

VOTING

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT:

Barriers to the Ballot at Ohio's Historically
Black Colleges and Universities



ABOUT

All Voting is Local (AVL) fights to eliminate needless and discriminatory barriers to voting before they happen, to build a democracy that works for us all. It is a collaborative campaign housed at The Leadership Conference Education Fund, in conjunction with the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation; the American Constitution Society; the Campaign Legal Center; and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

AVL launched in 2018 in Ohio to advocate at the state and local level to expand access to the ballot, especially for Americans historically silenced at the ballot box, to achieve a democracy where all voices are heard. The campaign uses data-driven organizing, strategic communications and grassroots powerbuilding to achieve its goals.

Needs Improvement: Barriers to the Ballot at Ohio's Historically Black Colleges and Universities seeks to expose and remove voting obstacles at Central State and Wilberforce universities.

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Chart and data sources taken from Greene County Board of Elections public records request and [Ohio Secretary of State](#), supplemental provisional ballot report.

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THE PROBLEM

Central State and Wilberforce universities are Ohio's sole Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Located in Greene County, the institutions share another distinction: they are home to entrenched obstacles that keep students from having their voices heard at the ballot box.

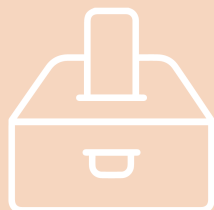
An analysis of voting data from 2018 reveals troubling trends in low turnout, provisional ballot rejection and registration problems. But these barriers are not insurmountable. All Voting is Local together with students and community partners, propose a robust and sustained investment in voter education and poll worker recruitment and training to solve these problems so all students can cast a ballot that counts.

FINDINGS

In November 2018, the League of Women Voters Dayton Chapter (LWV-Dayton) and Advocates for Basic Legal Equality's Western Ohio Office (ABLE) alerted All Voting is Local to recurring voting problems for students at Central State and Wilberforce universities. AVL examined 2018 election data from precincts that serve these campuses and met with students to determine the scope of the problems. Among the findings:



Low turnout. While statewide voter turnout in Ohio exceeded 55 percent in 2018, the precinct serving Central State was a distant outlier with roughly 15 percent of registered voters casting a ballot.



College voters cast a disproportionate number of provisional ballots. At Central State, 46.4 percent of all votes cast were by provisional ballot. In Greene County, the rate was only 1.89 percent.



College voters' provisional ballots were more likely to be rejected. Provisional voters at the precincts serving Central State and Wilberforce were at least twice as likely to have their ballots rejected than other provisional voters in Greene County.



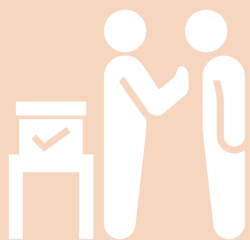
Registration problems. The most common reason for a provisional ballot: a voter was not registered or the registration was not current. While this is generally true for counties throughout Ohio, a disproportionate number of people cast provisional ballots at the precincts serving Central State and Wilberforce because of registration issues.

SOLUTIONS

College students living on campus may not be aware they can register to vote where they go to school. They may be confused about the registration procedures, rules, and deadlines. The universities and county election officials must invest in voter education to tackle these problems.



Streamline voter registration on campus. Make voter registration a core element of campus orientation. Encourage graduates to update their registrations before they leave campus so they can vote easily in future elections.



Encourage students to serve as poll workers on Election Day. Allow student organizations to count service as a poll worker towards required community service hours. Work with faculty to allow students to receive course credit for serving as a precinct election official.



Co-sponsor robust voter education programs. University and county election officials should support campus-wide events that will be organized by AVL, the Student Government Association, NAACP and the League of Women Voters.



Ensure proper and complete training for poll workers on provisional ballots. Students who cast provisional ballots should feel confident their votes will be counted. Polling places must be staffed with well-trained poll workers who can help them.

