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A New Tool for Mobilization? The Effects of Social Media Use on Youth Voter Turnout

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Author

Ferrer Lozano, Silvia P.

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#VOTE

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT

By

Silvia Ferrer

A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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APPROVED

Dr. Loren Collingwood

Department of Political Science

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Jr. Chair

University Honors

Abstract

Social media is a relatively new phenomenon— and one that is constantly changing. There is very literature on the link between social networks and political participation and the scholarship that does exist usually varies greatly in terms of the social network in question and the extent of political participation. As the most active users of social media, youth are usually the focus of the studies. This paper brings two bodies of literature (voter turnout and social media) together to examine whether social media can mobilize youth to vote. This paper finds that while social media itself does not have a positive correlation to turnout, the remaining hypotheses are supported: social media has a greater effect on youth than it does on older age groups and outreach efforts conducted on social media seem to be successful. Although social media itself does not have a statistically significant effect on turnout, these results imply that online outreach can serve as a way to mobilize young citizens to register and to vote in larger numbers.

Acknowledgements

For My parents — for always supporting me, especially in the toughest times.

For Dr. Collingwood — for introducing me to amazing opportunities.

For the RBSI program — for introducing me to a kindred soul and opening up a door full of learning experiences and possibilities.

For me — for making it through despite the odds.

Introduction

Social media users and organizations utilized different tactics to encourage and register voters during the 2018 midterm elections. Less than a month before November 6, *Elle* magazine sent out a tweet that would gain significant internet and media attention— the tweet claimed that a celebrity couple had broken up but instead of directing the user to the story, it redirected them to a voter registration page on When We All Vote (Melas, 2018). Other people with substantial social media followings followed *Elle*'s lead, albeit in a less disingenuous manner; pop superstar Taylor Swift urged her Instagram followers to register to vote on Vote.org, another nonprofit organization meant to encourage voter turnout and political engagement. The director of communication reported receiving over 155,940 new visitors and 65,000 registrations within 24 hours (France, 2018). Snapchat, a popular social media service among youth, also "pushed people 18 and over to register by adding a button about doing so on each user's profile page. The company also sent video messages to all of those users urging them to register" (Kang, 2018).

While youth are actively and consistently engaged on social media, they lack the same level of engagement when it comes to voting. The 18- to 29-year-old demographic historically has one of the lowest rates of turnout. Voter participation overall has decreased steadily, but "young people's participation has taken the biggest nosedive of any age group" (Walker, 2006). This decline is even more evident during congressional elections (Wolfinger et al., 1981). Given this history, the increase in youth voter turnout during the 2018 midterm elections was surprising. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Survey Voting and Registration Supplements, 18- to 29-year-old voters went to the polls in numbers that were significantly bigger than during the 2014 midterm elections; turnout increased from around 20 percent to 35 percent, the largest increase for any age group (Misra, 2019).

Researchers have already begun to study how social media can mobilize the elusive group. For example, Michelson and Teresi conducted an experiment that targeted college students on Facebook to analyze the "effect of exposure to social network site messages with varying degrees of political content" (2015, p. 201). In a meta-analysis, Boulianne found that studies that assessed the relationship between political participation and social media overall had positive relationships; others showed that "in spite of the promise SN (social network) sites hold for increasing political interest and participation among the chronically disengaged cohort, the political participation they arouse seems to be limited to the digital sphere" (Boulianne, 2015; Baumgartner and Morris, 2010, p. 38).

While there is some literature on the link between social networks and political engagement, there is still a large question of whether social media itself will produce notable results and how those results change as social media evolves. Social media is always advancing; platforms that received regular use during the early 2000s are now obsolete. This study attempts to add to the existing literature by testing whether *current* social media use has a significant influence on the voting turnout of the youth population. This analysis makes a contribution to our knowledge in three important ways. First, it utilizes the new question that directly accounts for social media in the CCES 2018 survey. Second, it makes a comparative analysis of age groups to examine whether social media has a greater influence on young voters than on older voters. Third, the analysis aims to contrast the 2014 and 2018 congressional elections to explore whether the recent outreach efforts of organizations had a positive correlation between young social media users and voter turnout.

Literature Review

Voter Turnout

In order to understand how social media influences voter turnout (and specifically, the turnout of youth), we must first examine the factors that depress and increase voter turnout of the general American population. Scholars have established an extensive history of significant factors that have a notable effect on turnout. In this section, I will briefly summarize several variables that many political scientists have found have an effect on voter turnout. I will control for these variables in my measurement in order to isolate the independent variable, social media.

In a comprehensive study, Wolfinger and Rosenstone zero in on several variables that affect voter turnout: income, registration laws, race, and education. Several other scholars further this field of literature by producing additional studies that supplement the existing analysis and introduce other variables. Amongst these new variables are age, gender, and political interest.

The prominent consensus is that education has a significant increase in voter turnout. In their study, Wolfinger and Rosenstone "found a very strong relationship between rates of voting and years of education" (1980, p. 17). Although other variables have an effect on turnout as well, Wolfinger and Rosenstone conclude that "education has the greatest effect on the probability that those in the lowest status categories will vote" (1980, p. 25). There are certainly variations within this relationship; for example, Hillygus finds that a "social science curriculum has a consistent, positive, and statistically significant effect on… political engagement" (2005, p. 37). However, the general observation is that "citizens with more formal education are more likely to vote; each additional year of education is associated with higher turnout" (Harder and Krosnick, 2008, p. 530). Different levels of education and subfields may have differing results, but studies have consistently found that education causes a notable increase in turnout.

