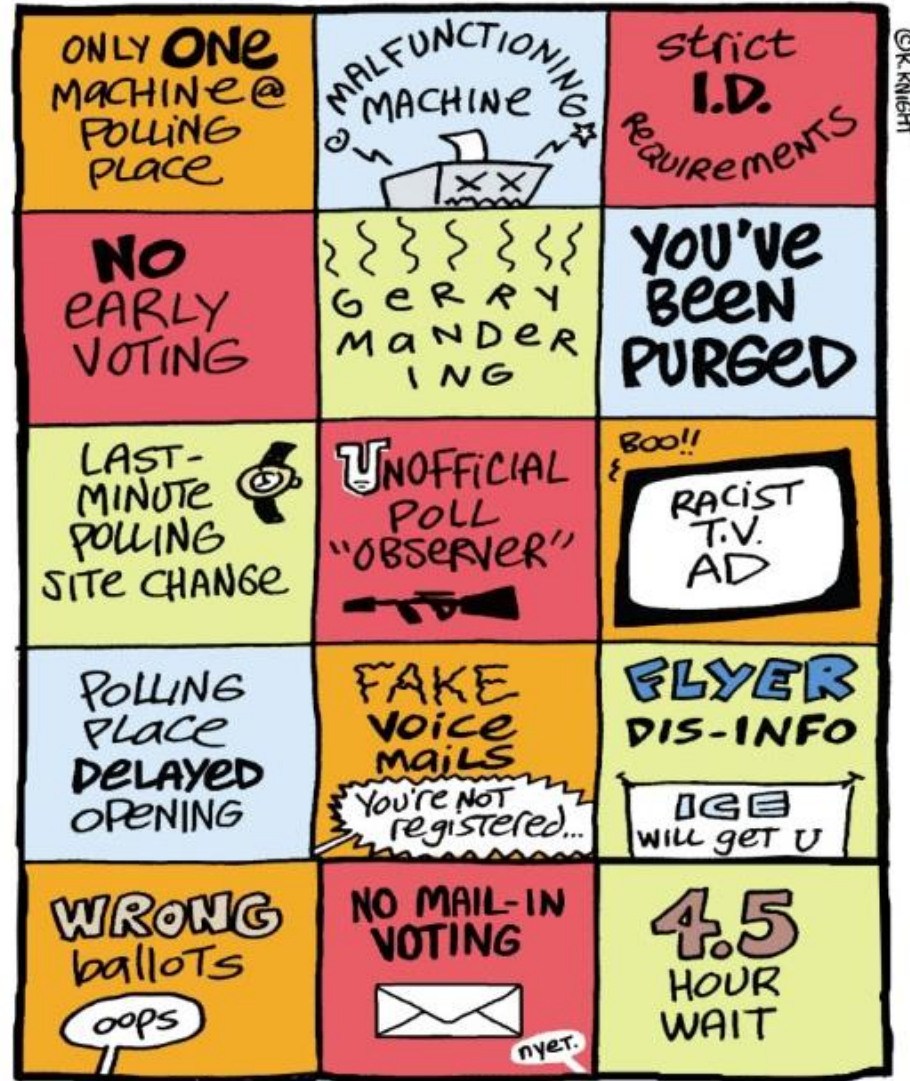
*Race, class, and gender inequalities continue to nourish anti-democratic forces.*

# Structural barriers feed engagement barriers

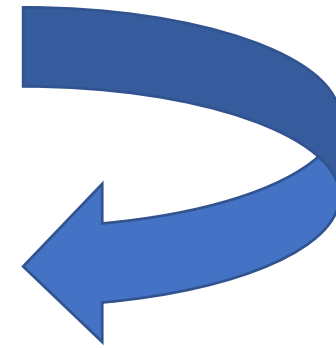
50 states, 50 sets of  
deadlines, rules and policies  
Hyper-local.

Misinformation & lies  
No standards for candidates  
Drop in civic education  
Hyper-partisan

# VOTER SUPPRESSION



# BINGO!



Intentional Myth:  
Voting doesn't matter

# Civic Engagement and Social Work

# Civic Engagement Matters to Social Work's mission, ethical mandate and IMPACT





# Nonpartisan does not mean nonparticipation

- **Hatch Act:** IRS is clear that agencies and nonprofits can help people to register and to vote
- **Public Agencies:** at State and Federal level it is encouraged, and in some cases, required to provide voter registration opportunities forms and more.

*1993 National Voter Registration Act mandates most state agencies and nonprofits registering people for federal benefits to offer voter registration*

**Know the nonpartisan facts!**



REGISTER voters

EDUCATE voters about the voting process (when, where and how to vote)

SHARE nonpartisan guides and information on the candidates

HOST a candidate forum. *All candidates must be invited but not all have to attend*

ENCOURAGE people to vote!



