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**A Comparative Analysis Between the Voting Patterns of CSUMB Students and Nationwide
Voters, Ages 18-24**

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**SBS 404S
SBS Service Learning Capstone
Track 1
Senior Capstone Advisor, Armando Arias, Ph.D.**

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Literature Review.....	4
<i>The Effects of the Political Media on Young Voter Turnout.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Negative Attitudes Towards Politics and Voting.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>The Gender Gap in Young Voters.....</i>	<i>7</i>
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Methodology.....	10
Limitations.....	11
Results.....	11
Data Analysis.....	13
Conclusion.....	15
Bibliography.....	22

Abstract

The purpose of this capstone is to evaluate if CSUMB students, ages 18-24, follow the historically low voting and low voter registration patterns of other U.S. voters, ages 18-24. The study will draw on the theory of political information efficacy in order to analyze why young voters, ages 18-24, are less likely to vote in federal and state elections. My methodology for this study included using both qualitative and quantitative methods. I created an online survey to critically analyze why young adults from 18 to 24 years old vote in significantly fewer numbers than voters over the age of 64. The participants included 40 California State University Monterey Bay students, ages 18-24. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau will allow me to evaluate data sets and compare the differences in voting behaviors between CSUMB students and U.S. voters, ages 18-24. The overall results of this capstone were that the voting patterns of CSUMB students, ages 18-24, do not mirror the historically low voting patterns of U.S. voters, ages 18-24.

Introduction

In November 2016, only 43% of registered voters, ages 18-24, voted in the United States general election (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). However, citizens over the age of 64 voted at a rate of 72.6%. There is a stark divide in voter turnout between young people and people over the age of 64. In addition to the age gap between voters, there is also a gender gap in the population of voters. In the past 10 years, women have registered to vote and voted at a greater rate than men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The research questions for this capstone include the following: 1) What are the voting patterns among California State University Monterey Bay students, ages 18-24? 2) How do those patterns compare to the historically low voting patterns of young people, ages 18-24? 3) What common reasons are found to be prevalent among the CSUMB students, ages 18-24 who decided not to register to vote and/or did not vote?

I am part of the young voting population, and I have personally noticed how many people around my age do not vote. Some do not recognize the reach of their vote and how important it is, especially in contemporary United States politics. The overarching issue is the lack of voting within the 18-24 community. I hope to comprehend why young people do not exercise their voting rights as much as voters over the age of 64. A primary goal of this research is to discover ways in which to increase voter turnout. Increased voter turnout may have a large impact on not only state election results, but also on federal election results.

Literature Review

This literature review examines previous studies on how various factors affect overall voter turnout. The first theme will evaluate how political media, specifically mainstream news media, affects the young citizen vote. Specifically, it will analyze how the Internet provides a profuse amount of information that in turn produces young people that are more politically

informed than their parents' generation. The second theme will examine young people's unfavorable attitudes towards politics and how these attitudes play a significant role in voter turnout. The final theme will discuss the differences in voter registration and voter turnout by gender.

The Effects of the Political Media on Young Voter Turnout

Scholars have turned their attention on the growing influence of the political media, such as political television advertisements and the Internet, on young voters. In the past decade, young voters have increasingly gone to the Internet in order to obtain political information (Wells and Dudash, 2007). About 71% of young voters use the Internet to obtain political information (Kaid, McKinney, et al., 2007). Although the internet is able to provide a wealth of free information, there has been conflicting evidence from scholars on whether the internet negatively or positively affects voter turnout.

According to Wells and Dudash (2007), the easy accessibility of the internet has not necessarily provoked an increased voter turnout for young people. This could be due to the unreliability of information on the internet. Lariscy (2011) states, that "it could also be argued that people might want to avoid the Internet and its potential exposure to the 'armchair analyst' political discourse that advances in personal publishing..." (p.750). There are millions of political sources on the Internet, but it is not always easy to distinguish real journalism from personal opinions, biased information, and false news. The unreliability of information obtained on the Internet can dissuade young voters from gaining political knowledge and, in turn, decrease the likelihood of young people voting.