In their exhaustive analysis, Harder and Krosnick sum up the results of several studies to conclude that "wealthier people vote at higher rates" (2008, p. 531). In contrast to education, however, Wolfinger and Rosenstone contend that "income is still related to turnout, but its effect is relatively small" (1980, p. 25). They continue that income carries the greatest consequence when it comes to poor people, as they are "preoccupied by the struggle to keep body and soul together… they have no time or emotional energy for nonessentials such as voting" (1980, p. 20). Galbraith and Hale also find that state income inequality "is a significant determinant of declines in electoral activity" (2008, p. 894). Both analyses conclude "low-income voters are less likely to vote" (Galbraith and Hale, 2008, p. 895).

Like education, different elements of age affect voter turnout in distinct ways. The extensive research on the subject points to middle adulthood as the sweet spot for voter turnout. Harder and Krosnick write that "people appear to become increasingly likely to vote as they progress from early adulthood through middle adulthood; after about age 75, people become less likely to vote" (2008, p. 531). After controlling for all other variables, it becomes apparent that "people aged eighteen to twenty-four are about 28 percent less likely to vote than fifty-five-year-olds; those aged twenty-five to thirty-one are about 21 percentage points less likely to vote" (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, p. 50). Although individual circumstances, like a politically charged climate or "historic events" may result in a high youth turnout, controlling for these circumstances leads to the same conclusion— "increasing age still appears to be associated with increased turnout" (Harder and Krosnick, 2008, p. 532).

Race and gender also play important roles in voter turnout. African Americans have demonstrated similar or higher turnout rates than whites, especially when significant variables (i.e., education and income) are controlled (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, p. 90). McClain and Carew report that in 2012, a substantial majority (about 90 percent) of blacks who were registered voted in the election (2017, p. 112). After controlling for income, Latinos/as have the opposite result; their turnout is lower than whites (Harder and Krosnick, 2008, p. 534).While the diversity within the Latino/a community results in different turnout rates, Barreto still finds that "the turnout rate of naturalized Latino voters is *almost* equal to the voting of non-Latinos" (2005, p. 83). Latino/as also turn out in smaller numbers than blacks— only 48 percent voted in the 2012 election (McClain and Carew, 2017, p. 112).

Since the mid-1980s, the proportion of female voters has exceeded the proportion of male voters in presidential elections (CAWP, 2019, p. 1). Even during midterm elections, women have shown up to the polls in consistently higher numbers (CAWP, 2019, p. 4). During the 2018 election, for example, 55 percent of women reported voting in comparison to 52 percent of men. CAWP (Center for American Women and Politics) also reports that black and Hispanic women have reported voting at higher percentages than their male counterparts. McClain and Carew have similar findings.

Registration laws are one of the biggest obstacles for voter turnout. Harder and Krosnick explain that the "costs of registering to vote are among the most significant reasons why many Americans fail to go to the polls on election day" (2008, p. 528). Wolfinger and Rosenstone link the detrimental effects of registration costs and political interest by writing: “the barriers imposed by restrictive laws seem to make little difference to well educated but are a fairly formidable impediment to people with less interest and bureaucratic skill” (1980, p. 80). These laws, then, seem to target young people, as they lack both political interest and prowess. In the next section, I will expand on the cost of registration laws, examine the additional variables that may have a damaging effect on youth turnout, and discuss youth voter turnout during midterm elections.

Why Don’t Youth Vote?

The 26th Amendment granted 18-year-olds the right to vote, but this right has historically been underutilized. Lopez et al conclude that “the electoral participation of Americans under the age of 25 has declined since 1972,” even in times of presidential elections (2002, p. 1). Similarly, Carpini emphasizes that although civic engagement has declined overall for a number of decades, the decline is most evident among the young (2000, p. 1). There are several reasons for the decline, but lack of knowledge, interest, and a lower likelihood to register to vote are among some of the most prominent issues (Carpini, 2000; Harder and Krosnick; 2008; Wolfinger, Rosenstone, 1980).

Older citizens are more likely to turn out, perhaps because of an increased sense of political knowledge (Harder, Krosnick, 2008, p. 532). Very few young Americans say they are interested or knowledgeable about politics; lack of knowledge, in particular, was cited by the youth demographic as “one of the two most important reasons why young people don’t vote” (Carpini, 2000, p. 3, 4). Wolfinger and Rosenstone observe how a lack of political interest goes hand in hand with other variables, often to the detriment of voter turnout. Education, as mentioned prior, imparts knowledge that “facilitates political learning… learning about politics doubtless heightens interest; the more sense one can make of the political works, the more likely one is to pay attention to it" (p. 18). 18- to 25-year-olds are usually still completing their schooling, while "older citizens have more free time, and/or have more interest… growing older may lower the information costs of voting, because people may become more knowledgeable about the parties by watching them in action for many years" (Harder and Krosnick, 2008, p. 532). To sum, younger citizens do not have the opportunity to become knowledgeable or interested in politics to the extent that older citizens do (Carpini 2000, p. 5).

