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"It's important to just have your voice heard": Young voters' change perception of political efficacy

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"IT'S IMPORTANT TO JUST HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD": YOUNG VOTERS'

CHANGING PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL EFFICACY

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Abstract

Youth voter turnout in Iowa spiked in the 2018 midterm election. This paper attempts to figure out why. By replicating a 2004 study examining the voting behavior of young Iowans during the 2002 midterms, this study identified significant shifts in how young voters think and communicate about voting. After conducting 37 open-ended interviews with 18-24-year-olds, it was found that although young people identified many of the same concerns in 2018 as they had in 2002, they were far more likely to vote. Respondents were more likely to identify the consummatory effects of voting, which in turn led to an increase in the identification of the instrumental effects of voting. Additionally, respondents were more likely to identify voice as an important reason for their vote, which further augmented the high turnout rates. This paper argues that their belief in the efficacy of their vote contributes to their more optimistic outlook on politics.

Introduction

Many things have changed since 2002: the Space Shuttle program was shuttered, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat were all launched, and the United States elected both an African-American and a famous businessman with no government experience as president. Some things remain the same, though: youth are still portrayed negatively in media, and young people continue to vote at rates that lag behind other demographic groups, particularly those who are in older age categories (Golshan, 2018; Bashein, Cheney-Rice, Schonbek & Whitford, 2018; Perry, 2018). For example, in 2016, over 70 percent of registered voters over the age of 64 voted, while just over 45 percent of people aged 18-29 voted (File, 2017).

The elections of 2008 and 2016 have had a profound impact on the political socialization of many younger voters, who were coming to age during these two elections. There was a slight increase in youth turnout in 2016 (46.1 percent) over 2012, but it was lower than the levels in 2008 (File, 2017; NextGen, 2017). Interestingly, they only voted for the Democratic candidate for President, Hillary Clinton, at a 55 percent clip, which was significantly lower than their support for Obama in 2008 and 2012, respectively (66 and 60 percent) (NextGen, 2017).

In the 2018 midterm elections, record numbers of voters showed up at the polls. In Iowa, 37.76 percent of voters aged 18-24 vote, which is a significant increase over the 2014 midterm elections, which had 23.6 percent turnout rate among younger voters; however, it is still significantly lower than the 78.47 percent of 65 and older voters who voted (Iowa Secretary of State, 2019b; Iowa of State, 2015). Overall, turnout was around 61 percent in Iowa (Iowa Secretary of State, 2019b). Voters aged 18-24 were slightly more likely to be registered as a Democrat (61,413) than as a Republican (59, 332), but were far more likely to be registered with neither party (123, 659) (Iowa Secretary of State, 2019b).

Even though young voters' turnout percentages have lagged behind, it has not deterred people from studying this group. As Kiesa et al. (2007) wrote, the millennial generation (those born between 1985 and 2004) is the future of the United States and studying their voting habits is important if our democracy is to remain representative. One of the first major elections they were able to vote in was 2004 when their turnout increased, and this was followed by another uptick in youth voting in the 2006 midterm elections (Kiesa et al., 2007). One such study was the one that this paper was based on; it was conducted during the 2002 election and was published in 2004, and focused on college-aged voters and nonvoters in Black Hawk County.

To see if anything has changed, interviews were conducted with residents of Black Hawk County, because they were attending school at the University of Northern Iowa, in Cedar Falls. In Black Hawk County, 44.32 percent of registered voters aged 18-24 voted (Iowa Secretary of State, 2019a). Overall, 60.04 percent of all registered voters in Black Hawk Co. voted in the 2018 election, compared to 61.55 percent of all registered voters in the state (Iowa Secretary of State, 2018).

When embarking on this project, it was not known that the midterm election would have such high turnout, and anticipated minimal enthusiasm overall, comparable to 2002. This paper sought to find if any differences existed between young voters in 2002 and young voters in 2018, and if so, what those were. While many things remained the same, there were also significant differences, that if they are not an anomaly, may significantly impact people's views on how young voters perceive politics, and impact how campaigns must reach out to young voters to mobilize them.

Literature Review

A similar study conducted in 2002 found that there were two main themes as to why youth were not voting: attitudinal barriers and structural barriers. Structural barriers have only increased since 2002, causing college students to have higher costs of voting due to registration restrictions that some states place on them (Richman & Page, 2010). However, Iowa is one of the few states that makes it easy for college students to vote, as they allow college students to vote either at college or at home, allow same-day registration, and allow for voters to request absentee ballots (O'Loughlin & Unangst, 2006; Iowa Secretary of State, 2016). Richman and Pate (2010) also found that states that have registration deadlines that are farther out from Election Day have lower turnout levels than states that have closer days; Iowa has same-day registration (Iowa Secretary of State, 2016). However, the effects of restrictions impact students who are on the fence more than those that have already decided whether to vote or not (Richman & Pate, 2010). They also found that whether a student works, and how much they work, impacts their likelihood of voting; those that work full-time tend to vote less, as they have more time-constraints, while those who work part-time tend to vote more (Richman & Pate, 2010).

