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# Where Have All the Young Voters Gone?

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# Where Have All the Young Voters Gone?

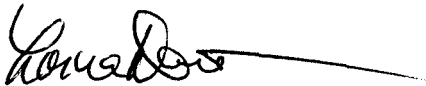
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Jordan Nunn

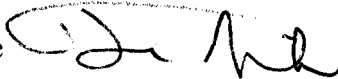
3/16/2015

In pursuit of Departmental Honors in Political Science

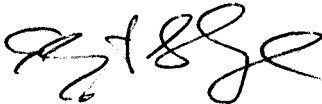
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## **Abstract**

In this study I addressed the concerning decrease in voter turnout among our nation's young people and what is causing this decrease. I used the American National Election Studies (ANES) Cumulative Time Series Data File to observe voting behavior and the causes of voter turnout. Using Binary Logistic Regression and the Probability of Difference Equation, I found that among the general population, increased education is the most significant factor that leads to voter turnout. I then narrowed the scope to compare causes of turnout between adults aged 17-24 and adults aged 65-74. I hypothesized that a sense of political efficacy would be the leading factor in determining voter turnout among young people. I found, however, that the level of higher education correlates to higher voter turnout among both young and older voters.

## Introduction

In 2004, a large number of Americans were walking around with T-shirts on that said “Vote or Die.” To some this proclamation might have seemed shocking, but to the youth of the United States this was supposed to be inspirational. The T-shirts were a product of the *Citizen Change* campaign that was founded by a group of artists, actors, athletes, and celebrities, and was established to target young people and encourage them to get involved in the political world by exercising their right to vote. Sean Combs, a.k.a., P.Diddy, a co-founder, claimed that *Citizen Change* was going to make voting “sexy” in the same way that music and movies are. The campaign was directly geared toward young people and it is not the only one of its kind. Many other organizations exist which are directed at the young voter including *Rock the Vote* and *This Is My Vote*. They all exhibit a common goal, which is to educate and increase voter turnout among the youth of the nation.

The fate of the United States rests in the hands of the elected government and the power to elect government officials rests in the hands of the people, as it is a democratic republic. It is obvious then that we place a large amount of importance on voting and representation but sometimes voter turnout is not what we would like it to be, particularly among young voters. In the 2012 Presidential Election only 38% of eligible voters between the ages of 18 to 24 reported voting. This percentage is down from its peak of 44.3% in the 2008 Presidential election. In 2012 out of the 29,878,000 young people aged 18 to 24 only 49.4% even registered to vote, compared to 53.4% of the 28,263,000 young people in 2008 (United States Census Bureau 2012 and 2008). On the other hand, adults aged 65 to 74, with a population of 24,162,000, reported a 77.1% registration rate and a voting rate of 71.1% in 2012 (United States Census Bureau 2012). Many Americans are already aware that young people simply do not vote as often as their elders, but

when faced with these disappointing numbers it is apparent that low turnout really is a problem. Young voters are two times less likely to vote than their elders. This information then logically leads to the question: Why is it that young people vote less?

### **Literature Review**

Since 1971, when the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution lowered the voting age to eighteen, Americans have been talking about the youth vote. Now in 2014, there are many scholars who have contributed theories and ideas about voting to the collection. To understand young voters, it is important to first understand the average voter. There are many factors that will lead an individual to make the choice to vote or not but it is a common belief among political scientists that the foundation of all factors regarding turnout begin with the simple comparison of cost vs. benefit. As Anthony Downs wrote, "Every rational man decides to vote just as he makes all other decisions: if the returns outweigh the costs, he votes; if not, he abstains" (Downs 1957, 60). Fredrik Carlsson and Olof Johansson-Stenman (2010) support this claim in their work, "Why do You Vote and Vote as You Do?" by saying "the expected benefit from voting is small compared to the time, cost, and effort involved" (Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2010, 495). Wolfinger and Rosenstone, in "Who Votes?" (1980), also find that the costs and benefits of voting will vary among different individuals based on certain factors including but not limited to education, occupation, income, age, sex, registration, church attendance, and marital status. Almost all authors on voting agree that these are the fundamental factors that contribute to whether a person will vote or not. These characteristics are all interrelated and build on one another. For example, "professionals are likely to have more education and money than do blue-collar workers" (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 10). The person described received higher education, which led to his

professional job and higher salary, which then leads him to be more politically involved and thus to vote more. It is possible that some of these factors combine with others to create a correlation to voting. Wolfinger and Rosenstone's research reveals that socioeconomic status, education, income, and occupation all have varying effects on voter turnout. Wattenberg (2011) and Caprara, Vecchione, and Schwartz (2012) also show similar findings that these factors have varying degrees of importance and each build upon them in their own studies. They find that education plays a big role and has a positive effect on voting rates. Income, however, was found to have a relatively small effect once a certain standard of living has been reached. Wolfinger and Rosenstone found that individuals with low income had low turnout and individuals that reached a comfortable standard of living reported a higher rate of voting. The interesting finding is that after the level of comfortable living was reached, the turnout rate did not increase further, and therefore rich individuals were no more likely to vote than comfortable individuals. This could potentially explain the lack of turnout among young people who have not yet reached that comfortable standard. Wolfinger and Rosenstone tackle the factors of age, sex, and marital status. In the 1970's they established that "married people are more likely to vote than those who are single, separated, divorced, or widowed" (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 44). They attributed this to the influence that spouses have on each other and their encouragement for one another to vote. One particular finding is essential to my research, that "aging, by itself, produces not a decline but an increase in turnout" (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 47). The majority of political scientists support this claim because of the abundance in evidence found in statistics. The question still remains, however: why does voting turnout increase with age?