ANALYSIS

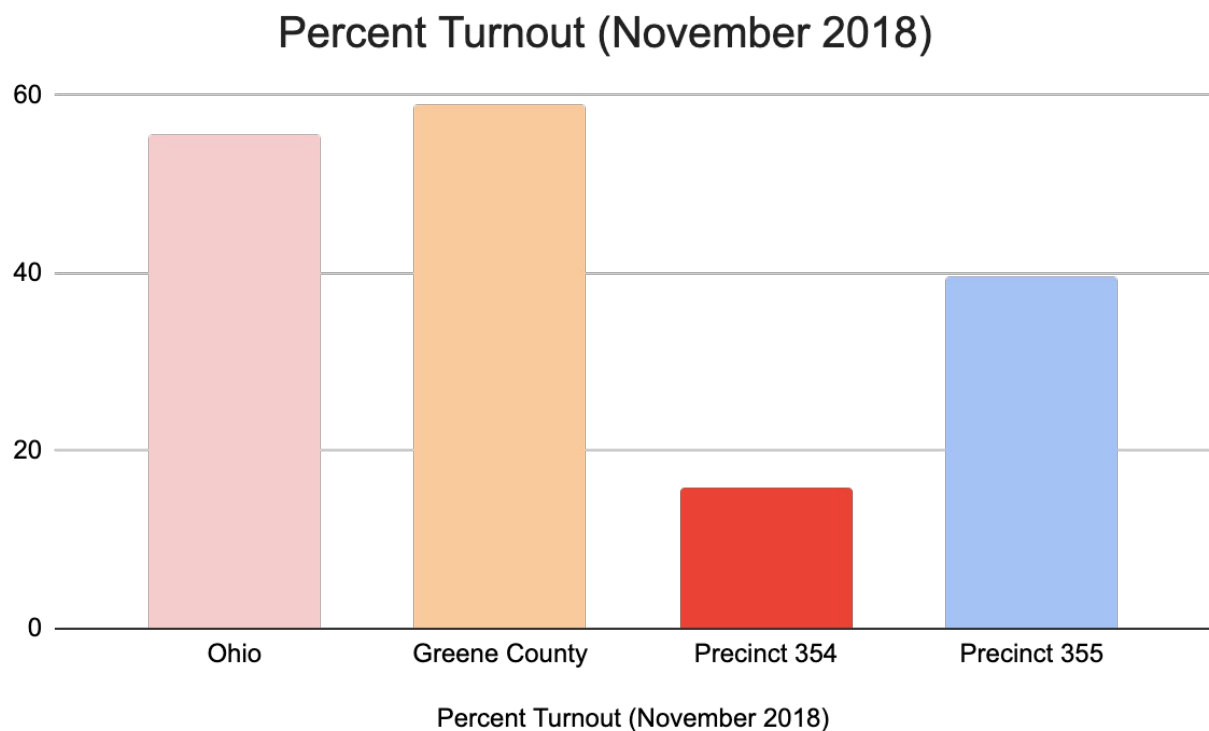
Low Turnout

Greene County's precinct 354 serves most students at Central State University and precinct 355 serves most students at Wilberforce University. While turnout in Ohio overall exceeded 55 percent and turnout in Greene County was nearly 60 percent, Central State and Wilberforce lagged.

At the precinct serving Central State University only 250 of nearly 1,600 registered voters cast a ballot.

Central State ranked the 8th lowest out of 8,903 precincts in Ohio in 2018.

On its own, this figure could be read as an indicator of a lack of engagement by students. But taken with other data points—such as the high use of provisional ballots and their rejection—this illustrates systemic challenges to students making their voices heard.

