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Swing State Residency and Young Voter Turnout

by

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Introduction

This paper examines the impact of swing state residency on the voting behavior of college-aged citizens to determine whether this factor might affect an increase in turnout for presidential elections.

There has been a growing age gap in voter turnout in the United States for some time now, and this is a reasonable concern for the United States democratic system as it is broadly understood. U.S. democracy places great value on public opinion and fair elections as part of the governmental selection process, and anything which might impeded that from taking place is worthy of examination. Accordingly, anything which might shine light on the issue of low voter turnout is valuable for future inquiries.

For this end, an examination of swing state vote differences on young voters is useful since it might lead to answers for the reduction in youth turnout. Swing states, or battleground states, are those states which in presidential election years are considered contentious, in that they might give their Electoral College votes to either of the two major party candidates. In this context, swing states become very important to candidates and their campaigns, and it is well established that campaigns will spend great sums of money on advertisements and appearances in these battleground states (Lipsitz 2009, Gimpel et al. 2007, Huber and Arceneaux 2007, www.washingtonpost.com 2012). Therefore they are useful in a study of youth voting behavior because the swing states present an environment of increased political exposure and more competitive elections within the same country which allows for testing of existing voter theories.

Previous turnout studies which have examined battleground states have had mixed results. Both a 2005 study by Hill and McKee and 2006 study by Wolak found a significant

improvement in voter turnout for swing states than in safe states for the 2000 election, but a 2005 study by Holbrook and McClurg found no difference in turnout between battleground and safe states across elections. A study by Bergan and colleagues, however, found a 5 percent greater turnout in swing states for the 2004 election than in safe states for that same election (Lipsitz 2009). Keena Lipsitz argues in a more recent study from 2009 that there is a distinct improvement in political activism and interest for battleground states compared to safe states and that in close elections (2000, 2004, and 1988 are measured to statistical significance) turnout will also be higher in swing states than safe states. This might mean that there are significant effects on voting behavior in contentious elections within battleground states which might offer greater insight into voting behavior as a whole and particularly for low youth turnout.

These previous studies have not broken down the data by age or analyzed youth turnout in swing states. This paper seeks to answer whether there is any improvement specifically in youth turnout in battleground states which might suggest an interaction of factors within existing voter motivation theory and open further inquiry into youth turnout. This would be especially informative in light of the common argument that youth are apathetic and cynical as voters since the battleground states provide an environment where votes theoretically matter more and greater media pressure to vote is applied.

Literature Review

Overall turnout in America has been decreasing drastically over time, but there is evidence that this is partly because ineligible individuals are being counted as members of the voting pool despite being unable to vote either as immigrants, felons, or any other disqualifying feature (Dalton 2008; Levine 2002). However, even when these factors are accounted for, there

is a moderate decline in overall vote participation, and it is accompanied by a growing age gap (Wattenberg 2007 and Rosenstone 1993). Previous studies of single year election turnout have found the turnout goes up with age but also declines again after the age of 70; recently, the oldest voting age groups have been improving their turnout while the youngest voters have been suffering further declines (Wattenberg 2007; Levine 2002; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

There is already extensive data concerning the voting gap between young and old voters. Since 1964, voters aged 21-24 have voted at a lower rate than any other age group in the United States; and once the vote was extended to 18-year-old citizens in 1971, the age group 18-20 has voted at even lower rates than the 21-24 year olds (Wattenberg 2007). No more than 48 percent of 18-20 year-olds have turned out in any presidential election up through 2004 (Wattenberg 2007).

Notably, however, there was a large jump in youth turnout for the 2004 and 2008 elections. This is often attributed to the competitive nature of the race and the outreach of the presidential campaigns (Wattenberg 2008). Nevertheless, the results are not inspiring when compared against other demographics. Youth turnout in 2004 was still below average when compared to the other age groups and below youth turnout in 1972 (Wattenberg 2007). In the 2008 election, the youth turnout was still nearly 3 times less than that of 60-year-olds despite popular outreach programs from Barack Obama, and most of the increased youth turnout in that election came from minority voters who boosted the combined youth vote rather than across the board increases (Wattenberg 2008). In the 2008 election 18-25 year olds were the least likely to both register and vote with a meager 74 percent registration rate and a 64 percent turnout rate (Flanigan 2010).

There is a tendency to blame a life cycle effect for the discrepancy in youth turnout. The argument is that individuals will go through inevitable shifts in their circumstances as they age which will make them more prone to voting. However, the declining youth vote and the climbing elderly vote across multiple elections discredit that as a full explanation since there is no consistent effect across time (Wattenberg 2007). Additionally, elections in other democracies do not reflect the same age gap as those in America, which further discredits the life-cycle hypothesis at least as a complete explanation (Wattenberg 2007).