Wolfinger and Rosenstone, as well as many other authors, examine other contributing factors to voter turnout which include registration laws, ethnic background, regional differences,

and whether or not voters are government employees. Of these, registration has been found by scholars to be a fairly significant factor of voter turnout. In order to vote, you must first be registered; if you are not registered you may not vote. Logical reasoning and common sense say then that registration would be the most important cause of voting. Robert. S. Erikson agrees with this claim and concludes in his 1981 study that “almost all people who are registered vote in presidential elections,” showing that this is in fact, true (Erikson 1981, 274).

In summary, most scholars conclude that education is the greatest factor that determines whether a person will vote or not. Education allows a person to better understand not only the world around them but also how they can express their opinions to that world through their vote. The second most important factor in determining voter turnout is age and third could be considered registration. The other variables mentioned above were found to have little to no influence.

Caprara, Vecchione, and Schwartz agree with all of these basic concepts of what leads to voter turnout but they also add new explanations to the mix. They frame four models that attempt to explain the decline in voter turnout over time. First is the resource model that mostly follows the conclusions of Wolfinger and Rosenstone. “This model specified low income and education as the major determinants of voter disenfranchisement” (Caprara, Vecchione, and Schwartz 2012, 266). They agree with Wolfinger and Rosenstone that education is important but disagree in regards to income. They regard income as being equally important to voter turnout as education and having a noticeable impact. Second, the mobilization model “asserts that people vote because parties, interest groups, and candidates mobilize them to do so” (Caprara, Vecchione, and Schwartz 2012, 266). Third, they identify the electoral competition model, which “attributes change in turnout rates to long-term, cumulative effects of demographic shifts in the

electorate, features of the electoral systems, and changes in laws and procedures” (Caprara, Vecchione, and Schwartz 2012, 267). This model is the one that deals with aging and the effect of younger cohorts who are less politically involved replacing their older cohort. The fourth and final model is the civic virtues model which “views voter turnout as an important indicator of the civic mindedness and social capital of a community” (Caprara, Vecchione, and Schwartz 2012, 267). This model reflects the trust and responsibility that individuals place on the system and its institutions. The civic virtues model clearly supports the idea of political efficacy, in which a trust in government is essential, and its importance in voting and voter turnout.

Fredrik Carlsson and Olof Johansson-Stenman also frame three major competing hypotheses for why people choose to vote. The first is an “instrumental reason, that is, to affect the outcome” (Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2010, 501). The second is an “expressive reason, that is, to be able to express one’s views” (Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2010, 501). The third is “a social norm reason, that is, to conform to a norm saying that it is a democratic obligation to vote” (Carlsson and Johansson-Stenman 2010, 501).

Although scholars provide many different theories and perspectives to explain why people vote or do not vote, they all share a common belief that different groups of people are driven to vote for different reasons. Therefore, an older individual may choose to vote, where a younger individual chooses not to. What is this factor that makes the difference?

Martin P. Wattenberg has done extensive research on voting specifically among young people and has come to the conclusion 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” (Wattenberg 2011, 3). He agrees with the traditional

views of scholars like Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) but also sheds light on the new modern factors contributing to low turnout as well. He contends that there is a conflict growing between today's politicians and young voters that is further damaging youth voter turnout. According to Wattenberg, politicians tend to focus their efforts and campaigns on those voters who continually show up at the polls. The elderly are typically very invested in government as they rely on programs such as Medicare for their health care needs which leads them to pay more attention to politicians and voice their opinion on Election Day. As a result, politicians are neglecting the young voter, and therefore the young voter tunes out and does not show up to the polls. When young people do not show up to the polls, politicians will not cater to their needs, as it is not important to their reelection. It is a vicious self-perpetuating cycle that has rendered the youth of the nation politically tuned out. Wattenberg outlines a few major reasons why young people do not vote. He begins by showing the change in news consumption over the years. In earlier times, Americans were used to reading the daily paper for their news and politics but in modern times, television and the internet have almost made newspapers obsolete. Today, there are so many channels that are readily available that few young people will choose to watch the news channels, favoring MTV or a movie instead. With such a lack of political knowledge, many young people do not possess the information necessary to make an informed vote and abstain.

Ruthann Weaver Lariscy, Spencer F. Tinkham, and Kaye D. Sweetser call this lack of information low "political information efficacy" (Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser 2011, 750). Political information efficacy is the extent to which citizens are confident in their political knowledge and possess sufficient knowledge to engage with the political process, including voting (Kaid et. al 2007). Lariscy et. al. (2011) conclude that a lack of political information efficacy also leads to low political efficacy in young voters.

A growing trend among many of today's youth is to get involved in politics by volunteering or with hands-on involvement. If a young college student feels that going to the polls and casting a vote will not make a difference, she may choose instead to volunteer and take a more hands-on approach to bettering her community. To some young people, volunteering is a more rewarding experience than voting because they will see immediate results and feel as if they played an important role in the success of the community. This is described as civic engagement but Wattenberg warns to not be fooled because the main cause of this new volunteering initiative has a lot to do with college-age students trying to boost their resumés. Young people are not becoming always becoming politically active for a truly political reason but rather to look good for colleges and potential employers. It may be an outlet that allows them to get involved politically but in the grand scheme it does not make much of a difference as far as voter turnout is concerned.

Stephen Bennett writes about the view that young people have of politicians and the government system. He says, "Like many Americans over 30, young people do not trust politicians, believing many to be corrupt and self-serving. Large percentages think government is unresponsive to people like themselves" (Bennett 1997, 47). Bennett directly agrees with Wattenberg's view that politicians ignore young voters. Bennett also mentions the fact that many Americans under the age of thirty do not follow politics on television, in newspapers, or on the radio and therefore they are disconnected from the political spectrum. He argues that this new trend of low voter turnout is actually not new. He recalls research from the 1950's and 60's that demonstrate the youthful inattention to politics. During that time period, scholars attributed the lack of political participation to "residential mobility, completion of schooling, commencement

of jobs and careers, and the search for the significant other” (Bennett 1997, 49). Bennett states that some of these same factors could still apply today.