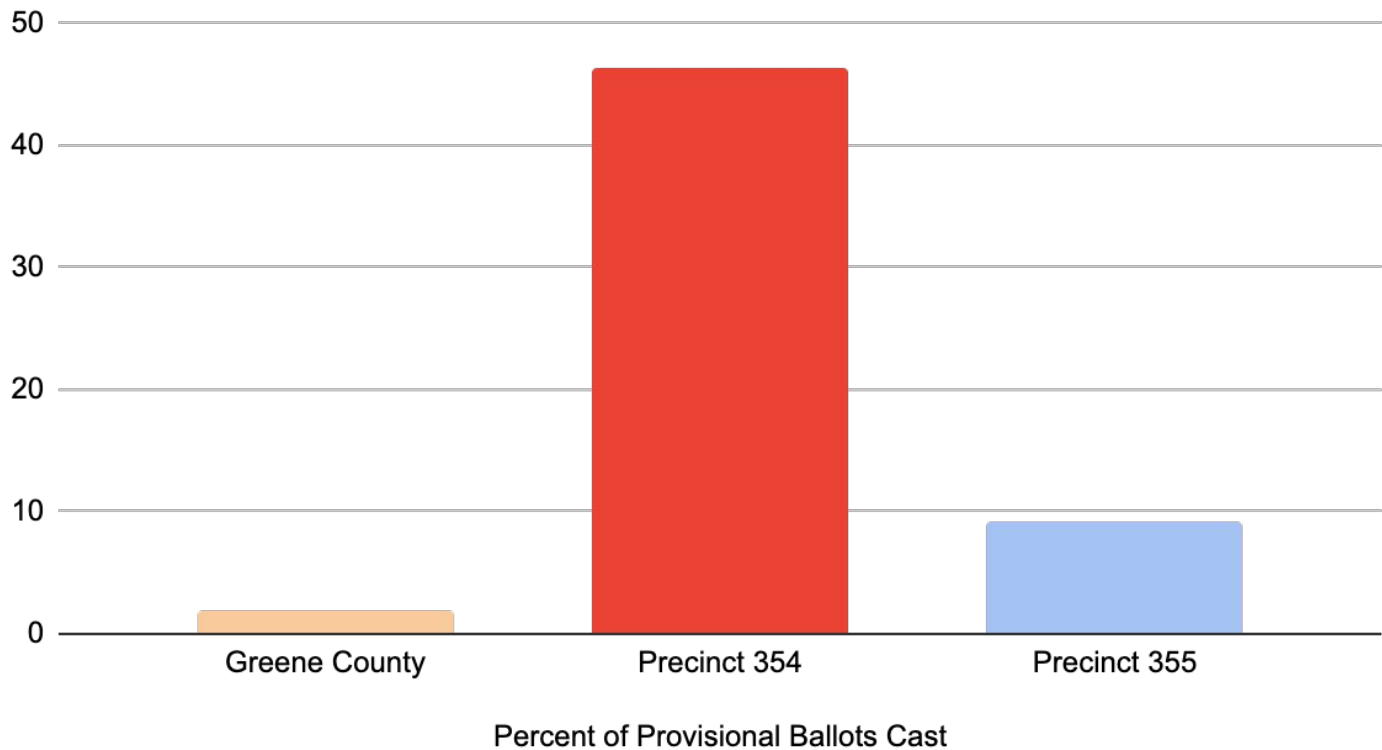


HIGH RATES OF PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

Provisional ballots are a “last resort” for voters who encounter a problem that prevents them from casting a regular ballot. Voters who go to the wrong polling location or do not appear in the poll book on Election Day may need to cast a provisional ballot. If a voter was eligible to cast a ballot, election officials can resolve the problem and count the ballot. High rates of provisional ballot use—and rejection—not only raise questions about the health of the election system, but also reflect barriers to voters being able to cast a ballot that counts.

Of the 250 votes cast in the precinct serving Central State, nearly half were provisional ballots: 46 percent compared to 1.8 percent countywide.