Instead, it is possible that a cohort effect exists which might account for overall voter decline and the especially low rates of youth voter turnout. The idea is that older generations were more exposed to certain galvanizing political issues which prompted political participation. Putnam and Sander note that political participation was boosted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks and use this as evidence of an event-based cohort model of voting. However, when the expected life-cycle effects and generational differences are accounted for in polling data, there is still a definite age gap in the voting populace; there are definitely other forces at play even if cohort effects are controlled for (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Rosenstone and Hansen argue for a third interpretation, a life experience effect. They believe that an individual will acquire a greater share of resources and experiences as he or she ages which will make the action of voting more likely to occur. These resources can include money sent on campaigns, property that the individual wishes to keep, political understanding and skills, or anything which makes the individual more willing to pay attention to current events and cast a vote. Additionally, an individual will be more likely to acquire experiences in the workplace as they age, and will be more likely to form a stable base of contacts with similar opinions and interests which can keep the individual informed about issues. This theory, though

very similar to the life-cycle effect, tries to combine traditional resource models of voting with the age gap present in turnout in a way which includes individual experiences rather than simple aging.

Brady, Verba, and Scholzman also found a positive correlation between a person's share of political resources in the form of wealth, education, and political skills and that individual's likelihood of turnout. They found that those individuals with more wealth were also more likely to have free time to devote to campaigns or acquiring political knowledge, and that those people who had more work and organizational experience in leadership roles were more likely to vote and participate politically. They argued that a person's individual resources served as reasonable predictors of political participation, and this lends some support to Rosenstone and Hansen's explanation of life-experience models.

We might then expect that youth voters, already lacking in some of the aforementioned skills vote less than older adults by virtue of their reduced time to acquire wealth and smaller experience with political activities. However, the age discrepancy in turnout persists even when traditional predictors of voting, such as wealth, race, and education are accounted for (Dalton 2008). The presence of these political resources mitigates the discrepancy between youth turnout and older turnout, but it does not eliminate the gap altogether. Additionally, whatever other factors are at play are significantly strong enough to overcome the real benefits of greater education that youths have as an advantage over older generations now that college attendance and high school graduation rates are growing (Wattenberg 2007).

One factor that might be at play is political interest, which also strongly correlates with the likelihood of voting (Brady, Verba, Scholzman 1995; Campbell et al. 1964). Indeed, it is

popular to blame voter apathy for reduced turnout. Putnam's "Bowling alone" sparked widespread speculation that modern society was disconnected from social values and communication which promote socialization into democratic participation (Dalton 2008). Galston cites evidence that young citizens are more and more reporting a lack of interest in staying informed about politics, and he argues for a causal link between political knowledge and political action. In his explanation, though modern youths are receiving more education before entering the workforce, the education has less emphasis on political values and civic duty than that received by older generations.

Galston, rather than claiming that political thinking is altogether excluded, argues that modern American society emphasizes individual rights over political cooperation and that trust in government is declining at an alarming rate, and Wattenberg believes declining political interest and efficacy more than counters the advantages of greater education for youth turnout. When coupled with earlier data linking political interest to voting behavior, it sounds reasonable that a more iconoclastic culture will produce fewer new voters.

There may be some merit to this argument. Flanigan and Zingale argue that political disinterest can account for nearly one third of the overall declining voter turnout. Further, although Putnam recants his original claim that people are no longer socially active or politically engaged, he notes that young people tend to participate in different ways than they used to: they tend to volunteer more and vote less (Sander and Putnam 2010). Young people are also more likely to try and persuade others to vote than are older citizens, but less likely to vote themselves, work on a campaign, or donate money to a political candidate (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Dalton argues that young people are being socialized as what he calls actualized citizens rather than duty-based citizens; the former are more drawn to volunteering activities and more prone to boycotts and protests but the latter are the voters. The idea is that young voters, disinterested with the traditional political actions open to them are pursuing alternative political actions to make their opinions known. These young voters are more likely to respond with a low amount of political efficacy or an increased amount of cynicism towards governmental institutions, but still participate politically. This theory discredits claims of youth political apathy, but acknowledges a shift in citizen participation for young voters.

There is evidence supporting this claim even in the differing media consumptions of young and old voters. A study found that online media, which is the main source of information to youth voters, tended to promote actualized citizen behavior (creation of content, ability to organize independently, and the capacity to share user-generated content) over traditional duty-based citizen behaviors such as voting (Bennet et al. 2010).

Not all authors agree with this thinking, however. Rosenstone and Hansen argue that there is little to know reason to believe that low reported trust in government or political efficacy will result in reduced turnout. These same authors still acknowledge that young citizens are less likely to vote and more likely to perform volunteer activities, however. Much of the current dispute is not concerned with the existence of a participation difference between young and old citizens, but with potential causes of this effect.

The predictors of voting behavior, resource-based and otherwise, have led to the development of two main voting theories: the duty-based model and the rational choice model. The former argues that individuals will vote based on socialized duties learned in childhood and

reinforced over time. The latter argues that individuals will vote because they find it to be logical decisions as rational actors. It is under these two models that much of the current turnout debate is taking place, and they are of some importance to an understanding of why certain groups vote while others do not.

Duty-based citizenship is supported in part by evidence that voting is a habitual behavior such that those who have previously voted are those most likely to vote again (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Campbell et al. 1964). This suggests that the urge to vote might be a consistent force inherent to the individual rather than an external force which leads a person to vote based on each election. Specifically, in the duty-based model, a person will feel some sort of obligation to vote which leads them to the polls so that they vote to fulfill an obligation rather than for any personal gain.