There are two main competing theories that many of these scholars reference that attempt to explain why young people do not vote. The first is the Habituation Theory. Edward Fieldhouse and David Cutts explain the role of habituation in voting.

Green and Shachar define habit as an act whose engagement in it ‘makes it more likely that one will engage in the same activity in the future’ (2000, 562). This implies that going to the polls in one election will lead to a greater likelihood of returning to the polls in a subsequent election (Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003), which will in turn lead to inertia (Cutts, Fieldhouse, and John 2009; Plutzer 2002). Habit is not only the repetition of the act itself, but also the specificity of the (stable) context in which it takes place. With regard to voting, this implies that repetition in voting behavior as well as context stability is important in understanding habitual voting (Aldrich et al. 2010) (Fieldhouse and Cutts 2012, 858).

The argument is that an elderly man who grew up being politically involved and voting constantly will continue that behavior as he ages. If a young man was not politically knowledgeable and had no interest in voting early on, as he aged, he would continue to abstain from voting or getting involved politically because he never had before. This is the theory that Wattenberg sides with, believing that socialization and new media habits have led today’s youth to tune out and stay tuned out. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980), however, take the other side. They argue in favor of the Life Cycle Theory, which asserts that voting increases with age and achievement of life goals. As a person continues his education and gains knowledge of politics and policy, he will be more likely to vote. Further, as the person gets a career and starts a family, he will be even more likely to cast a ballot. The chances of voting continually increase as he ages and more milestones are reached in a person’s lifetime; thus, the Life Cycle theory.

Wolfinger and Rosenstone, following the life cycle theory, believe that as age increases, voting rates do too. Voter turnout does however decline in what they label “the twilight years”

due to lack of mobility and disabilities. They assert that as you age, you gain more education and therefore more political knowledge. Also as you age, your income rises, you may take on a spouse, and you will further integrate into the community, causing you to be more politically aware. These arguments are rejected by Nicholas A. Valentino, Krysha Gregorowicz and Eric W. Groenendyk (2009). They declare that experience in politics itself is what boosts involvement, thus siding with the theory of habituation. For example, if a person votes one time and finds it to be satisfying she will then choose to do it again in order to achieve the same satisfaction. If this is true, then the life cycle theory is obsolete because everything comes back to what people grow accustomed to. Aging itself does not preclude the habit also being developed.

A third perspective that attempts to explain why young people do not vote is the idea of political efficacy. Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk state that political efficacy is

A combination of one's sense of competence in the political sphere and one's assessment of the responsiveness of the system. A citizen is more likely to participate when she believes her actions can make a difference in politics. This can either be because she considers herself competent and influential . . . or because she is confident that the system is responsive to her and others like her (Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009, 308).

Campbell et al. were some of the first scholars to study political efficacy and they concluded that individuals with the lowest level of political efficacy only voted 52% of the time. On the other side of the spectrum, individuals who demonstrated a high level of efficacy voted 91% of the time. Political efficacy was determined using a cumulative scale formed from the responses to four questions (Campbell et al. 1960).

Valentino et. al. (2009) contend that a person's sense of political efficacy is responsible for determining whether he/she will choose to get involved in politics or not. At the most basic level, if a young person believes that her vote will not matter, she may choose not to go to the

polls at all. She could, however, decide later in life that her vote does in fact matter and make the choice to vote. This scenario supports the life cycle theory. On the other hand, a young person who initially feels that his vote matters will vote and form a habit of voting into adulthood, hence supporting the habituation theory. It is clear that political efficacy plays a very important role in both of these major competing theories.

André Blais and Ludovic Rheault (2011) also observed political efficacy and concluded that uninformed and inattentive voters have a lower political efficacy because they feel as if their vote is not pivotal to the election. Wattenberg says that “Rational choice theorists have long pointed out that the chance of any one individual’s vote making a difference to the outcome is extraordinarily slight” (Wattenberg 2011, 87).

Many of these authors share common fundamental beliefs about the factors that lead to voting including the comparison of cost and benefit, as well as the idea that one person’s vote will not make a substantial difference. This idea in particular is the key element of the argument that the lack of a sense of political efficacy is a main factor in low youth turnout. Young people who feel as though their government does not care about them, as shown through Wattenberg, will find other avenues of political involvement, such as volunteering. Habituation and Life Cycle theory are both attempts to explain the lack of voter turnout but fundamental to both is a sense of political efficacy. Without a sense of political efficacy, no one would vote: therefore no one would form a habit of voting or choose to vote later in life.

Voter turnout in general is on the decline but all of the authors agree that the youth vote was, and still is, the least represented and therefore, the most worrisome. Many factors that have been listed above may contribute to the low rates but overall, I hypothesize that a sense of

political efficacy is most important. The authors above have formed the framework that I will continue by researching more in depth the role that political efficacy plays in youth voter turnout.

### **Research Design**

In order to answer the question, “Why is it that young people vote less than their elders?” I have collected data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) Time Series Cumulative Data File beginning in the year 1980 up until 2008. I chose to study data from 1980-2008 as this is the most recently updated information and because of the significant amount of press that youth turnout garnered in the 1980s. I have specifically studied data that was gathered from Presidential, or primary, elections only. In the first portion of my study, I only focused on the factors that lead to turnout among the general population. In the second portion, I used this baseline to compare the differences in variables between young voters and older voters.