Although some may believe that the Internet negatively effects on young voter turnout, there has been compelling evidence pointing otherwise. Kaid, McKinney, et al. (2007) pointed

out that those who seek political information on the Internet are among the most politically well-informed voters. According to Kaid, (2002):

Young voters exposed to political information such as political advertising on the Internet were significantly more likely to seek out additional information sources and to indicate a greater likelihood of voting, whereas those exposed to the same ads on television were stimulated to engage in other political activity, such as volunteering to help a candidate or contributing money to a campaign. (p. 28)

Young voters who seek out political information on the Internet are more informed on political matters, and in turn are more likely to vote. Furthermore, Tedesco (2007) noted that young people who highly interact with the Internet have more political knowledge. Those who have more faith in their wealth of knowledge were more likely to indicate voting as an important action (Tedesco, 2007).

Due to technology, individuals are also able to get instant news notification from the internet on their phone. This allows further access to political information and news in an instant. As a result, more youth have a higher amount of political knowledge (Ballard, 2014). Moreover, it is important to note that as a result of increased access to political information, youth in this recent decade are more politically active than youth a decade ago (Ballard, 2014).

Negative Attitudes Towards Politics and Voting

Another notable topic discussed among scholars is the negative attitude which many young people display towards voting and politics. Increased media bias, corruption in politics, lack of engagement in political conversations, and lack of trust in the political process are all factors that have aided to the growing negative outlook towards politics (Bennet, 1997; Hoffner & Rehkoff, 2011).

According to Bennet (1997), reasons that young people have for disliking politics include believing that many politicians are corrupt, believing the government is self-serving rather than working for the people, and a lack of trust in their own political opinion. Moreover, lack of engagement in political conversations adds to the disconnection from politics for young voters (Bennet, 1997). Perceived media bias also adds to the lack of political participation (Hoffner & Rehkoff, 2011). A solution proposed to change negative attitudes towards politics is political mobilization (Niven, 2004). Niven (2004) studies how face-to-face mobilization has been effective in increasing the number of overall voters. Face-to-face canvassing was also found to increase voter turnout overall (Niven, 2004).

Another factor affecting attitudes towards politics and voting are negative political advertisements. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1999) found that negative political advertising has been shown to decrease overall voter turnout. When prospective voters, specifically independent voters, view negative political advertisements, instead of being persuaded to vote for the candidate, they choose not to vote all together (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1999). Independent voters constitute a large population of prospective voters, but since they are not set in a specific political party, when they view negative political advertising, they are revolted by the attacks on candidates and choose not to vote.

The Gender Gap in Young Voters

A prevalent theme discussed amongst scholars of this topic is the gender gap in voter registration and voter turnout. According to Ansolabehere & Hersh (2013), women register to vote up to 16% more often than men. Not only does voter registration vary by age, but also by race. In all racial groups, women are overall registered to vote more than men (Ansolabehere &

Hersh, 2013). Ansolabehere and Hersh (2013) noted, “Among Blacks and Latinos, women participate at vastly higher rates than men”. African American and Latino women vote at a rate of 14% to 16% higher than men.

According to Winfrey (2014), the political identity women form at a young age is one that will most likely follow them throughout the rest of their lives. Studlar (1998) explains how differing values and priorities may contribute to the greater turnout of women in the polls. Many women’s opposition towards using force and their support of public assistance are among the greater reasonings shown to influence voter turnout. Women base their own political opinions and voting decisions on the stances that candidates have on those specific issues. Due to their interest in specific issues, women tend to make it to the polls at a greater rate than men.