Education and political interest work to the detriment of youth voter turnout; likewise, registration laws and political interest usually work in conjunction to reduce turnout. As introduced above, registering to vote can be too costly; citizens must "expend effort to gain relevant knowledge" about the basics of registering (Harder and Krosnick, 2008, p. 528). Rates of turnout produced by variations in registration laws are then "an indication of the varying commitment and capacity to vote of different kind of people" (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, p. 80). To reiterate, the position of older people means that they have greater levels of capacity and commitment to register than do young people. The lack of political interest and knowledge of youth work to depress their voter turnout until middle adulthood.

During non-presidential elections, the decline is even more prevalent: Wolfinger et al. state that the most prominent difference between presidential and midterm elections is its lower turnout, specifically the "much higher drop-off among younger voters" (1981, p. 246). While turnout is generally lower than during presidential elections, scholars have found that young voters, in particular, are disproportionately prone to drop out during non-presidential years (p. 248). Some of the factors discussed thus far have a role in the drop, but none as significant as the age differences— 18- to 31-year-olds vote at around 12 percent while 37- to 69-year-olds vote at 60 percent (p. 254).

This historical background is important to note because it provides a clear account of the variables that significantly affect voter turnout. Further, it focuses on how variables affect the youth population differently than other age groups. Getting a sense of the systems and powers already in place allows us to identify how social media can exclusively be used to mobilize a group that shown little motivation to vote.

Youth, Social Media Use, and Political Participation

Social media is a relatively new phenomenon; as such, the literature studying its link to political participation is small compared to other subfields. Many of the existing studies focus exclusively on the youth population as they have long shown to be the most engaged group online (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 153). While each research piece focuses on a distinct aspect of the relationship between the two, political participation is usually defined broadly within the articles (Xenos et al., 2014; Loader et al., 2014; Baumgartner and Morris, 2010).

Xenos et al. examine whether social media has a positive relationship between political engagement in English-speaking democracies but evaluate political engagement in general terms. They focus on the implications that social media use and subsequent engagement can have "for patterns of unequal political voice" in their empirical study (p. 156). Xenos et al. find a positive, strong connection between social media and youth political engagement but choose to explore the role of social capital within the digital sphere instead of investigating the connection further (p. 155). This study establishes an important link between social media and political engagement, but it does not address specific aspects of political engagement. Furthermore, their empirical study discounts the differences in political systems by exploring the link between social media and youth across the world.

Loader et al., on the other hand, construct an image of the "networked young citizen" and explains how social networks can expand the political engagement of youth to spheres outside the existing institutions. This approach is useful when thinking about how the explosion of digital media "increasingly shapes" the political participation of youth and allows a space of political discourse (p. 148-149). However, its focus on engagement outside of the existing political arena seems to disregard the ability for youth to translate their engagement to the present institutions.

Teresi and Michelson's experimental study, on the other hand, consider the importance of voter turnout, as it "is of interest for both the maintenance of American democracy and also to ensure political equality" (2015, p. 196). They contend that social media can have the same mobilizing effect that mailers and phone-canvassing do (p. 196). Their experiment, which takes place on Facebook with a sample of college students, is one of the only analyses in the field that indicates a direct connection between exposure to online political messages and the likelihood of voting (p. 200). This finding is a major starting point. However, social media is always changing— Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat have since installed functions that reach outside the limits of Facebook's narrow friend circle. Further, the ability for content to go "viral" exceeds the bounds and may present users with information they may not have intentionally sought (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 154).

Baumgartner and Morris go against the existing scholarship to argue that while social networking (SN) sites have "promise," they do not actually increase political knowledge or participation in any significant way. Their analysis suggests that while young adults use SN sites for political news, they seek information that "conforms to their preexisting political views" (2010, p. 25). More so, the information they receive does not make them more knowledgeable than others (2010, p. 38). Baumgertner and Morris contend that social networking platforms are "limited to Internet activity" and do not cause an increase in political engagement or turnout (2010, p. 38). While their acknowledgment that social media could have a mobilizing effect is noteworthy, their claims and measures are problematic. Their use of proxies (i.e., using news stories as representative of social media) and the outdated SN sites they inspect (i.e., MySpace) call their argument that social media has no effect on participation into question. Their study may have been accurate a decade ago, but the evolving nature of social networking sites means that their finding is not necessarily still correct.

My particular research question contributes to the extant scholarship by addressing the influence that current social media use may have on voter turnout. The majority of the literature is focused on a broad notion of political participation; Teresi and Michelson's experiment is one of the few recent studies that centers in on arguably the most important aspect of political participation. Additionally, the present scholarship only conducts an analysis on the youth population, but the study I will conduct compares how youth may be affected in contrast to older voters.

Theory

This analysis will attempt to shed light on how social media, a modern occurrence, can be utilized by users to increase voter turnout, especially the turnout of young populations. A majority of young Americans report that they use a variety of social media platforms frequently; 88 percent state that they use a form of social media and a majority of those surveyed report that they use a specific form of social media (i.e., Instagram, Snapchat) multiple times a day (Smith, Anderson, 2018). On top of that, users are already beginning to use social media for political purposes. In a report by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, Rainie finds that 45 percent of voters from 18- to 29-years-old were turning to social media to encourage others to vote (2012, p. 2). Social media platforms and users with great social media followings have recently begun to encourage their audiences to become more politically involved (France, 2018; Kang 2018).