I have not only studied political efficacy, but other factors as well. Much of the literature on voting behavior attributes voter turnout to a few main factors including education, income, age, marital status, race, registration, and church attendance. I have addressed each of these in order to help clearly establish the cause of low voter turnout among young people. To begin, I hypothesized that as education increases, voter turnout also increases. Education is a fundamental aspect of voting in that it provides for the basic knowledge that is necessary to become politically aware. Education in high school promotes a sense of citizenship and civic duty by emphasizing the importance of voting. It also teaches basic reading and comprehension skills that help people to understand politics and major issues. I measured the effect of education on voter turnout by examining the ANES time series study, variable VCF0140. The question is, “What is highest grade of school or year of college you have completed? Did you get a high

school diploma or pass a high school equivalency test?” Available answers include: 8 grades or less (grade school), 9-12 grades (high school), no diploma/equivalency, 12 grades and diploma or equivalency, 12 grades and diploma or equivalency plus non-academic training, Some college with no degree; junior/community college with level degree (AA degree), BA level degrees; advanced degrees incl. LLB.

Another key component of voter turnout that I have studied is income. I hypothesized that as income rises, voter turnout will rise. Income and education are closely connected due to the fact that in most cases, in order to achieve a high income, one must first receive higher education. For the purposes of this study I have observed income separately from education as its own factor. Income level is important to voter turnout because a higher income correlates with a higher interest in politics and civic engagement. Wolfinger and Rosenstone assert that poor people are simply trying to survive on a daily basis and lack the time, energy, or resources to become knowledgeable about political issues and even get to the polls to cast a vote. Rich individuals are likely to have obtained their wealth through a certain amount of assertiveness and are likely to be much more civically engaged. Moreover, a person with a high income will have more assets to protect by staying politically involved and voting. I have measured income by examining the ANES time series study, variable VCF0114. The question asks, “Please look at this card/page and tell me the letter of the income group that includes the income of all members of your family living here in [previous year] before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income.” The available answers are: 0 to 16 percentile, 17 to 33 percentile, 34 to 67 percentile, 68 to 95 percentile, 96 to 100 percentile.

The question of why young people vote less than older people is first and foremost a question of age. I hypothesized that as age increases, voter turnout will increase as well. To

measure age, I have examined the ANES time series study, variable VCF0102. The question presented is, “What is the month and year of your birth?” The respondents’ answers were then calculated into an age range and the available answers are: 17 – 24, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54, 55 – 64, 65 – 74, 75 - 99 and over.

Another important factor in voter turnout is marital status. In order to answer my question I hypothesized that married people are more likely to vote than single, separated, divorced, or widowed people. According to the literature, marriage is an important factor of voting, perhaps because of interpersonal influence between spouses. A married couple will discuss politics and encourage one another to vote on Election Day. Wolfinger and Rosenstone comment that spouses are likely to share similar political preferences and reinforce each other’s beliefs and this might be the push necessary to get them to vote (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Marital status however, can lead to the concept of cancelling each other out. If two partners have opposing views on a candidate, they may feel as though they would only be cancelling the other’s vote out if they cast a ballot. This could lead them to simply not go at all in order to avoid a waste of time. I observed marital status by examining the ANES time series study, variable VCF0147. The question asks, “Are you married now and living with your husband or wife or are you widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never married?” The available answers are: Married, Widowed, Divorced, Separated, Never Married, or Partners.

I have also examined the effects of race on voter turnout. Ethnicity is an important aspect of turnout because different racial groups demonstrate different rates of turnout due to many cultural and societal differences. We often assume minorities are under-represented but this surprisingly is not always the case. I hypothesized that minorities vote less than whites, otherwise known as Caucasians. I observed the effects of race by examining the ANES time

series study, variable VCF0106a . The question asks, between 1948-1998: “Interviewer observation of race.” In 2000 and later: “What racial or ethnic group or groups best describes you?” In 1972 and later (excluding 2002): “In addition to being American, what do you consider your main ethnic group or nationality group?” The possible answers are: White, Black, Asian, Native American, Hispanic, or Other.

Registration seems like it may be an extremely important factor in voter turnout due to the fact that in order to vote you must register beforehand. This leads to the logical conclusion that there will be a strong correlation between registration and voting. I hypothesized that if a person is registered to vote, the chance of him voting will increase. To study this variable I have used variable VCF0737 which asks, “Were you registered to vote in this election?” The available answers were, “Yes” or “No.” Respondents who answered “Yes” to voting are automatically calculated as answering “Yes” for this question as well.

The last traditional factor that I have studied is church attendance. I hypothesized that as the rate of church attendance increases, voting will increase. By Church, I mean any religious worship service or organization. I expected that church-going people are much more likely to demonstrate pro-social behaviors and get involved in politics. In the past, government and religious groups have not always gotten along. Today, we live in a country where there is a “separation of church and state” that continues to put a strain on some religious believers. This has caused religious voters to be eager to have their voices heard. In order to observe this, I looked to the ANES time series study, variable VCF0130. The question asks, In 1970-1988: “(if any religious preference) Would you say you/do you go to (church/synagogue) every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?” In 1990 and later: “Lots of things come up that keep people from attending religious services even if they want to.

Thinking about your life these days, do you ever attend religious services, apart from occasional weddings, baptisms or funerals? (if Yes:) Do you go to religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?" Possible answers include: Every week (Except 1970: almost every week), Almost every week (no cases in 1970), Once or twice a month, A few times a year, Never (1990 and later: 'No' in filter), or No religious preference (1970-1988).

