



<https://cce.bard.edu>

“Little Has Changed: Poll Sites on College Campuses in New York State since the 2022 College Poll Mandate”

*A Report Prepared by the Bard Center for Civic Engagement<sup>1</sup>*

February 16, 2024

## **New York State Context**

In April of 2022, New York State Governor Kathy Hochul (D) approved budgetary legislation that contained several pro-voting measures, including one that mandates poll sites on college campuses in New York with more than 300 registered voters. The legislation was hailed by voting rights activists who hoped it would enhance youth voter turnout and halt discriminatory practices directed at college-age voters by county Boards of Election.

The need for legislation was great. Since the passage of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1971, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 and outlawed age discrimination in access to the ballot, Boards of Election across the country, including in New York State, have targeted college students, imposing onerous residency requirements, making discriminatory rules concerning voting addresses, and making poll sites inaccessible. Students have been discriminated against and/or intimidated across the State at both public and private institutions, from SUNY campuses in Stony Brook and New Paltz to private institutions like Marist and Skidmore.

At Bard College in Dutchess County, students, faculty and administrators, led by the Bard Center for Civic Engagement and a student group, Election@Bard, have engaged in a quarter-century battle to ensure student voting rights, including four successful Federal and State lawsuits. The 2022 legislation was in part a result of the tumult at Bard and the egregious actions of the Dutchess County Board of Elections as outlined in two lawsuits filed in 2020 and 2021 to help bring a poll site to the Bard Campus.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This report was prepared by Jonathan Becker, Professor of Politics, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Director of the Bard Center for Civic Engagement, and students from the Bard Center for Civic Engagement, led by Natalia Novoseltseva. Novoseltseva conducted the research as a part of a fall 2023 course, “Student Voting: Power, Politics and Race in the Fight for American Democracy,” taught by Simon Gilhooley and Jonathan Becker, a course supported by the Andrew Mellon Foundation and the Open Society University Network. Novoseltseva received a research micro-grant supported by the Mellon Foundation to allow her to continue research over the winter break in 2023-2024. Others contributing to the report include Anna L., Erika Jeanty, and Christina Jones.

<sup>2</sup> Among other things, the lawsuits demonstrated that Election Commissioner Erik Haight (R) attempted to force Bard students to vote in a small church 1.5 miles from campus during the Covid election of 2020, a space the church elders even deemed unsafe and also did not meet State

## National Context: Youth Voting

The need to focus on youth voting remains acute. Despite some progress in recent years, the youth vote lags behind other demographics. While voting among 18-24 year-olds [reached 51.8% in the 2020 elections](#), a jump from [43% in 2016](#), it remained more than [10% lower than among 25-44 year-olds and 20% lower than 45 to 65 year-olds](#). In the 2022 midterms, [only 30% of 18-24 year-olds voted, nearly 15 points less than 25-44 year-olds and more than 35% less than those 65 and over](#). Registration numbers also lag: in 2022, a mere 52% of 18-24 year-olds registered to vote, 25% less than those 65 and older. Among the top reasons cited by 18-24 year-olds for not voting in 2022 is that they were [“too busy,” had “conflicting work,” and/or that voting clashed with their “school schedule” \(13.5%\), or that they were “out of town” \(28.4%\)](#).

While many students vote absentee, this remains [challenging for young people](#), as it requires them to take many steps in a convoluted process that is becoming more difficult as many states impose new restrictions. Moreover, an increasing number of states are imposing [barriers to student voting](#).

## Poll Sites on College Campuses: The Bard Study

Unfortunately, as two recent studies show, state and local election administrators have not adequately prioritized or fully implemented this critical voter protection legislation: the vast majority of colleges in New York state do not have on-campus poll sites and there has been almost no change since the passage of this legislation.

A team of Rutgers Law School clinical students, under the supervision of Professor Yael Bromberg, Esq., a leading national scholar of the 26th Amendment, and a team of students from the Rutgers International Human Rights Clinic, surveyed Boards of Election about the availability of on-campus poll sites at colleges across New York State, before and after the new mandate.<sup>3</sup> The results were not promising, indicating that there had only been a minor increase (2.2%) in the presence of on-campus poll sites between the 2018 and 2022 elections, when the law came into effect. (The law allowed for reassignments of poll sites after the State’s annual March 15 deadline for poll site designation.)