Theoretical Framework: Political Information Efficacy

The study drew on the theory of political information efficacy in order to analyze why young voters, ages 18-24, are less likely to vote than voters over the age of 65. Political Information Efficacy is a theory that describes the extent to which individuals have sufficient confidence in their level of political information or knowledge to participate in the political process (Kaid, 2007). This theory aids in explaining why young people do not vote as much as people over 65: because young people are not confident in their amount of political knowledge. Young people also have low confidence in their government and feel their vote does not matter.

Political information efficacy plays an important role in determining if young voters do or do not vote. According to Kaid (2007), low levels of political knowledge and information can account for low voter turnout. If they do not feel sufficiently informed, young voters tend to choose to abstain from voting. Young voters perceive themselves to have a lack of knowledge and feel unfit to vote. Kaid also states that those who watch political advertising and political

debates tend to have greater political information efficacy. However, Kaid (2007) acknowledges that there is conflicting evidence regarding the effectiveness of political ads. Kaid (2007) also analyzed the level of political knowledge young voters 18-24 seem to have, compared to older voters. Young voters reported to be moderately informed and older voters reported being significantly well-informed.

In addition to Kaid's findings on the impact of political information efficacy on voting, Lariscy (2011) presents a mirroring view on the significance political information efficacy. Lariscy (2011) examines different aspects of political participation and the age differences in political participation. A common theme Lariscy (2011) found among voters is the importance of political information efficacy in determining voter turnout. Different levels of exposure to political information determine the amount of political information efficacy. Young voters exposed to the Internet, campaign advertisements, and debates were among those with the highest political information efficacy. In contrast, young people who reported having low political information efficacy decided not to vote due to their perception of lack of information. A solution proposed was to increase exposure to political content, such as advertisements and debates, to raise political information efficacy.

Political information efficacy also plays a vital role in Tedesco's (2007) study. Young voters who had a high exposure to the Internet indicated an increase in political information efficacy. Tedesco explains how young voters with political inefficacy felt that if they voted, it would have no value in the political arena. The more lack of knowledge a young voter possesses contributes to the detachment from politics. Young voters cited lack of political knowledge as the main reason for not voting. Participants who were engaged in a highly interactive condition were much more likely to consider voting important than those in a low interactive condition.

The study found that the more exposure to Internet media resulted increased positive perceptions of one's vote. Increased interaction on online political forums also increase political information efficacy.

Literature Review/ Theoretical Framework Conclusion

The literature review analyzes different factors that may affect voter turnout. Three prevalent themes emerged from the literature. The first theme evaluates the effect of the various political media on young voters, specifically focusing on the effects of the internet. The second theme discusses how negative attitudes surrounding politics and voting negatively affects young voter turnout. The third theme focused on the differences in voting among gender. Furthermore, political information efficacy shows to play a vital role in influencing voter turnout. The more political knowledge one perceives to have, the more likely they are to vote. Individuals must display sufficient confidence in their amount of political information to participate in the voting process.

Methodology

Data for this study was collected by employing mixed methods. I created an online survey to critically analyze why young adults, ages 18-24, vote in significantly fewer numbers than voters over the age of 64. The participants included 40 California State University Monterey Bay students, ages 18-24. In the survey, I also include yes/no questions with the option to include an 'other' response. I also included open-ended questions prompting participants to explain reasoning behind not voting. The program I used to create my survey is Google Forms. This program summarized the results collected from the participants and displayed them in an orderly manner.

In addition, I employed quantitative methods by evaluating data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau produces high quality data on voting, public opinion, and political participation. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau allowed me to evaluate data sets and compare the differences in voting behaviors between CSUMB students and U.S. voters, ages 18-24. Specific statistics measuring voter turnout at the polls will were identified using the U.S. Census Bureau data. I also used the voting data I collected from U.S. Census Bureau and the data I collected from the survey administered to evaluate if the results from my survey mirror those from U.S. Census Bureau.