Attitudinal barriers are characterized as those attitudes that "negatively impact participation", while those characterized as structural barriers are those impediments in the actual process of voting (Palczewski et. al, 2004, 48). However, the literature to which the study responded focused primarily on readings that talked about negative aspects of youth non-voting, not how youth could be or were engaged in other forms of civic life (Cooper, 2000; Hollihan, 2001). The studied also used the terms 'consummatory effects' and 'instrumental effects'. Consummatory effects are the reasons as to why people vote when they receive no tangible reward; however, they may be rewarded through the act of actually voting, such as fulfilling their

civic duty (Lake, 1983; Palczewski et al., 2004). Instrumental effects, conversely, are the reasons as to why people vote when they do receive a tangible reward, such as a beneficial policy or seeing someone getting elected into office (Lake, 1983; Palczewski et al., 2004). Attitudinal barriers are directly related to levels of both internal and external political efficacy. Internal political efficacy is the belief that one has the capacity to process political information and participate in the political process (Ruxton & Saunders, 2016; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). External efficacy, meanwhile, is the belief that one has influence over the political process and that the government is responsive to them (Ruxton & Saunders, 2016; Kahne & Westheimer, 2006).

There are several factors that affect the development of political efficacy. Langton and Karns (1969) found that multiple factors contribute to the development of political efficacy, but it also depends on the people's prior levels of political efficacy. School was very effective at helping develop efficacy, particularly in those who had low efficacy (Langton & Karns, 1969). In particular, social connections seem to be very important. Family was a significant factor, especially among lower socioeconomic classes, but had an impact among members of all social classes (Langton & Karns, 1969). Beaumont (2011) found that growing up in a politically involved household was one of the most important factors for developing a sense of political efficacy. Kiesa et al. (2007) found that the main reason many younger people voted was because their parents also voted. Langton & Karns (1969) found another factor in developing political efficacy, peer groups, was especially helpful in moving people from all social classes from medium efficacy to high efficacy. Relatedly, there is a reciprocal relationship between voting and participating in campaigns and external political efficacy (Finkel, 1985).

Race also impacts political efficacy. Beaumont (2011) found that those who were white and had higher education attainment (or whose parents also had high educational attainment) demonstrated more political confidence. Interestingly, they found that some other factors have found as significant, such as gender, socioeconomic status, or race, have little impact on political efficacy (Beaumont, 2011). Other sources have found that because people of color believe the government does not respond to their needs as it does to the needs of whites, they may have lower external efficacy (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). Conversely, Lopez et al. (2006) found that African-Americans had very high levels of political engagement. Race is particularly determinant in who may vote; whites and Asians were much more likely to register and vote than were Latinos and African-Americans (Callahan, Schiller, & Muller, 2010). However, Herner (2018) found that young black males were the most likely to vote of any racial group, and young Asians were the least likely; however, this may be an anomaly, as the data used for the analysis was collected during the 2008 election, which coincided with the election of the first African-American president.

School also has an impact, whether it be academic performance or involvement in extracurricular activities. It should be noted that an academic and participation gap exists between various students. This is caused partially unequal education opportunities; students who have more disposable income and white students tend to have more opportunities than non-white and poorer students (Damico, Damico, & Conway, 1998; Beaumont, 2011, Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012; Herner, 2018). However, these programs can have an impact on any individual student. Damico et al. (1998) found that being involved in high school extracurricular activities increased the likelihood that one would be active in the community, be knowledgeable about politics, and would participate in the political process. Callahan et al.

(2010) had similar findings when studying the academic performances of students; those that were higher-performing were much more likely to participate than those who were not as high-performing. There was also a relationship between grades in social studies classes and the likelihood to participate in politics in the future (Callahan et al., 2010). In general, those who have higher educational attainment were more likely to vote than those with lower educational attainment (Richman & Pate, 2010).

Both barriers and low levels of political efficacy may have a large impact on turnout. Turnout is also impacted by a variety of factors, including gender, race, age, education level, and school socioeconomic status (Richman & Pate, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Lopez et al., 2007). The barriers, in combination with college students' low levels of political efficacy, may leave little incentive for them to participate (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Kiesa et al., 2007). This is troubling, as voting is a habit-formed behavior (Gerber, Green, & Shachar, 2003; Shea & Green, 2004). In presidential elections, turnout has ranged from 52 percent in 1992 to 39.6 percent in 1996 for the 18-29 age range (File, 2017). Overall turnout since 1980 has generally declined, particularly within the non-Hispanic white demographic (File, 2017). Future models are not that optimistic, either; Callahan et al. (2010) found that there was only a 47 percent chance a young adult (in their late teens or early 20s) would both register to vote and follow-through on voting. Politicians are taking notice to this trend, as almost 90 percent of political party leaders thought that low youth engagement was a large problem, but they tended to be passive about getting them to actually vote (Shea & Green, 2004). Even though politicians are taking notice, there is a perception that politicians do not care about younger voters (Kiesa et al., 2007). This may be because politicians do not rely on younger voters' support for reelection, and thus young voters are typically not included in mobilization

efforts (Benenson, Brower, & Thomas, 2016). Shea and Green (2004) pointed to the fact that many party leaders felt that reaching young voters was difficult.

Low turnout levels may be affected by falling trust levels in government by citizens of all ages; this leads to low levels of external efficacy (Ruxton & Saunders, 2016). This leads into Rosenstone and Hansen's (2003) argument, in that if one has low efficacy, it will be even less likely that they see the benefits of voting outweigh the costs of voting. Even if one does have a high level of internal efficacy, they may not view voting as effective if they possess a low level of external efficacy (Pollack, 1983). Further, many younger voters do not have a strong partisan affiliation, which leads to lower participation, as partisans tend to be more likely to participate in campaigns and vote than independents (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Lipsitz, Trost, Grossmann, & Sides, 2005). Additionally, young voters may believe that their voices are not being heard and see politics as a way for current leaders to retain power and influence, or that politics is just meant for older adults (Bennett, 2008; Skelton, 2010). They also do not have resources to create large social networks, which further lowers the chance that they will vote (Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Callahan et al., 2010).

