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VOTING: IS IT JUST FOR OLD PEOPLE?

by

PRECIOUS HALL

Under the Direction of Dr. Michael Binford

ABSTRACT

In 2004, the clothing retailer Urban Outfitters sold a t-shirt with the slogan, “Voting is for Old People”. Did Urban Outfitters step over the line, or were they a reflection of the sate of our democracy and the demographics of current voters? Many organizations have developed to combat the problem of low youth voter turnout and disengagement. One of the most well-known organizations is Rock the Vote. In its 18 year existence, has youth turnout increased? Have their efforts been futile or on the other side, have they been successful in paving the way for the youth to demand attention from the government and be heard? The purpose of this research is to measure the effects of the efforts targeted toward youth voters over the past 18 years, in terms of voter turnout using American National Election Studies Data. The results show that voting is not just for old people.

INDEX WORDS: Rock the Vote, Youth Voter Turnout, American National Election Studies

VOTING: IS IT JUST FOR OLD PEOPLE?

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PRECIOUS HALL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2008

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2008

VOTING: IS IT JUST FOR OLD PEOPLE?

by

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College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2008

DEDICATION

No child can ever grow into a responsible and productive adult without the guidance of people who love them. I have been fortunate enough to have two parents who love and support me in all that I do. This is dedicated to the two people who love me and showed me the way, both in their successes and mistakes. I am also a believer in the African proverb "It takes a whole village to raise a child." No one gets to where they are by themselves, so this is also dedicated to my village; you all know who you are. Finally, this is dedicated to all my young brothers and sisters who are actively changing the stigma placed on us by others and ourselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost I have to recognize the one from whom all blessings flow – God. Thanks for your unspeakable gift. This project could not have been completed without the guidance and suggestions of my committee Dr. Michael Binford, Dr. Richard Engstrom, and Dr. Scott Graves. A special thanks to Dr. Binford who agreed to be the chair in his last year at Georgia State: A happy and fun retirement to you. A final thanks to Dr. Carrie Manning, Graduate Director.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The classic texts of democratic theory (such as J.S. Mill and Rousseau) assume that for a democracy to function properly the average citizen should be interested in, pay attention to, discuss, and actively participate in politics.

-Richard Lau and David Redlawski

In 2004, the clothing retailer Urban Outfitters sold a t-shirt with the slogan, "Voting is for Old People" (Wattenberg 2007, 1). Did Urban Outfitters step over the line, or were they simply a reflection of the sate of our democracy and the demographics of the current voters? Who could ever forget Sean "Diddy" Combs infamous "Vote or Die" t-shirt that he sported at several high profile events leading up to the 2004 Presidential election? It was a statement that was both eye-catching and stern. The harsh statement was meant to convince young people to vote in the upcoming election, but if the slogan "vote or die" were taken literally, many of our youth would be dead and if the only alternative to voting is death, than we should have people rushing to the polls to vote on Election Day.

"Participation is an instrumental activity through which citizens attempt to influence the government to act in ways the citizen prefers" (Verba and Nie 1993, 24). But how can the citizenry influence the government if they do not participate in the electoral process? The vote probably remains the most effective means for citizen control (Niemi and Weisberg 1993, 34), but since 1960 participation has declined in almost every area of electoral activity (Patterson 2002, 4). The decline in voter turnout over the years has been a steady one, but the decline in youth voter turnout has been more than any other segment of the voting population. Many people see the chasm that exists and wonder how it seems to have grown wider over the years, when the intention has been to increase youth voter turnout.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The 26th Amendment

Until 1971, the minimum voting age was 21, but that changed with the ratification of the 26th amendment. In the decades surrounding the Vietnam War, young people were a driving force for change. "Old enough to fight, old enough to vote" was a slogan used by millions of young men and women who were too young to vote, but asked to serve during the time of war. (American Bar Association 2007, Voting Youth Citizenship). In the late 1960's, 18-21 year olds organized marches and demonstrations to convince lawmakers of the perceived hypocrisy of drafting young men who could not vote to serve in the armed forces. The argument was that they could be sent to Vietnam to fight in the war and possibly die in a conflict that they had no power to support or prevent. Resolutions were introduced in Congress in 1969, but none resulted in any action (American Bar Association 2007, Voting Youth Citizenship). In June 1970, Congress extended the 1965 Voting Rights Act to include 18-year-olds by adding three amendments, including a provision that lowered the voting age in federal and state elections. The bill passed in both the House and the Senate. The Constitutionality of the provision lowering the voting age in state elections was challenged and the U.S. Supreme Court held that Congress had the authority to permit 18-year-olds the right to vote in federal elections, but that the States had the power to establish qualifications to vote in state and local elections. The solution to this ruling was the 26th Amendment (American Bar Association 2007, Voting Youth Citizenship). In 1971, the Amendment was ratified, giving everyone over the age of 18 the right to vote.

In response to the turmoil of the time over the Vietnam War, the 26th amendment was passed lowering the voting age to 18. In addition to helping to quell some of the uprising at the time, the amendment was also thought of as a way to increase youth voter turnout and bring a new spirit to elections (Wattenberg 2007, 98). Although lowering the voting age to 18 in 1971 was thought of as a way to increase youth voter turnout, since 1972, the turnout rate for ages 18-20 has averaged 35% which is the lowest for any age group (Wattenberg 2007, 99). According to Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) with the passage of the 26th amendment, voter turnout did not decrease slightly; it plummeted.

In addition to the generation gap that exists, there are also important implications for the consistent lack of youth voter turnout: With the youth not being part of the governing body, "the ideal government of the people, by the people, and for the people is seriously compromised" (Wattenberg 2007, 140). Some believe that these figures are no cause for concern, and they point out that young people have historically been less inclined to vote. They say that this makes sense because young people tend not to own property or have children in school, so they feel they have less of a stake in the political process. Some suggest that apathy among younger voters isn't necessarily young people's fault because politicians tend to ignore the issues of concern to young voters (American Bar Association 2007, Voting Youth Citizenship).

Declining Youth Vote

The slogan "vote or die" is not the first attempt to capture and to bolster the voice and the vote of youth voters, in fact it is only one of several campaigns and efforts to add some life to this inactive population of voters. This attempt to bring life again to this segment of the population reflects a disturbing trend over the past 30 years: The declining political participation

of young adults throughout the world's advanced industrialized democracies (Wattenberg 2007, ix). This declining participation has not just been concentrated in the youth population, but there has been a general decline in participation all around. Although there has been a general decline in all segments of the population, none have been as steep as the decline in youth voter turnout.

Causes of Low Turnout

Perhaps the most dramatic political change in the American public has been the decline in partisanship (Nie, Verba, and Petrocik 1993, 235) and voting. Many political scientists have speculated about the causes of the continued decline in voter turnout. A variety of explanations have been offered to account for the phenomenon of voting in the United States: that in a country where education, income, and wealth have all increased across segments of the population; voter participation has continued to decrease. The explanations that have been offered include the negative effects of the media, the increase in negative and attack campaign advertisements, and the lack of mobilization of particular segments of the voting population.

Media

In *Is Voting for Young People?,* Martin Wattenberg (2007) states that "changes in media habits from generation to generation have led to a new situation in which young people are far less likely to be exposed to news about public affairs than their elders" (3). The media, technology, and its use have changed from year to year, but these changes can not be said to be beneficial for all or even a majority of the public who consume it. The media and its careful construction of the news and events of the day have had an effect on the youth and have contributed to the fact that "since the 1980's, young people have been socialized in a rapidly

changing media environment that has been radically different from that experience by the past couple of generations" (Wattenberg 2007, 34). Some believe that it is this rapidly changing environment that has contributed to the lack of voter turnout.

The media are dominated by frames. There are a multitude of frames that define, diagnose, and inform the viewer of the dominant messages and/or themes. Framing has not always been a concept that scholars have endeavored to define or conceptualize in a consistent or widely agreed upon manner. Robert Entman, however, has offered an identity of common tendencies among the multiple uses of the term "framing", in turn offering a better understanding of its effect.