Several authors have studied this phenomenon and determined that it has a large deal of credibility. Campbell et al. found in a study of the 1956 election that those surveyed with a high degree of citizen duty were far more likely to vote than those with a low sense of citizen duty. They argue that in the absence of a feeling of civic obligation to vote, individuals have very little impetus to show up at all on Election Day.

Dalton, in a 2008 study, had participants rank the importance of several civic actions to determine whether they favored a citizenship obedient and respectful to authority or one actively engaged in political actions. He classified the former group as dutiful citizens more likely to favor actions such as reporting crimes, voting, obey laws, etc. The latter group he considered engaged citizens, more likely to emphasize protest behavior, volunteer work, or forming

individual opinions. Dalton found that dutiful citizens were more likely to vote, but that engaged citizens were more likely to attend protests or volunteer for the needy.

These dutiful citizens are more likely to trust authority and to believe that the government will provide appropriate means of participation (Dalton 2008). They have received socialization in the traditional means of political participation and are fine waiting for the natural system rollover to adjust things they disapprove of. Engaged citizens, however, are not content to let the system be their sole or most important means of political expression; they are more likely to distrust government or to want quicker responses to new issues.

Moreover, these engaged citizens are becoming more numerous in America as time passes. Rosenstone and Hansen plotted surveyed sense of civic duty with regard to elections across elections from 1952 to 1988 and found a growth in civic duty between 1952 and 1956 followed by a slow decline and a massive spike upwards in 1982 followed by an even steeper fall to an abysmal low in 1988. They found steady and alarming declines in the public trust of government and public belief that government responds to problems effectively. Flanigan and Zingale plot a similarly depressing decline in public trust of government up through 2008 which shows that, despite a temporary incline from 1992 to 2000, the trend of public distrust is continuing; even 2004 showed no boost in trust of government. Gronke, Hicks, and Cooke have found a similar trend of declining trust in their own studies. Wattenberg plots a steady decline in dutiful citizenship and a growing age gap whereby the young are increasingly so the most unlikely to be dutiful citizens.

Galston's arguments about modern political education neglecting civic socialization in favor of individual rights promotion and emphasis might help explain the overall negative trend

in civic duty over time. He believes that over time the obligations which characterize dutiful citizenship have been phased out of educational programs so that more recent generations are more likely to be engaged citizens rather than dutiful ones. Even outside of education, there is a difference in how people are socialized into politics in recent years which is far more iconoclastic and distrustful of authority than it has been in years past (Fischer et al. 2000). There has been a general shift in public political activity which reflects this; as voter turnout has been declining, other forms of participation more indicative of engaged citizens have been increasing across the board (Dalton 2008).

Further, it is apparent that young citizens are more likely to fall under engaged citizenship measures than under dutiful while the reverse is true for older citizens (Dalton 2008). Overall, young people are less likely to report a sense of efficacy in the current system and are more likely to distrust government and authority in general; so voting has declined as other volunteer activities have risen to compensate (Dalton 2008; Putnam 2010). Younger citizens are accordingly less likely to vote than their elders who were socialized under a more trusting and authority-respecting set of societal ideals, but young voters are more likely to boycott products for political purposes, to volunteer socially, and to attend a protest (Dalton 2008; Putnam 2010).

This shift has entered into the political literature as a clarification of earlier claims of political apathy among the youth as more writers recognize that youth participation is shifting more than it is declining. It is now argued more that young people are participating differently rather than avoiding politics altogether (Dalton 2008; Putnam 2010).

The dutiful citizen model is not universally accepted, however. Though Rosenstone and Hansen report declines in reported citizen efficacy and trust of government and acknowledge a

correlation between these factors and voting, they argue that the impact is negligible in a broad understanding of voter behavior. Further, Dalton's data show an age gap in voting turnout even when dutiful and engaged citizenship effects were accounted for. It seems that there is an extant interaction involving feelings of citizen duty, but that there are other factors which diminish its usefulness as a comprehensive theory of voting behavior.

The alternative, the rational choice model, borrows from economic theory to propose that humans as rational actors derive some real or perceived benefit from voting which induces citizens to turnout on Election Day. Costs to turnout include arranging travel to the polling place, time lost from work or leisure, and the time and energy spent to become informed about the election while benefits include whatever good things a citizen expects to achieve from his or her vote. Supporting this hypothesis, studies have shown turnout to be inverse to the cost of casting a ballot; and it is argued that the reason those with more resources are most likely to vote is because they are expending a smaller portion of what time and energy are available to them when compared to an individual with fewer resources to offer (Feddersen 2004). Additionally, individuals are more likely to vote who report a strong level of concern for outcomes in an election (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

There exists a problem with this model found in the way costs and benefits are calculated in economic theory. Both the goods and costs must be weighed against the probability of their occurrence, but while the cost of voting is certain the benefits are incredibly unlikely to hinge on one individual's vote (Campbell et al. 1964, Downs 1957, Feddersen 2004). This means that no matter how much a person believes that the victory of one candidate will be beneficial, the miniscule value of that person's vote should not be greater than the certain inconvenience of becoming informed about the election and casting a ballot. In fact, Downs and Campbell et al.

both argue that it is rational for nearly every individual to avoid active information seeking and political involvement.