Politicians may also be struggling with the fact that young voters' construct of citizenship (and being a good citizen) may be changing. Bennett (2008) classifies older voters as dutiful citizens and young voters as actualizing citizens. In these 'actualizing' citizens, participation is based on loosely-networked groups, and is not anchored in the belief that voting is the most powerful tool that is available to them to create change, though many still believe that it is important and can play a role (Bennett, 2008; Chareka & Sears, 2006; Kiesa et al., 2007). However, these youth may fail to realize that activism and voting may be more closely related than they may realize (Earl & Schussman, 2008). Even so, youth have been more engaged in

what is called "little p" politics (Kahne, Crow, & Lee, 2013; Kiesa et al., 2007). One reason that they may prefer this alternative type of politics is that they are deterred by the political climate, which they feels hampers real change (Kiesa et al., 2007). Jennings and Stoker (2004) believe that the youth have lower social capital and low levels of engagement due to being similar to Generation X, which has much lower levels of engagement and capital compared to the previous generation, and due to the period in their lives.

However, engagement levels may not be as down as many suspect. Levels of civic engagement vary depending on the definitions and metrics that are used. Jennings and Stoker (2004) set three criteria to help measure civic engagement: social trust, membership in voluntary organizations, and volunteer work. If one uses volunteering and activism involvement, it has gone up, as college students are more active in these activities than members of previous generations, but if one looks at traditional party involvement and voting, it has gone down; this has matched a society-wide decline in civic society membership and interpersonal social trust (Bennett, 2008; Xenos & Foot, 2008; Levine, 2008; Bers, 2008; Kiesa et al., 2007; Jennings & Stoker, 2004). Other views of citizenship now are more inclusive to life in the online world, as some scholars have included contributions to blogs and wikis as a mark of civic engagement (Levine, 2008). However, the increase in volunteerism may be due to the fact that schools now require it more than they have in the past due to the changing structure of high schools and graduation requirements; much of this work is done in fields that are heavily impacted by politics, such as education, health care, and helping the needy (Kiesa et al., 2007). Many students ended up feeling that volunteering was more effective to enact change than voting (Kiesa et al., 2007). Herner (2018) found that females were slightly more likely to volunteer than males, and whites were more likely to volunteer than Asians, and one way to get people to volunteer is to

increase their social circles and social capital. Lopez et al. (2006) found that nearly one-fifth of all young voters had not done any civic engagement activities in the past year.

When conditions are right, young voters do get involved and can have an impact on the election. In 2006, a strong Democratic year, young people canvassed more than adults did (Lopez et al., 2006). The authors also highlighted how young people were engaged. They found that young people were more likely to engage in boycotts, buycotts, protests, or petitioning than in traditional forms of political expression (Lopez et al., 2006). Organizations with an active voter mobilization effort, like NextGen, found that mobilization efforts, using tools such as texting, phone class, direct mail, and digital ads, did have an impact on young voters for 2016 (NextGen, 2017). Individual states have gotten involved to get young voters engaged. Methods ranged from the non-political, such as included volunteering in the community with a partner organization, online blogs, leadership institutes, scholarship programs to traditionally political methods, such as voting registration drives, mobile bus registration, knocking doors, collecting absentee ballots, fundraising, phone calls, attending conferences and conventions, and party organizations on campus; what was important is that young voters felt like they were making a difference (Shea & Green, 2004).

By drawing on the Palczewski et al. (2004) paper that studies youth voting behavior in the 2002 election, and the research that has been published since, this paper attempts to identify how young voters in Iowa make sense of their participation in the electoral process, as well as how those perceptions have changed since the 2002 election.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature, with the data being collected through 37 interviews. The interviews were conducted with young people aged 18-24 who were eligible to vote in the 2018 midterm election and were residing in Black Hawk County, Iowa, at the time of the interview. Participants were recruited from various classes at the University of Northern Iowa during the Fall 2018 Semester. In order to create a broad sample, participants were recruited from classes offered in several departments, as well as lower and upper division courses. The interviews took place from mid-October to early November 2018, and all of them took place before Election Day on November 6, 2018. Originally, the goal was to have at least 30 respondents; while there is no exact size for theoretical saturation in this context, thirty participants would have been an ample amount to have distinct themes emerge (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012). The positive response to the willingness to be interview was greater than anticipated, so all willing respondents were interviewed.

Before the research was conducted, the author/interviewer was trained in accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, and IRB approval was granted to the research application. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, with an interview guided by a list of open-ended questions to ask (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015). Semi-open interviews were used as the mode of data collection so answers could be compared but respondents had the freedom to tell their story, to add depth behind the simple statistics and poll numbers, and to provide greater detail and variety in answers than a survey would. Open-ended questions "offer richer information than existing surveys" and "allow people to respond in their own words and encourage detailed and in-depth answers" (Palczewski et al., 2004, p. 52; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015, p. 67). Because of the desire to collect this richer information, interviews

were conducted in a one-on-one setting between the interviewer and interviewee. This choice was made as interviews conducted on an individual setting are more likely to be open and upfront than those in a group setting (Gubrium et al., 2012). Lastly, this structure was used to mirror the 2004 paper, in order to provide an opportunity to compare and contrast the results.