The data collected was used to evaluate if CSUMB students, ages 18-24, follow the historically low voting patterns of young voters, ages 18-24, in the United States. Moreover, the data collected was critically analyzed to determine reasoning behind the lack of voter turnout in young citizens, ages 18-24. Independent variables that may affect voting behaviors include access to political media, gender, and age.

Limitations

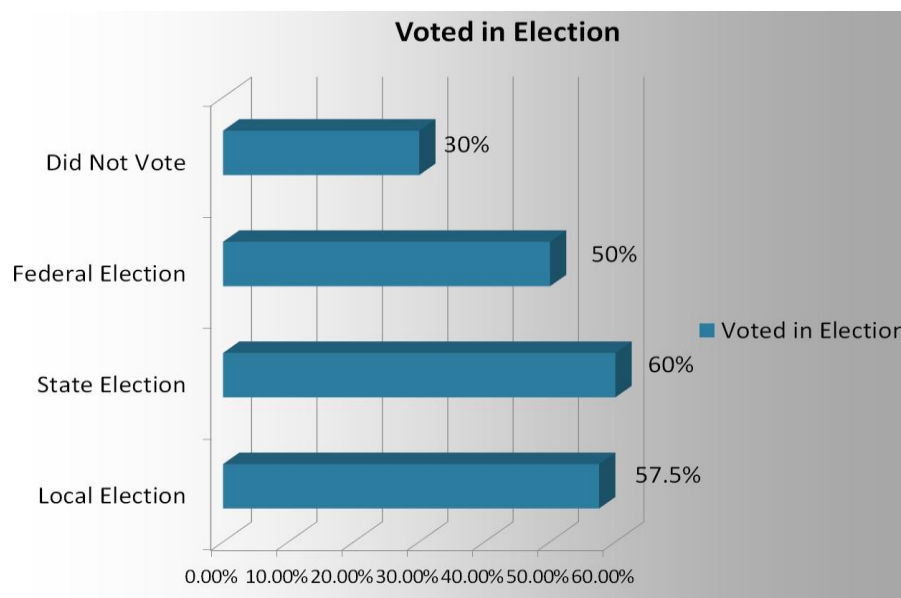
It is important to note that I did not include a data analysis of the results by gender. Due to the demographics of CSUMB students, 63% female and 37% male, my sample survey was majority females. 70% of the participants who answered the survey are women, 25% were men, and 5% preferred not to say. An analysis of the results based on gender would not be encompassing or accurate.

Results

Out of the 40 CSUMB 18- to 24-year-old participants, 72.5% reported being a registered voter. Of the remaining 27.5%, 25% of participants reported that they were not registered to vote, and 2.5% were uncertain of their status. Common factors that were stated for not voting

and for not registering to vote included not being a U.S. citizen (44.4%) and having no time to sign up to register or to vote (33.3%). Out of the 72.5% of registered CSUMB voters, ages 18-24 voters, 67.5% voted in the most recent (2018) elections. 32.5% of CSUMB participants reported not voting in any elections within the past eight years. Furthermore, Figure 1 displays in which type of election participants have voted in in the past 8 years. A majority of participants voted in state elections (60%) and the least popular type of election voted in was the federal election (50%). This response could be related to dissatisfaction in the federal voting system and the electoral college. In an open-ended question on the questionnaire, over 65% of participants reported being extremely dissatisfied with the electoral college. Most expressed that it is difficult to understand how it works, makes voters feel like their vote does not matter, and that the electoral college does not give states equal representation.