In "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", Robert Entman offers a clear definition of frames, how they work, and the benefits of using them. His main point is that framing involves selection and salience in which in order to construct dominant messages or themes, you have to "select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (52). Entman (1993) points out that by highlighting certain pieces of information, the media actually elevates its salience which makes them more noticeable or memorable to audiences (53). Accenting and placing more prominence on particular elements of a text is essentially how frames work, and this can be achieved by placement, repetition, or association with common societal symbols. Through the strategic placement of words, text formatting, and repetitive language, frames can be manipulated and altered to convey the desired message, theme, or representation.

Frames are not random, and in his article, Entman (1993) shows that frames involve deliberate choices. The deliberate choices that the media implores when it comes to framing can have a detrimental effect on voter participation, specifically youth participation. The harmful effects can happen when the media does not present information that pertains, or is of interest to this segment of the population, or presents only pieces of a complicated puzzle. Even though the mainstream media may not be framing information specifically to the youth demographic, youth voting advocates and organizations have developed tactics and mobilization strategies specifically targeted to youth voters. These youth voter organizations choose to develop methods for disseminating information that is targeted toward the youth, thereby combating the lack of information that is aimed and structured toward this demographic of the electorate.

In addition to offering a definition of frames, Entman (1993) also compiles and identifies four functions of framing: They define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (52). These functions inform the viewers of what the problem is and the costs associated with that particular problem, they make known the forces behind that problem, they evaluate the current and possible effects of the problem, and offer solutions to the problem and the effects of those solutions. Because frames are chosen to help covey some aspect of a given reality, they help to build a bridge between the media and the public.

Building this bridge between the media and public has important implications for political communication and participation (Entman 1993). Because frames call attention to certain aspects, while ignoring others, politicians compete with journalists over news frames and presentation. The competition over frames plays a big role in the use of political power and the identity of actors and interests. The competition between political actors and the media over frames is a competition that seeks to influence large portions of the public. In terms of the

competition between political actors and the media, Entman (2003) identifies framing as "the central process by which government officials and journalists exercise political influence over each other and over the public" (417). This influence that is exercised involves highlighting some aspect of events or issues and making connections between them to promote a particular interpretation. By promoting a particular interpretation or evaluation of certain events or issues, the magnitude with which the audience resonates with that particular issue or event is of great value to government and political actors. In "Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame after 9/11" Entman explores framing in the context of political actors or elites and their effect on the media by illustrating a cascade model of activation. In his model, the public maintains the bottom level of the cascade because elites heavily influence the media which subsequently shapes public opinion (Entman 2003, 421). In his model, elites maintain the power over the media, but only when frames have some congruency with themes or patterns customarily used by most members of society. Voters are neither super-sophisticated, nor abysmally ignorant (Niemi and Weisberg 1993, 50), therefore the resonance that must exist with the members of society acts as a check on elites and the media and insists on their consideration of the public and societal values.

Frames construct meanings, they don't invent them. They take the pieces of information that already exist and build meaning around it. Even though frames are powerful and can have influence over the public, they must however have some familiarity with the society, so as to reinforce what is already embedded in the culture. Because frames act on what already exist within the culture, it has been argued that the media fosters an environment in which individuals can develop politically. Calavita (2003) argues that the news media are of "subtle-but-fundamentally powerful ecological importance…because all aspects of the larger culture and

society – including family – are themselves shaped by mass media" (23). The media's environment shows that the process of framing is not independent, but rather within the contexts of the distribution of political and social power (Carragee and Roefs 2004, 214). Carragee and Roefs (2004) argue that "a frames ability to dominate news discourse depends on complex factors, including its sponsor's economic and cultural resources, its sponsor's knowledge of journalistic practices, the practices themselves, and a frame's resonance with political values" (216). Without some sort or resonance with the public, a frame can not be effective. Because resonance is needed for effectiveness, frames are not independent agents, but rather used in connection with the elements that already exist in society. Because frames affect people in different populations in different ways, it is plausible that young voters simply do not relate to frames that older voters relate to, therefore there is a need for frames to be geared toward young voters.

Even though the media are dominated by frames which determine the presentation of information, in order for that information to be framed, an agenda must be established to determine the nature of the coverage. In "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media", Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw discuss how the media play an important part in molding political reality. McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that readers learn about issues and the amount of importance to attach to those issues from the amount of information in a news story and its position (176). Agenda-setting in its simplest form does not tell the audience what to think, but rather what to think about. In the world of politics, agenda-setting is crucial to the political process, especially political campaigns because now, more than ever, candidates present themselves to the public through the media, and increasingly, the public relies on the media for information about candidates. Through agenda-setting, the media can not change the course or

the foundation of the campaign, but they can attach a level of importance to campaigns and its issues. More specifically, McCombs and Shaw (1972) hypothesize that "the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues (177). Agenda-setting is the job of the media, everything that happens in the world can not be reported, so they must not only decide what to cover, but the nature of that coverage also. The nature of that coverage is achieved through the use of frames. Even though agenda-setting is a function that must be used by the media, it can prove to be a dangerous one because the agenda of the media can effectively leave out and block off particular segments of the population, including the youth.

In addition to the media effects of framing and agenda-setting, priming is also an effect of the media. Priming is an extension of a part of the process of agenda-setting and framing. Iyengar and Simon (1993) identify the term priming as "the ability of news programs to affect the criteria by which political leaders are judged" (368). Priming does not give an evaluation, or promote a specific evaluation; it proposes to the viewer the criteria with which to perform evaluations. Priming is an extension of agenda-setting and framing in which the impact of news coverage on the weight given to specific issues in making judgments is evaluated. Priming is "the impact that agenda-setting can have on the way individuals evaluate public officials by influencing the thematic areas or issue that individuals use to form evaluations" (Scheufele 2000, 297). When the media determines the nature of their coverage through agenda-setting, then develops the theme of their presentation by framing, priming is the result of those two effects. Agenda-setting, framing, and priming are media affects that work in conjunction with each other, and it is the combination of these effects that makes political communication and its effect on voting participation through the media a powerful tool.

The mass media is everywhere and even though there are different channels of news and media, the events that are reported are similar. This "sameness" in reporting can lead to a normalization of social problems and events, which can lead to the concept of "compassion fatigue" among certain individuals. Compassion fatigue shows that the media's role is not always predictable. Kinnick, Krugman, and Cameron (1996) argue that "while news coverage may initially serve a facilitating role in attracting attention and resources to problem amelioration, pervasive coverage which emphasizes problems without solutions may backfire and create a numbing concern toward social problems and their victims (703)." The "compassion fatigue" that can develop takes away from the media's power in the policy and voting process and shows that the power is not absolute, but is dependent on the audience/viewers. Instead of facilitating an interest in voting or governmental participation, the media can actually normalize these civic duties and create an unexpected fatigue in voter attention, retention, and participation. This effect has to ability to be more pronounced among young voters, because this segment of the population has essentially come up in an age where there is no emphasis on civic responsibility and in which voting is not viewed as an obligation. Not voting has the capability of becoming the rule, rather than the exception.

There has been an ongoing debate about the media's power. In the global world that we operate today it is impossible to ignore the ability of the media in constructing and reporting the news. In the world that the youth live in today, the complexity of contemporary political life compels the individual to rely on political information gleaned from the media, peer groups, and political parties for the "house of his own thoughts (Cantor 1975, 4)." Yes, it is true that the media does exert some influence, but the media's influence and power is neither absolute nor

predictable. The media however, is not seen as a cause of decline in only youth voters but as a cause of decline among the general electorate.

Campaign Advertisement

Ideally, democracy is a dialogue between leaders and citizens. Campaigns provide the most obvious and the loudest forums for this dialogue. Candidates try to persuade citizens to vote for them and to support their cause. Voters respond by coming to the polls and selecting their preferred candidates. The quality of the dialogue can diminish, however, if candidates speak poorly, or if voters close their ears (Lau and Pomper 2002, 47). When the quality of dialogue begins to become negative, citizens have the ability the option to stop listening and or even worse stop voting which is detrimental to any democracy.

Technology and the use of it changes and grows from year to year. Along with changes in technology have been changes in campaigns and how they go about spreading their messages and garnering support for their candidate. The changes that have occurred in campaign processes and techniques have helped to facilitate a change in citizens and voting behavior. One of the major changes in the dialogue of campaigns can be viewed by looking at political advertising. Political advertising is everywhere. The amount of money spent on advertising is reaching new heights every election with hundreds of millions of dollars being spent on what has become the main means of political communication in the United States (Kern 1989). The United States is no stranger to advertisements; there are millions of dollars spent on advertising everything from clothing, food, electronics, and services. Although advertisements help to drive

the economy and increase spending, political advertising, specifically negative political advertising, can come with a price: decreased voter turnout.