The first question asked of each interviewee was be "Do you plan to vote in the 2018 election?"After interviewees answer, the investigator will then follow with "Why or why not?" As stated above, additional questions followed those two questions, depending on the answers given. Interviews were recorded after consent was given on the interviewer's iPad Air with a simple voice memo application; each participant chose their own pseudonym to be used thereafter. Interviews lasted between 4 and 20 minutes; this was due to the breadth and length of interviewees' answers.

After interviews were completed, the investigator transcribed each interview verbatim and then performed data analysis under Saldaña's (2013) two-cycle coding method. In this, the investigator based the coding on the text and not their own preconceptions (Blair, 2015). The first cycle of coding comprised of reading through the interview texts multiple times, marking and annotating the transcript, creating a codebook, and then conducting a final reading (Saldaña, 2013). By reading the interviews multiple times, the researcher could fully grasp the data, while the marking and annotation phase was be done several times so differences and discrepancies could be compared, contrasted, and rectified (Saldaña, 2013). A final reading phase was then completed to make sure that all relevant data was included in the code analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

The second cycle consisted of a meta-analysis of the codes; that is, the codes from the that had been gathered from the first cycle were organized into broad concept categories. This approach is based on Saldaña's (2013) two-cycle coding method. As Saldaña (2013) wrote, "the

primary goal during Second Cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization" with first cycle codes; as such, there will be fewer codes. The second cycle was also completed multiple times, to ensure that any discrepancies were found, clarified, and rectified. After the second cycle was completed, the meta-categories were compiled, and a general theory was found for the question that was posed (Saldaña, 2013).

The sample consisted of 16 males and 21 females, and all but one were white. Like the 2004 study, this primarily gives insight into white American college students and is not representative of the diversity of the country at-large. However, it is fairly representative of the demographics of the campus of the University of Northern Iowa, which was over 90 percent white as recently as 2016 (Peterson & Hoing, 2017).

Results

A sizeable majority of respondents at least planned on voting. Although the author did not follow up with participants to see who did or did not actually vote, of the 37 people that were interviewed, 34 said that they had already voted (absentee or satellite voting) or were planning to vote by election day. The other three said they were unsure if they would end up voting or not in this election, but had voted in some type of election in the past. Even though the midterm election of 2018 had extraordinarily high turnout levels, having 92 percent of respondents say they planned to vote was surprisingly high. This was particularly interesting given that respondents who planned to vote in 2018 identified many of the same concerns that led young people to not vote in 2002.

As found in the previous paper, voters stated or implied that they voted for either consummatory or instrumental reason. However, there was a significant shift in their identification of such reasons, in that far more voters identified a consummatory reason to vote.

In fact, 25 people identified a consummatory effect, and nearly all voters identified some sort of instrumental effect of voting, either through an explicit reason (such as "I want to see a change") or through identifying an issue that they hoped their vote affected. In the previous paper, it was noted that the identification of the consummatory effects of voting increased the overall probability that someone would then identify an instrumental effect of voting, which thus made it more likely that they would then vote (Palczewski et al., 2004). As such, it makes sense that as more people identified consummatory effects they would be more likely to vote.

Recognition of Consummatory Effects

The recognition of consummatory effects seemed to play a large role in the increase of the percentage of respondents who planned to vote. 13 of the 37 people interviewed solely identified a consummatory reason to of why they were voting, while 12 identified both consummatory and instrumental reasons. Respondents ended up identifying many of the same consummatory reasons that voters had in 2002, which included: responsibility to previous generations, duty to future generations, duty to country, voting as a precondition to complaint, and voice. There was one noticeable change from 2002, respondents placed a high value on having their voices heard.

        Responsibility to previous generations.

A few respondents mentioned that voting was a duty because people had fought for it in the past, and they wanted to honor that sacrifice. John was one of these respondents, and he said, "I feel like it's a right that we have that people fought for, and died for, and so I feel like it's an obligation." This type of answer was prominent in both this and the 2004 study. However, there were additional reasons that were not present in the other paper. Some felt they were paying respect to women who had fought for the right to vote; Rod said that she voted because "I've

always, it really hasn't been like an option in my head, it's like, we all get the right to vote, especially for women, it's important, because we haven't had this right for a super long time." Piper also echoed that, saying "I guess I feel like it's kinda my duty to vote, especially as a woman because I haven't always had that right." Overall, this subcategory seemed to be very similar to the 2002 respondents, however, the increased focus on paying respect to women seems notable.

Duty to future generations.

Several respondents articulated a sense of duty to future generations. However, this sense of duty manifested itself in two different types of responses: the desire to be a good role model, and voting as a means of preserving democracy. Two respondents based their reason to vote around their desire to be good role models to their future families. Corey was worried that if he did not vote, then his children would not be socialized to vote because they would not see a role model voting: "if I don't voice my opinion or vote for that, then I'm one person, then my wife or girlfriend or family doesn't vote, then my kids don't vote and then it's a domino effect." Another respondent, Jerome, had similar thoughts; he had only recently been made aware of local elections and now planned to vote in them because "I'm able to think more of like family and kids and stuff, um, my kids are gonna like be in school one day, so I want to influence that as much as possible." Two other respondents framed it in more negative terms. Walter said voting is "something that could be taken away from you if we're not careful in selecting who we vote to control our government,", which was echoed by Sara, albeit in less stark terms: "It's a really important part of our democracy, to um, actively take part in voting because it is a right that we are given, so we shouldn't take it for granted." Fred's take on voting was a little vaguer, as he said he would continue to vote "to try and have a voice for the future of our country." However,

even though the responses differed slightly, they hit at the same theme: that younger voters care about the future and how they will be perceived by future generations.