The extant scholarship is very scarce. Whereas the pieces that do exist tend to center on political participation in unspecific terms, I intend to focus my study on voter turnout. Historically, voter turnout has been a form of political participation in which youth lag behind. Additionally, the existing articles utilize youth populations on the basis that youth are the most active users of social media. While this is true, comparing age groups could shed light on whether social media platforms can mobilize an entire population or whether the influence is restricted to youth.

The “unique properties of social media” discussed in the literature review (e.g., the ability to exceed social circles and be exposed to political messages) can help youth get over significant hurdles that limit their turnout. Through the use of social media and a “habitual review of their ‘news feeds’, users are often presented with information that they may not have been originally seeking" (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 154). The debacle with *Elle* magazine's false tweet is a perfect example; fans of the celebrity couple were exposed to a message that was not the one they were originally seeking. This "incidental exposure" to political content also works to reduce the cost of registration (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 154; Harder and Krosnick). A person no longer has to expend any effort to gain the knowledge of learning where and when to register— social media literally puts that information at people's fingertips. Social media addresses the "minimal exposure to information" that Wolfinger and Rosenstone cite as a primary barrier to registering.

In his study, Erickson came to the conclusion that "even unlikely registrants are relatively frequent voters when they do register" (1981, p. 271). This concept may be applicable to the youth population since scholars have concurred that registering to vote is one of the most prominent obstacles to turnout. Recent events seem to show that social media outreach is successful in registering eligible voters. Erickson contends that "low mass media followers, Independent, the young, and the grade-school educated— presumably good candidates for nonvoting— actually voted at well above 90% if they were registered" (1981, p. 265). This can logically lead to the theory that social media outreach can mobilize youth to register. Once that impediment is surpassed, there is a greater likelihood that youth will vote.

Hypotheses and Anticipated Findings

H1: I anticipate that social media usage will have a positive correlation with voting turnout.

The turnout rates of the 2018 election were significantly higher for the youth population than they have been in recent years (Misra, 2019). The literature has pointed to the cost of registration as one of the most significant factors in restricting turnout. As detailed, an interesting addition to this electoral cycle was the way social media platforms encouraged and registered voters. Thousands of voters were registered by third-party organizations that partnered with different platforms (Kang, 2018; France 2018). Because of the social media outreach and higher numbers of registration, I expect that social media usage will have a positive correlation with voter turnout.

H2: The positive correlation will be more significant in relation to young voters (aged 18 to 29) than any other age groups.

People aged 18- to 29-years-old have demonstrated that they are the most active users on social media platforms (Anderson and Smith, 2018). I anticipate that their higher rates of use will increase the probability that they will have "incidental exposure" to political content in comparison to older populations who use social media in lesser degrees (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 154).

H3: Lastly, I hypothesize that the new outreach efforts of users and platforms will result in notable differences between the 2014 and 2018 youth voter turnout.

My theory is partly focused on the social media *outreach* efforts. As Michelson and Teresi discussed, social media may have the ability to mobilize voters in the same way that "face-to-face and live telephone interpersonal communication [can] increase participation" (2015, p. 196). I anticipate that this new development in social media use will be reflected in my results.

Null Hypothesis: Social media usage is not associated with increased voter turnout.

As Baumgartner and Morris argue, there may be no relationship between social media and political participation— it truly may just be "hype" (2010, p. 38).

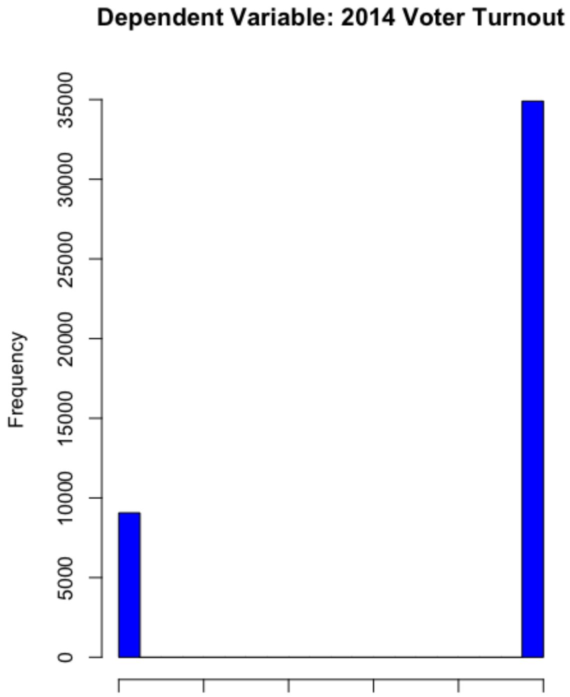
Research Design

The data I utilized was the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) that was conducted during 2014 and during 2018. The data was collected from over 50,000 participants nationwide who answered survey questions in three waves during election years. Participants complete an online questionnaire and later complete a follow-up interview.