Political efficacy is what I believed to be the major cause of low voter turnout among young people. I hypothesized that as a voter's sense of political efficacy decreases they will be less likely to vote. Political efficacy, as stated in the literature, is "a combination of one's sense of competence in the political sphere and one's assessment of the responsiveness of the system" (Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk 2009, 308). Political efficacy is, in short, the belief that a person's vote matters and/or makes a difference. This is a new concept that has not been measured exclusively in past studies. I have measured political efficacy by measuring the amount of trust that people have in their government. I also looked at how much citizens feel that government officials care what people like them think as well as whether people feel as though it matters if they vote or not. I have measured trust in the federal government by examining the ANES time series study, variable VCF0604. The question is: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" The answers are: None of the time, Some of the time, Most of the time, Just about always, Don't know; depends. For the purposes of studying political efficacy, I will code the last answer that claims Don't know; depends as missing code. I have measured people's perception of how much government officials care what they think by examining the ANES time series study, variable VCF0609. The question is: "Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with this statement: 'I don't think

public officials care much what people like me think.' Do you agree, neither agree nor disagree, or disagree with this statement?" I also looked at variable VCF0613 which states, "People like me don't have any say about what the government does." The available answers are: Agree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree (1988 and later only), or DK; depends; not sure; can't say; refused to say. For the purposes of studying political efficacy, I recoded the last answer that claims DK; depends; not sure; can't say; refused to say as missing.

In order to better understand how each of these factors leads to political efficacy, I took these three questions and combined them to form a scale. I then used the range of answers to determine whether voters demonstrate a high or low level of political efficacy. The scale is cumulative and numerical with the combination of answers demonstrating low political efficacy represented by a 3 and the answers demonstrating the highest sense of political efficacy represented by a 10. These numbers were added to determine a sum of efficacy. The answers for Variable VCF0604 are graded as follows; None of the time: 1, Some of the time: 2, Most of the time: 3, and Just about always: 4. The answers for Variable VCF0609 are graded as; Agree: 1, Neither: 2, and Disagree: 3. The answers for Variable VCF0613 are graded as; Agree: 1, Neither: 2, and Disagree: 3.

The most important question that I studied is variable VCF0703 which asks, "Did R register and vote?" The possible answers are: Not registered and did not vote, Registered but did not vote, and voted (registered). This question is crucial to my study as it is my dependent variable and showed me who voted and from there I determined why or why not using the variables listed above.

In order to test the relationships between these variables, I ran Binary Logistic Regression in order to find the beta, standard of error, and significance of each variable as well as the constant. I found the minimum, maximum, and mean by applying descriptive statistics. I then used the beta and the mean of each variable along with the constant to form the components of the Probability of Difference equation (shown in figure 1) and I solved for R. This gave me the baseline of voter turnout among the general population only. I then split my data into two groups to compare the young voter to the older voter. I ran Binary Logistic Regression once more on this new data set and again found the beta, standard of error, significance, and constant. I applied descriptive statistics to the split file to retrieve a mean. I then used the new beta, mean, and constant to form the Probability of Difference equation for this split data set. This gave me the variables and their significance as they relate to both young voters and older voters separately.

**Figure 1:** Probability Difference Equation (example given for Variable 1)

$$P1_{(R=50)} =$$

$$\frac{e^{constant + V2\beta(V2X) + V3\beta(V3X) + V4\beta(V4X) + V5\beta(V5X) + V6\beta(V6X) + V7\beta(V7X) + V8\beta(V8X) + V1\beta(50)}}{1 + e}$$

$$P2_{(R=85)} =$$

$$\frac{e^{constant + V2\beta(V2X) + V3\beta(V3X) + V4\beta(V4X) + V5\beta(V5X) + V6\beta(V6X) + V7\beta(V7X) + V8\beta(V8X) + V1\beta(85)}}{1 + e}$$

## Data and Analysis

**Table 1:** Results of Binary Logistic Regression and Probability of Difference Equation for General Population

	Variable	$\beta$	Standard Error	Significance	Probability of Difference
V1 Age	17-24 vs. 55-64	.266	.023	.000***	Min: 3% Max: 9% <b>Difference: 6%</b>
	17-24 vs. 65-74	.266	.023	.000***	Min: 3% Max: 12% <b>Difference: 9%</b>
V2 Race	White vs. Black	-.150	.033	.000***	Min: 7% Max: 6% <b>Difference: 1%</b>
	White vs. Asian	-.150	.033	.000***	Min: 7% Max: 5% <b>Difference: 2%</b>
	White vs. Hispanic	-.150	.033	.000***	Min: 7% Max: 4% <b>Difference: 3%</b>
V3 Income	0-16 percentile vs. 34-67 percentile	.273	.038	.000***	Min: 4% Max: 7% <b>Difference: 3%</b>
	0-16 percentile vs. 68-95 percentile	.273	.038	.000***	Min: 4% Max: 9% <b>Difference: 5%</b>
	0-16 percentile vs. 96-100 percentile	.273	.038	.000***	Min: 4% Max: 11% <b>Difference: 7%</b>
V4 Church Attendance	Every week vs. Never	-.166	.022	.000***	Min: 10% Max: 4% <b>Difference: 6%</b>
V5 Education	Grades 9-12 (no diploma) vs. BA and above	.333	.027	.000***	Min: 3% Max: 12% <b>Difference: 9%</b>
	8 Grades or less vs. BA and above	.333	.027	.000***	Min: 2% Max: 12% <b>Difference: 10%</b>
V6 Marital Status	Married vs. Not Married	-.281	.080	.000***	Min: 7% Max: 5% <b>Difference: 2%</b>
V7 Registration	Not vs. Registered	22.977	948.303	.981	N/A
V8 Political Efficacy	Lowest vs. Highest	.124	.030	.000***	Min: 5% Max: 11% <b>Difference: 6%</b>
	Constant	-46.322	1896.605	.981	N/A

(Sig  $\leq$  .01 = Significant\*\*\*; Sig  $\leq$  .05 = More Significant \*\*; Sig  $\leq$  .1 = A little Significant\*)

Binary Logistic Regression allowed me to test each independent variable while keeping the others constant. In using the Probability of Difference Equation I used different combinations of answers to find the various differences in probability. In doing so, I was able to find which variables demonstrated the highest rate of difference among the general population.