Figure 1- Type of Election Voted in Within 2011-2018 Among CSUMB Students



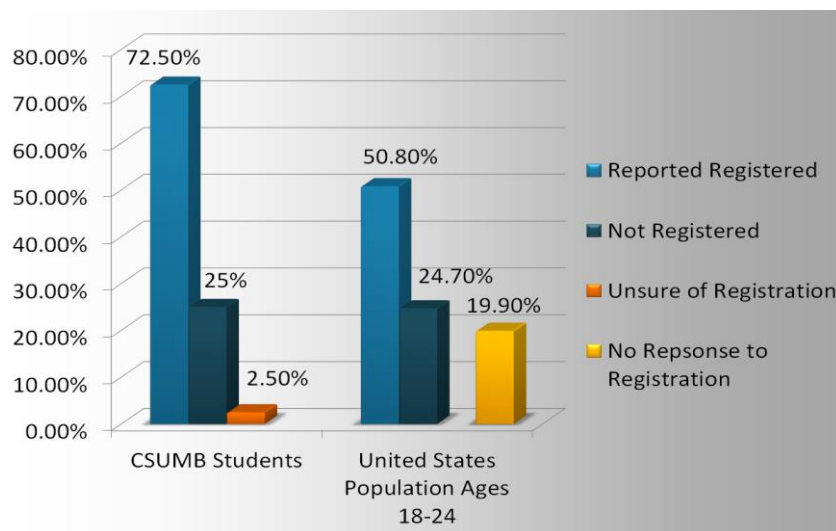
Other noteworthy responses by participants were their lack of confidence in their own political knowledge to on how to be a responsible voter. Only 50% of participants reported

feeling like they possessed enough political knowledge in order to be a responsible voter. 35% of participants reported to have ‘maybe’ enough political knowledge and 12.5% believed they did not have enough political knowledge to vote responsibly. Political Information Efficacy tells us that this can also be many people’s reasoning behind not voting or not registering to vote.

Data Analysis

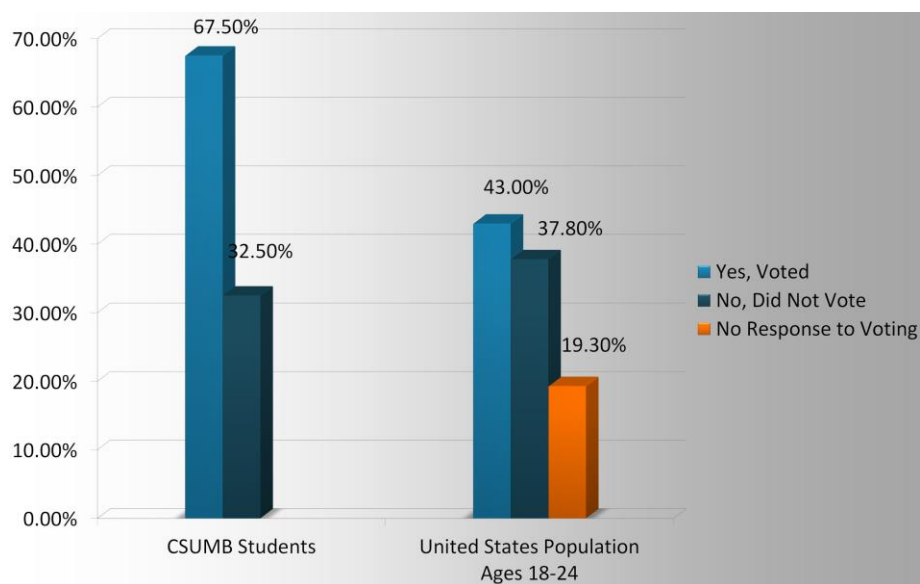
According to U.S. Census data, CSUMB students, ages 18-24, reported registering to vote at a much high rate than other U.S. voters ages 18-24. CSUMB students, ages 18-24, reported registering at a rate of 72.5%, whereas U.S. voters, ages 18-24, reported registering to vote at a rate of 50.8%. CSUMB students ages 18-24 reported registering to vote over 20% more than U.S. voters, ages 18-24. Figure 2 displays the vast difference in rate of voting registration between CSUMB students and U.S. voters, ages 18-24. However, the rate at which those who are not registered mirror each other closely. 25% of CSUMB students, ages 18-24, reported not being registered to vote, while 24.7% of U.S. Voters, ages 18-24, reported not being registered to vote. The closeness in rate can be attributed to the 19.9% of U.S. voters, ages 18-24, who had no response to registration in the U.S. Census survey.