One area of political campaigning that attracts controversy is that of "negative campaigning," and the area of attack ads. Today, negative campaigning, which is generally defined as "that which is directed to the failings of the opponent in relation either to character or issues" (Kern 1989, 93), seems to be standard practice in most modern elections. But with the popularity of going negative many ethical dilemmas and questions arise such as, Do negative political advertisements motivate people to vote, or do they increase feelings of unhappiness in the political process and keep the voters away from the polls on Election Day? This question has been frequently discussed in public debate, and media experts from all political backgrounds have weighed in with their own analysis and commentary (Cowart and Powell 2003). Some critics view negative ads as inherently unfair, others say that the topics of negative ads are inappropriate for true political debates, and many fear the impact that negative ads have on our political system (Cowart and Powell 2003, 268). Negative ads can impact our political system in ways that foster cynicism and in turn decreases voter participation and undermine democratic values (Moy and Pfau 2000, xiii).

On the other side of the debate, some researchers dispute the claim that campaign "attack" advertising decreases voter turnout and believe instead that attack advertising it likely to "stimulate others by increasing their store of political information about the candidates and increasing the degree to which they care about the outcome of the election or by increasing ties to their party's nominee" (Finkel and Greer 1998, 573)." In addition, some researchers also assert that the theory of demobilization in regard to negative political advertising can not be confirmed and is actually associated with higher turnout (Wattenberg and Brians 1999, 892).

There are also those that believe that negative ads attempt to raise issues that will win votes and convince citizens that they are worthy of their participation. Based on this assumption, if the choice between candidates is presented as an important one, then voter turnout is likely to increase rather than decrease (Wattenberg and Brians 1999, 896).

On one side, negative political advertising can shore up loyalists to vote for their traditional party; on the other side those same advertisements are increasingly turning away a band of citizens who turn from independence to apathy toward political institutions. Over the past decades, record lows have been recorded in political participation, while record highs in public cynicism and rates of disapproval have been recorded as well (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995, 2). One of the biggest causes of this new attitude can be linked to the intensity of negative political advertising in the mainstream media.

Political campaigns are expected to inform voters about issues relevant to the day, to reduce their dependence on simple labels, and to enable them to reach reasoned choices (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995). Unfortunately, even as candidates have become increasingly dependent on television advertising, the information function of political campaigns has changed from information based on platforms to information based on the shortcomings and failures of others, and as a result, campaigns appear superficial and the question arises whether superficial campaigns raise superficial voters (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995)? In an attempt to answer this question, scholars such as Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995), Finkel and Greer (1998), Lau and Pomper (2002), and Wattenberg and Brians (1999) in the fields of political science, psychology, and communication studies have turned increasing attention to assessing and evaluating the effects of political advertising. The consistent use of negative campaigning raises a very important question: Does the use of negative or attack advertisements in campaigns

promote or suppress voter turnout? The literature surrounding this question presents a clear answer: In this representative democracy that we live in, the use of negative campaigning suppresses voter turnout and stifles the progress of our democracy.

Negative campaigning is trying to win an advantage by referring to harmful aspects of an opponent or policy. In negative campaigning, off-putting approaches are used in democracies as an element of adversarial policy making and electoral processes. Techniques of negative campaigning include running advertisements attacking an opponent's personality on record, leaking false information to the press, and employing lobbying groups to launch negative attacks against other opponents. Some theorists contend that negative ads are more memorable and introduce controversy and raise public awareness through additional news coverage (Wattenberg and Brians 1999). Although negative political advertising has been defined in many ways, there is wide agreement that negative ads make up a significant portion of modern political advertising. Researchers estimate that between 30% and 50% of all political advertising produced can be seen as negative (Copeland and Johnson-Cartee 1991, 3). These numbers show that the practice of negative campaigning, and the use of negative political advertisements are rising and have the potential to take over the process of campaigning and the campaigns use of advertisements.

With regards to the effect of negative campaigning on voter turnout, there is large body of research on negative advertisements, but not a significant amount that link it to voter turnout. In spite of this fact, the articles that do exist, including the criticisms are relevant to the proposed question involving negative campaigning and its effect on voter turnout in general.

Negative Political Advertisements as a Demobilizer

Two researchers in this field are Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar. In their article "Does Attack Advertising Demobilize the Electorate?" and their book *Going Negative* they address the effects of negative campaign advertising on voter turnout by using a unique experimental design in which advertising tone is manipulated.

The article states that American campaigns have changed dramatically since the 1940s and 1950s. Today, it is generally accepted that television has undermined the importance of party organizations, because it permits a form of direct communication between candidates and voters (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Through direct communication, candidates have been able to weaken party ties and reach out openly to citizens and voters. Changes in communication have led to changes in the media and its use as an instrument, as all forms of broadcasting, from network newscasts to talk show programs have become powerful tools in the hands of campaign managers, consultants, and fund-raisers with paid political advertisements becoming an essential part of campaign communication (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994, 829). Because of the changes in communication and the use of media, candidates and campaigns have become increasingly aware that a win without political advertisements is a near impossible task in today's political arena.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) assert that campaigns can either be mobilizing or demobilizing events, depending on the nature of the messages they generate. They used an experimental design that manipulated advertising tone while holding all other features constant, then reproduced their results on an aggregate level by demonstrating that turnout in the 1992 Senate campaigns was significantly reduced in states where the tone of the campaign was

negative. After filtering based on voter registration, the results of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's study showed that advertising tone significantly affects turnout and that those participants shown the negative version on the advertisement were 2.5% less likely to vote than those shown no political advertisement and conversely those shown positive political advertisements were 2.5% more likely to vote. Overall, negative ads suppressed the intention to vote by 5% (831-833). At first glance, these numbers may not seem significant, but it must be taken into account that in the United States, the decline in voter turnout over the years has been a steady one (Teixeira 1992), and that a 5% decrease in the intention to vote is significant when only about 55% of the voting age population votes in an election.

Following the experimental design in the laboratory, the experimental framework was reconstructed in the real world by measuring the tone of the campaign of each of the 34 states holding a Senate election in 1992 and measuring voter turnout for those same elections. On the aggregate level, the results were similar: negative campaigns decreased turnout by 2% and positive campaigns increased turnout by 2% for a total of 4%. In this study, both the experimental and nonexperimental methods yielded the same results: negative campaigns tend to demobilize the electorate and take a toll on electoral participation (1994, 833). Ansolabehere and Iyengar showed that whether in the context of a controlled setting, or in the context of a nonexperimental design, the results show that any exposure to negative political advertising is harmful to the system of electoral politics and voter participation.

In the article "Effectiveness of Negative Campaigning in U.S. Senate Elections," Richard Lau and Gerald Pomper discuss how the character of elections can affect the dialogue of democracy and examines the dialogue in the 143 Senate elections from 1988-1998 in which an incumbent sought reelection. Lau and Pomper (2002) claim to focus on the character of

campaigns in order to produce reliable estimates to answer a simple question: How effective is negative campaigning in helping to get candidates elected (48)?

Before digging into their research methodology, Lau and Pomper (2002) were careful to distinguish between negative campaigning and unfair campaigning since many often define negativity as anything they do not like about campaigns. The two categories often end up being confused, but the two are not necessarily linked. For these scholars, negative campaigning is talking about the opponent – his or her programs, accomplishments, qualifications, associations, and so on – with the focus, usually on the defects of these attributes. Candidates can lie about their opponents in negative campaigning, but they can also do the same about themselves. The motivation is the same either way: to help them win the election. Because of this fact, some prominent researchers recommend avoiding the term "negative" in describing political advertising because it has become so affectively loaded (48). Because the term "negative" in reference to political advertisements has become so encumbered, it forces those who use the term to have an objective understanding of what they are saying and implying so as not to appear that they are simply unhappy with advertisements, but that they are truly harmful.

