

A Critical Civic Crossroad:

Legislative Restrictions on Civic Education in US Public Schools to Suppress a POC Electorate

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## **Introduction**

Current US Census projections suggest population demographics changing quite dramatically over the next 25 years. A Brookings Institute publication highlights 2018 census data that suggests the US will become a ‘minority white’ nation as early as 2045 (Frey, 2018). As people of color become the majority demographic in the United States, it has never been more important for US education systems to accurately reflect and incorporate these diverse, historically underrepresented, and marginalized groups. Specifically, the inclusion of these diverse perspectives in curriculums will ensure that these diverse demographics will be prepared and active members of the electorate. However, state legislatures across the country have begun to restrict the methodologies, and specifically the content, that teachers can utilize in the classroom to support and bolster these diverse demographics.

Critical Race Theory is defined by the NAACP as, “recogniz[ing] that racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice. It is embedded in laws, policies, and institutions that uphold and reproduce racial inequalities” (Fernandez, 2021). There lies a major divide among US states on the decision to embrace or reject anti-racist methodologies in the social studies classroom. The NY Times 1619 Project and the Critical Race Theory it includes have been the subject of recent scrutiny by the Texas state legislature (Svitek, 2021). Republican representatives enacted legislation that removed several potential teacher freedoms from the civic education curriculum as a, “part of a national effort by red-state legislatures to ban or limit the teaching of critical race theory.” (Svitek, 2021). Notably, this legislation dictates what can be counted for credit in the classroom. This removed credit from any classroom activity that included political advocacy and activism, discussion of current events, or work with organizations that are affiliated with lobbying or legislation (H.B. No. 3979). As state

legislatures begin to place restrictions on civic education, a heavy burden is placed on the teachers as they attempt to practice critical thinking and civic skills with their students. Civic education is vital for the classroom, and research suggests that students who complete education courses related to being involved in civic education extension programs reported a higher self-efficacy for political participation and increased the participants' likelihood to remain politically engaged long term (Pasek et al., 2008).

The damaging of critical thinking and civic skills occurs simultaneously as the US endured a national insurrection amid election and covid-19 disinformation. The ability for students to analyze disinformation and fake news has never been more necessary. Improving the current state of the US civic education programs could improve the democratic longevity of the United States as citizens can make more informed and educated decisions regarding civic decisions and policies.

This topic is of increasing relevance as state legislators attempt to restructure and reframe their social studies and civic education courses following influence from the Trump administration's 1776 Commission. This commission aimed to redefine how social studies and civic education would be taught in US schools. Following Trump's campaign mantra of "Make America Great Again", the official report was headlined, "1776 Commission Takes Historic and Scholarly Step to Restore Understanding of the Greatness of the American Founding". The report description ultimately unveils the true reason for the creation of the 1776 commission, "a dispositive rebuttal of reckless "re-education" attempts that seek to reframe American history around the idea that the United States is not an exceptional country but an evil one"(The President's Advisory 1776 Commission, 2021). The report shyly refers to the "re-education attempts" of several expanding pedagogies which emphasize anti-bias and anti-racist teaching

such as the New York Times 1619 Project, the Zinn Project, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. These organizations that have developed the curriculums within these pedagogies will further be discussed in the literature review and are often named in several state legislations I will discuss.

This essay focuses on the evolving state of civic education in the United States and the legislative actions being taken to limit the civic education curriculum in many states through bans on Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory is a concept which places race as a social concept and that racism is not just an individual's biases, but is ingrained in the legal system and policies within the United States (Sawchuk, 2021). It is heavily debated whether Critical Race Theory is actually being taught in schools and survey data from the American Association of Educators points out that just 4% of responding teachers indicated that they were required to incorporate Critical Race Theory in their curriculum (Sharkey, 2021). Nonetheless, the restrictive measures in the legislation aim to curb more than just Critical Race Theory, specifically targeting methodological practices that teachers can employ within the classroom such as discussions of controversial topics or even discussions of current events. The legislations that target Critical Race Theory would also aim to limit the ability for teachers to incorporate service-learning or experiential learning opportunities into their curriculums, diminishing the effectiveness of civic education in these states. I will analyze introduced legislation as well as enacted legislation to assess possible correlations with declines or increases in voting activity by people of color. I will be examining a central research question to better assess the current state of civic education in the United States by analyzing the introduction of anti-Critical Race Theory legislation and comparing that to voting outcomes in the correlating state. My central research question will focus on the relationship between these legislations and voter turnout, specifically, "Did states