Endorse or oppose candidates or campaigns

Contribute, as an agency, to a candidate's campaign or party

Rate or rank candidates

Invite only selected candidates or parties to your agency or event

DISCOURAGE people from voting!

TURNOUT MATTERS!  
But not everyone Votes

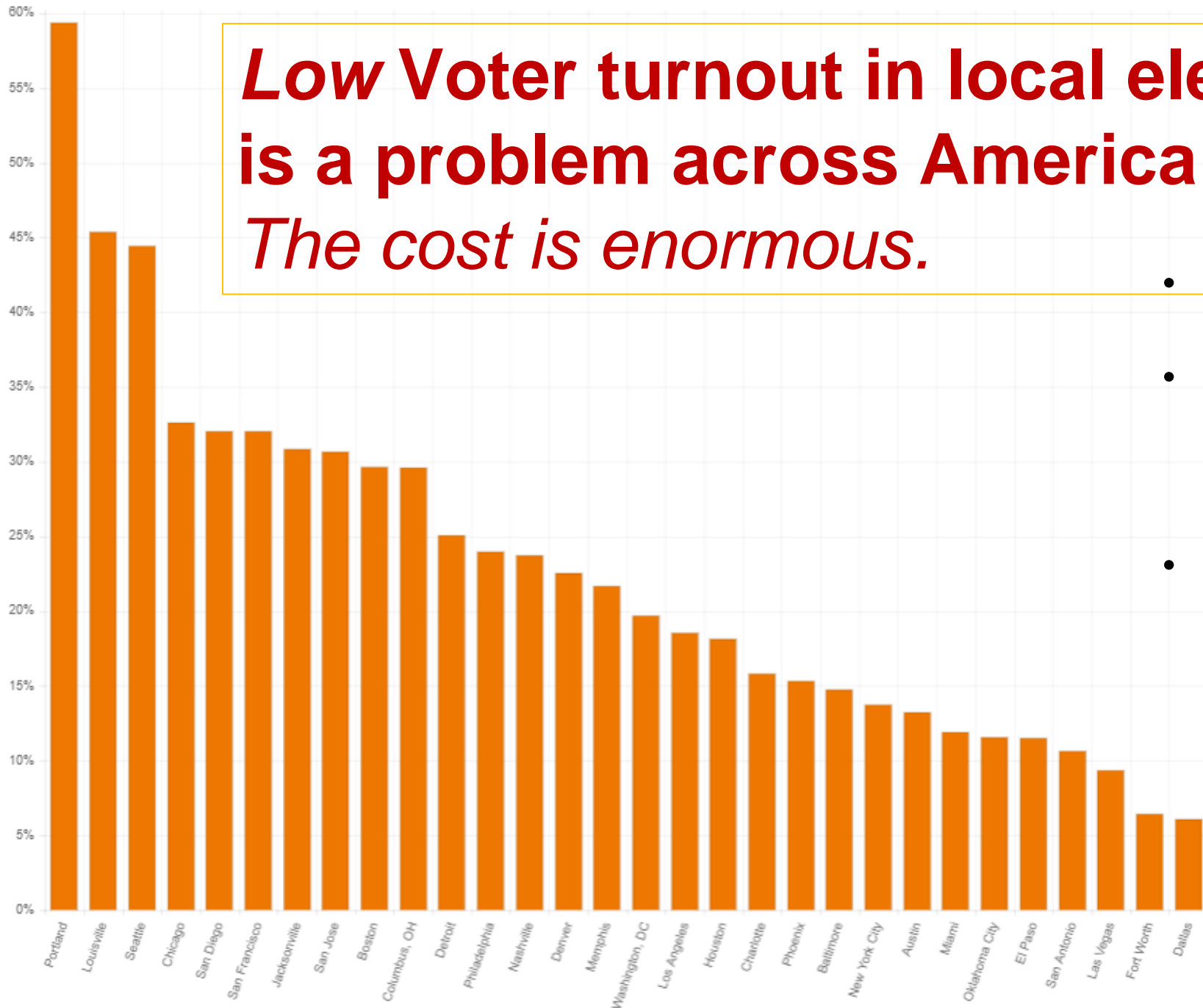


## **Elected officials prioritize the needs of voters.**

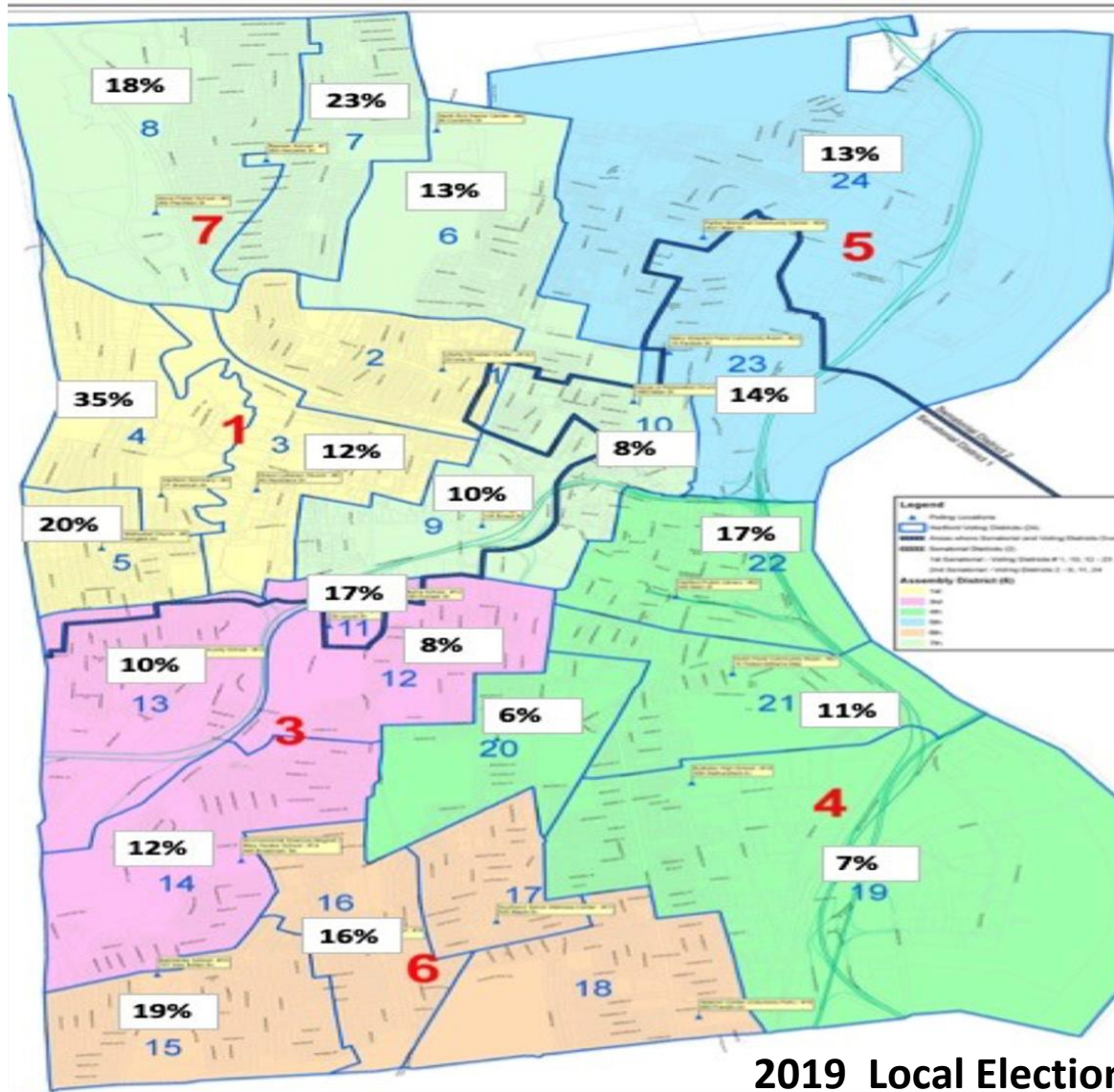
Studies confirm strong correlations between voter turnout, resource allocation and policy priorities at the federal, state and local levels.

# Low Voter turnout in local elections in cities is a problem across America

*The cost is enormous.*



- Turnout in 10 of America's 30 largest cities was **less than 15%**.
- City residents **65 and older** were **15 times more likely to cast a ballot** than younger residents between the ages of 18 and 34.
- Turnout varies dramatically **impacting resources, investments and outcomes.**