Lau and Pomper relied on estimates of the nature of the campaign gathered from newspaper accounts of the election campaigns which included descriptions of political advertisements broadcast by the different candidates and a variety of other campaign activities. The impact of negative campaigning was not evaluated in isolation, nor treated as one of many predictor variables that independently explain the outcome of the election. The data were gathered and unique variables specifying campaign characteristics were developed with both aggregate and individual data sets. As a result, the effectiveness of negative campaigning in achieving the desired end – winning the election – was examined (52).

According to the authors, the most interesting findings of this research include indicators of the nature of the campaign's tone. The results point out that attacking the opponent could be an effective strategy for challengers allowing them to improve their performance at the polls by 1% by increasing their attacks on their opponent during the campaign by about 6%. On the other hand, the results show that attacking the opponent is an ineffective strategy for incumbents to follow because for every 6% of their campaigns used attacking their opponent, they did about 1% worse at the polls. Phrased differently, incumbents who stayed positive did significantly better than incumbents who chose to go negative. All else being equal, incumbents would have won more votes than they did had they gone more positive. These results show that the costs of going negative in terms of political advertising outweigh the benefits. Using negative political advertising has the ability to not only decrease voter turnout, but is an ineffective strategy for candidates to use.

In the summation of their article, Lau and Pomper (2002) concede that although the benefits of negative campaigning are relatively small, the costs could still be considerable, not only in campaign dollars, but in the more important effects on the dialogue of democracy and its use may serve to depress voter turnout (63). The likely effects of a further decrease in voter turnout have the possibility of leaving democratic values and principles in the hands of only a few, while leaving behind a majority of citizens' concerns and needs.

Criticisms

Following the publishing of Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar's article and book were a wealth of criticisms, but none that completely invalidate their argument that negative

campaigning demobilizes voters. One form of criticism came from Steven Finkel and John Greer (1998) in their article "A Spot Check: Casting Doubt on the Demobilizing Effect of Attack Advertising." In this article, they dispute the claim that "attack" advertising demobilizes the electorate, arguing instead that there is little reason to expect a powerful relationship between the tone of campaign advertising and voter turnout. They contend that attack advertising may depress turnout among some voters, but it is likely to stimulate others by increasing their store of political information about the candidates, increasing the degree to which they care about the election's outcome, or increasing ties to their party's nominee (573). Finkel and Greer believe that there is little theoretical reason to expect a powerful systematic relationship between advertising tone and voter turnout and hypothesize that the amount of a campaign's attack political advertising is unrelated to overall voter turnout and to turnout among independents. They go against the previous arguments that link a decrease in voter turnout to negative political advertisements, but they do not negate them all together.

Finkel and Greer (1998) give three reasons they believe that negative spots will stimulate voter turnout. First, negative advertising conveys a significant amount of policy and retrospective performance information to voters, and it is a truism that more knowledgeable voters are more likely to participate. Second, there is evidence that negative information is given more weight in political information processing, as it provides individuals with unexpected data that can be used to evaluate politicians. Therefore, negative advertising may be more likely to provide the kind of information with which voters can discriminate between the issue positions or other attributes of the candidates. Third, negative advertisements may produce stronger emotional and affective responses than positive ones which could augment turnout by arousing

the voter's enthusiasm for his or her preferred candidates, or by increasing the degree to which the voter cares about the outcome of the election (577).

The results of this study show that controlling for other variables known to influence turnout, attack advertising does not influence either overall turnout rates or individual self-reported votes. Similarly, no demobilizing effect for negative advertisements among Independent voters was found. Further analysis showed that the effect of attack advertisements on voter withdrawal is weakest among individuals who are most highly attentive to the mass media, and thus who are most likely to have read about or seen the negativity of the campaign (573). These results do not account for citizens that are not highly attentive to the mass media, but are still eligible and able to vote. Finkel and Greer argue that attack advertisements have a weaker affect on individuals who are more educated on the activity of campaigns. These results would be convincing if these were the only people expected to vote. Finkel and Greer however need to take into account those citizens who are not highly attentive, and who are affected more by attack advertising.

In the end Finkel and Greer (1998) contend that whether positive or negative, false statements made by candidates undoubtedly debase the democratic process, and may contribute to voter dissatisfaction with the conduct of contemporary campaigns. They argue that it is these issues – not the negativity of campaigns – that should be given more attention as the debate over effects of political advertising continues to unfold in the future (592). Finkel and Greer attempt to differentiate between the demise of the democratic process and the negativity of campaigns without giving reference to the idea that these issues are connected and that the negativity of campaigns leads to voter dissatisfaction, which leads to decreased voter turnout, which ultimately affects the democratic process.

A direct criticism of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's article is Martin Wattenberg and Craig Brians' (1999) article "Negative Campaign Advertising: Demobilizer or Mobilizer?" In this article, Wattenberg and Brians (1999) dispute the generalizability of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's claim that attack advertising drives potential voters away from the polls outside the experimental setting, and subject their research to real world testing. Wattenberg and Brians believe that the intent of most negative commercials is to convert votes by focusing on an issue for which the sponsoring candidate has credibility in handling but on which the opponent is weak and they seek to demonstrate that the demobilization theory cannot be confirmed (891). Wattenberg and Brians' theory focuses on the objective of negative political advertisements, rather than the outcome.

The authors seek to prove that Ansolabehere and Iyengar's theory about negative ads is not supported by the data of the National Election Studies and are in fact quite skeptical that advertising tones could have much influence on turnout. Ansolabehere and Iyengar's data are portrayed as erroneous and the results as unreliable because of the exclusion of absentee voters and votes cast for minor candidates. Watteneberg and Brians (1999) claim to find no support for the demobilization hypothesis and stick with their hypothesis that the methods used by Ansolabehere and Iyengar are flawed and that negative ads attempt to raise issues that will win votes and convince people that the "stakes"[1] are indeed worthy of their participation (896). If negative commercials persuade voters that the choice between the candidates is an important one, then they are likely to increase rather than decrease turnout. According to the authors, "Politicians may blame low turnout on negative ads, but we believe the blame is misplaced"

[1] The term "stakes" is in reference to Franklin Roosevelt's controversial 1964 Presidential campaign "Daisy Girl" advertisement.

(896). Even though Wattenberg and Brians believe that the blame is misplaced, their study only attempts to arrive at the heart of the intent of negative political advertisements and not the actual effect. The argument of this paper is not that candidates and campaigns who implore the use of negative political advertisements are trying to decrease voter turnout, but rather that decreased voter turnout is an unfortunate and until recently, unaccounted for effect.

In response to the claims of Brians and Wattenberg (1999), Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Simon published the article "Replicating Experiments Using Aggregate and Survey Data: The Case of Negative Advertising and Turnout." Ansolabehere and his colleagues respond to the basic claims that their research is unreliable and that their claims are unsubstantiated. This article provides a statistical analysis of aggregate turnout data, experiments, and surveys are also provided which confirm their original findings that negative advertising demobilizes voters.

Ansolabehere and Iyengar's (1999) findings were the same: Exposure to negative advertising creates "avoidance" among viewers, which leaves them disengaged from the candidates and the political process. They also admit that there is a challenge facing the field of political communication that seeks to bridge the divide between experimental and nonexperimental methods. Ansolabehere and Iyengar contend that their method of using aggregate data to correct for biases in individual-level data holds considerable promise and for the studies considered at hand, the experimental, survey, and aggregate data all meet at the same conclusion. The fact that Ansolabehere and Iyengar were able to replicate their experiments both in a controlled setting and in an aggregate setting validates their results and gives substantial credibility to the theory that negative political advertising decreases voter turnout.

The literature linking negative campaigning to voter turnout is not abundant in number, but it is rich in context, interpretation, and criticisms. The most notable researchers who link campaigning to turnout are Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar and their findings that negative campaigning demobilizes the electorate has been both accepted and criticized. These critiques, however, do not add up to the strength of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's argument of demobilization. The critiques fall short because they do not take into account the effect that negative political advertising can have on individuals, they focus on objectives rather than on the outcome, and their studies are not replicated in both controlled and aggregate experiments. Although the hypotheses differed, one common thread runs through all the literature on negative campaigning – intention. All of the authors agree that they believe that the intention of going negative is not to decrease the number of voters that show up to the polls. The intent is to sway voters from one side to the other, or to reinforce existing support. Even though the intention is not to reduce voter turnout, it can still happen. A decrease in voter turnout can be an unforeseen outcome of negative political advertising and this backlash is an unanticipated consequence of the advancement of going negative.