with stronger language in the anti-Critical Race Theory legislation experience an increase in non-white voter turnout from the 2016 general election to the 2020 general election?”. This research question may expose whether states are imposing anti-Critical Race Theory legislation in attempts to stifle the democratic progress of people of color, not just to target Critical Race theory specifically.

I hypothesize that states that saw an increase in voter turnout by people of color will have stronger language in their legislation in an attempt to stifle the educational opportunities that prepare these groups for civic participation. This hypothesis is founded heavily on the survey data published by the American Association of Educators that investigated both teacher feelings regarding Critical Race Theory and whether it was actually being taught in their schools (Sharkey, 2021). In addition, recent efforts by several states that have enacted legislation to suppress voters have specifically targeted people of color and those in economically disadvantaged areas (*Voting Laws Roundup: October 2021*, 2021). It appears that these bans on Critical Race Theory may be an additional attempt of voter suppression on people of color.

### **Importance of Multi-Cultural Civic Education**

To better understand the impact of these legislative measures which target key methodological practices, I explored research from several key areas. I first drew upon research that explains the importance of varied instructional strategies in the classroom. Specifically, regarding the importance of the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the classroom as well as the value of specific civic-related classroom activities. I then explored the organizations that are explicitly named in several state legislations that were examined and their role in civic education and how it relates to improving civic education.

When examining the effectiveness of civic education in general, research suggests an expansion of diverse students' agency and inclusion in the classroom. Current research already suggests strong correlations between incorporating diverse perspectives and increases in student performance and agency in the classroom (Young, 2010). A greater emphasis has been placed on creating culturally responsive classrooms in an attempt to better address diverse students' needs in the classroom (Bonner et al, 2018), and instances of culturally responsive teaching can often be apolitical in theory, such as using rap music to teach poetry to African-American students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Bassey expands on Ladson-Billings research and provides an in-depth explanation for why teachers who focus on culturally responsive pedagogies are effective, "These teachers are successful because they utilize students' culture as a vehicle for learning; they have a strong focus on student learning; they are creative; they develop cultural competences and cultivate socio-political awareness in their students" (Bassey, 2016). While incorporating culturally responsive teaching practices, teachers typically understand the politicized nature of the content and material and capitalize on this to ensure students understand their agency in society as a whole (Bassey, 2016). With the increase in the state legislature that aims to restrict the ability of teachers to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices, the effectiveness of inclusive education for diverse demographics may be especially vulnerable. A downturn in culturally relevant pedagogies may have negative consequences on the development of students to be civically prepared for life beyond their education.

Programs such as the Zinn Project or the 1619 Project are used to emphasize an expanding curriculum that incorporates diverse and multiple perspectives to provide students of all backgrounds agency in the classroom. Organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, Zinn Project, and the New York Times' 1619 Project have been at the forefront of anti-

racist and anti-bias teaching and curriculum. The New York Times 1619 Project was created to reframe the American historical narrative to place “the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of our national narrative” (Times, 2021). The New York Times intended to center the history of the United States around 1619, the year in which slavery began in the 13 Colonies.

The Zinn Project includes a similar view of reframing American history to center around perspectives and voices of those who built America, vilifying the traditional textbook approach to social studies education. The Zinn Project works to, “emphasize the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history.” (Zinn Education Project, 2021). A key component of the Zinn Project is to focus on educational campaigns of the Black Freedom Struggle, Climate Justice, Reconstruction Era, 15th Amendment, and Abolishing Columbus Day. The most prominent of the Zinn projects has been the ‘Zinn Pledge to Teach the Truth’, a reaction campaign to the growing legislative movement that targets civic education in US schools, “that aim to prohibit teachers from teaching the truth about this country: It was founded on [the] dispossession of Native Americans, slavery, structural racism and oppression; and structural racism is a defining characteristic of our society today.” (Zinn Education Project, 2021). The Southern Poverty Law Center seeks to use its resources in a similar manner to counter the growing number of legislations and seeks to empower discriminated and marginalized voices who have been affected by systemic poverty and racism, “Children of color and those with disabilities or mental health conditions are the ones who are harmed the most by these failures — particularly as states slash funding for education and social services” (*Children’s Rights*, 2020)