Duty to country.

Respondents in both 2002 and 2018 frequently articulated that their voting behaviors came from a sense of duty to country. This subcategory differed from the 2004 paper as no respondents that explicitly said it was their duty as Americans. Instead, several mentioned voting as a general duty that one should perform to be a citizen. Walter believed that since not everyone has the right, we should be grateful to exercise that privilege, saying "I just think that it's very important to exercise your right to vote because it is something that not everyone in the world has." Meanwhile, some felt it was the right thing to do in general; Jeff said "I believe that it's somebody's civic duty to vote. Yeah, just the right thing to do." Fernando also expressed this sentiment, believing that everyone should share their opinions, no matter where one fell on the political spectrum: "I think it's important as part of our democracy to vote at all times." Some respondents disclosed that there had been external factors in helping them develop their sense of civic duty. Sarah said, "my parents have always voted, and I would say that social studies teachers pushing [*sic*] it." Olivia claimed that "The University of Northern Iowa's campus has really pushed voting and so has [*sic*] my parents and so I feel like its is my civic duty to cast my ballot." Another admitted to the previous presidential election being their catalyst for forming a sense of civic duty; Meg's civic duty "was mostly anger from 2016." This view was echoed by many people; in fact, almost everyone had some form of external influencing their decision to vote or not, whether it be parents, guardians, teachers, or friends. Though there were differences, there did not seem to be enough of a significant deviation to be substantial, as some respondents still felt they owed their country enough to warrant a vote.

Voting as a precondition to complaint.

As in 2004, there were a couple of respondents who believed that one had to vote in order to complain about the current system. John said, "If you don't vote, and you didn't try to change who was in office, and it's really hard for you to be able to complain about, like what our government is doing." Marshal echoed that sentiment, saying, "I don't believe that you should have an opinion on politics if you're not voting on your politics." The 2004 paper did not provide specific numbers on how many people mentioned this, only saying it was echoed in "many other comments" (Palczewski et al, 2004). As this issue was only identified by two voters this time, it seems that this may not be as commonly expressed of a view of these respondents as it had been in the past.

Voting as voice.

Of all the categories named in the 2004 paper, the biggest difference occurred around the idea of voice. Voters in 2018 were far more likely to identify having their voice heard as an important part of their decision to vote. In 2002, it was nearly all females who identified voice as a reason for voting, but in 2018, it was much more evenly distributed. Respondents who mentioned voice typically recognized the consummatory value of having their voices heard; some also articulated how having their voice heard could lead to certain instrumental outcomes.

Many viewed voice as a more consummatory reason to vote. Simply speaking out was its own reward. Meg responded to the interviewer's question of "you believe it's even more of your civic duty now, to make your voice heard?" with "Yeah." Corey, meanwhile, said, "I think it's important to vote in the 2018 election because I believe my voice matters." Josh believed that everyone should be heard, no matter their political stance or candidate preference, win or lose: "Just because I think that even if the candidate that I vote for loses, I still feel like it mattered,

just to show that there are still people speaking for both sides and that there's a voice to both sides." Sidnee echoed these sentiments with a similar statement: "I guess I have strong opinions but I believe that everyone's opinions should be expressed, just not my own." This view was also shared by Fernando, who explained: "I think it's important to just have your voice heard no matter whether or not your candidate wins or loses, it's still just important to share your representation."

Josh also believed that it was important for his generation's voice to be heard, and this election was the perfect time to do so: "we're going to make our voice heard as the younger generation now." Rian echoed this, saying "I think it's important for people our age to have their vote count towards what's going on in the country or state, whatever it might be." Sarah also discussed this, explaining "I think the current generation I am in is very different from the other ones, and I think that we have a chance to make a change."

Others believed that voting was a simple way for their voice to be heard. Piper said "I guess the simplest way to say why I decide to vote is voting is the easiest way to be involved in that aspect of things and government and make your voice heard," and Jane echoed that: "I just kinda want to put my input in there and get my vote out there." As one can see, the concept of voice was very prominent, as voters placed high importance on having their voice heard.

Increased Recognition of Instrumental Effects

As with the consummatory effects, there was an increase in the number of people that saw an instrumental effect of voting, which likely impacted the high percentage of people who decided to cast a ballot. About a quarter of respondents solely identified an instrumental reason to why they vote. Additionally, almost all voters identified an issue that was poignant in their minds when they went to the polls, so almost all voters saw either an instrumental reason. This

was a similar finding to the 2004 paper, which identified a link between consummatory effects and instrumental effects, in that when one was able to identify a consummatory effect, they were more very likely to be able to identify an instrumental effect of their vote (Palczewski et al., 2004).

Voting gives people a say.

Similar to voice, some respondents felt that casting a vote gave them a direct say in what went on in government. One respondent, Enzo identified the main instrumental reason from 2004, having control over who is elected; he said that he voted because "I feel passionately about who should be making decisions in our governmental system." Carmen felt the same, particularly about women's rights, which was her top issue when she was voting; she said: "old white men shouldn't control what happens with MY ovaries." TC felt that this election was ripe for change, saying "I feel like now is an important time to be voting because there are potential shifts that could be made in the government that would be beneficial to where we are not." This was similar to what Alexis said, "I like to see things happen,", and believed that voting was the most effective way to see things happen. This seems to be closely related to voice, as voters want to express their sentiments in the form of a vote and see the fruits of that vote via officials that they believe they have power over.