Modern political campaigns are carried out heavily via the media (Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 181) and almost everyone agrees that political advertising is getting worse, but no one agrees on what to do about it (Kamber 1997, 229). Campaigns ought to empower voters to choose candidates who will best represent their interests, but the belief is that political advertisements manipulate and deceive voters. Voters are by no means foolish, but the potential for manipulation is real and campaign messages can influence how people vote, and they can influence what people think the election is about when they vote. The debate over going negative is still going on, and will continue to be a topic of debate as technology and the use of it

continues to grow as seen through the developments and popularity of web blogs and online vides engines. If this descent continues one has to ask if the dialogue of democracy can thrive or even survive.

Rock the Vote

> The continued decline in turnout reads a near crisis tone because political engagement in the sense of interest in politics and a willingness to follow (if not participate in) what is happening in government has also fallen. And observed declines are concentrated especially among the young, making the prospects for further declines likely and of a quick recovery implausible
>
> -Niemi and Weisberg 2001

According to Martin Wattenberg (2007), "Today's young adults are the least politically knowledgeable generation ever in the history of survey research" (5). But why is this the case? Some argue that young Americans need to be convinced that politics is interesting (Wattenberg 2007,49), while others argue that the youth are not offered any incentives so that in return the perceived benefits of voting are not worth the costs (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 10). Whatever the arguments are for low youth voter turnout, the facts have not fallen on deaf ears, and there are many organizations that are now solely dedicated to informing young voters of the issues facing them, providing them with a platform, and seeking to increase the participation of young voters through the act of voting. One of the most well-known organizations committed to the cause of increasing youth voter turnout and combating disengagement is Rock the Vote.

Rock the Vote is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that was founded in 1990 that seeks to engage the youth in the political process by incorporating the entertainment community and youth culture into its activities (Rock the Vote 2007, About Rock the Vote). Just as older citizens identify with religious, racial, and ethnic groups, so too do the youth have multiple identities

(Niemi and Weisberg 1993, 210) so Rock the Vote utilizes anyone from actors and athletes, to comedians and musicians to make political participation appealing. If the argument that low youth voter turnout exists because the youth believe that politics is uninteresting or it costs too much to participate, then Rock the Vote certainly acts as an intermediary between political leaders and the youth, and takes on the role both as educator and mobilizer. Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) argue, "People participate in politics not so much because of who they are, but because of the political choices and incentives they are offered" (5). Rock the vote, seeks to offer young voters incentives, inspiration, and the tools to create social and political change in their lives and their communities with the end goal of increasing youth voter turnout (Rock the Vote 2007, About Rock the Vote). Rock the vote's mobilization efforts include coordinating voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote events, and voter education and empowerment. People participate in electoral politics because someone encourages or inspires them to (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 161), and Rock the Vote seeks to encourage and inspire the youth.

CHAPTER THREE

Hypothesis

Research Question

Rock the vote has been in existence for over 18 years and in those 18years has youth voter turnout increased? Have their efforts been futile in its attempts to have youth voters "rock the vote"? Or on the other side, have they been successful in paving the way for the youth to demand attention from the government and be heard? Rock the vote is not the only organization dedicated to increasing youth voter turnout, no matter what your taste, or feelings, there is an organization out there to educate the young voter: Citizen Change, Declare Yourself, Hip Hop Summit, Choose or Lose, SmackDown Your Vote, Vote Latino, etc. Regardless of the organization, the efforts are still the same. Are these efforts that are aimed at voters ages 18-29 working?

Hypothesis

The purpose of this research is to measure the effects of the efforts targeted toward youth voters over the past 18 years, in terms of voter turnout. The organizations aimed at the youth have various initiatives and activities all through the year, in many states, but the ultimate goal of all these initiatives, activities, and efforts has been to increase youth voter turnout, and to reverse the previous trends of extremely low youth voter turnout that has been the case since 1972.

Rock the Vote reports that youth voter turnout has increased in the past two major elections, but how accurate are their numbers? Are their numbers inflated for the purposes of maintaining

and gaining a substantial reputation? Do advocates for the youth vote really have cause to celebrate? Can anyone be sure that the trend has been reversed and that youth voter turnout is on the rise as reported by Rock the Vote? More importantly, has the disenfranchisement of the younger segments of the population from years of low youth voter turnout ultimately proven too difficult to reverse?

These are questions that I seek to answer through a time analysis and measurement of voter turnout data, specifically studying the turnout of youth voters in Presidential elections. By analyzing the trends of voter turnout for the youth, an accurate light can be shed on what has truly been happening over the years and whether or not there is cause for celebration, cause to reevaluate the methods that are being used, if it is time to throw in the towel, cede voting power to older generations and bring back the Urban Outfitters "Voting is For Old People" t-shirt.

The time has come to evaluate the effect of the efforts targeted at youth voters and to see if the youth have shown to be a powerful force. There is no point in continuing efforts that do not work, or using old methods, when new ones are called for. This paper will give an account of the youth voters of this country, and will measure what their contribution has been in the political process. It will put to rest the lingering questions of what has happened to the nation's youth, and whether or not they care what happens around them and to them.

This thesis seeks to add a valuable contribution in the area of youth voting behavior. There are many avenues that have been explored and it may seem unreasonable to add anything new. I argue that this is not the case. I seek to contribute to the field by evaluating the effectiveness of the measures that have been taken in the (almost) past two decades to target and ultimately increase youth voter turnout. There are many organizations that are currently seeking to engage

and increase the youth vote. Many organizations claim success, but the accuracy of their claims have not been explored in any of the recent literature in youth voting behavior. I seek to confirm whether or not the measures that are in place now are currently successful in increasing youth voter turnout.

The results of this study will have important implications. The results will let the reader know if the efforts that are in place now need to be re-evaluated or restructured to be effective and helpful in reaching the goal of increasing voter turnout. If the data shows that youth voter turnout has continued to decline, even with the efforts and organizations that fight to increase youth voter turnout, then this will show organizers that efforts need to be reconsidered, and altered.

A continued decline in youth voter participation will also allow for the exploration of other forms of voting and consideration of the question: Should this country switch its methods for registration and voting? One consideration is that when citizens are of age, they should automatically be registered to vote by their state or the federal government. Another possibility is that we switch to a method of compulsory voting in which voting is mandatory and there is a punishment that accompanies the decision not to vote. With the system of compulsory voting, the cost of not voting can outweigh the cost of voting. These methods have worked in other democracies around the world. If the numbers show a continued decline, then it begs that we ask tough questions about our voting system and the possible changes that can be made to make it better.

On the other hand, if the numbers show that these measures are actually working, this outcome has the ability to change the face of politics. Positive results will show that measures that are targeted towards specific populations are effective, and that other segments of the

population can be aggressively targeted. Because there has been a decline in all segments of the electorate, positive numbers would indicate that more targeted attention is a contributing factor to increasing voter turnout and can thus increase voter turnout over all voting populations. Also, if the numbers show that youth voter turnout is increasing, it will bring more attention to this ignored segment of the population and compel more political leaders to consider the issues facing young voters. It has the capability of shifting some of the focus away from the older generation of voters and changing how politicians go after votes. Positive results will show that young people are following what's going on in politics, and they will gain an advantage in being able to direct how politicians deal with the issues of the day. The results will ultimately show if we have a government for the people, by the people, and of the people, and if not, how we can get there.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Method

Data Availability

I plan to perform this study by utilizing the statistics available from the American National Election Studies. The American National Elections Studies produces data on voting, public opinion, and political participation for the purpose of the research needs of those who want a better understanding of the theoretical and empirical foundations of national election outcomes (American National Election Studies 2006-2009, About ANES). The goal of the American National Election Studies is to give light to explanations of election outcomes by providing data across people, context, and time. They provide researchers with a view of the political world through the eyes of citizens. For Americans who want to understand how democracy works, the American National Elections Studies helps to inform them by explaining the causes and consequences of voting behavior and electoral outcomes (American National Election Studies 2006-2009, About ANES).