A study by the Bard Center for Civic Engagement conducted in late 2023 and early 2024 yielded similar results. The study focused on colleges with more than 1,000 undergraduate students and entailed three overlapping methods of determining whether campuses maintained and/or added poll sites: a survey of college administrators, a survey of Boards of Election, and cross-checking poll site addresses provided by Boards of Election. The need to have overlapping methodologies was rooted in the difficulties experienced in the attempt to obtain answers from county Boards of Election. Many do not have

---

requirements concerning access to public transportation - the Americans with Disabilities Act form used for the church was so inaccurate that it begged the question of whether it was a product of incompetence or malfeasance. Haight was also deemed to have been untruthful in his statement to a Supreme Court Justice in Dutchess County over the possibility and consequences of moving a poll site prior to the 2020 election. For more on the Bard case, see [Jonathan Becker and Erin Cannan, “Institution as Citizen: Colleges and Universities as Actors in Defense of Student Voting Rights,” \*Rutgers Law Review\*, Summer 2022, pp, 1870-1905](#). For further information, go to: <https://cce.bard.edu/community/election/voting-rights/>

<sup>3</sup> This survey was conducted in the spring of 2023 through inquires to county Boards of Election.

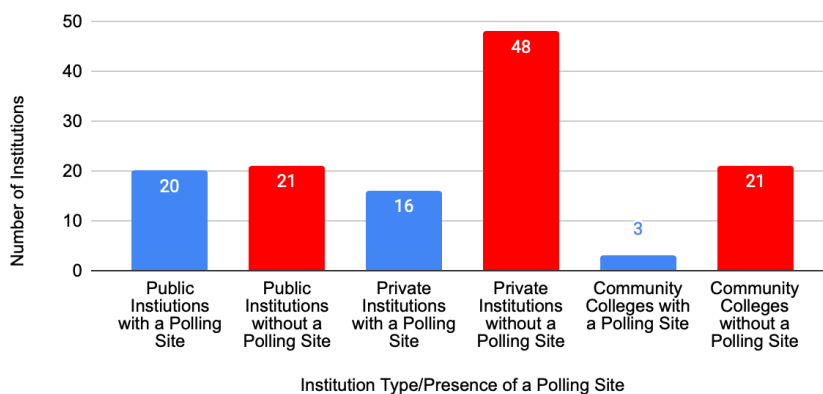
information on poll site locations on their websites, and those that do often do not indicate if the poll sites are on a college campus. Calls to Boards of Election often went unanswered. When interviewers did speak to Board representatives and requested basic public information, such as whether a poll site is situated on a college campus, answers were often withheld until a Freedom of Information Act request was filed. Even then, Freedom of Information Act requests often went unanswered.

The study found that there was negligible change between the November 2022 elections and the November 2023 elections, an interval during which, for the first time, the law mandating poll sites on college campus would be in effect for the annual March 15 State deadline for assigning poll sites. In that time, the study identified only three instances in which public and private colleges campuses added poll sites: Hostos Community College and Brooklyn College, which are part of the CUNY system, and Vassar College in Dutchess County. However, the CUNY advancement might be more due a [system initiative to promote voting and early voting sites](#) than the new law. Moreover, Vassar only gained a poll site after [litigation was initiated by a faculty member and supported by the League of Women Voters](#). This underlines the challenges and need for a more systemic response and institutional response. It should also be noted that one institution which had a poll site, St. Francis College in Brooklyn, has moved and its new campus does not yet have a poll site. Another, Keuka College, was offered an on-campus poll site according to Board of Elections officials, but demurred due to a perceived lack of appropriate space. The Madison County Board of Elections indicated that it is considering adding poll sites to Colgate University and SUNY Morrisville this round of poll assignments.

The overall picture at college campuses remains bleak. Amongst 64 private institutions surveyed, only 25% have poll sites. If we lower the student population among private institutions to those with more than 600 undergraduates, the percentage of institutions with poll sites drops to only 22%. The four-year public institutions surveyed with more than 1,000 students have better rates, at just under 50% for regular or early voting. Community Colleges that have on-campus residences have very low rates, at around 16%, though the lower density of residents helps explain this. In all, 38% of public institutions surveyed have polling sites on campus. (For further information on the individual institutions surveyed, see Appendix I and II and III).

### New York State Higher Education Institutions: Poll Sites on College Campuses 2023

From a statewide survey of undergraduate students (n>1000)



## Next Steps

The situation suggests that further intervention is needed. The State should consider further modifications to the legislation to ensure greater compliance. A coalition of voting rights and good governance groups under the banner of [Let NY Vote](#) is engaging with this issue. One area of focus needs to be county Boards of Election: if it is onerous to obtain information as simple as whether a public poll site is situated on a college campus, it is well-nigh impossible to learn whether there are 300 or more registered voters on a college campus.