Voting is likeliest thing for effect.

As in 2004, many felt that voting was the easiest way for citizens to be active in the government. Piper said that "voting is the easiest way to be involved in that aspect of things and government and make your voice heard and also because I would like to see changes, and again voting is the easiest way to make an impact." Jerome echoed this, saying "it's the largest way you can have your voice heard, um, when you're not part of the political system." Contrary to

what the literature says about younger voters (see Bennett, 2008), it appears that many still feel that voting is one of the most effective and easiest ways to create change.

Voting for the greater good.

While no one specifically said they voted to make the world a better place, many of the issues they identified fit into this category. This is particularly true of those who identified social issues as important. Laura said that she voted because "because I'm queer, a lot of my friends are queer, or they fall into other minority groups, so it feels to me that I especially need to vote, just to protect myself and my loved ones." Jerome brought up voter suppression: "I think voter suppression, it's kind of big around the country due to racist tendencies in the South, which, aren't as big as they used to be, but I still think the effects of racism still exist." Some voters linked civic duty and change together. Meghan said "I feel like it's my civic duty to vote. If I want change, I need to take action and vote." In general, younger voters felt that they could have a positive impact on the world if their voices were able to be heard.

Increased internal efficacy and belief in their capacity to vote.

One of the reasons that people decided to not vote in 2002 was because they feared making the wrong choice. However, no one expressed this hesitancy this time. Instead, voters felt that they were much more knowledgeable this time. One respondent, Rod, had been keeping close tabs on the First Congressional District election between Blum and Finkenauer: "I've been doing, I've been keeping track of the house race, in this district so, I'm like more knowledgeable, so I wanna participate." That same interest was palpable throughout other voters, even though they may not have explicitly said so.

Further, only a few respondents had said that they had voted in some type of municipal, off-year, or school election, but almost all of them said that they believed they would vote in

these in the future as they became more knowledgeable. Sara said that she did not vote because "It wasn't like, I'd say, as much in the media and that type of stuff," but says she will "Hopefully" vote in future elections. Whether this is a naively optimistic view or not, it shows that voters can recognize when they are not knowledgeable and that they decide not to vote as a result. However, as they voted in 2018, it can be assumed that they felt that they could confidently make the right decision with the information they possessed. This sense of internal efficacy likely had an impact on the increase in voting percentages across the respondents.

Increased optimism and external efficacy.

Just as young voters in 2018 demonstrated a greater sense of internal efficacy, they were also more likely to communicate a sense of external efficacy. This faith in the effectiveness of the system helps explain why 34 out of 37 people interviewed said that they had already voted or planned to vote. Further, 32 people said that they planned to vote in every future election without condition. While many people felt the political climate was toxic or bad right now, many expressed cautious optimism that it would improve over time. They believed that they could make the world a better place if they got the change to have a great say in the decisions that were made. In 2002, non-voters disclosed a plethora of reasons as to why they decided not to vote. Many of the respondents in 2018 named these concerns, which included the electoral college, the mathematical insignificance of a single vote, the amount of money in politics, the two-party system, and the two-party system; however, the 2018 interviewees decided that the consummatory and instrumental votes weighed more than their concerns did.

Electoral college.

Three respondents mentioned the electoral college, which was a highly poignant issue after the 2016 election, similar to the situation after the 2000 election. Two people said that they

felt the electoral college could be revised, but it still might be necessary. Fred said that "the popular vote really shows what the citizens want versus what our politicians vote for", and that he "think[s] it could be revised or revamped. I feel like there's a lot of pull from citizens and we do a lot from our part to go out and vote, but I don't think it actually gets shown through the electoral college." One respondent, Corey, meanwhile, said "I think the electoral college should be done away with, get away from it," because "if your vote truly matters, then your vote should matter." Sidnee said that "some of the stuff with the electoral college is kind of fishy, with some votes counting more than others." However, they also said that they felt it was still important to vote. Sidnee said, "I still think it's still important to participate and say I had a part of this as a citizen." This answer suggested that Sidnee believed the consummatory value of having her voice heard outweighed her concerns about how the electoral college might undermine the power of her vote.

Mathematical insignificance.

A few voters mentioned that a single vote would not change any election result. Fernando, alluded to this issue, saying, "It's kinda hard to see if my vote is going to matter in the grand scheme of things," but he followed it up by saying "I think it's important just to have your voice heard." Indeed, more voters believed that their votes always counted. Melissa said that "One vote still matters." Maggie boiled it down to a single point: "the votes decide that" in reference to the outcome of elections. Despite the unlikely chance that one vote would change anything, they still felt it was worthwhile to cast it.

Money.

Only one voter brought up the issue of money in politics, but he felt it was the most important issue in modern day politics because it diluted his voice. Ryan said that "the most

important issue that I've always pushed is the idea of money in politics because it affects everything we do." One might have expected this issue to be more prominent than in 2002, as this study took place after the *Citizens United v. FEC* Supreme Court decision, but it was not something respondents mentioned.

Two-party system and political climate.