The principal source of nationwide sample surveys is the National Election Studies (Mann and Wolfinger 1993, 188). There are other data available through other organizations, but for the purpose of studying voting turnout/behavior, the most reliable source is the National Election Studies. They make every effort to make sure that their information is correct because they are aware that many researchers turn to them and rely on the accuracy of their reported data. Other organizations include the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). This organization promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between ages of 18 and 25. CIRCLE conducts and funds research and was founded in 2001. Given the relatively recent development of CIRCLE and its proclivity

toward the youth vote, I do not feel confidant using their data for my research. The American National Election Studies with their hundreds of questions about the parties, the candidates, and the issues have become the standard data base for the study of United States Elections (Niemi and Weisberg 1993, 6).

The years that youth voter turnout will be reviewed with the National Election Studies are 1976-2004. This is a span of 28 years, and includes 14 years before the founding of Rock the Vote and 14 years after. I am choosing to stay within the time frame of Rock the Vote because the beginning of Rock the Vote in 1990 signals the beginning of the founding of different organizations specifically formed to target the youth vote. In order not to have too many outliers, or extremes, it is plausible that the trends that can be observed over this almost thirty year period can be extremely useful and effective in applying the results to the general youth vote demographic.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, there are a few terms that need to be explained in order to have an accurate understanding of the study and its results.

1. Participation

In terms of this study, voter participation is measured solely through the act of voting. Even though participation in voting has declined, other types of political participation have increased (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 2). There are many ways to participate in the American political structure, including volunteering, donations, and other initiatives, but the end result of all these efforts is the hope that a vote will actually be cast. The principle that “the most common form of

citizen participation in America is voting" (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 41), still holds true even today.

2. Elections:

When I speak of reviewing voter turnout in elections, I am only talking about Presidential elections, or first-order elections. Presidential elections provide a periodic review of government by the citizenry (Cantor 1975, 126). I am only using first-order elections because "second-order elections are less likely to decide crucial issues, or get as much media coverage as presidential elections, [and] they just don't appear as important to citizens" (Wattenberg 2007, 108). It is well-known that in off-year elections, voter turnout for every demographic is lower than Presidential election years. Second-order elections simply do not attract the level of media exposure or general interest that attends Presidential elections (Cantor 1975, 83) and Presidential elections represent the form of political participation that attracts the largest percentage of the citizenry (Cantor 1975, 2). It would not be fair to study the youth voter phenomenon during a time when voter turnout is dismal for all sectors of the voting population. When it comes to Presidential elections, most voters place more emphasis and more of an effort in casting their vote than in non-presidential elections.

3. Youth:

In regard to this study, the term youth does not refer to a stable cohort, or a number that is consistent from 1976-2004. The minimum age for this cohort is 18 because that is the age that voter eligibility begins, but the maximum age will vary across elections. There are some studies who define the youth as those between the ages for 18 and 25 or 18 and 24; I argue that these ages are not definitive for the all elections. One of the most widely discussed social trends that coincide with the decrease in civic engagement and participation is the breakdown of the

traditional family unit (Putnam 2001, 50). Along with the breakdown of the traditional family unit has been a trend over the years of an increase in the age of first marriage. Some theorists argue that many young people don't vote because they do not possess enough vested relationships or social capital that propels them to vote. One of the most observable determinants is that of marriage. Because the age of marriage has become later in life, the youth cohort will vary based on this number/statistic. Based on the median age of first marriage, these are the following cohorts for the youth voting demographic:

Table 1: Youth Cohort for Presidential Elections 1976-2004

Election Year	Median Age of First Marriage	*Youth Voting Cohort*	Year(s) Born
1976	22	*18-22*	1954-1958
1980	23	*18-23*	1957-1962
1984	23	*18-23*	1961-1966
1988	23	*18-23*	1965-1970
1992	25	*18-25*	1967-1974
1996	26	*18-25*	1970-1978
2000	26	*18-26*	1974-1982
2004	26	*18-26*	1978-1986

Data Collection

Data for this research will be collected from the American National Election Studies Data Center. The American National Election Study conducts national surveys of the American Electorate in election years and has time-series studies, pilot studies, and other major data collection (American National Election Studies 2007). "The growth of the National Election Studies into a time series covering almost four decades greatly facilitates inquiry into the impact of historic public events on the body of politic." (Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 339). The American National Election Study has data extending from 1948 to 2006. Because of the longevity of the American National Election Study's time-series the usefulness of the data is greatly enhanced and both long-term trends and the impact of historical events are able to be identified (American National Election Studies 2007). For the purposes of this research, I am only interested in the studies conducted between 1976 and 2004 during presidential elections.

The American National Election Study Time-Series studies are conducted around each national election. In presidential election years, the study is usually done before and after the election (American National Election Studies 2007). Pilot studies are conducted when there is no election and other data, including Senate elections are also studied. Because I am only interested in presidential election years, I am only going to utilize the time-series data, more specifically the voting participation statistics that are available through the online data center.

The main purpose of my research is to study youth voting trends in presidential elections over the past thirty years and to analyze the turnout data to see if specifically targeted measures toward the youth demographic are helping to increase youth voter turnout.

> Explaining election outcomes requires asking people many more questions than the commercial pollsters do. Voters can not just be asked who they will vote for. They must be asked their feelings about each candidate, each party, each issue, how they obtained

> information on the electorate, how they voted in the past and so on (Niemi and Weisberg 1993, 3).

The American National Election Study does not just configure participation statistics; it also asks many valuable questions. Because there is a wealth of information available through the data center, it seems prudent to also explore other trends that may or may not coincide with youth voting statistics. In addition to voting participation numbers, I am going to look at the numbers and questions concerning support for the political system and political involvement and engagement. Looking at the questions that ask the youth demographic about trust in government, the benefit of the government for all, the character of government officials, and media use on behalf of the voter during campaigns will allow me to track other trends over time and to see if any of these trends follow the same trends as voting participation over the past thirty years (American National Election Studies 2007, NES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior). The answers to these questions, and the trend over the years, may help to gain some insight into the attitudes that accompany youth voter turnout, or the lack thereof.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings and Analysis

The findings of this research support the claims of Rock the Vote that over the past two major elections youth turnout has increased. According to ANES data, since the 1996 presidential election, youth voter turnout has increased by almost ten percentage points. Although the claims of Rock the Vote are supported by ANES data, they are not supported to the same magnitude as Rock the Vote claims. Rock the Vote claims a 9 per cent increase in youth voter turnout from 2000 to 2004. ANES data however only shows a 4 per cent increase. The increase in turnout is there, but the extent to which Rock the Vote claims is inaccurate according to the data provided by the ANES.

Figure 1 shows that from 1976 to 1988 there was a steady decline in youth voter turnout, even reaching as low as 49 per cent of the eligible demographic turning out to vote in the 1988 election between Ronald Reagan and Michael Dukakis. Perhaps most strikingly is the fact that this cohort shows a steep increase in the 1992 election between George Bush and Bill Clinton to 65 per cent of the cohort turning out to vote. What distinguishes this year from the others is the fact that Rock the Vote was started two years before the 1992 election, which allows one to speculate about the positive effects of the targeted mobilization efforts on the youth vote.

When these results are compared to that of voters ages 60 and older there is a slight trend upwards for the 1992 election from 76 per cent to 78 per cent. Figure 2 shows that even though both segments of the population saw an increase, it was not as sharp as the increase among the youth demographic. The 16 per centage point increase among the youth shows that the

developed targeted measures given to this demographic were a vital contributing factor to the sharp increase in voter turnout.

There are many who point to 1992 and ask, “What about the candidates”? 1992 saw the emergence of President Clinton who was and still is seen as a dynamic and charismatic person, who some may call the “ultimate” politician, and the presence of a viable third party candidate in Ross Perot. Over the years, researchers have shown that partisanship is weaker and the presence of more choices (such as Ross Perot in 1992) has lead to higher levels of voting. The previous research is not disputed here, but the dynamism of politicians and the presence of more credible choices alone can not fully account for the spike in youth voter turnout in 1992, especially when taking into consideration the only two percentage point increase among voters ages 60 and older. The candidate speculation is further put to rest by the fact that since 1996 youth voter turnout has continued to increase despite a lack of noted charisma and viable third party candidates. The results show that one thing is certain: young voters are turning up to the polls to vote more than in any previous election since 18-20 year olds gained the right to vote.