## **Reforming Civic Education**

Reform is necessary in the pursuit of change, but the legislative reform surrounding Critical Race Theory may be founded in political sensationalism rather than for improving the quality and effectiveness of civic education. In *Democracy, accountability, and education* Meira Levinson argues that standards, assessments, and accountability within civic education in the United States should be used minimally as guides to facilitate greater civic training and support for students. Levinson argues that SAA's are not the center of reform for the civic education system, but rather provide an ambiguous guideline for teachers to follow. Levinson concludes that a reduction in the oversight of SAA's would allow for greater time in the classroom for teachers to focus on civic and democratic values and activities, rather than fulfilling whatever the state deems necessary. Levinson suggests intricately linking a portion of SAA's to the local community to allow for greater impact of civic skills and knowledge of community responsibility (Levinson 2011). This is very similar to David Sobell's Place-Based Education theory which suggests education is more impactful and effective when incorporating students within their surrounding community. This would include service projects, field trips, and guest speakers all within the local community (Sobel et al., 2021). When combining Sobel's community reliance with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, a teacher's educational methodology is reflective of analytical skills that are practiced within the local community (Freire & Ramos, 1993). Additional literature suggests that these educational philosophies can be used in a classroom to create effective simulation programs that model aspects of society and civic life (Hursh et al., 2000, 165-189).

These practices promote critical thinking and inquiry skills while engaging students in material that is relevant to their daily lives. Extension activities and especially content activities that rely on incorporating current events, controversial issues, political advocacy opportunities,

or service-based learning opportunities are directly targeted in several legislations indicating increased difficulties for educators to effectively conduct a civic classroom based on the most effective measures outlined in the literature review. Enacting activities or using content that is relevant to critical pedagogy and place-based theory becomes increasingly difficult to incorporate as legislation aims to restrict these elements from the classroom, although done through the targeting of Critical Race Theory.

Further research suggests that effective civic education programs prioritize service-based experience. Notably, these service experiences are with the organizations that serve vital roles and public services, a critical component of Place-based theory. The material the students learn in the classroom provides the context for why issues exist and persist in our society, then the students gain firsthand experience of the issues and potential solutions through their service (Campbell et al., 2012). Ultimately, Levinson concludes that increasing the standardization of our education system unfairly assesses students' actual learning abilities and the effectiveness of the civic education they have received (Levinson 2011). As the standardization of the education system continues, the limitations on the students seem to increase as well. However, a more accurate assessment of students' knowledge, and a more effective method of instruction, is to incorporate many of the activities that are being targeted in several pieces of legislation, specifically in Texas, Ohio, Iowa, and Louisiana which each targets current events and controversial topics.

By focusing on areas with higher rates of poverty that have lower access to civic opportunities, civic education reform can reshape the school environment to work symbiotically with the community to teach civic engagement skills while also working to reduce the poverty rates within the communities (Syeed and Noguera, 2014). Ultimately, this article supported an

equity-based approach to reforming education. However, the current proposed legislation seeks to diminish the ability for equitable treatment of all students. Aside from targeting Critical Race Theory, which is only required to be taught in a small number of schools per the American Association of Educators, these legislations seek to diminish the impact of racism and slavery on the development of the United States. These legislations also aim to diminish the ability for teachers to incorporate elements of Place-based education into their curriculum. By removing service learning opportunities from the classroom, the option to integrate the classroom with the community is removed, resulting in potentially negative impacts in regards to the quality of civic education students receive

Levinson specifically pinpoints five critical reforms that should be at the forefront of education reform to target de facto segregated schools. I argue that three of these reforms are most critical for the reformation of the current civic education system; reforming history education to help students construct empowering civic narratives that simultaneously cohere with their lived experiences and impel them to civic and political action (similar to that of Critical Race Theory), provide students frequent opportunities to engage in empowering civic practices (similar to the Theory of Place-based education by David Sobel), and the need to provide powerful civic learning and engagement opportunities for urban teachers. (Levinson 2010, 332-337).