I found that level of Education demonstrated the highest rate of difference. People who have received a BA level degree or higher are 10% more likely to vote than a person who only completed 8 grades or less. When observing a different combination, I observed that persons who received a BA level degree or higher are only 9% more likely to vote than a person who completed 9-12 grades but did not receive a diploma.

The second highest rate of difference was found in age. A person aged 65-74 is 9% more likely to vote than a person aged 17-24. Alternatively, a person aged 55-64 is only 6% more likely to vote than a person aged 17-24.

The next highest rate of difference was found within income. A person whose income places them in the 96-100<sup>th</sup> percentile is 7% more likely to vote than a person who is in the 0-16<sup>th</sup> percentile. A person who is in the 68-95<sup>th</sup> percentile is 5% more likely to vote than a person in the 0-16<sup>th</sup> percentile. Further, a person in the 34-67<sup>th</sup> percentile is only 3% more likely to vote than a person in the 0-16<sup>th</sup> percentile. Using the same data analysis I found that a person in the highest percentile is only 2 % more likely to vote than a person who is in the second highest percentile, or a comfortable range.

I found that a sense of political efficacy and church attendance tied with the fourth highest rate of difference. A person with a high sense of political efficacy is 6% more likely to vote than a person with a low sense of political efficacy and people who attend church every week are 6% more likely to vote than persons who never attend.

Race demonstrates the next highest rate of difference. A white person is 3% more likely to vote than a Hispanic person. Alternatively, a white person is only 2% more likely to vote than an Asian person and only 1% more likely to vote than a black person.

Marital Status showed the lowest rate of difference. A person who is married is only 2% more likely to vote than a person who is not married.

When running Binary Logistic Regression, I found that registration was the only variable that is not significant. Its beta was a 22.977 which means that it does not fit well on the linear line. Its significance was found to be .981 which is  $\leq .1$  and is therefore not significant.

**Table 2:** Results of Binary Logistic Regression and Probability of Difference Equation for Young Voter Age 17-24.

Variable		$\beta$	Standard Error	Significance	Probability of Difference
V1 Race	White vs. Black	-.173	.085	.042**	Min: .0006% Max: .0005% <b>Difference: .0001%</b>
	White vs. Asian	-.173	.085	.042**	Min: .0006% Max: .0004% <b>Difference: .0002%</b>
	White vs. Hispanic	-.173	.085	.042**	Min: .0006% Max: .0003% <b>Difference: .0003%</b>
V2 Income	0-16 percentile vs. 34-67 percentile	.114	.086	.185	Min: .0004% Max: .0006% <b>Difference: .0002%</b>
	0-16 percentile vs. 68-95 percentile	.114	.086	.185	Min: .0004% Max: .0006% <b>Difference: .0002%</b>
	0-16 percentile vs. 96-100 percentile	.114	.086	.185	Min: .0004% Max: .0007% <b>Difference: .0003%</b>
V3 Church Attendance	Every week vs. Never	-.002	.070	.973	N/A
V4 Education	Grades 9-12 (no diploma) vs. BA and above	.326	.082	.000***	Min: .0003% Max: .0011% <b>Difference: .0008%</b>
	8 Grades or less vs. BA and above	.326	.082	.000***	Min: .0002% Max: .0011% <b>Difference: .0009%</b>
V5 Marital Status	Married vs. Not Married	.129	.229	.572	N/A
V6 Registration	Not vs. Registered	22.313	2293.823	.992	N/A
V7 Political Efficacy	Lowest vs. Highest	.112	.081	.168	Min: .0004% Max: .0086% <b>Difference: .0082%</b>
Constant		-45.530	4587.646	.992	N/A

(Sig  $\leq$  .01 = Significant\*\*\*; Sig  $\leq$  .05 = More Significant \*\*; Sig  $\leq$  .1 = A little Significant\*)

**Table 3:** Results of Binary Logistic Regression and Probability of Difference Equation for Older Voter Age 65-74.

Variable		$\beta$	Standard Error	Significance	Probability of Difference
V1 Race	White vs. Black	.008	.164	.961	N/A
	White vs. Asian	.008	.164	.961	N/A
	White vs. Hispanic	.008	.164	.961	N/A
V2 Income	0-16 percentile vs. 34-67 percentile	.198	.158	.212	Min: 32% Max: 47% <b>Difference: 15%</b>
	0-16 percentile vs. 68-95 percentile	.198	.158	.212	Min: 32% Max: 58% <b>Difference: 26%</b>
	0-16 percentile vs. 96-100 percentile	.198	.158	.212	Min: 32% Max: 70% <b>Difference: 38%</b>
V3 Church Attendance	Every week vs. Never	-.220	.082	.007***	Min: 62% Max: 26% <b>Difference: 36%</b>
V4 Education	Grades 9-12 (no diploma) vs. BA and above	.309	.097	.001***	Min: 28% Max: 95% <b>Difference: 67%</b>
	8 Grades or less vs. BA and above	.309	.097	.001***	Min: 20% Max: 95% <b>Difference: 75%</b>
V5 Marital Status	Married vs. Not Married	-.442	.282	.118	Min: 52% Max: 33% <b>Difference: 19%</b>
V6 Registration	Not vs. Registered	23.712	3765.684	.995	N/A
V7 Political Efficacy	Lowest vs. Highest	.320	.121	.008***	Min: 0% Max: 2% <b>Difference: 2%</b>
Constant		-46.627	7531.367	.995	N/A