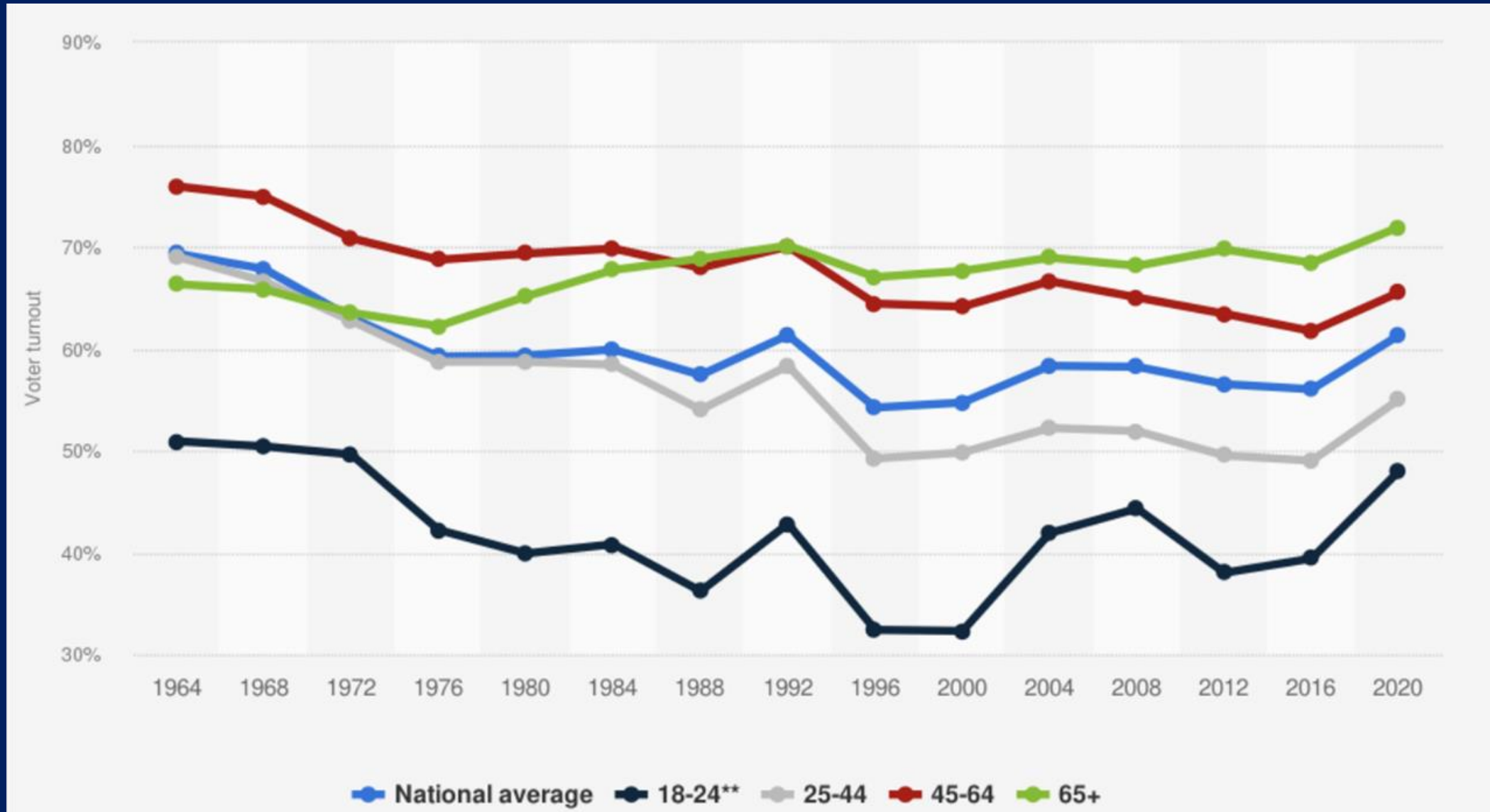
2019 Local Elections  
Hartford, CT

Voter turnout tells a story about power and resource allocation

Studies show that communities that vote at higher rates get more attention and more resources, especially on the local level.