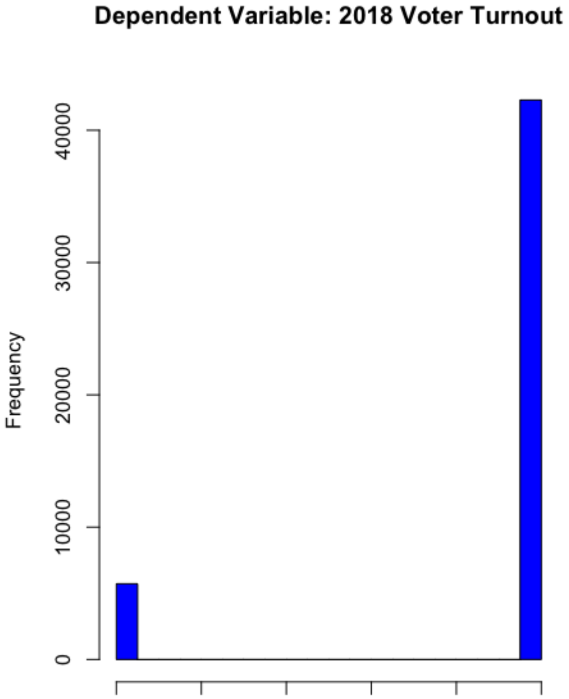
In the 2014 dataset, there are a total of 56,200 observations. In the 2018 dataset, there are an even 60,000. The units of observation are individuals. After disregarding measures that were not of interest to my research, the 2014 dataset had 23,599 units of observation. The 2018 dataset had 42,570.

Dependent Variable

My dependent variable for both years is voter turnout. Since I am measuring whether voter turnout increased or not, I am measuring this variable as a dummy variable, where (1) means that an individual reported voting and (0) is that an individual reported not voting.



Dependent Variable: 2014 Voter Turnout



Dependent Variable: 2018 Voter Turnout

My dependent variable was coded as “CC18_401” and asked “Which of the following statements best describes you?” on a scale from (1) I did not vote to (5) I definitely voted in the Midterm Election on November 6th. Options (2) - (4) were variations of (1). In R, I turned (5) - I definitely voted into (1) and the rest of the options into (0). I named this variable “turnout” for 2018 and “turnout14” for 2014.

Independent Variables

A) Social media use: This variable was originally coded as “CC18_300_5” and asked “In the past 24 hours have you… Used social media (such as Facebook and YouTube).” The follow-up question “Did you do any of the following on social media (such as Facebook, YouTube or Twitter)?” measured the type of social media engagement. I did not include it in order to account for individuals who do not intentionally go onto social media for political content. I coded this as “soc.use.”

   a) In the 2014 dataset, “CC18_300” asked the same question but did not include the option to check social media. In its place, I used a proxy. I utilized the same question but used the check box “Read a blog” and “Read a newspaper in print or online.” I joined the two variables together to focus on the people who read a blog and read newspapers online or online *and* in print. This question is meant to simulate the social media question present in the 2018 dataset as it accounts for the social networking (i.e., connecting to users on a blog and having the option to leave comments) and political exposure (i.e., newspapers online). I named this proxy “soc.use14.” Although this measure will be a close approximation to the social media question, I recognize that it is a limitation because it is not actually asking directly about social media.

B) Age: This variable was coded as “birthyr” and asked “In what year were you born?” Since I am focusing on youth, I calculated the range for each year that would contain respondents from 18-29. For 2018, participants who were born between the years 1989 and 2000 were coded as (1) and every other respondent (the older demographic) was turned into a (0). Similarly, participants in the 2014 dataset who were born between 1985 and 1996 were coded as (1) while participants over 29 were coded as (0). For 2018, I coded these respondents as “youth” and as “youth14” for the 2014 dataset.

Control Variables

As discussed in my literature review, there are significant factors that can influence whether an individual votes. All of my controls are variables that have an effect on turnout. I am including them as controls in order to isolate the connection between social media and turnout without having other variables potentially skew the results.

1) Income
    a) Coded in the 2018 dataset as "faminc_new" and in 2014 as "faminc." Both questions ranged from (1) Less than $10,000 to (97) Prefer not to say. I converted (97) into an NA and kept order of the values from (1) to (16) $500,000 or more for both datasets. I coded 2014 as "income14" and 2018 as "income18."
2) Education
    a) Coded in the 2014 and 2018 datasets as "educ." The question asked "What is the highest level of education you have completed" and ranged form (1) Did not graduate from high school to (6) Postgraduate degree (MA, MBA, MD, JD, P.h.D, etc) for both datasets. I kept the range the same and re-coded the name in 2014 as "educ14" and "educ18" for 2018.
3) Black/Hispanic
    a) The original question asked "What racial or ethnic group best describes you?" and ranged from (1) White to (7) Other and included several racial categories, including "Black or African-American" and "Hispanic or Latino." Per the traditional measures, I isolated people who checked black and Hispanic and coded them as "black14" and "his14" for 2014 and "black18" and "his18" for the 2018 dataset. They were both dummy variables so that "black" or "his" isolated each

respective racial group, turned them into (1)s, and turned the rest of the respondents into (0)s. For example, “black14” is coded so that every black or African-American respondent is a (1) and every other respondent is a (0).

4) Gender (Female)
    a) Coded in the 2014 and 2018 datasets as “gender.” The question asked “Are you…?” and had the two options (male and female). Male was coded as (1) and Female as (2). I made this into a dummy variable and coded Female as (1) and Male as (0).