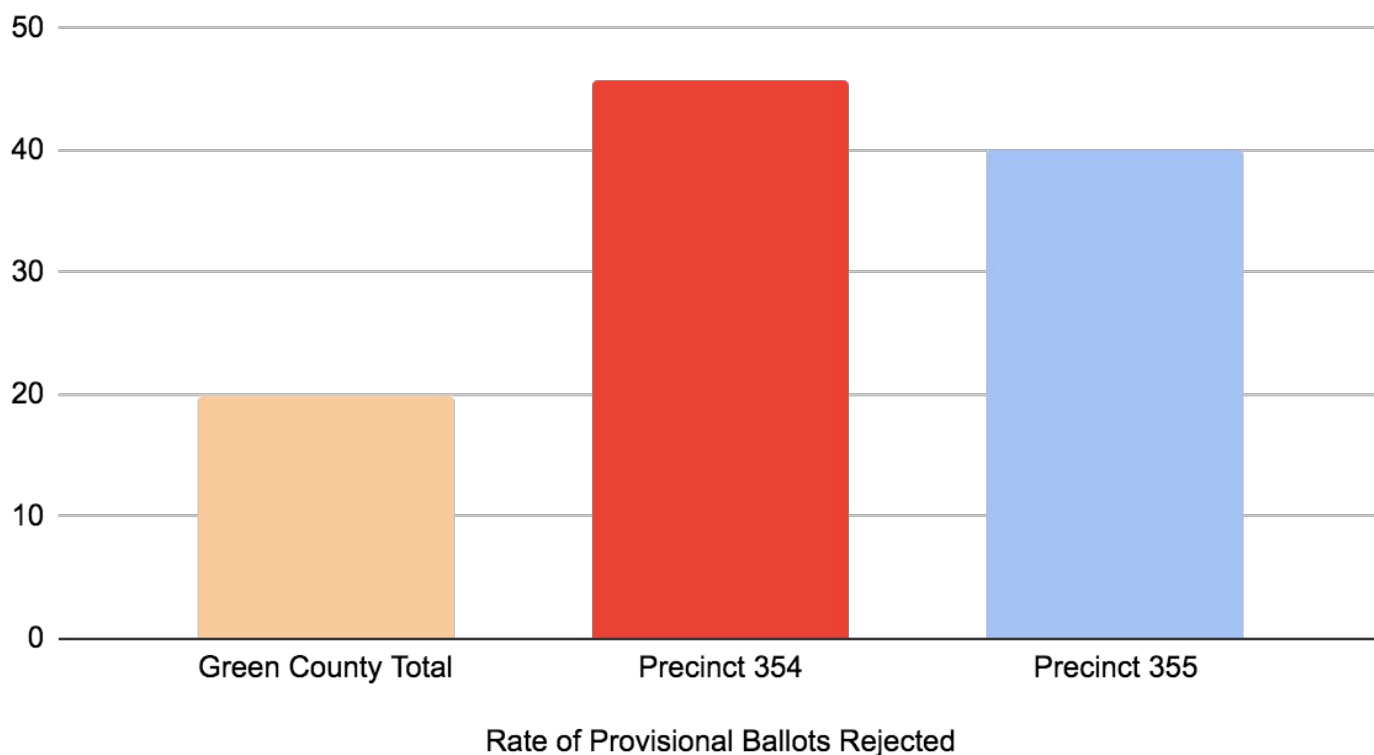
Percent of Provisional Ballots Cast (November 2018)



HIGH RATES OF PROVISIONAL BALLOT REJECTION

Once a voter casts a provisional ballot, the Board of Elections must resolve the questions around a voter's eligibility before the vote can count. Provisional voters at both Central State and Wilberforce universities were more than twice as likely to have their ballot rejected than provisional voters countywide.

Rate of Provisional Ballots Rejected (November 2018)



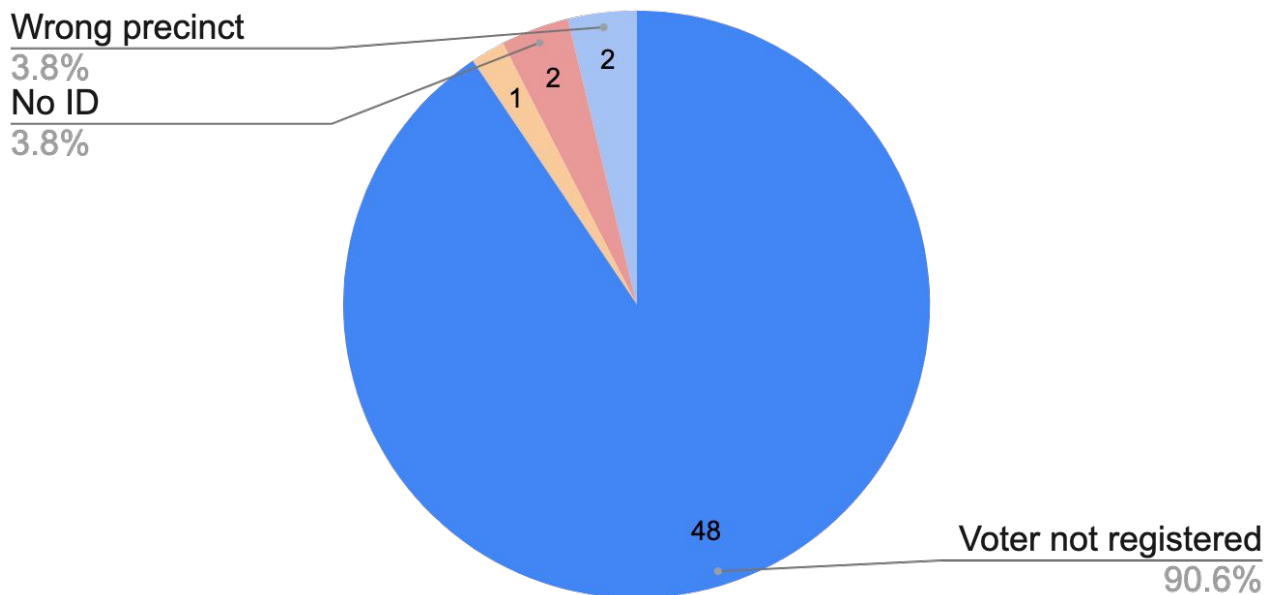
The high rate of ballot rejection at Central State University's precinct is particularly troubling. Only half of voters were able to cast a regular ballot—early in-person, by mail, or on Election Day.