# The Voting power of Senior Americans: Turnout by age 1964 - 2020

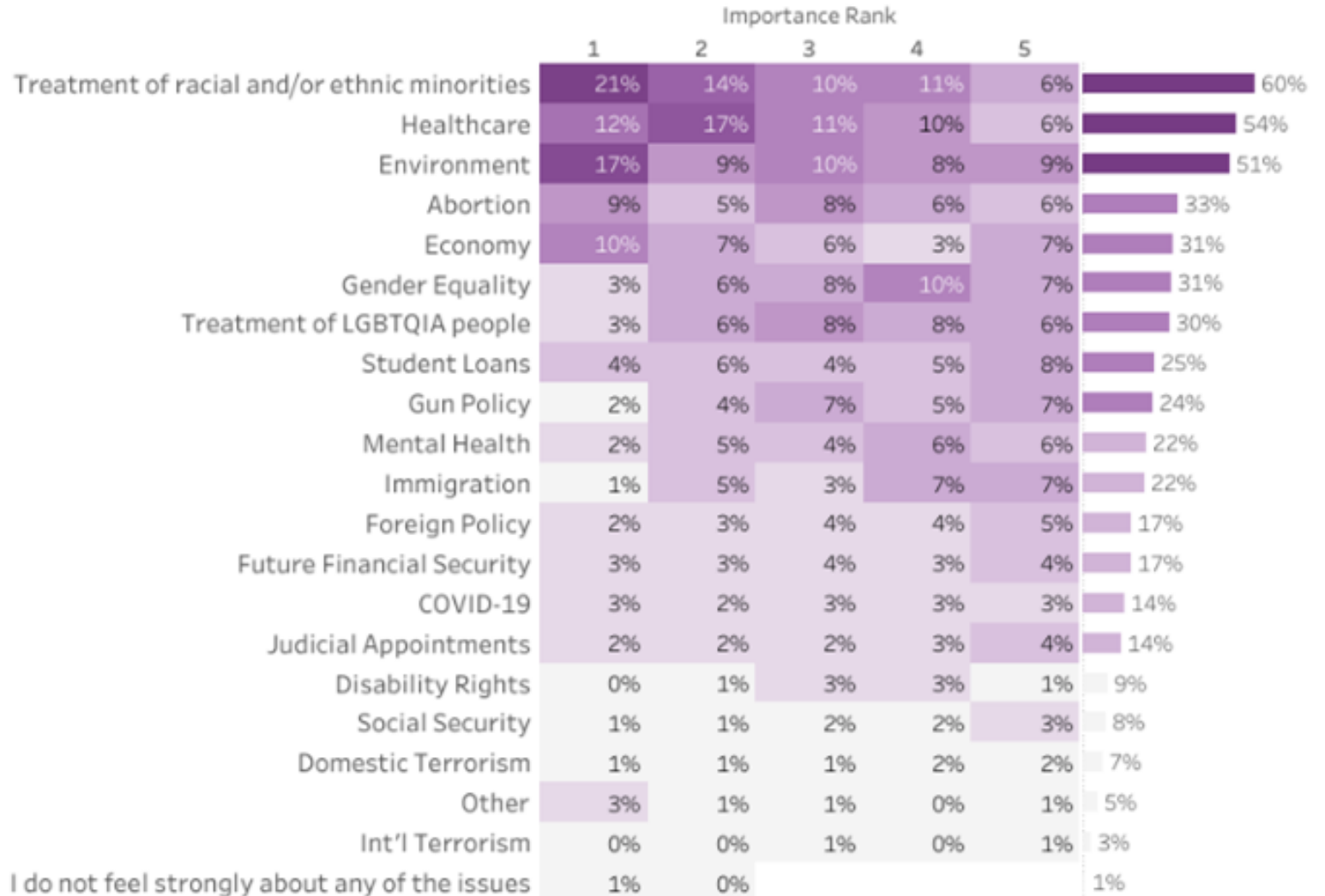


# Young people are not apathetic but they need to know WHY voting matters and HOW to do it.

America's youth have **strong beliefs**, and they want to see those beliefs represented in government.

**This isn't news:** in the 2000 and 2008 presidential elections, 69% of National Exit Poll respondents between the ages 18 and 29 stated that a **candidate's positions on issues was more important** than leadership/personal qualities. Today, youth voters are passionate about a number of issues facing their communities.

Only **1%** of survey respondents did not feel strongly about an issue.