Figure 2- Voting Registration for CSUMB Students and U.S. Voters Ages 18-24



Furthermore, CSUMB students, ages 18-24, reported voting at a rate of 67.5% in the most recent elections (2018). Only 43% of U.S. voters, ages 18-24, reported voting in most recent U.S. elections. Students reported voting at a rate of 24.1% higher than U.S. voters ages 18-24. CSUMB students voted at a much higher rate than U.S. voters, ages 18-24. Figure 2 displays the large gap in the rate of voting among those groups. There is not a drastic difference in the rate at which CSUMB students and U.S. voters, ages 18-24, did not vote. CSUMB students did not vote at a rate of 32.5% and U.S. voters, ages 18-24, did not vote at a rate of 37.8%. Although the rates are rather close, it must be taken into account that 19.3% of U.S. voters, ages 18-24, had no response to voting in the U.S. Census Bureau survey.

Figure 3- Voting Among CSUMB Students and U.S. Voters Ages 18-24 in 2018 Elections



Common reasons stated among CSUMB students, ages 18-24, that stated they did not vote and did not register to vote included, not being a U.S. citizen, having no time to sign up to register or to vote, and not believing they possess enough political knowledge to vote responsibly. Moreover, 42.5% of CSUMB students reported that a lack of good candidate

choices has impacted their reasoning to vote in an election over the last eight years. This contributes to a lack of faith in governmental candidates across different types of elections. As stated, 32.5% of CSUMB voters reported being unclear if they possess enough political knowledge to be a responsible voter and 12.5% believed they did not possess enough political knowledge. According to Political Information Efficacy theory, perception of political knowledge plays a role in voter turnout. Political Information Efficacy has a direct correlation with voter turnout because CSUMB students, ages 18-24, stated that they were unsure or did not believe that they did not have enough political knowledge to vote responsibly. Lack of voting may also be attributed to the lack of confidence in the federal voting system, the electoral college.

Another factor that may come into play with higher rates of registration in CSUMB students, ages 18-24, is the level of education. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. voters, ages 18-24, with a Bachelor's degree registered to vote at a rate of 65% and reported voting at a rate of 55.5%. U.S. voters, ages 18-24, who only received a high school diploma registered to vote at a rate of 43.9% and reported voting at a rate of 32.4%. Individuals' level of education is a clear factor that may have contributed to the much higher rate of voting and voter registration that CSUMB students displayed.

Conclusion

Overall, the voting patterns of CSUMB students, ages 18-24, does not mirror the historically low voting patterns of U.S. voters, ages 18-24. CSUMB students vote at a much higher rate than other national voters in the same age bracket. CSUMB students also register to vote at a higher rate than U.S. voters, ages 18-24. Common factors that were stated among participants for not voting and for not registering to vote included not being a U.S. citizen,

having no time to sign up to register or to vote, and not possessing enough political knowledge to vote responsibly. Political Information Efficacy theory played a role in voter turnout for CSUMB students, ages 18-24, because they were unsure or did not believe that they did not have enough political knowledge to vote responsibly. Furthermore, level of education may have played a vital factor in determining why CSUMB students, ages 18-24, vote and are registered to vote more than U.S. voters, ages 18-24. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there is a notable increase in voter participation with voters who have a Bachelor's degree, versus those who only have a high school diploma

In order to increase voter registration and voter turnout, the United States needs to completely alter the format of the electoral college. The United States could look to other countries that have a more representative democracy system. The United States federal voting system has caused much distrust in government and unequal representation of the people. Moreover, voters need access to unbiased, fact-based political information in order to increase their political knowledge and have faith in their voting abilities. I believe altering the voting system will significantly increase voter trust in government and voter turnout.

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