As Levinson provides the context for the limitations and possibilities of the education system as a whole, Rehfeld poses three unique participatory pathways for students; fractional voting, national electoral constituencies, and political spending accounts. Rehfeld bases many of his claims on the improvement of students' political maturity, both cognitive and functional, to improve their civic participation and education at younger ages (Rehfeld 2011). Many of

Rehfeld's suggestions align closely with those of the Place-based education of Sobel, mainly highlighting the need for service-based learning opportunities to fully engage students in an effective civic education program. Rehfeld also concedes that providing legitimate political power to those who are politically immature may hold negative consequences for the whole, thus the need for greater civic involvement is key in developing political maturity. However, as legislative efforts continue in their attempts to limit the control teachers have over their own pedagogies and methodologies through Critical Race Theory bans, teachers may lose the ability to properly explain civic concepts to these vital demographics.

## **Methods**

My initial research into the effectiveness of civic education began as an evaluation of students' feelings towards the civic education they had received and whether they felt it had sufficiently prepared them for their role as active and informed citizens. A pilot study was conducted in the spring of 2021 to assess whether recent graduates of public schools felt prepared to participate in civic engagements such as registering to vote, voting, and keeping up with the latest current events. I was interested to see whether there was a correlation between civic education and an increase in political turnout; specifically, could an effective civic education increase voter participation or increase civic involvement overall. Results of this pilot study indicated that students who had taken required civic courses felt significantly less prepared for civic engagements. Individuals attributed their lack of preparedness to the civic education they had received. Individuals expressed that the material was either provided at too early of an age or was biased. Respondents also stated that their education was not inclusive to varied perspectives and did not incorporate experiential learning that would have made the experience effective.

This pilot study indicated that students who experienced elements of place-based theory education or critical pedagogy felt more prepared to participate in civic engagements. Whether they were better prepared than another student may not necessarily matter, so long as students felt confident to participate they were more likely to seek out political engagements and become more educated on their own time. Experiential service-learning opportunities and the inclusion of varied perspectives are beneficial in helping students grapple with civic issues, yet the proposed legislation of 21 states would limit these opportunities. The aforementioned research indicated the value of service-learning and experiential learning opportunities as effective measures for increasing students' understanding of civic issues and the development of civic skills. I then began to assess whether the states which were enacting these specific legislations were doing so in response to an increase in voter turnout by people of color. Stifling the ability to educate and motivate people of color on civic topics could be an effective measure to limit their political participation.

In order to properly investigate my research question, I first needed to examine the legislation that had already been passed as well as the legislation that had already been enacted in order to understand exactly what the bills were targeting. I began by compiling the current body of existing legislations and sorted them into groups whether they had been passed into law or had been introduced into the state legislatures (Figure 1). Currently, seven states have enacted legislation that bans Critical Race Theory from schools; Idaho, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Iowa, Texas, Arkansas, Arizona. North Carolina and Wisconsin each had bills pass their state legislatures, but North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper vetoed the bill and Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers is also expected to veto the proposed legislation. Among this legislation, an additional 12 states have introduced bills attempting to ban Critical Race Theory. Currently, only

Delaware has enacted legislation that prioritizes Critical Race Theory concepts in the classroom. Notably, Delaware places an emphasis on Black History and the significance of racism and racial superiority throughout US history and the founding of the United States. I began with Idaho as this was the first state to pass legislation and then quickly found the Tennessee legislation had several key phrases which were repeated in 14 of the 21 legislations.