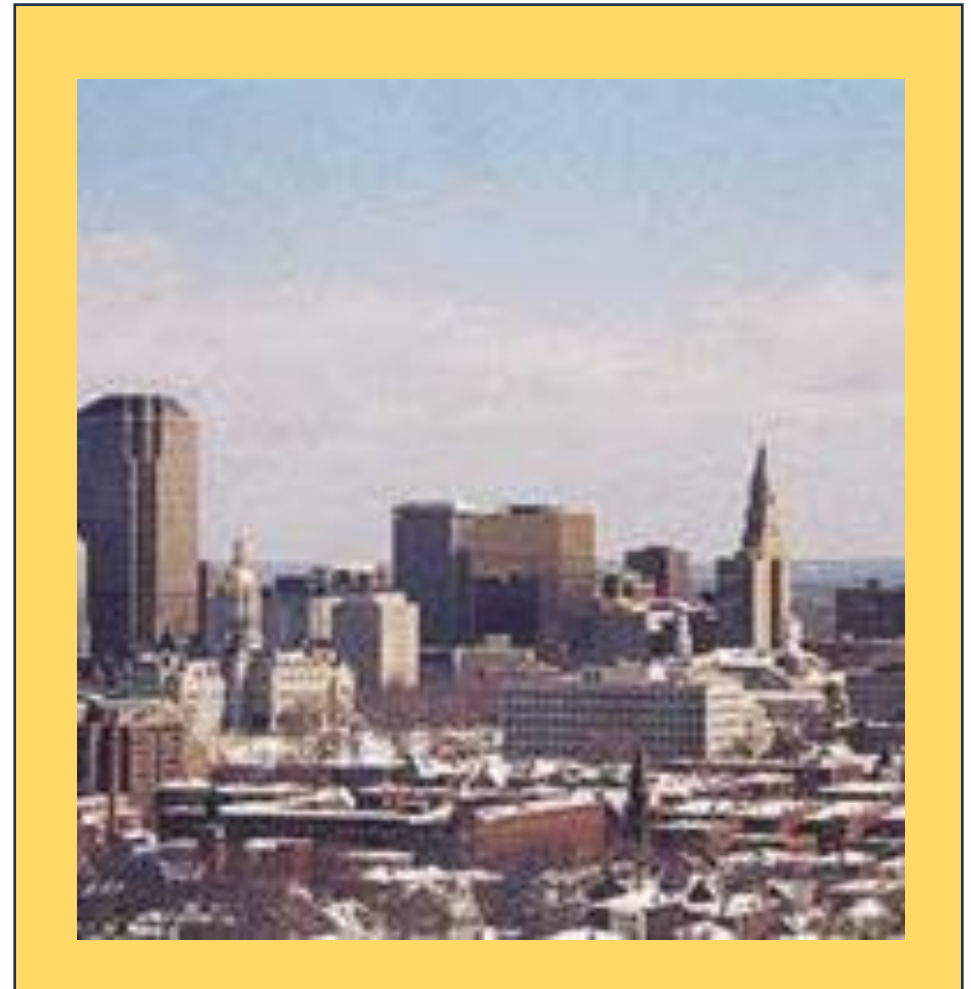
Voting, health and power



# Healthy Democracy, Healthy Community

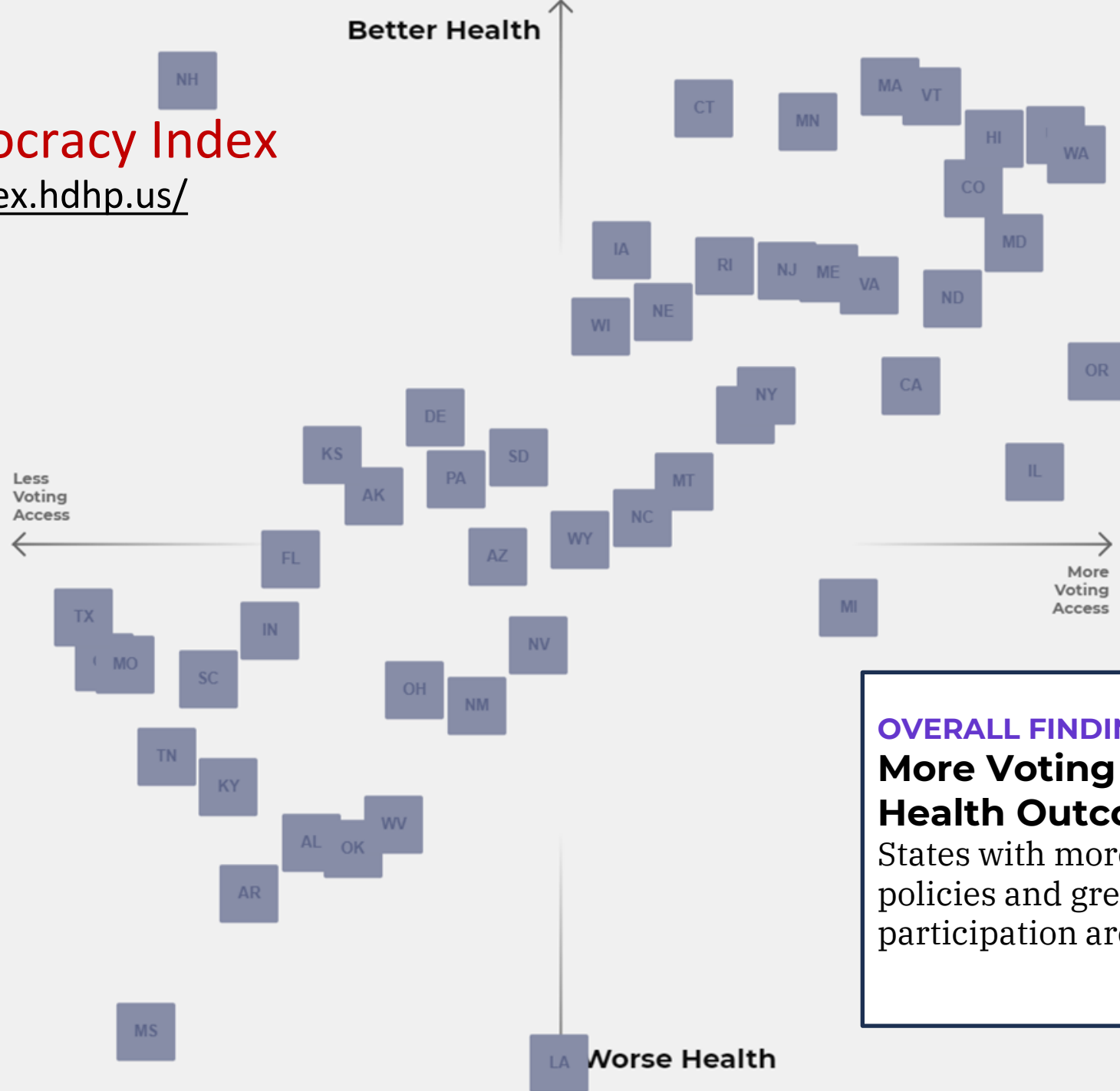
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- **AMA declared voting a social determinant of health.**
- Communities and individuals who vote are better off in important and numerous measures of well-being.
- Voting in late adolescence and early adulthood is associated with decreased risky health behaviors, higher socioeconomic status in adulthood, more years of education and higher personal earnings. (Ballard, Hoyt, & Pachucki, 2018)
- Voting is associated with higher earnings, education and health and lower rates of recidivism rates (Florida Parole Commission study, 2010; Uggen & Manza; 2004)