(Sig  $\leq$  .01 = Significant\*\*\*; Sig  $\leq$  .05 = More Significant \*\*; Sig  $\leq$  .1 = A little Significant\*)

After splitting my data into two groups, young voters aged 17-24 and older voters aged 65-74, I used the same methods as I did in the general population data set to find the differences in the new split set. I found the results were not as clear and conclusive when compared in this way as they were when I was only examining the general population. Specifically, the results of the Probability of Difference equation were hard to interpret as the answers did not all follow a common format and had to be rounded differently. Although the numbers do not look very pretty, they still demonstrate very important findings regarding voter turnout.

Among young voters, my results showed that education demonstrates the strongest significance with a .000 and a rate of difference at .0009%. A 17 – 24 year old with a BA level degree or higher is .0009% more likely to vote than a 17-24 year old who completed 8 grades or less and a young person with a BA level degree or higher is .0008% more likely to vote than a young person who completed grades 9-12 with no diploma.

Race was found to be the next strongest in significance with a .042 although demonstrating a fairly low rate of difference. I found that a white person, aged 17-24, is only .0001% more likely to vote than a black person, .0002% more likely than an Asian person, and .0003% more likely than a Hispanic person, all age 17-24.

All other variables were found to be not significant but they did however show a small rate of difference. Surprisingly, a young person with a high sense of political efficacy is .0082% more likely to vote than a young person with a low sense of efficacy. This finding is contradictory as this should lead political efficacy to be found significant. I also found that a young person with an income that places them in the 0-16 percentile is .0003% less likely to vote

than a young person in the 96-100 percentile, .0002% less likely to vote than a young person in the 68-95 percentile, and .0002% less likely to vote than a young person in the 34-67 percentile.

Church attendance, marital status, and registration were found not significant and did not demonstrate rates of difference.

In older voters, the results were similar in some ways but also quite different. I found that education, again, is most significant with a .001 and demonstrates the highest rate of difference with 75%. A person aged 65-74 who has received a BA level degree or higher is 75% more likely to vote than a person aged 65-74 that only completed 8 grades or less. An older person who has a BA level degree or higher, is 67% more likely to vote than an older person who has completed 9-12 grades with no diploma.

Church attendance was the second most significant variable with a .007. An older person who attends church every week is 36% more likely to vote than an older person who never attends church.

Political efficacy was a close third with a significant of .008 but had a much lower rate of difference. An older person with a high sense of efficacy is only 2% more likely to vote than an older person with a low sense of efficacy.

Income, although found to be not significant did show high rates of difference. An older person aged 65-74 in the 0-16 percentile is 15% less likely to vote than an older person in the 34-67 percentile, 26% less likely to vote than an older person in the 68-95 percentile, and 38% less likely to vote than an older person in the 96-100 percentile.

Marital Status depicted the next highest rate of difference with married individuals being 19% more likely to vote than non-married individuals. Race and registration were found to have no significance and a low or non-existent rate of difference.

## **Conclusion**

### **General Population**

After running regression on the general population data set, I found that seven out of my eight variables demonstrated strong significance. Registration was the only variable that was not significant.

I have found that education is the most significant factor in determining voter turnout. Education exhibits the highest rate of difference of all of the variables. As I manipulated the minimums and maximums, the data showed me that as any given person increases in education he or she will be more likely to vote. This conclusion follows in line with the findings in the literature and agrees with my hypothesis; as education increases, voting increases.

Education was closely followed by age. As I hypothesized, as age increases, voting increases as well. This finding supports the literature, specifically the Life Cycle Theory that is held by authors such as Wolfinger and Rosenstone. Age clearly has a strong correlation with voting and it is necessary to determine why this gap in voter turnout exists.

Income comes next with a 7% difference rate. Following in line with my hypothesis, as income increases, I found that voting increases also. In the literature it was suggested that after a comfortable standard of living is reached by an individual they will be no less likely to vote than a much more well off individual, such as a billionaire. I found this to be false. My results showed that as income increases, voting will continue to increase even after an “average” income

percentile is achieved. Very rich individuals are in fact, slightly more likely (2%) to vote than comfortable individuals.

I found that political efficacy is a significant factor in determining voter turnout and in agreement with my hypothesis, as political efficacy increases, so does turnout. My findings support the authors Campbell et al. (1960) and Valentino et. al. (2009) who also contend that a sense of political efficacy is a key determinant of voter turnout. I was wrong however in suggesting that political efficacy is the most important factor in voter turnout, as that was found to be education. A person with a high sense of political efficacy is only 6% more likely to vote than a person with a low sense of efficacy. Although this difference rate is less than that of education, it still shows that political efficacy is a significant factor and should not be disregarded. That 6% difference equals thousands of people who choose not to vote because they feel that their one vote does not matter.

Church attendance, race, and marital status, although significant, all demonstrated low rates of difference being 4%, 3%, and 2% respectively. All three of these variables are significant in that they do contribute to voter turnout but not as much as education or age. I found that as church attendance increases, voting will also increase. I found that a white person is in fact more likely to vote than minorities and married people do vote more than unmarried people. All of these findings also agree with the literature.