Enacted Legislation	Introduced Legislation	Pending Legislation	Dead Legislation	Special Case
Alabama	Kentucky	Louisiana	North Carolina	Montana
Arizona	Michigan	Missouri	Mississippi	
Arkansas	South Carolina	New Hampshire	Wisconsin	
Idaho		Pennsylvania		
Iowa		Utah		
Oklahoma		West Virginia		
Tennessee				
Texas				

Figure 1: Breakdown of Legislation by State

I then examined the legislation and coded for keywords that would be reflective of civic education and the limitations the bills would impose. I grouped my key words into 3 sections; Organizational words, Politicized words, and Educational content words. For the Organization words I included the main contributors to Critical Race Theory and organizations which have focused on increasing anti-racist teachings and pedagogies: Critical Race Theory, New York Times 1619 Project, Southern Poverty Law Center, Zinn Project. For the Politicized words, I focused on language that would signal stronger emotion among those with political interest as survey data from AAE indicated “78 % [of respondents] agree outside factors, including sensationalized headlines are interfering with a productive and necessary discussion regarding race in America” (Sharkey, 2021): divisive concepts, fundamental or systemic racism, guilt, inherently (responsible or racist), overthrow, scapegoat or bears responsibility. I then examined

keywords based on their relation to the actual educational environment, focusing on what teachers would use to effectively teach a civic curriculum: activism, advocacy, controversial issues, current events, credit, service-learning. The cumulative total of keywords for each state was then compared and ranked from lowest to highest.

Following this, I then referenced the Brookings Institute compilation of the US Census bureau's statistics on voter turnout for 2016 and 2020. This data set listed the non-white voter turnout breakdown for the 2016 and 2020 Presidential elections. I chose to specifically focus on the voter registration percentage and turnout of non-white voters to better assess my research question, "Did states with stronger language in the anti-Critical Race Theory legislation experience an increase in non-white voter turnout from the 2016 general election to the 2020 general election?". Using this data, I was then able to compare the voter turnout rates to the total number of cumulative keywords to see if any significant results would indicate an increase in non-white voter turnout and either states introducing or enacting the legislation in question.

## **Results**

Following the compilation of the necessary data sets and information, I began to evaluate my data. After calculating the total number of keywords per legislation and ranking them lowest to highest (lowest being least strong language and highest being strongest language), I found the legislations ranged from 3 keyword hits (Arizona) to 38 (Montana) and had a median number of keywords at 6 total (Figure 2). I found it important to use the median number of keywords as opposed to the average because of outlier states like Montana and Arizona.

State	# of total key word hits	Key Words	Total
Arizona - Passed	3	<b>Organization Words</b>	
Idaho - Passed	3	Zinn Project	1
Michigan - Introduced	3	Southern Poverty Law Center	1
Oklahoma - Passed	4	1619 Project	3
Alabama - Passed	5	Critical Race Theory	24
Utah - Introduced	5	<b>Education Content Words</b>	
Wisconsin - Introduced	5	Political Activism	1
South Carolina - Introduced	6	Service Learning	1
North Carolina - Vetoed	6	Current Events	3
Pennsylvania - Introduced	6	Controversial Issues	5
West Virginia - Introduced	6	Advocacy	9
Tennessee - Passed	7	Credit	9
Missouri - Introduced	8	<b>Politicized Words</b>	
Kentucky - Introduced	9	Overthrow	2
Arkansas - Passed	11	Fundamental or Systemic Racism	8
Texas - Passed	15	Guilt	10
Ohio - Introduced	15	Divisive Concepts	18
Rhode Island - Introduced	15	Scapegoat / bears responsibility / bears guilt	27
New Hampshire - Introduced	16	Inherently (responsible, racist, superior/inferior)	58
Iowa - Passed	17		
Louisiana - Introduced	20		
Montana - Banned by DA	38		

Figure 2: Total Number of Keywords per Legislation and Total Amount of Individual Keywords