5) Political Interest
    a) Coded in the 2014 and 2018 datasets as “newsint.” Both datasets included the question: “Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs…” The responses included (1) Most of the time, (2) Some of the time, (3) Only now and then, (4) Hardly at all, and (5) Don’t know. I converted (5) into an NA and flipped the range so that (1) was Hardly at all and (4) was Most of the time. I did this in order for the range to follow a normal numeric order. I coded this as “pol.int14” and “pol.int18.”

Type of Analysis

I am running a multiple linear regression, as I am determining whether there is a linear relationship between my dependent variable (voter turnout) and my independent variables (age and social media use).

The two models for the multiple linear regression are as follows:

2014

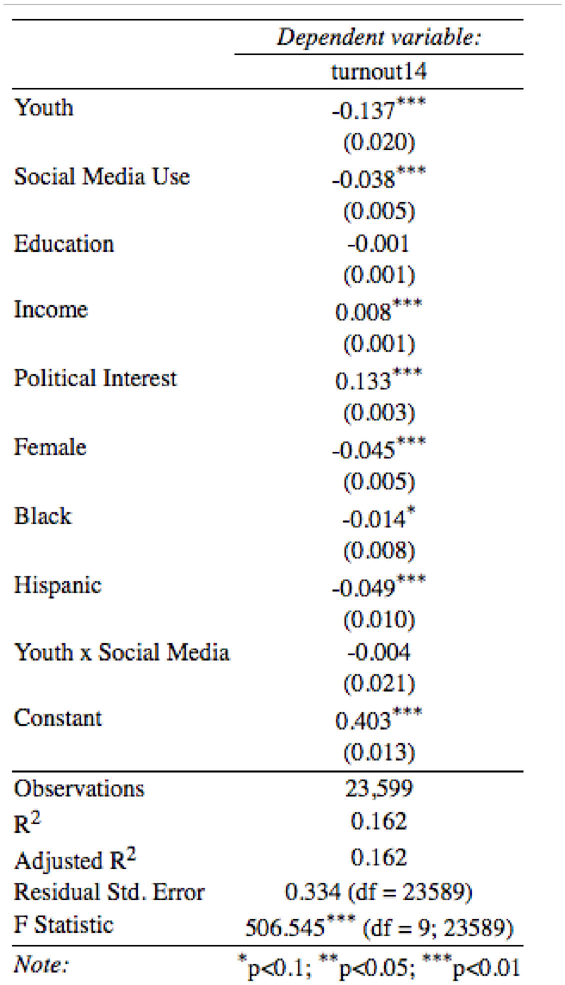
```
model.2014 <- lm(CCES14$turnout14 ~ CCES14$youth14 * CCES14$soc14 + CCES14$educ14
+ CCES14$income14 + CCES14$pol.int14 + CCES14$fem14 + CCES14$black14 +
CCES14$his14)
```

2018

```
model.2018 <- lm(CCES18$turnout ~ CCES18$youth * CCES18$soc.use + CCES18$educ18 +
CCES18$income18 + CCES18$pol.int18 + CCES18$fem18 + CCES18$black18 +
CCES18$his18)
```

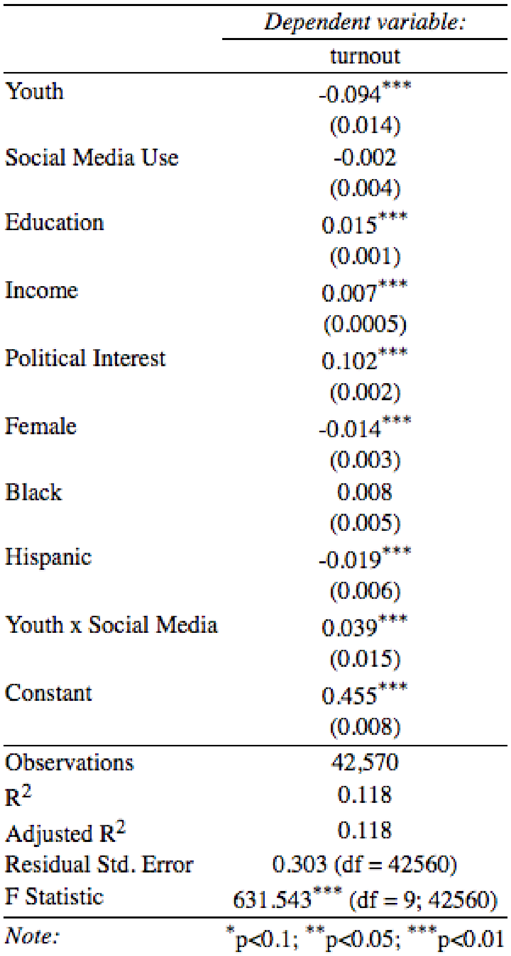
Results and Analysis

TABLE 1: 2014



	Dependent variable:
	turnout14
Youth	-0.137^{***}
	(0.020)
Social Media Use	-0.038^{***}
	(0.005)
Education	-0.001
	(0.001)
Income	0.008^{***}
	(0.001)
Political Interest	0.133^{***}
	(0.003)
Female	-0.045^{***}
	(0.005)
Black	-0.014^{*}
	(0.008)
Hispanic	-0.049^{***}
	(0.010)
Youth x Social Media	-0.004
	(0.021)
Constant	0.403^{***}
	(0.013)
Observations	23,599
R^2	0.162
Adjusted R^2	0.162
Residual Std. Error	0.334 (df = 23589)
F Statistic	506.545^{***} (df = 9; 23589)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