To answer this paradox of rational ignorance, there have been several modified forms of the rational choice model proposed. One of the more popular explanations is that people derive some intangible benefit from voting which acts as a certain benefit to outweigh the certain costs of casting a ballot. This benefit is sometimes the personal satisfaction of casting a vote and fulfilling a sense of obligation (in this way there is some overlap with the dutiful-citizenship model of voting); and sometimes the benefit is the acceptance and admiration of one's peers (Downs 1957; Feddersen 1954). These models rely on societal pressures and peer interaction to motivate a person's vote, sometimes as part of an organized group.

Downs recognizes that most individuals have a rational reason to be ignorant and to ignore political information because of how miniscule their vote is. Nevertheless, people vote because they are roused by opinion leaders who have the ear of a large body of voters; these opinion leaders (lobbyists, union leaders, local party officials, etc.) are the ones who interact with candidates and campaigns to argue for legislation and to acquire information on the election. The opinion leaders utilize their leverage as a bargaining chip with campaigns since they have more power than the average voter; they then disseminate the information they have acquired to their peers and encourage them to vote as a block.

In support of this argument, it has been found that partisan individuals are more likely to vote in elections (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Flanigan and Zingale 2010). The argument is that intense partisans are more likely to be in contact with party leaders and other party members who will encourage them to vote and offer them information about the election. This close-knit

group of like-minded people also derives peer affirmation from voting along the party line, while less partisan individuals might not receive as much support. These highly partisan voters, therefore, are suspected of voting in part for the social and internal benefit it brings them.

Another proposed model relies on irrational assumptions on the part of the voter; the argument is that perceived closeness in elections will induce people to vote even when mathematically their vote is unimportant. The argument is that the voter might not correctly perceive how little one vote matters in the context of an election. Supporting this, it has been found that close elections tend to report higher turnout and that people are more likely to vote when they report that their vote is impactful to the election (Feddersen 2004; Campbell 1964; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Further, a 1999 study found that young people exposed to information concerning the actual odds of one vote deciding an election were much less likely to vote when compared to a control sample; this suggests that at least some of the vote can be explained by irrational assumptions of vote impact (André Blais and Robert Young 1999). Lipsitz findings of greater swing state turnout during close elections mirrors this finding and suggests that battleground states might act as a magnifier for perceived closeness since both the state and national outcome of the election are more contested; and even perceived closeness in an election can improve turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

Both the Dutiful citizenship model and the rational choice model are influenced by mobilization forces acting on the voter, and these forces are very likely present in swing states. For the dutiful citizenship model, mobilization entails anything which will remind an individual of his or her obligation to cast a ballot; and in the rational choice model, mobilization is anything which will make the act of voting more appealing to a potential voter. While some of the forces

that will create these mobilization effects are relatively universal, some such as advertising and visits from candidates are more likely to be present in swing states.

Rosenstone and Hansen identify two broad categories of mobilization: direct and indirect. The former refers to advertisements, messages, and visits from candidates or activists designed to encourage people to vote. The latter is the less formal mobilization that comes from peers or well-known opinion leaders who are spreading their own views and encouraging others to turnout on Election Day. They argue that these forms of mobilization are able to increase turnout by interfering with individuals; sense of obligation and analysis of election outcomes.

For direct mobilization, pressure can be applied to dutiful citizens which reminds them of their civic obligation to vote or to partisans so that they are rallied around their party obligations. These citizens will be more likely to turnout if their sense of duty is galvanized in this manner (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Direct mobilization will impact rational voters with a similarly positive impact on turnout if it can succeed in convincing a potential voter that the stakes of an election are high enough to warrant a vote being cast. This will be especially effective on partisan voters who will be receptive to the potential benefits and costs their party faces in the election (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Support for the impact of direct mobilization was found by Costas Panagopoulos who found that citizens subjected to positive pro-voting messages were more likely to turnout on Election Day.

Additionally, direct mobilization can provide rational voters with information with little effort on the part of the voter thus reducing the costs associated with voting. Receiving information about the election for free certainly makes staying informed a less burdensome task for voters, and data supports the claim. Students called with nonpartisan pro-vote messages and

information on nearby polling places were found to be more likely to vote than if the information had not been given (Green and Gerber 2001). Not only that, but if advertisements or media attention can make a race seem more competitive, then turnout will likely increase considering the already stated correlation with perceived closeness of an election and turnout.

Indirect mobilization comes from direct associates rather than formal leaders, but can be just as effective as direct mobilization. There is evidence that people who are involved in more organizations and have larger social networks are more likely to vote and participate politically (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). These people are beset with peers who will likely discuss politics as it plays out in an election. These connections amplify the sense of obligation a person will feel to cast a ballot through peer pressure, and can lower the costs of voting by disseminating information gathered from other peers or from media (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Downs 1957, Feddersen 2004).