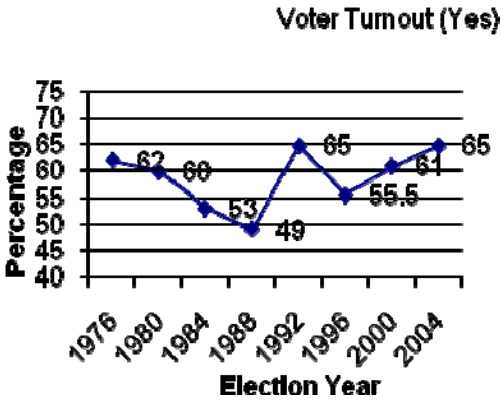

Figure 1: Voter Turnout of Youth Cohort in Presidential Elections

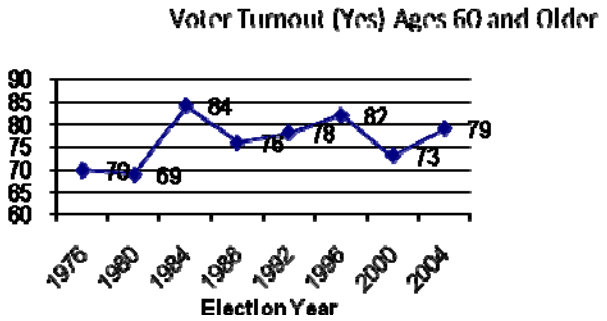

Figure 2: Voter Turnout of Ages 60 and Older in Presidential Elections

The American National Elections Studies time series data also allowed me to study the attitudes of the youth that have accompanied their turnout numbers. Other questions that were viewed were whether or not respondents felt that the government was for the benefit of all, whether or not the respondents viewed government officials as "crooked" and whether or not the respondents trusted the Federal government[2].

For the question asking the youth cohort if the government is for the benefit of all, it can be observed that this number was at its lowest point in 1976 with only 24 per cent of the youth voting population believing that the government benefited all citizens. This number reached its highest in 1984 with 44 per cent of the youth voting population believing that the government was for the benefit of all. The percentage of the youth believing that the government was for the benefit of all reached another low of 26 per cent in 1992, which is the same year that there was a "resurgence" of the youth vote. These results show that even though the youth vote was stimulated to reach one of its highest turnouts since 1972, the portion of those youth that

[2] See appendix for exact wording of the questions asked by the American National Election Studies.

believed that the government was for the benefit of all citizens rested at one of its greatest lows since 1972. These results perhaps indicate that as the youth demographic became more knowledgeable about the government through targeted mobilization efforts, they formed meaningful opinions about the benefit of the government for all, and those opinions led them to believe that the government was not beneficial to most citizens.

The data for voters ages 60 and older show that this number reached its lowest point at both 1980 and 1992 with only 16 per cent of the population believing that the government was for the benefit of all. These numbers are even lower than the youth demographic, while simultaneously having higher numbers of turnout. Interestingly, 39 per cent of both youth voters and voters ages 60 and older believed that the government was for the benefit of all in the 2004 election. The results show that even though the older demographic has believed at lower numbers that the government benefited all citizens, more than 70 per cent of this population has consistently turned out to vote. Perhaps, more targeted measures toward the youth voting segment have been able to turn knowledge about the government and dissatisfaction with it into active voting habits, rather than frustration and non voting.

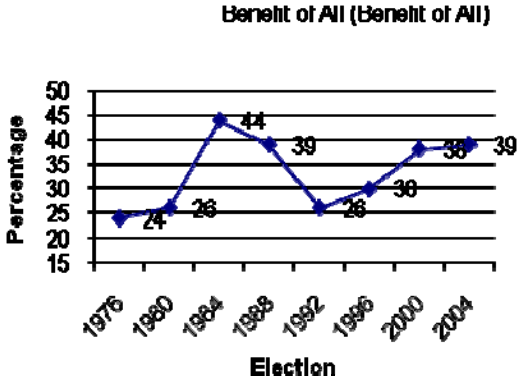

Figure 3: Percent of Youth Voters who agree that the Government is for the "Benefit of All"

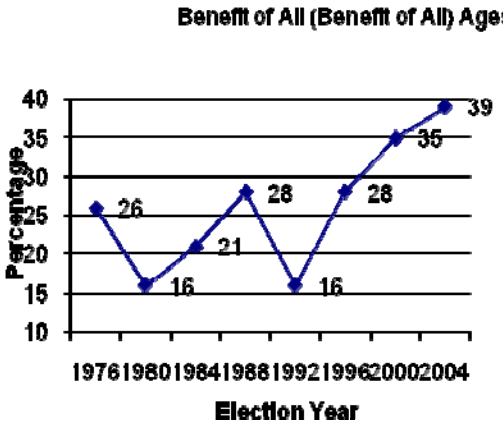

Figure 4: Percent of VotersAges 60 and older who agree that the Government is for the "Benefit of All"

For the question asking if the respondents thought that government officials are crooked, between 1992 and 2004, these levels have remained between 41 per cent and 45 per cent of the youth cohort believing that "quite a few" government officials were crooked. These numbers show that even though at times more than 45 per cent of the youth voting electorate felt that government officials were crooked, still, upwards of 60 per cent of the population has still turned out to vote in presidential elections since 1992. The results also show that more of the youth electorate believes that "quite a few" of government officials are crooked than believe that the government is for the benefit of all. Perhaps most striking about these results is the fact that even though many in the youth voting cohort have feelings of inadequacy about the benefit of government for all and the crookedness of government officials, it has not deterred them from voting or instilled a greater sense of voter apathy.

For voters ages 60 and older, there has been a downward trend since 1984 of those who believe that "quite a few" government officials are crooked. This number reached a high of 55

per cent in 1984, but has continued to decline (with the exception of the 2000 election which was 43 per cent) with a low of 28 per cent in 2004. In general, the youth voting demographic have believed more than voters ages 60 and older that "quite a few" government officials are crooked. As the youth have trended up, voters ages 60 and up have trended down showing that despite feelings of unequal benefits for citizens and the belief that government officials are crooked, youth voters are still increasing their turnout rates.

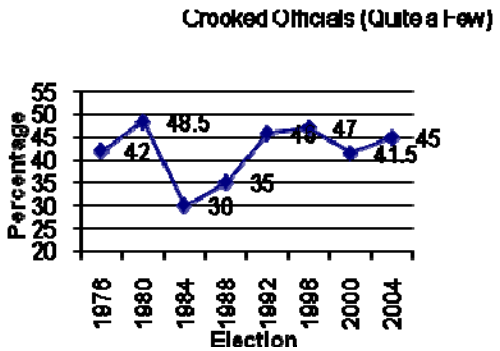

Figure 5: Percent of youth voters who feel that "Quite A Few" Government Officials are "Crooked"

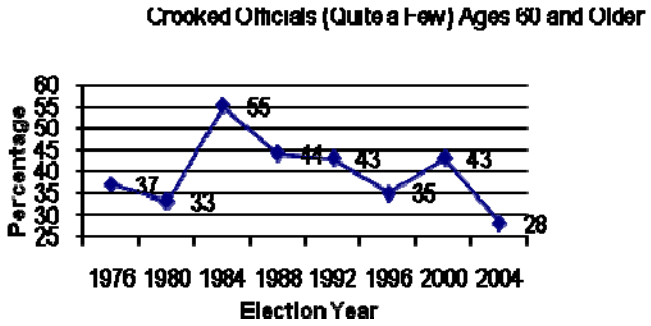

Figure 6: Percent of voters ages 60 and older who feel that "Quite a Few" Government Officials are "Crooked"

For the question asking the respondents if they trusted the Federal Government "most of the time", from 1976 to 2004 this number has ranged between 27 and 41 per cent. Trust in the

Federal Government was at an all time low during the 1992 election with only 27 per cent of the youth voting cohort trusting the Federal government most of the time. Interestingly, the lowest level of trust in 1992 does not correspond with the highest level of turnout (65 per cent) in the 1992 election. These results show that a low level of trust in the government does not lead to low levels of voting among young voters. These numbers also show that despite arguments about the media and campaigns effect on the electorate, the levels of trust in the Federal government are on the rise, and have been since 1996.