When examining overall trends in change of non-white voter turnout among states with the enacted legislature, states such as Alabama, Oklahoma, and Arkansas saw declines in voter turnout among non-white voters (Figure 3). Examining specific states, I compared the change in voter turnout from 2016 to 2020 of the states that had passed anti-Critical Race Theory legislation and found that Tennessee had the largest increase in percent change. In 2016, Tennessee had a non-white voter turnout of 44.3% and increased by 19% to 63.3% in the 2020 election. This was the largest percent increase of all states, even surpassing Georgia who experienced a moderate increase of 4.7% amid Stacey Abrams Fair Fight campaign to mobilize non-white voters. Tennessee's dramatic increase is interesting specifically because it demonstrates a state that has enacted legislation that may make it more difficult for non-white voters to become prepared to participate in the civic processes. While Tennessee was the

standout in terms of total percent change among non-white voter turnout, it also had the 10th strongest language of the 22 bills examined with a total of 7 keyword hits. Tennessee's landmark legislation established critical phrases that were adopted by multiple other states when they introduced their legislation, and for one state to easily influence other states to enact harsher or more specifically defined legislation may lead to increasingly strict measures against civic education.

When examining the remainder of the states with enacted legislation, Arizona held the fewest amount of total keywords with 3 yet held one of the highest increases in non-white voter turnout at 16.7%. Alabama and Idaho followed Arizona with the second and third least strong language indicated by keyword hits of 5 each. Alabama displayed a decrease of roughly 3% and Idaho bolstered its non-white turnout percentage by 6 points.

Arkansas and Oklahoma also saw steep declines in non-white voter turnout but varied in the strength of the language in the bills. Arkansas had the 8th strongest language with a total of 11 keyword hits and Oklahoma ranked among the lowest at 18 with 4 keyword hits. Texas had the 7th strongest language among all bills with 15 keyword hits, as the state experienced an increase in overall non-white voter turnout from 2016 to 2020 by 9.1 percent. In total, seven of the examined states experienced declines in non-white voter turnout while 14 states experienced increases in non-white voter turnout. Nationally, the US experienced an overall increase in non-white voter turnout by 5.7% from the 2016 election and when comparing this with the increase in youth voter turnout of 6.6%, it appears that the electorate is becoming more active among non-white and youth demographics. However, if these legislations can limit the effectiveness of civic education in schools, these percentages may begin to drastically decrease in the following years.

	States	Nonwhite Voter Turnout			Key Words
		2016	2020	% change	
x	Montana (DA only)	52	62.2	10.20%	38
-	Louisiana	60.3	57.3	-3%	20
x	Iowa	47.2	50.1	2.90%	17
-	New Hampshire	54	46.4	-7.60%	16
x	Texas	46.5	55.6	9.10%	15
-	Arkansas	52.9	42.8	-10.10%	11
x	Kentucky	58.9	60.4	1.50%	9
x	Missouri	59.5	61.9	2.40%	8
x	Tennessee	44.3	63.3	19%	7
-	North Carolina	63.4	61.2	-2.2	6
-	South Carolina	63.2	52.1	-11.1	6
x	Pennsylvania	59.4	63.8	4.40%	6
x	West Virginia	51.3	55.7	4.40%	6
-	Alabama	58.2	54.9	-3.30%	5
x	Wisconsin	47.1	52.3	5.20%	5
x	Utah	50.2	52.8	2.60%	5
-	Oklahoma	45.7	42.4	-3.30%	4
x	Arizona	47.2	63.9	16.70%	3
x	Michigan	55.4	62.2	6.80%	3
x	Idaho	43	49.2	6.20%	3
x	Mississippi	67.8	71	3.20%	X

Figure 3: Percent change of non-white voter turnout between the 2016 and 2020 General Election

## Discussion

My results indicate that the relationship between critical race theory or civic education overall and civic participation is complicated. My central research question was, “Did states with stronger language in the anti-Critical Race Theory legislation experience an increase in non-white voter turnout from the 2016 general election to the 2020 general election?”. After examining the data and research, I can reject my initial hypothesis that US states with larger increases in non-white voter turnout would have legislation with stronger language in an attempt to stifle the progress of the non-white electorate.