Many young voters felt that neither party represented them very well, and were very frustrated by that. Sara said that "I feel like I'm more in the middle, so I wish it would reflect that a little bit more" and "I think the average person tends to be in the middle." John said that "I am someone who very much believes in bipartisanship, because I'm very in the middle, ideology-wise." Sidnee said, "I consider myself more moderate, down the middle, I can side with either party on certain issues, and I wish our government was structured more like that right now." She also pointed to the fact that she believed American politics was never supposed to evolve into a two-party system: "like, it wasn't really how America was supposed to go, we weren't supposed to have a two-party system." Corey expressed this sentiment through a metaphor: "You know, neapolitan ice cream exists, there's three great kinds right there, so why don't we have three political parties?"

As stated earlier, a majority of the respondents also noted a negative and hostile political climate, but they wanted to vote to help solve it or at least get their people in power. Maggie said that everything is "so polarizing, everything's an argument, everything's a, trying to say one way or another or trying to frame a message or push an agenda...it's a mess." Tyler stated "it's very, very divided. It's on both sides, it's not one specific party." Despite their concerns, they felt that being active in politics, even with a hostile climate, was better than sitting it out.

Some people had different interpretations of the climate, though. Piper said "if I could describe it in one word, it would be heated and I don't necessarily think of the negative connotation. I guess the first thing you would think is negative, but I think there also, a lot of passion behind it, which is generally a good thing. So there's like a lot of people fired up about politics, or at least more people are seeming to get fired up, especially younger people, which is a good thing." Corey offered a similar interpretation, saying "I think it's very interesting and very unique. I think we will look back on this time and say what was going on during that time?" However, he did admit to the climate being "very hostile right now." Rian, meanwhile, said that the climate was good "just because people are more aware of what's going on, they're more willing to say what they want to say in front of people now." Although they harbored negative feelings towards the current climate, many young people felt a cautious optimism, about the prospects of the future.

Barriers.

While this particular topic was not as influential in the 2018 election, many respondents felt there were some barriers to them voting in previous elections. This was particularly true of smaller elections. Many of these respondents are living outside of their hometown to attend college at UNI, and they do not necessarily feel tied to the town in which they are currently living. Olivia did not vote in 2017 even though she was eligible, because "my voting location is in a different county that is 2.5 hours away, and I didn't understand the absentee ballot process last year and so I just didn't go." Alexis held similar views, saying she did not vote in local elections because "it's probably just because I was at college...yeah, probably not as informed." It would seem that these young voters' interest in local elections is more representative of the general interest into politics of their whole demographic.

The Non-Voters of 2018

Only three respondents indicated that they did know if they would be voting in the 2018 midterm election. All three had said that they had voted in previous elections, and two had voted in the 2016 Presidential Election, and the other respondent had voted in some election before, but she could not recall which election. This was a significant decrease in the number of people who did not know compared to the 2002 election, where over 50 percent of people did not know if they were going to vote, or were planning to not vote (Palczewski, et al., 2004).

All three people addressed one topic, in particular, that was a reason that they did not know if they would vote: being uninformed, which would seem to suggest a low sense of low internal efficacy. One respondent also identified two other factors that were causing him to consider not voting: time and the political climate.

Being uninformed.

Ashlee said that she voted in 2016 "because I was aware of what was going on, what the president's [candidates] were for and what they weren't for," and that for this election, "I don't really know, like what it's voting for, what it's supposed to be, so, therefore, I feel like if I learn more about it I will vote." She said that before voting, "I would probably seek the information, " (about politics), which seems to imply that she passively gets information. However, she also believed that all elections "tie into one another", and would vote in the future, even though she claimed that "Half the time I don't know when they're happening." She disclosed after the election took place that she had indeed voted.

Bis had also voted in 2016, because "I just thought the presidential [election] meant more." He was generally unaware of what he would have been voting for the midterm election, asking the interviewer "Um, is this for the, sorry I'm a little bit naive, or maybe ignorant. Is this

for our senators and representatives?" (There were representatives on the ballot, but no Senate election in Iowa). He followed this by saying "I'm on the fence, just because I'm not really, like I said I'm ignorant and naive, I'm not really up to date, date with who's running, what are their platforms, and if they match my values for society." He later admitted that even though he had believed the Presidential election was more important, he now believed that was a naive view, because "there's a bunch of other people and politicians, even at the state level." He personally did not seek out information regarding politics, instead consuming it "more passively." He said that he would vote in a future election "if I get more informed on the people who are running and stuff."

Violet had also voted in a previous election, but could not recall which one; her mother had made her go vote. She said, "I'm uneducated, and I don't want to vote uneducated." Like the other two non-voters, she planned to vote in future elections as well and viewed voting as important. She perhaps had contradictory views, as she believed that "all elections are important because it's important that the people choose who makes the decision for them and stuff", but yet was planning to sit this election out. She also explained that, like Bis, she didn't really go out of her way to find any information to get informed about politics: "I don't usually go searching for it, whatever I do is like news, internet, or what people tell me."

Not being informed was not limited to just non-voters, though. One voter, Jerome, did not even realize that there were such things as municipal elections prior to 2016: "I got into the booth in 2016, and I saw all of the extra things that were on the ballot". Despite this, he took the time to vote.

Time.

Only Bis mentioned that he might have to work on the night of the election, saying that "It's already like late for me to take, I mean I could ask, but…". He did not seem to be aware that one could vote at satellite voting stations or that he could request an absentee ballot.

Political climate.

One non-voter, Bis, also disclosed that the political climate was also a potential factor in him not wanting to get involved: "This is probably why I also get unmotivated and not really want to be part of it, because I just see too much drama in the news. I see each party criticizing each other and trying to attach each other...and I just don't really see anything getting done." However, many other respondents who were voting also identified the political climate as being negative but did plan to vote. In Bis' case, it seemed that he exhibited both low internal political efficacy and low external efficacy, and those in tandem made him less likely to vote.