TABLE 2: 2018



	Dependent variable:
	turnout
Youth	-0.094^{***}
	(0.014)
Social Media Use	-0.002
	(0.004)
Education	0.015^{***}
	(0.001)
Income	0.007^{***}
	(0.0005)
Political Interest	0.102^{***}
	(0.002)
Female	-0.014^{***}
	(0.003)
Black	0.008
	(0.005)
Hispanic	-0.019^{***}
	(0.006)
Youth x Social Media	0.039^{***}
	(0.015)
Constant	0.455^{***}
	(0.008)
Observations	42,570
R^2	0.118
Adjusted R^2	0.118
Residual Std. Error	0.303 (df = 42560)
F Statistic	631.543^{***} (df = 9; 42560)
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

We are unable to reject the null hypothesis for H1 in 2014 because for every person who uses social media, there is a 3.8% decrease of voter turnout. During 2018, the effect was also negative but it was not statistically significant, as it was during 2014. This can serve as support for Baumgartner and Morris' argument because this measure could serve as an indicator that political participation does not extend outside of the Internet sphere.

Based on the standard error and coefficient estimate for Table 1, Youth X Social Media (the interaction between young social media users) the results are not statistically significant, as they do not cross the 1.96 level. Table 2, however, stands at 2.6. This means that there is a statistically significant effect in voter turnout for young social media users in 2018. For every person whos uses social media, there is almost a 4 percent increase in voter turnout.

According to our adjusted R^2 value, the relationship proposed by these variables describe 16% of the variance in our dependent variable (for 2014). During 2018, the adjusted R^2 value is about 12%, which means that the model explains about 12% of the variation in voter turnout. This model is not meant to be used for prediction, though, so the R^2 is not as pertinent as it would be in a prediction model.