This is evident as there was no clear pattern between states with higher totals of keywords, which was the indicator for the strength of legislative language, and the percent change in non-white voter turnout. Alabama, Oklahoma, and Arkansas each experienced a decline in non-white voter turnout with -3.3 percent, -10.10 percent, and -3.3 percent

respectively. Additionally, Oklahoma and Alabama ranked near the bottom of all states with only 4 and 5 keywords respectively. Arkansas was an interesting example because while it did experience a decline in non-white voter turnout, it ranked near the top of all states with 11 total keywords. While examining the five states which experienced an increase in non-white voter turnout, Tennessee and Texas experienced some of the highest percent change of voter turnout with increases of 16.6 and 9.1 percent respectively. These two states also saw a modest amount of total keywords with Tennessee achieving just about the median with 7 keywords and Texas with the second-highest total among the enacted states with 15 keywords. While investigating the final three states with enacted legislation, I also experienced mixed results. When examining the legislation for the total number of keywords, Arizona and Idaho each ranked near the bottom of all states with 3 keywords each, yet Arizona had one of the highest increases in non-white voter turnout of all US states with 16.7 percent. Iowa ranked near the bottom of all states when examining the percent change of non-white voter turnout with a modest 2.9 percent increase, but had the third-highest amount of keywords with 17.

What this research may indicate is that the Critical Race Theory legislation and overall controversy in civic education may be more heavily focused on a politicized issue of racism in schools and how schools should teach about the founding of the nation, as first noted by the AAE survey. Legislations were more likely to include language from the Politicized section of keywords than the Educational Content section of keywords (Figure 2). This indicates that all legislations examined are focused on framing how the founding of the US is taught and ensuring that the founding is not explained as or linked to systemic racism. However, legislation such as Texas, Ohio, Tennessee, and Iowa do include provisions that limit the educational content such as service-learning, current events, or controversial topics. Whether explicitly restricting specific

teaching practices or not, all of the legislation examined aims to control some elements of the civic education classroom, and based on the research explained in the literature review, these reforms are not the type that would benefit civic education.

With a better focus, this research could be expanded upon to examine the specific language and phrases of the legislation that have been passed and compare that to legislation that is just being introduced or is currently pending approval. Specifically, examining the Tennessee legislation and seven of its key phrases that are repeated verbatim in more than half of the introduced legislation.

Additionally, this research could be further expanded upon to investigate the impact of the legislation on youth voter turnout. According to research published by Tufts University's Tisch College Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, youth voter participation rates were higher in 2020 than in previous elections (*2020 Youth Voter Turnout by Race/Ethnicity and Gender*, 2021). The CIRCLE research also indicated that of all youth demographics, white youth had the highest voter turnout. Civic participation among youths is on the rise following the 2020 election, yet as the overall demographic becomes more diverse a greater emphasis is placed on mobilizing and educating youth from diverse backgrounds. Critical Race Theory legislation aims to deter experiential student learning opportunities, imposing greater barriers on what educators can do in the classroom will only lead to an increasingly uneducated and uninterested electorate.

Overall, it is clear that a greater focus on civic education is necessary to spur civic engagement, although limiting educators' ability to facilitate civics in their classrooms may only damper the effectiveness of civic education. In order to appropriately examine this research project, this research study would include a time lag to appropriately assess the effectiveness of

the education students receive. Prominent educational researcher Lewis Solomon explains a variety of ‘lag’ measures that are necessary to integrate as a result of the legislative process as well as the implementation processes in districts and classrooms. Solomon argues that the reform process must be investigated with patience and recurrently over multiple years after the reform is implemented (Solmon, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

Contributing to the reform process are a multitude of agents from students and their families to their teachers and their teacher’s unions, but legislators and public officials also direct policy and funding. With so many different stakeholders within the civic system, one coherent plan or path will not rise above the others, but the reformation process will be a combination of factors, theories, and perspectives. Reform measures should be targeted specifically to impoverished areas where education inequality is higher, as well as in the segregated school districts that are still prevalent around the country. Bolstering reform, not imposing restrictions, may be key in improving the overall quality of civic education in the United States.

These legislations examined appear to be more reactionary to a growing social movement that raises awareness of the darker elements of US history. While not all of these legislations directly restrict the activities a teacher can utilize in a classroom, they all impose a specific historical narrative onto the classroom and limit the ability for teachers to have full agency in their classroom. Through the introduction of these limitations, the possible ramifications for future generations of non-white students may lead to decreased political involvement as a result of their lackluster and ineffective civic education. Increasing reform measures that prioritize these communities instead of restricting them will result in a more active and more representative electorate.

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