Discussion

One notable part of this study was the increase in the percentage of young voters who said that they would be voting. Respondents in 2018 were far more likely to report that they planned to vote than those in the 2004 paper. In fact, respondents planned to vote at a rate higher than 18-24-year-olds - or any other demographic - actually voted in the 2018 election. There may be an inherent selection bias in those who are willing to participate to be interviewed, as they will most likely be more interested in politics and therefore more likely to vote. This may be also be attributed to using a single researcher compared to using multiple, as the 2004 paper did, as the potential pool of respondents (which increases the change that non-voters would be captured) would be larger and potentially more diverse than the pool when a single researcher is used. Another factor may be that most of the respondents were white, and all had at least some college

education, both of which are strong demographic predictors of voting (see Richman & Pate, 2010; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Hart et al., 2007; Lopez et al., 2007).

Nevertheless, while the results of these interviews surprised the author, it is hard to escape the contextual factors that may have made this possible. While it remains to be seen if the 2016 election was a seismic shift or just an anomaly, its impact on 2018 cannot be ignored. In fact, several voters mentioned Trump in their interviews, and one even specifically as a reason why they were voting in 2018; Melissa said, "Well, there's a lot of like important issues going on right now, and especially with the [*sic*] Trump and stuff...so that's probably my main reason" (for voting).

Further, the 2018 election cycle was fundamentally different than 2002 in many ways. The 2002 election happened just 14 months after a major terrorist attack on the United States, and President Bush had a high approval rating of 63 percent at the time of the election (compared to Trump's 38 percent approval at the time of the 2018 election) (Gallup, 2009; Gallup, 2019). As college students are not a traditional Republican constituency, it makes sense that many of them were not sure that they would vote in a very strong Republican year. They may have lacked enthusiasm or saw that their votes weren't going to matter (which is exactly what did happen in the non-voters) (Palczewski et al., 2004).

The 2018 election presented a converse situation when the energy was on the side of the Democrats. While party identification was not asked of the respondents in this study, many of the issues they identified as important to them, such as health care, LGBTQ* rights, easy access to birth control methods, and college affordability, suggested that they were likely to vote for Democratic candidates. Additionally, college students are a demographic group that typically

votes for Democrats, so it makes sense that their turnout would have increased in a 'blue wave' election year.

While it is uncertain how many of the respondents actually followed through on their plans to vote, the purpose of this study was not to generate a sample with a representative proportion of voters and nonvoters. Rather, it was to figure out why young people do or do not choose to vote. Although this study did not include enough non-voters to generate useful insights into why some young people still choose to abstain from voting in 2018, the 34 respondents who either had or were planning to vote certainly provided useful insights into how these likely voters think about their participation in the election.

This paper found the relationship between consummatory effects and instrumental effects discovered in the 2004 essay held; people who are able to recognize the consummatory effects of voting are more likely to also identify its instrumental effects, and those people are thus more likely to vote. In 2018, however, a new form of consummatory effect emerged in many interviews: voice. This prominent new consummatory category correlated with a greater number of respondents who recognized the instrumental effects of their vote and planned on voting.

However, as voice was a less-prominent response in 2002, it is unknown how they exactly coded that topic, or what was coded to be included in the category of 'voice'. For the purposes of this paper, a wide range of responses were coded as voice: believing that their voices were not currently being heard, using voting to speak out, or wanting a particular representative who would represent their voice were all coded as voice for this paper. One could potentially parse those into separate categories, however, all of those responses get at the same point: young Americans want their voices heard, believe that their life experiences and beliefs are important, and want to be represented.

Conclusion

After interviewing 37 college-aged youth about their voting intentions in the 2018 election, it was found that they were more likely to be able to identify consummatory effects and instrumental effects of voting, as well as placing a priority on having their voice heard, which led to a much-increased turnout percentage over the group that was interviewed in 2002. There was a significant increase in the percentage of young voters who expressed their desire to vote, and those who did not plan to vote realized the importance of voting, as they had all voted in previous elections.

However, one should be cautious when using the results of this project, as the population that was interviewed was not representative of the population of the United States. Those interviewed were almost all white and had at least some (in some cases, extensive) college education, both demographic factors that have been found to increase the likelihood that one votes. The United States, as a whole, is less educated and less white than the respondents in this study. The interviews also were based in a single geographic entity, which made for a good comparison to the 2002 paper but also contributes to the general unrepresentativeness of the respondent sample pool.

The drastic changes from the previous study suggest a shift in how young voters understand themselves and role in politics. Young people increasingly perceive that their voice is important; they articulate a recognition of both the consummatory and instrumental effects of their vote and thus, seem more likely to vote. If that trend continues, politicians of all stripes will have to reckon with this widely held desire, or risk being voted out of office. Overall, this study seems to point to a significant development in the study of youth voting.

Further research should be done on this topic, as the generation studied is projected to make up approximately 27 percent of the electorate in 2020 and their voting habits continue to play a growing role in deciding future elections (Kight, 2019). Future research on the topic should try to get a more demographically representative sample, to see if these trends hold amongst young voters with different educational levels. Additionally, further research should be done to find out how social media has impacted younger voters' political efficacy.

One thing seems clear, though: as young voters find their voices, and come to believe that their voices matter and should be heard, politicians should pay attention, or they may not be politicians for long.

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