# Health and Democracy Index

<https://democracyindex.hdhp.us/>



## OVERALL FINDINGS:

### More Voting Access, Better Health Outcomes

States with more inclusive voting policies and greater levels of civic participation are healthier.

Voting is POWER for our profession, our students and the communities we serve

*It's a violation of our code NOT to support the political power, capital and voice of groups whose power has been intentionally suppressed.*

- “engage in social and political action” to “expand choice and opportunity”
- “promote policies and practices that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people”

Fixing inequality (and any problem) must include shifting power to those most impacted





**Tested  
strategies**

# 1. Give students the WHY and the HOW of voting and basic civics

- At an all-school event (with civic partners)
- In all required micro and macro course(s) and field
- Through a skills lab

*Voter engagement skills are best learned by doing!*



# 2. Tie voter engagement activities to all 9 CSWE Core Competencies

- Include in educational contracts for micro and macro
- Give field credit for running voter engagement activities on campus

## Incorporating Voter Engagement into Field Education: Example Practice Activities

The Nine Competencies:

- C1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior
- C2: Engage diversity and difference in [practice](#)
- C3: Advance human rights and social, economic, and environmental justice
- C4: Engage in practice-informed research and research-informed practice
- C5: Engage in policy [practice](#)
- C6: Engage with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities
- C7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and [communities](#)
- C8: Intervene with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and [communities](#)
- C9: Evaluate practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and [communities](#)



Example Practice Activity	Alignment with core competencies								
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9
Research allowable nonpartisan voter activities and lobbying rules for 501(c)(3) organizations and/or requirements for nonprofits in the 1993 National Voter Registration Act.	✓		✓		✓				
Discuss ethical implications of not supporting the political power and voice of clients and communities through voting and civic participation.	✓	✓	✓						
Share information on voting, elections, and basic civics with clients, staff and/or communities	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Integrate voter registration and	✓	✓	✓			✓			

### 3. Create a culture of civic awareness

- Share information about all elections with students, faculty and field agencies
- Promote upcoming elections and important dates
- Provide links for registration and nonpartisan resources
- *Allow students election day to vote and engage others to vote*
- *Give field credit for volunteering or serving as election officials.*





## 4. Support innovations in practice

- Share voter activities for educational contracts with field instructors in orientation, supervision and training.
- Provide free CEs to field supervisors on nonpartisan voter engagement and/or basic civics

*Philanthropy funds programs that build civic engagement and community power. Go for it!*

## 5. Create opportunities for political social work



- Expand student placements in civic organizations, political offices and campaigns.
- Create civic engagement units with BSW and MSW students
- Send students to the Campaign School for Social Workers



# The Voter Engagement Model. It works!

TRAINING: WHY voting connects to SW outcomes and practice, including voting as social determinant of health

## CLASSROOM:

- Civics training module (1 – 2 class periods)

## FIELD INSTRUCTORS

- Short overview included in field instructor orientation, including voter activity ideas for Educational Contract

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

- Free CEs for Civics and Voter training

FIELD EDUCATION: Assignments in field build efficacy and awareness for students and field agencies. *Student-driven innovation in practice.*

## SAMPLE STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS

- Register 3 or more voters
- Conduct agency assessment to embed voter activities into services
- Discuss training and assignments with field instructor; write reflection