Registration demonstrated somewhat of an anomaly in that it was found to be not significant. Due to its lack of significance I was unable to calculate a probability of difference for this variable. This finding is in direct conflict with the literature, specifically the findings of Robert Erickson, and it can only be concluded that registration is no longer as strong a factor as it was in 1981. Changes in voter registration policy and procedure over time have made it

much easier to become registered to vote. This may have led to a spike in registration that did not necessarily carry over into turnout. Common sense dictates that a person must be registered to vote in order to cast a ballot, but today, many people are registering to vote and then they are not showing up at the polls on Election Day. Easier registration may have led to more Americans registering to vote, but it did not lead to more voting in itself; in other words, this is a policy failure.

Overall, I have found that among the general population, education is the most important indicator of voter turnout, and age is the second.

### **Young Voters vs. Older Voters**

The results of both young and older voters show that, in agreement with the general population model, education demonstrates the highest significance and rate of difference in both age groups. From there, the results differ. For young voters, education and race are the most important variables being the most significant and political efficacy follows closely behind with a high rate of difference. On the other hand, education and church attendance seem to be the most important variables for older voters with political efficacy, again, a close third. In older voters, income did however show a high rate of difference despite being found not significant. It is interesting that many of these findings contradict one another within each age group. For example, among both age groups, income was found to be not significant but nevertheless demonstrated a respectable rate of difference. This suggests that a difference exists between the minimum and maximum but it does not have an overwhelming impact on turnout compared to other more important variables like education. This finding, that education is most significant

across the board, agrees with the literature and confirms many of the authors' findings such as Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980).

My overall hypothesis is proven incorrect as political efficacy, though at times showing a high rate of difference, is in fact not significant among young voters and very significant among older voters. This is exactly the opposite of what I hypothesized.

I have concluded that the factor which is most influential in determining voter turnout among young people is actually equally as important to older voters as well. I set out to find a difference in the two and instead found that education is the major factor across the board. I can only determine that the level of education achieved must be significantly less among young voters than it is among older voters which would prevent 17-24 year olds from voting as often. This follows common logic as the age range of 17-24 could place a person either in their last year of high-school or their final year in undergraduate studies in college. A person in this low age range may not have received their BA level degree at this point in life whereas a person in the 65-74 category would have already been through undergrad and perhaps graduate school as well. This could explain the discrepancy in education between the two groups.

The literature has shown us that young people are not voting. The statistics agree and even popular culture is addressing the issue now. It is clear that young Americans are not going to the polls as frequently as their elders but is this really a problem? If the issue is simply that young people aged 17-24 have not fully completed their education until they are out of this age bracket, then it may not be a crucial issue that needs to be fixed. We can assume that these young people, once finished with their degrees, will make it to the polls like their more educated elders. Wattenberg, does however, point out that young voters have a very different view of politics than their elders and it is extremely important that they express those views at the polls or risk being

left out of the agenda. It may still be worth it to push the education and democratic obligation out to these young people and show them that their vote could be pivotal to the election.

My research points to education as the key factor in determining turnout among young people as well as the general population but I believe that further study is necessary. My model covers all of the traditional variables that may lead to voter turnout but I suspect that there are other factors as well that have yet to be studied such as gender, political activism, and general political awareness. It is possible that my model of variables is missing a crucial variable that is extremely important to young people voting and we simply haven't studied it yet. It is important that this research continue so that we might understand what is causing the age gap between young and older voters and determine how best to close it. If voting continues to decline among young people we will soon be moving toward a very different political atmosphere. Older voters will be solely in charge of influencing and changing public policy and young people will be left out or oppressed much as they were before the twenty-sixth amendment to the U.S. Constitution. To prevent falling backward, we must move forward and study this issue so we might understand it and be able to bring young people back into the political realm.

## Appendix

### Appendix A: ANES Codes for Variables

1. Education VCF0140 = 1980: 800436, 1984: 840438, 1988: 880422, 1992: 923908, 1996: 960610, 2000: 000913, 2004: 043254, 2008: 083218x.
2. Income VCF0114 = 1980: 800686, 1984: 840680, 1988: 880520, 1992: 924104, 1996: 960701, 2000: 000994, 2004: 043293x.
3. Age VCF0102 = 1980: 800408, 1984: 840429, 1988: 880417, 1992: 923903, 1996: 960605, 2000: 000908, 2004: 043250, 2008: 083215x.
4. Marital Status VCF0147 = 1980: 800409, 1984: 840430, 1988: 880418, 1992: 923904, 1996: 960606, 2000: 000909, 2004: 043251, 2008: 083216a, 083216b.
5. Race VCF0106a = 1980: 800695, 800721, 1984: 840689, 840708, 1988: 880412, 880534, 1992: 924116, 924202, 1996: 960067, 960703, 2000: 001006a, 001008, 2004: 043299a, 043301a, 2008: Not listed.
6. Church Attendance VCF0130 = 1980: 800694, 1984: 840688, 1988: 880530, 900526, 1992: 923828, 1996: 960578, 2000: 000877, 000879, 2004: 043223, 043224, 2008: 083186, 083186a.
7. Trust In Government VCF0604 = 1980: 800402, 1984: 841064, 1988: 880955, 1992: 926120, 1996: 961251, 2000: 001534, 2004: 045197, 2008: 085147a.
8. How much Government cares VCF0609 = 1980: 801033, 1984: 840313, 1988: 880938, 1992: 926103, 1996: 961244, 2000: 001527, 2004: 045201, 2008: 085151c.
9. How much say do you have VCF0613 = 1980: 801030, 1984: 840312, 1988: 880937, 1992: 926102, 1996: 960568, 2000: 001528, 2004: 045202, 2008: 085151d.

10. Vote VCF0703 = 1980: 800134,800988, 1984: 840783,840802, 1988: 880756,880757, 1992:  
925601,925602, 1996: 961074,961075, 2000: 001241,001242, 2004: 045018x, 2008:  
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