Further, the information received is likely relevant to the potential voter because of the connection shared with his or her peer; Campbell et al. argue that opinion leaders can fix the apathy of potential voters by motivating them to turnout for issues they should care about and by relating voting to an activity done as part of group membership. Downs and Feddersen both discussed the ability of opinion leaders or heads of organizations to acquire and distribute election information relevant to their followers or fellow member. They also possess the capability to encourage their peers to vote either through peer pressure or by pointing out the potential benefits and costs associated with election outcomes as relates to the group.

As related to this paper, mobilization efforts are more likely to target the elderly and to be concentrated in swing states. The elderly are more likely to be contacted by political parties and

candidates because of their greater statistical likelihood of voting and because they are more likely to possess the resources that correlate with political activity (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Additionally, elderly voters are more likely to be partisans; and campaigns are more likely to target and contact partisan voters because they hope their own supporters turn out to vote while their detractors stay away from the polls and because independents have a lower rate of turnout than partisans (Campbell et al. 1964; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Flanigan and Zingale 2010).

Moreover, even ads that appear in television, internet, radio, newspapers, and magazines are more likely to reach elder voters than young voters. This is because campaigns have started taking very careful measures of who is tuning into what media and targeting their ads to capture their target demographics; this new tactic is often called microtargeting (Wattenberg 2007; Flanigan and Zingale 2010; Ridout et al. 2012). The Republicans in 2004 utilized vast amounts of data to determine when to air advertisements and on which media so that each intended demographic was most likely to see an ad which referenced the issues they could relate to; by 2006 the Democrats had caught up to the Republicans and made use of similar data pools to position their ads (Flanigan and Zingale 2010; Ridout et al. 2013). This new form of advertising means that those voters traditionally unlikely to vote are not likely to see as many ads as they would before microtargeting became popular which would be essentially wasted money for the political parties. Those groups (the elderly, the partisan, and the wealthy) who are more likely to vote to begin with and who are therefore more likely to respond well to voter mobilization efforts are more likely to see ads, however.

Young voters are also less likely to experience indirect mobilization because of their less solidified social groups and their lack of experience in organization membership and long-term

employment (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Older voters are more likely to have established social networks and found stable jobs in a long-term residence; this means they will be more exposed to mobilization forces from their peers and from organizational leaders hoping to leverage a block vote in an election.

Lastly, general exposure to media mobilization is more likely to impact older voters than young voters. This refers to any media repetition of campaign ads, discussion of salient political issues, and general discussion of election news which informs voters and potentially excites them enough to influence voting behavior. Young people are increasingly less likely to follow news stories in all forms of media (Wattenberg 2007). Even in internet media consumption, where young voters are significantly more likely to consume media, young citizens are still less likely to consume political media than are older citizens (Wattenberg 2008). Much of that is attributed to the vast array of media available to consumers today and selective exposure on the part of consumers (Wattenberg 2007; Graber 2010). Youth are more likely to seek out entertaining stories while older citizens are more likely to seek out new stories whether out of habit, socialization, or political interest.

In most cases, swing states are more exposed to direct socialization than are non-battleground states. Political candidates have a strong incentive to win battleground states to supplement the safe state Electoral College votes they already count on in close elections, so many candidates make it a priority to target swing voters and partisan supporters in a battleground state much more so than in safe states (Ridout et al. 2012). Therefore it is no surprise that campaigns air more advertisements in battleground states than in safe states and are more likely to visit battleground states than safe states while campaigning (Lipsitz 2009; Gimpel et al. 2007).

This additional campaigning is substantial and can impact voting turnout. Gimpel et al. found that swing state campaigns are effective at distributing information to voters and lowering the potential costs of casting a ballot for low income citizens. Further, there is a positive correlation between heightened campaign activity and increased turnout in elections (Shaw 1999). Lipsitz finds that swing state advertisements in particular are indeed able to jumpstart turnout in contentious elections to a statistically significant measure, as expected, but not in every election.

Theory

It is established that young citizens are less likely to vote in elections than older citizens. The extant literature on elections supposes that individuals are more likely to vote either when they feel an obligation to cast a ballot or when they feel some benefit which outweighs the costs of casting a ballot. Further, it is supported that mobilization effects can enhance turnout by amplifying the sense of duty a voter feels, applying peer pressure to cast a ballot, or by framing the race as particularly important or close. Additionally, elder citizens are more likely to be contacted by campaigns, see advertising for the campaigns, acquire political information from all sources, and receive indirect mobilization from peers. Lastly, the voters in swing states are more likely to be targets for campaign visits from candidates and for political advertisements; and some authors have found increased turnout in swing states during contentious elections.

Considering the traditional positive correlation between older age and turnout in all elections, it is expected that swing state turnout will show a similar trend.

H1: Age (in years) is positively correlated with turnout.