For voters ages 60 and older, from 1976 to 2004, this number has ranged from 29 to 66 per cent of voters trusting the federal government most of the time. Trust in the federal Government reached a low in 1984 with 28 per cent, which is also the highest level of voter turnout for this group of voters showing that levels of trust in the government do not lead to low levels of voting. Also, consistent with the trend of youth voters is the upward trend since 1992 showing that both of these groups have increased in their trust of the Federal Government "most of the time". The ANES data shows that levels of trust are on the rise, but cause for celebration is not here, as still less than half of youth voters answered that they trust the Federal government "most of the time".

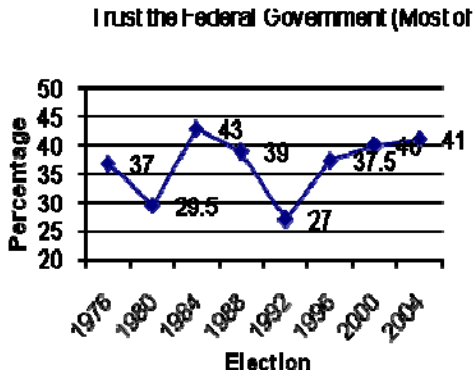

Figure 7: Percent of Youth Voters who Trust the Federal Government "Most of the Time"

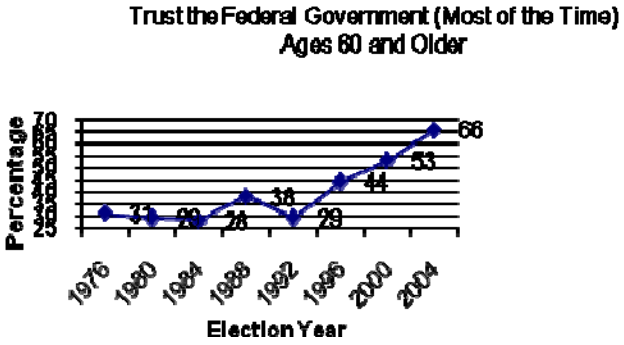

Figure 8: Percent of Voters ages 60 and older who Trust the Federal Government "Most of the Time"

For the general attitude questions that were asked of the respondents, the trends for two of the questions in both the youth demographic, and voters ages 60 and older were generally the same. For the question asking if you believe the government is for the "benefit of all", both cohorts show a similar positive trend particularly after the 1992 election. The same observation is true for the question asking if you trust the federal government "most of the time". For both youth voters and those ages 60 and older there is a positive trend since the 1992 election. Even though the specific numbers are not identical, the general trend for both of these voting populations suggests that these attitudes pervade all of society but that the impact on individual cohorts is different.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

So what does it all mean? First the numbers tell us that youth voting is on the rise, and has been since the 1996 Presidential election. More importantly, these numbers help to solidify the purpose of organizations targeted toward not only the youth demographic, but other demographics in the electorate. The numbers show that targeted measures of mobilization have encouraged youth voter participation. So one must ask, if targeted measures have worked on the youth demographic, then why not other segments of the population? "Political participation is the product of strategic interactions of citizens and leaders" (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 228), and Rock the Vote and its offspring organizations have facilitated these interactions, thereby helping to stimulate voting among what was thought to be a dying segment of the voting population. Youth voting organizations have found their niche by imploring methods of mobilization, framing, and interactions that have helped to facilitate a rise in youth voter turnout. Perhaps, more targeted measures are needed for other segments of the voting population, as voter participation has been bleak for the entire U.S. electorate when compared to other democracies around the world.

The results show that youth voting has been consistently on the rise since the 1996 election, but they also point to an incredible turnout for the 1992 election. The 1992 election shows that the initial response to mobilization efforts sparked an extraordinary rise in youth voter turnout. Additionally, the general attitude questions that were asked shows that this high of voter turnout was accompanied by almost record lows of dissatisfaction with the benefit of the government, feelings that most government officials are "crooked", and low levels of trust in the federal

government. The corresponding highs and lows point to an interesting observation: The more information that the youth received through targeted mobilization efforts, the more they were dissatisfied with the government, but this dissatisfaction did not instill a greater sense of apathy, but rather was turned into active voting habits.

Voting is both an individual and collective act (Kornbluh 2000, 1) and young voters have been independently and jointly steeping up to the plate and exercising their role in our participatory democracy. In previous years, the youth have not shown to be powerful, therefore candidates may feel that there is no benefit in the direct mobilization of this population, but the findings of this study show that youth voting is on the rise, and it would be wise for candidates to include this previously ignored segment of the population. Incorporating this segment shows the possibility for change: Change on the policy level, as the youth begin to have more of a say in how politicians deal with issues of the day, change in the political choices and incentives they are offered, change as the political disenfranchisement of the younger population can begin to come to an end, and change in the awareness of a generation thought to be the least politically knowledgeable.

"Participation is the lifeblood of democracy, and the health of a democracy is often seen in terms of its level of turnout" (Niemi and Weisberg 2001, 83). The results show that the health of our democracy is not 100%, but then again, reaching levels of 100% participation is a near impossible feat. One thing is clear: The United States ranks as one of the lowest countries for voter turnout in the world, and as the professed "leader of the free world" our present numbers of turnout should not be acceptable. There are some democracies in the world who sustain 90% or more voter turnout in every election but the United States does not come close to those numbers. It would be incredible if the perceived "leader" would show the way and be ranked as one of

countries with the highest levels of turnout instead of the lowest. If the results show anything, it is that we have not reached the pinnacle yet, but with each election and increase in youth voter turnout, we get closer to that ideal of "government for the people, by the people, and of the people."

Rock the Vote has been a catalyst for increased voting among the youth demographic. Over the past three elections, turnout has been on the rise. This research does not claim that Rock the Vote and organizations like it are solely responsible for the increase in participation, but it is certainly a contributing factor. More research is needed to dig deeper into this subject. Future research should be conducted along the lines of race, gender, and region to look at the effects on a more basic and local level. This research shows however that despite levels of distrust in the government and government officials, and feelings that the government is not for the benefit of all its citizens, Urban Outfitters got it wrong in 2004: As the results show, voting is most emphatically not just for old people!

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APPENDIX A

American National Election Studies Question Wording

Voter Turnout (Figures One and Two):

Percent among demographic groups who responded: “Yes, Voted”

Benefit of All (Figures Three and Four):

“Is the government run for the benefit of all 1964-2004?”

Percent Among Demographic Groups who responded: “Benefit of All”

Government Officials Crooked (Figures Five and Six):

“Are government officials crooked 1958-2004?”

Percent Among Demographic Groups who responded: “Quite A Few”

Trust in Federal Government (Figures Seven and Eight):

“Trust the Federal Government 1958-2004”

Percent Among Demographic Groups who responded: “Most of the Time/Just About”

APPENDIX B

Results of All American National Election Studies Questions Asked of the Youth Cohort

Election Year	Voter Turnout	Watched Campaign on	Government Officials Crooked	Government for the Benefit of All	Trust the Federal Government
1976	62	87	42	24	37
1980	60	80.5	48	26	29.5
1984	53	80	30	44	43
1988	49	-	35	39	39
1992	65	85	46	26	27
1996	55.5	66	47	30	37.5
2000	61	77.5	41.5	38	40
2004	65	93	45	39	41

Election Year	Watched Campaign on TV (No)	Government Officials Crooked (Not Many)	Government Officials Crooked (Hardly Any)	Government for Benefit of All (Few Big Interests)	Trust the Federal Government (Some/None of the Time)
1976	13	44	11	65	62
1980	19.5	38.5	9	67	68.5
1984	20	52	14	50	55
1988	-	48	13	56	59
1992	15	44	8	70	72
1996	34	44	4	69	62.5
2000	22.5	46	11	56	60
2004	17	47	7	61	59

APPENDIX C

Results of all American National Election Studies Questions Asked of Those Ages 60 and Older

Election Year	Voter Turnout	Government Officials Crooked	Government for the Benefit of All	Trust the Federal Government
1976	70	37	26	31
1980	69	33	16	29
1984	84	55	21	28
1988	76	44	28	38
1992	78	43	16	29
1996	82	35	28	44
2000	73	43	35	53
2004	79	28	39	66