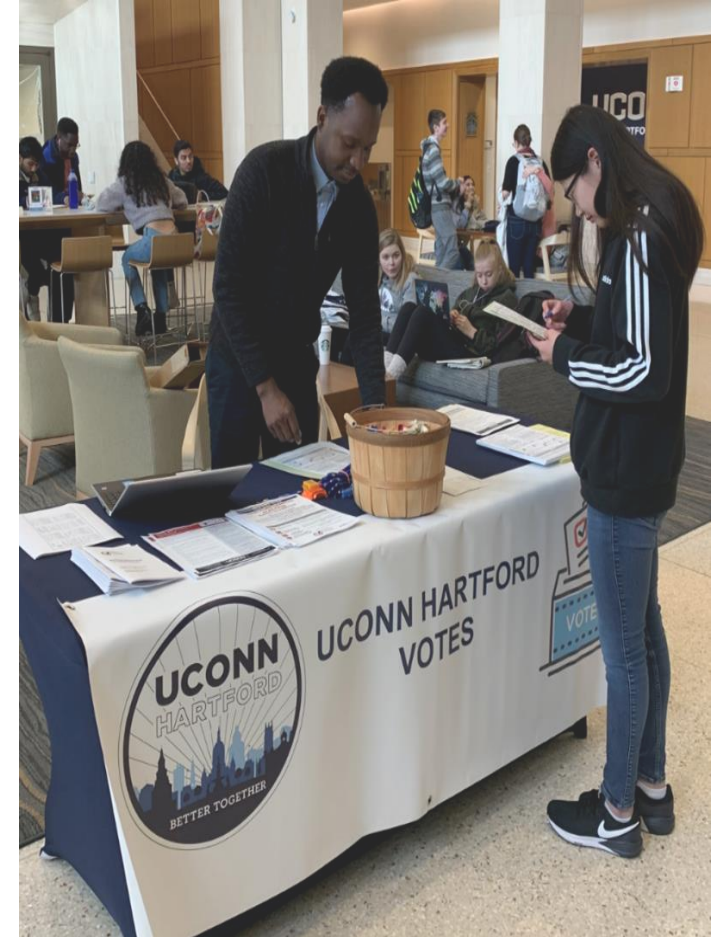
## Short Term Outcomes

### INCREASES IN:

- Registered voters (thousands to date) including students
- Students' plans to vote in all elections
- Attitudes about the importance of voter engagement to social work practice.

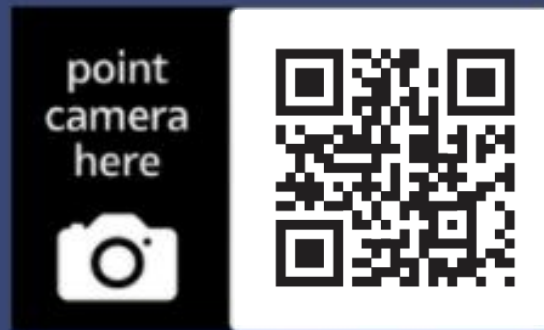
# Deans and directors are essential

- *Promote* social work's unique role in supporting Democracy and the political voice and power of our clients
- *Ensure* **basic civic skills are in the curriculum** to uphold NASW Code of Ethics
- *Connect* voting rights to the profession's commitment to racial and social justice
- *Debunk* the myth that voting doesn't matter
- *Share* information about all elections, including special elections, primaries, and local elections. ***It's more than a specific election.***
- *Actively support* faculty and students to lead voter engagement efforts in the classroom, field, and community.



# Technology makes engaging voters safe\* in all states and keeps voters informed about upcoming elections

Citizens in any state can register, verify or update their registration with these tools.



 **vote SW**  
*or text:* **to 34444**

- In states without online registration, forms will be mailed.
- After connecting with the platform voters receive reminder text messages before every election
- \*Voters who use TurboVote platform are technically registering themselves



## Amplify Social Work's Impact!

*Build a culture of civic responsibility and voter engagement in your school community.*

## Additional Resources

### Additional resources:

- [Votingissocialwork.org](https://votingissocialwork.org)
- [Organizational Assessment Checklist](#)
- [Voting Rules in CT](#)
- Build your civic skills: Add voter and/or political activities to your Educational Contract. [This worksheet has examples of voter activities that tie to Social Work's 9 core competencies](#) and as well as ideas for political action.
- [CT SOTS Civics Toolkit](#) with Vote local messaging
- Get easy answers about Democracy with [Rock the Vote's Democracy Explainers](#)
- Or listen to **Civics 101 Podcast** wherever you get Podcasts
- Go to [Vote411.org](https://Vote411.org) for information on voting and candidates
- Read [how activists helped direct funding to fix mold and neglect issues for one Queens public housing complex.](#)
- Read Allysha Bryant's [NYC Op-Ed: Voting: Health, the Homeless and Community](#)

# Thank you

## Contact Information

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