However, because of the increased mobilization efforts undertaken in swing states and the intense competition inherent to an election in a battleground state, it is expected that citizens will be more likely to perceive that a race is close or that they have an obligation to cast a ballot as a citizen. In either the rational choice model or the dutiful citizen model, the greater attention given to the election by the political parties is likely to stir media attention and political activists which will distribute information and propaganda to lower the perceived costs of voting and confer some sense of satisfaction or perceived benefit to a voter. This, taken into account the existing studies showing a correlation between battleground states and increased turnout in battleground states suggests that young voters will have a higher rate of turnout in swing states than in other states just as with the population at large.

H2: Battleground states have higher turnout for elections than safe states.

Moreover, the existing data and voting theories suggest that the increase in voting turnout for swing states would largely come from increased mobilization by candidates and citizens within the states. If this holds true and the arguments that older citizens are more likely to be affected by mobilization efforts are substantiated, then older voters ought to show a greater increase in turnout in swing states than will young voters.

H3: The impact of living in a battleground state is positively conditioned on the age of the individual voter.

There is, however, an alternative interpretation of the existing research and model that makes intuitive sense from the existing research. If it is assumed that older citizens are already highly mobilized regardless of swing state residency because of the factors already discussed, then it is possible that additional mobilization forces will not cause a dramatic jump in voter

turnout. Young citizens, however, are much less likely to be mobilized than their older peers; so there is a much greater portion of this population on which new mobilization forces might act. Taken this way, the possible mobilization forces of swing state residency, though more likely to reach elder citizens because of the research discussed, will bring about a more significant change in youth turnout than in elder turnout. This makes some intuitive sense as a group with a low ordinary participation rate is more likely to show relative improvements than is a group in which most members are already participants in the system.

H4: The impact of living in a battleground state is negatively conditioned on the age of the individual voter.

Data

Common Core Content from the 2010 Cooperative Congressional Election Studies (CCES) was analyzed to determine the impact of swing state residence on voter turnout in 2008, and was selected because of both the availability and nature of the data; the CCES is unique in that there are very large samples for every state.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is an individual level measure of whether a person voted in the 2008 presidential election. It is worth noting that there may be an overestimate of turnout in the data as turnout rates are unusually high for all groups, but it is unlikely that the relative turnout and behavior among groups is distorted enough to affect patterns across groups. This flaw results from the fact that for the 2008 election question we must rely on self-reported turnout. Although the 2010 CCES data did validate voters for the 2010 midterm, the 2008 vote report is

not verified by state voting records. Several measures were taken to minimize the apparent over-reporting bias.¹

Independent Variables

Within the data analysis, several independent variables are included. The theoretical argument posed suggests two primary independent variables of interest: age (in years) and swing state residency (as a binary variable) are included in the analysis because of their importance to the overall theory of swing state turnout for youth voters. Additionally, the interaction of these two variables is established as an independent variable to determine the impact of both swing state residency and age in years taken together on the turnout of citizens.

To account for other potential influences on voter turnout several other independent variables are included in the model as controls. Firstly, race is established as an independent variable (for both black and white) to account for historically higher voting turnout by white voters and to emulate traditional scientific methodology in the field of turnout studies (Flanigan and Zingale 2010). It is worth noting that at least one author believes there to have been a massive rise in minority voters for the 2008 election which was often reported as a rise in youth vote (Wattenberg 2007). In light of this, controlling for racial factors becomes especially important. Of course, while the black and white metric is useful as a means of analysis, data is

¹ To avoid inflation biases in self-reported voting behavior, CCES cross validates actual voting records with respondents' professed intent to vote so that analyses can account for those who reported they voted but did not. However, the data used here are from the 2010 election cycle though a question about whether the respondent voted in 2008 is the primary dependent variable. Unfortunately, vote validation is only performed for the 2010 reported voting behavior and not for the 2008 reported voting behavior. Steps were taken to eliminate over-reporting by recoding those respondents who reported they voted in 2010 (even though they did not) as not having voted in 2008, even if their response was yes to the 2008 question. This is not a perfect fix given that some people might have over reported in 2010 and still voted in 2008, but it is one way of identifying and eliminating probable over-reporters.

lacking for other minority groups which might have a unique turnout value; so this limitation should be recognized.

Secondly, gender is controlled for to account for any differences that gender can have on voter turnout or any interactions gender may have with other variables under consideration. There is, of course, evidence that gender does impact how citizens behave politically and approach acts of voting or public discourse which makes it all the more vital that this variable be accounted for (Brady, Verba, Scholzman 1995).

Thirdly, party identification is controlled for as a binary variable to account for any impact party affiliation might have on turnout statistics or any interaction party affiliation may have with the other factors present in the data. Considering the importance the prevailing literature places on partisanship and citizen obligations as a means by which citizens are motivated and encouraged to politically participate, it is worth considering for any analysis of voter turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Flanigan and Zingale 2010).

Fourth, socioeconomic differences are controlled for to account for the impact that wealth and status can have on voter turnout. The impact is evidenced to be quite substantial in the literature with wealthy citizens far more likely to make an effort to become educated and cast a vote on Election Day, so controlling for this factor can illuminate the impact of other variables at play (Brady, Verba, Scholzman 1995).