MORE THAN

1-IN-5

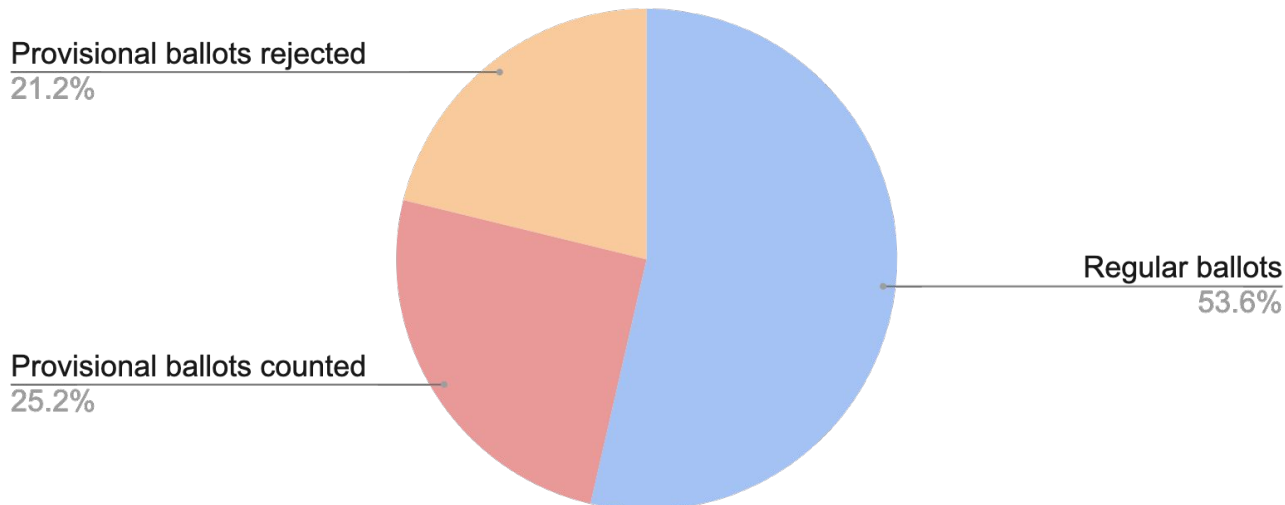
VOTERS IN PRECINCT 354 HAD THEIR BALLOT REJECTED.

Reasons Provisional Ballots Rejected in Precinct 354



Most of these issues happened on Election Day, although the same pattern appeared during early voting. Only 18 Central State voters cast ballots early in-person, but one-third of them had to cast a provisional ballot.