As a part of an educational institution, the Bard College Center for Civic Engagement is reaching out to academic leaders across the State to intervene. Specifically, with the March 15 deadline for determining poll sites in New York State fast approaching, it is calling on the leadership of higher education institutions to engage with local Boards of Election to determine whether their campuses are eligible for a poll site. A quick checklist of actionable items includes: 1) promoting student voter registration prior to the March 15 deadline; 2) reaching out to student groups involved in voter registration, advocacy and related civic engagement efforts to encourage them to begin peer-led voter registration efforts prior to the March 15 deadline; 3) identifying suitable poll sites on campus; and 4) consulting with local Boards of Election to determine if there are 300 or more locally registered voters (students, faculty, and staff) residing on campus. In cases where there are fewer than 300 registered voters on campus, Bard still encourages institutions to host a poll site on campus where feasible, in the hope that it will inspire higher turnout for on-campus voters. A parallel effort is also underway by students from [Election@Bard](mailto:Election@Bard) and students affiliated with the Andrew Goodman Foundation, Democracy Matters and Partners for Campus and Community Engagement.

Registering students to vote and encouraging poll sites on campus are among the most important things colleges can do in addressing this issue, but they are not the only things. We also encourage colleges to reach out to such as the [Andrew Goodman Foundation](#), [Partners for Campus-Community Engagement](#), and the [ALL IN Campus Democracy Challenge](#) to help expand their outreach and engagement efforts on this important issue. Only through such steps are we going to realize the promise of the 2022 law and, more broadly, the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

For further information, go to: <https://cce.bard.edu/community/election/> or email [civic@bard.edu](mailto:civic@bard.edu).

## Appendix One: Private Institutions

### List of private institutions which had an on-campus poll site in 2023

Bard College	New York University
Canisius University	Roberts Wesleyan University
Cornell University	Rochester Institute of Technology
Iona University (only for early voting)	Skidmore College
Ithaca College	Syracuse University
Le Moyne College	The New School
Manhattan College	Vassar College
Marymount Manhattan College	Yeshiva University

### List of private institutions which did not have an on-campus poll site in 2023.

Adelphi University	New York Institute of Technology (NYIT)
Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences	Niagara University
Alfred University	Pace University
Barnard College	Pratt Institute
Clarkson University	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Colgate University	Russell Sage College
Columbia College	Sarah Lawrence College
College of Mount Saint Vincent	Siena College
D'Youville University	St. Bonaventure University
Daemen University	St. John Fisher University
Dominican University New York	St. John's University
Fordham University	St. Joseph's University, New York
Hamilton College	St. Lawrence University
Hartwick College	St. Thomas Aquinas College
Hobart and William Smith Colleges	The Belanger School of Nursing
Hofstra University	The College of Saint Rose
Keuka College	The Culinary Institute of America
Long Island University	Touro University
Manhattanville University	Trocaire College
Marist College	Union College
Mercy University	University of Rochester
Molloy University	Utica University
Mount Saint Mary College	Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology
Nazareth University	Wagner College

## Appendix II: Four Year Public Institutions

### List of four-year public institutions which had an on-campus poll site in 2023:

Baruch College	Queens College
Binghamton University	Stony Brook University
Brooklyn College	SUNY at Cortland
City College, Harlem	SUNY at Geneseo
Fashion Institute of Technology	SUNY at New Paltz
John Jay College of Criminal Justice	SUNY at Oswego
Medgar Evers College	SUNY at Plattsburgh
New York City College of Technology at MetroTech	SUNY at Purchase
NYS College of Human Ecology at Cornell	University at Albany
	York College

### List of four-year public institutions which did not have an on-campus poll site in 2023:

Alfred State College	SUNY at Old Westbury
Buffalo State University	SUNY at Oneonta
College of Staten Island	SUNY at Potsdam
Lehman College	SUNY Maritime College
SUNY at Brockport	SUNY of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell University
SUNY at Canton	
SUNY at Cobleskill	
SUNY at Delhi	SUNY Polytechnic Institute, Marcy
SUNY at Farmingdale	United States Merchant Marine Academy
SUNY at Fredonia	United States Military Academy
SUNY at Morrisville	University at Buffalo

### Appendix III. Community Colleges

#### **List of Community Colleges which had an on-campus poll site in 2023:**

Genesee Community College  
Hostos Community College  
Mohawk Valley Community College

#### **List of Community Colleges which did not have an on-campus poll site in 2023:**

Adirondack Community College	Jamestown Community College
Broome Community College	Jefferson Community College
Cayuga County Community College	Monroe Community College
Corning Community College	Niagara County Community College
Duchess Community College	North Country Community College
Finger Lakes Community College	Onondaga Community College
Fulton-Montgomery Community College	Sullivan County Community College
Herkimer County Community College	Tompkins Cortland Community College