Fifth, education is accounted because of the prevailing evidence that those who are educated are more likely to vote; this is well established and documented in other works (Flanigan and Zingale 2010; Brady, Verba, Scholzman 1995; Dalton 2008). It is worth including this variable in the measure as a means to control for the substantial impact education has on

turnout and the potential for education discrepancies in the potential voting populations for different states.

Sixth, television use is included in the model as an independent variable largely because of the suspected link between media consumption or advertising exposure and voter turnout (especially if he increased advertising in swing states has an impact on voter turnout). Because a link between media consumption and voter turnout is a vital part of the theoretical connection between swing state residency and voter turnout, it is worth including in the model as a metric of how much media may impact decisions of voters to turn out or stay away from the polls. It is worth noting, however, that this variable does not measure what was watched on television, only that television was used; therefore it is not a full measure of how much advertising an individual may have been exposed to or what form of media was consumed. In this way the variable is limited, but not useless as it can still offer some indicator of overall access and exposure to media.²

² Respondents' level of income is 15 category variable rescaled to range from 0 (less than \$10,000 family annual income) to 1 (annual family income of \$150,000 or more). Education is a six category variable rescaled into a six part measure of education ranging from 0 (no high school degree) to 1(post graduate degree). Sex is coded as a dummy variable; Men are coded 1 and women 0. Age is a continuous variable that has been recoded into years of age. A respondent's race is coded into a series of dichotomous indicators. In the model White is coded as 1/0, and Black is coded 1/0; other groups comprise the baseline category. Finally, the partisanship measure is a measure of strength of partisan identification ranging from 1 to 4, where 1=weak and Partisan 4=strong. Television use was coded as 1=yes, 2=no.

Methods

Table 1 presents a logistic regression model where the dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator of the probability of a person voting in the 2008 presidential election. Probability estimates are displayed graphically Figure 1.

Table 1: Logistic Regression - Probability of 2008 Presidential Vote

Variables	Coefficients (Standard Errors)
<i>Swing State</i>	.272** (.115)
<i>Age-Years</i>	.051** (.002)
<i>Swing Years</i>	-.005** (.002)
<i>TV Use</i>	-.268*** (.039)
<i>Party Strength</i>	.450** (.017)
<i>Black</i>	.229** (.075)
<i>White</i>	.650*** (.066)
<i>Education</i>	.407*** (.017)
<i>Income</i>	1.54*** (.251)
<i>Male</i>	.500*** (.040)
<i>Constant</i>	-4.44 (.170)
N=39,846	
Pseudo R ² = .23	

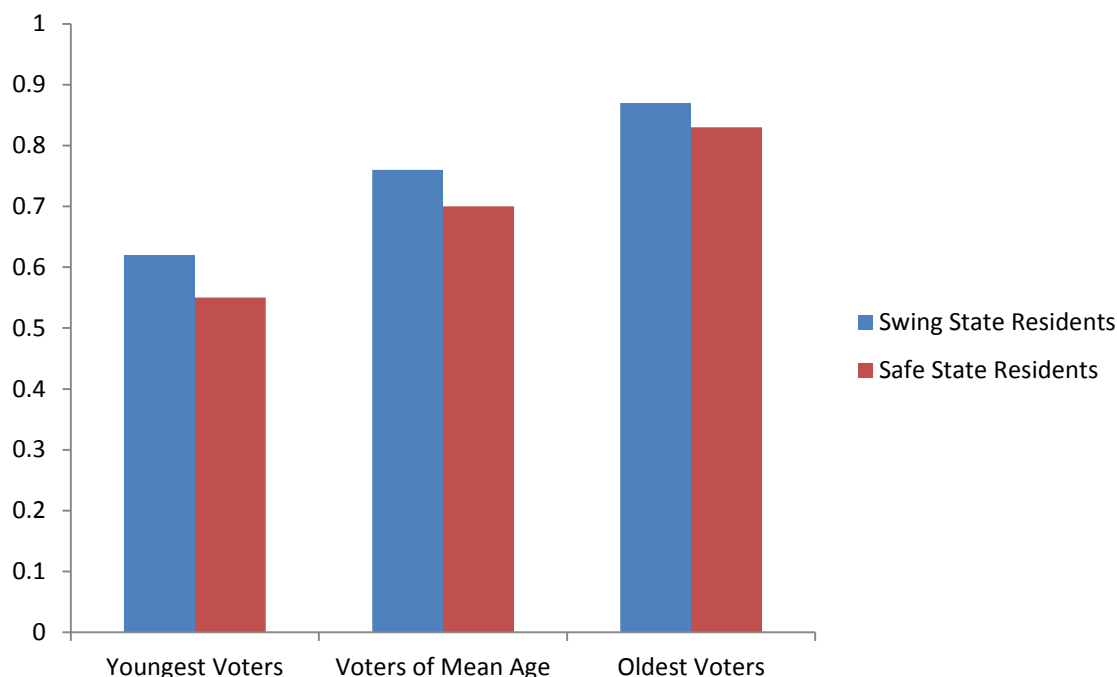
Notes: Cell entries are logistic regression coefficients. Standard errors are clustered on state. P-values based on 1 tailed tests for all variables. ^ .10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