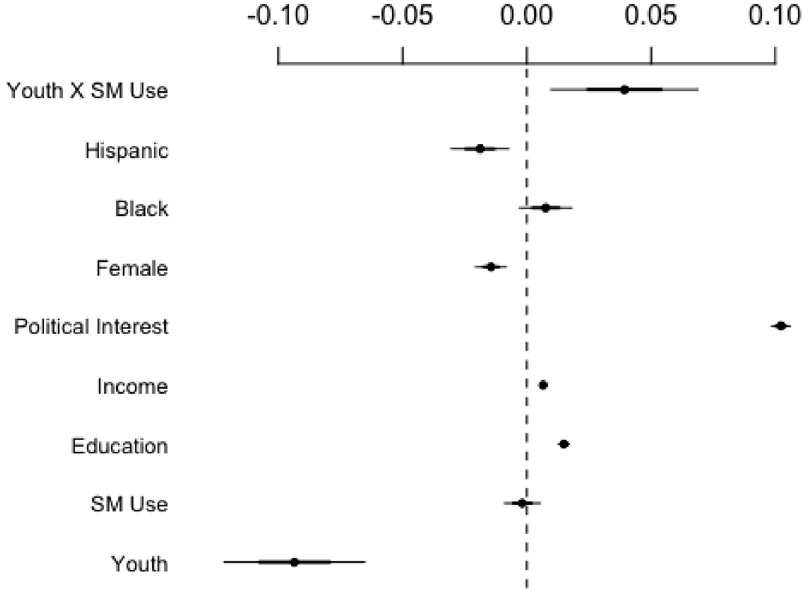


Figure 1: 2018 Election

Figure 2: 2014 Election

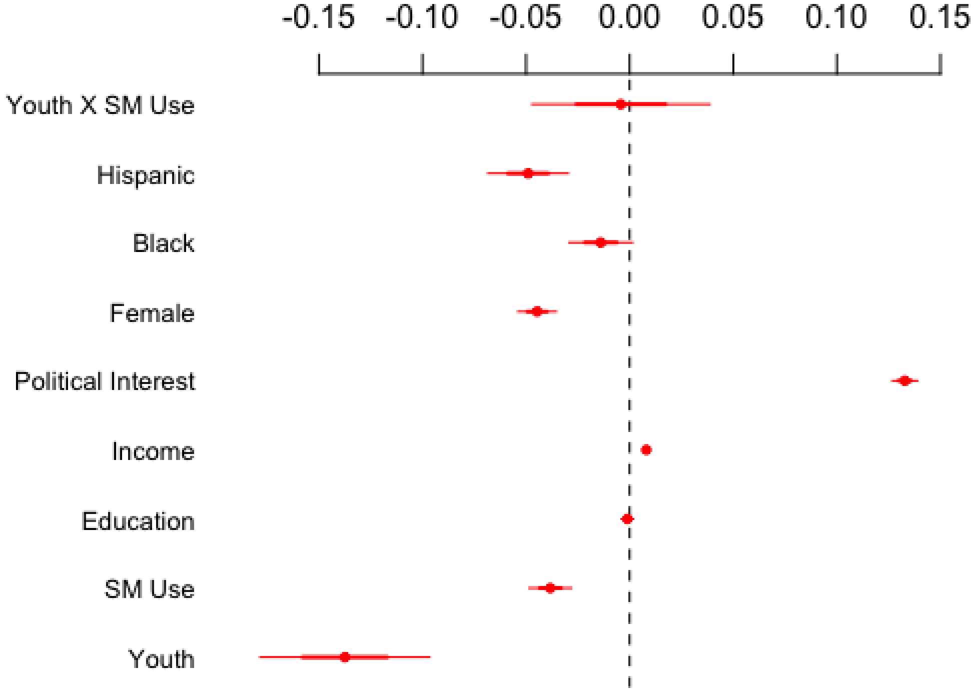
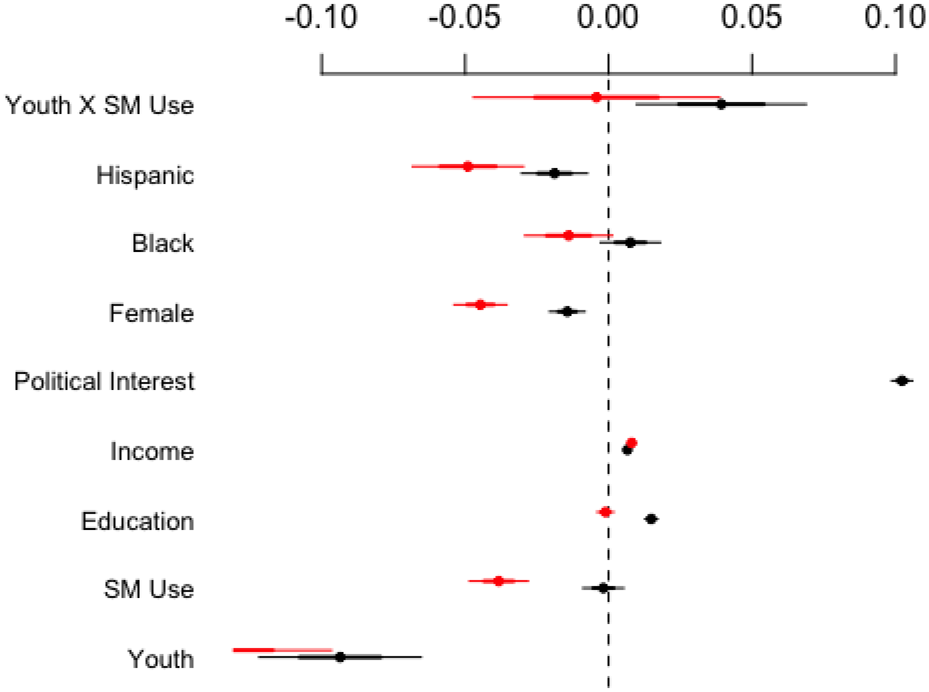


Figure 3: Comparison of 2014 & 2018 Elections



The figures above are coefficient plots. The youth variable unsurprisingly has a negative effect on voter turnout. In consensus with the extant literature, variables such as political interest and income have a positive relationship with turnout. Figure 1 shows how social media use in 2018 did not have a statistically significant effect on voter turnout, which means that H1 can be rejected. Interestingly, though, Figure 1 (2018) shows that social media use by youth had a positive effect on turnout. H2 (the age factor) is supported: social media use itself does not increase turnout unless the user is young. Figure 2 (2014) has no statistically significant effect between young social media users and turnout. In fact, Figure 2 demonstrates that social media use had a negative effect on turnout. Social media use by youth did not have a statistically significant effect on turnout in 2014, but it did have a positive, significant effect in 2018. These results support H3.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper began by recounting the recent tactics that social media platforms and users have utilized to encourage their audiences to register to vote. There was an unprecedented jump in youth voter turnout in 2018 but it was unclear whether social media outreach was responsible for the increase (Misra, 2019).

The core question of this analysis is whether social media has an influence on the voter turnout of youth. Voter turnout is by nature a difficult concept to measure, but many scholars have set forth studies that examine why people show up to the polls; there is plenty of literature dedicated solely as to why young people have historically failed to vote in large quantities. Recently, there has also been research that focuses on the connection between forms of political participation and social media, with some scholars placing a particular emphasis on youth

(Michelson and Teresi, 2015). The literature connecting the two bodies of literature— voter turnout and social media— is scarce and the extant scholarship has mixed results. This study is meant to address the gaps in the existing literature by connecting the two topics and analyzing whether Baumgartner and Morris were accurate in stating that political activity is limited to the digital sphere.

The investigation showed that while social media itself does not have a significant effect on voter turnout, the interaction between social media use and youth does have a statistically significant effect. As expected, the demographic that is on social media in the greatest quantities is more greatly influenced than other demographics who lag behind in use. This recalls the notion of "incidental exposure"— the likelihood that users will be exposed to political content without intentionally seeking it (Xenos et al., 2014, p. 154). The recent mobilization efforts by users like Taylor Swift and platforms like *Elle* magazine and Snapchat seem to have been successful— as expected, there was a greater effect between the dependent and independent variables during the 2018 midterm elections.

Although this analysis adds to our understanding about the influence of social media on the youth population and the political sphere, this study is severely limited by the lack of data on social media. Large surveys like the CCES have only recently begun to account for social media use. The proxy used in this study was the closest way to simulate social media use, but the results may have been different if the 2014 dataset had a direct measure for social media use. In addition, social media use is constantly changing. It would be interesting for future scholarship to locate a more effective way to measure social media use and to continue to examine how political actors may use social media to mobilize youth.

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