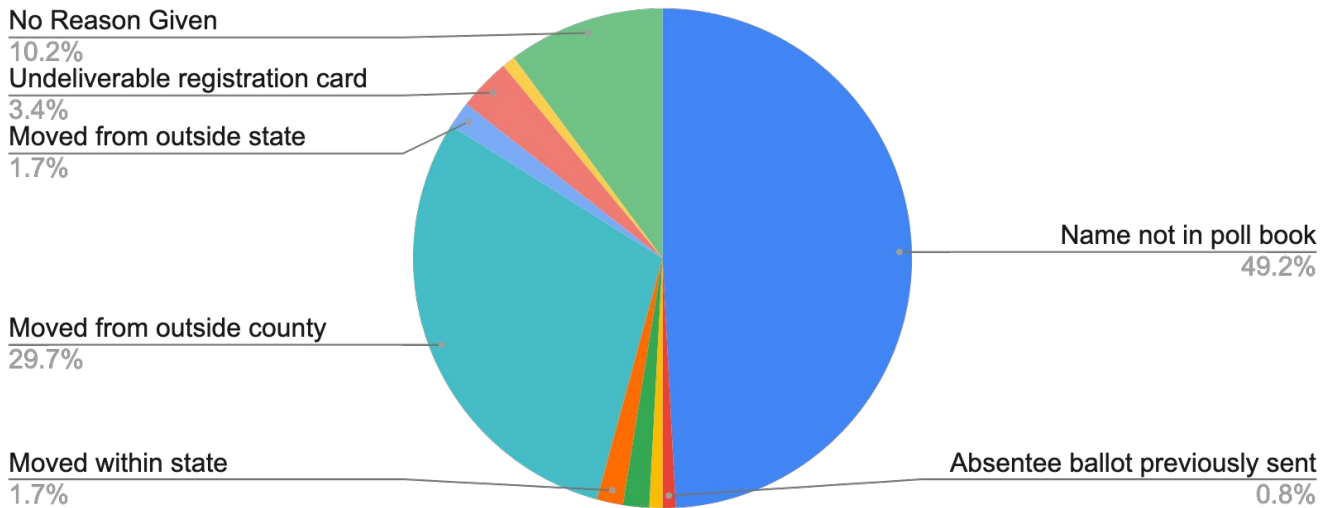
Breakdown of Total Votes in Precinct 354



VOTER REGISTRATION PROBLEMS

Overwhelmingly, Central State voters cast provisional ballots because of voter registration problems including: their names were not found in poll books or they had not updated their voter registrations. In many cases, we do not know why voters cast provisional ballots because election officials did not record a reason. For more than 10 percent of provisional ballots cast, election officials did not indicate why the voter cast a provisional ballot. This finding suggests election officials are not properly trained or following procedures to ensure that provisional ballots are cast only when necessary and that a reason is cited for their use.

Reasons Voter Cast Provisional Ballot in Precinct 354



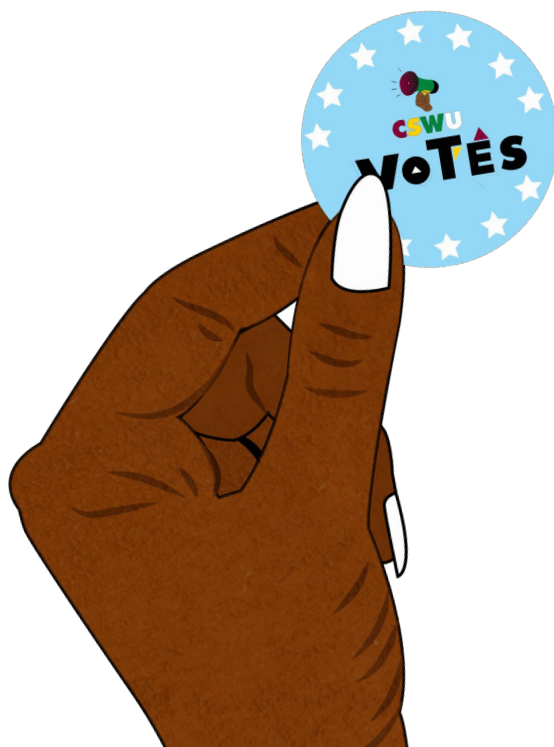
Similarly, the overwhelming reason provisional ballots are rejected is due to no registration.

CONCLUSION

Student voters poised to be active and engaged citizens too often face needless challenges at the polls. AVL found these challenges to be acute at the state's sole HBCUs. Student voters at these campuses often lack information about the rules for when and where to register and other important election rules. They may also receive inaccurate information by poorly trained poll workers that results in casting a ballot that may never count.

These obstacles can be overcome with robust voter education and poll worker training that empowers students at the polls to make their voices heard. AVL's voter education campaign seeks to educate and empower student voters in a series of engaging, student designed events.

The year-long education campaign, CSWU Votes, kicks off with a Carnival Registration Drive September 24, 2019 at Wilberforce University and September 25, 2019 at Central State from 5-7pm.



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