The significant coefficients presented in Table 1 reveal that several of the independent variables of interest are significantly related to the probability of voting in the 2008 election. Of primary theoretical interest are the coefficients for the swing state and age variables, and interaction term. The coefficient for swing state is positive and significant, providing support for the hypothesis that swing state residents are more likely to turn out to vote in presidential elections. The age (in years) coefficient is also positive and significant, indicating that older people are more likely to turn out, which is in line with extant research. But, of foremost interest is the coefficient for the interaction term, which illustrates the conditional relationship between age and living in a swing state. Here the coefficient is negative and significant, revealing that the influence of swing state residence is conditioned on the age of the potential voter. This suggests the hypothesis 4 is supported - the impact of living in a swing state is conditioned on the age of the voter such that the impact of living in a swing state is largest for the youngest voters in the sample. Hypothesis 3 is, of consequence, proven incorrect by the data. Figure 1 depicts the predicted probabilities for the influence of swing state residence on youngest voters in the sample, those of the mean age, and the oldest in the sample.

Table 2: Probability of Voting in 2008 Election by Swing State Residence and Age in Years

	Swing State Residents	Safe State Residents
Youngest Voters	0.62	0.55
Voters of Mean Age	0.76	0.70
Oldest Voters	0.87	0.83

Figure 1: Probability of Voting in 2008 Election by Swing State Residence and Age in Years



An examination of the point estimates and graph reveals that although older voters are always more likely to turn out than younger and middle age voters, and swing state residents are more likely to turn out than safe state residents the change in probability is greatest (-.7) among the youngest voters moving from a swing state to a safe state. Here again, we see that the hypotheses are supported.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings from this study are very intriguing and open doors of new inquiry within the scope of voter turnout. Of particular interest is the substantiation of the second and fourth hypotheses which assert respectively that swing state residency is likely to increase turnout and that the impact is relatively stronger for young voters. The validity of the first hypothesis was

expected from previous research, but the other two provide new insight into voter turnout and especially into youth turnout.

If the outcomes of this study are substantiated by repeat experiments, then new experiments should be made which outline precisely the reasons for these outcomes. On face the results from this study seem to support current mobilization model of turnout such that the increased advertising and media attention in swing states will bring a turnout increase as well, but that explanation still leaves open questions related to the rest of the standing research: the citizenship norms model. Perhaps mobilization is the entire answer for voting outcome, but more likely it is only one component of a more complete model which includes other factors. The citizenship norms model does predict that older voters will have higher turnout than young voters just as the data demonstrates, but the model was created to explain that very phenomenon. That the trend continues is not sufficient evidence to validate that model, though a breakdown of the trend might call it into doubt.

Conventional wisdom blames apathy (born of either general ignorance or resignation to the futility of a single vote in terms of outcomes) for the traditionally low youth turnout while more recent research pins the blame on differing citizenship norms among age groups. In light of the substantiation of the second hypothesis, effort should be made to ascertain whether youths in swing states are more likely to poll as dutiful citizens or if they are simply more concerned with political outcomes than their peers in other states (perhaps as a result of heavy mobilization efforts in the swing states or perhaps because they feel their vote has more impact on outcomes).

It is possible that the results are an outcome entirely of mobilization, but it is worthwhile to investigate the existing model for answers. Perhaps there is an interaction of multiple affects

which reinforce one another, e.g. that being mobilized will lead one to become a more dutiful citizens over time or that perhaps being an actualized citizen leaves one more open to mobilization messages from outside sources or any of another possibilities that are worth identifying. Because voting is such a fundamental component of the United States system of representative democracy, it is definitely of value to investigate this topic further.

Additionally, the validation of the fourth hypothesis offers clues for future voter outreach programs: if elder citizens are less responsive to additional voter mobilization efforts than are youths, then it might be a better investment for candidates to invest in youth outreach programs instead of trying to sway older age groups. This discrepancy might be an outcome of what was already discussed: that older voters are less likely to see a jump in voter turnout from additional mobilization efforts because they are already surrounded by everyday mobilization forces that compel the majority of those who could be persuaded to vote to cast their ballots before other forces are applied. If in fact that explanation is not valid, then the tenants of the mobilization turnout model must be reexamined because current research and models suggests that older citizens are exposed to far more mobilization forces than are youths.

The answers such studies might reveal would go a long way toward advancing or confirming the current voting models. Continued development of these models is vital for all those parties with an interest in voter turnout, whether candidates or political scientists and observers; improved models might even mean that traditionally overlooked voting groups get new attention and political benefits in efforts to attract new votes.

Developments in youth mobilization models in particular could alter the current political climate in which young citizens are largely ignored by political candidates and representatives

who see youth as a low payoff voting group. As discussed above, research shows that candidates are less likely to pursue youth with mobilization efforts or campaign promises because it is seen as a waste of resources to convert and mobilize young voters when those same resources could be spent to mobilize a reliable base of older voters. This means that young citizens lose out on potential political benefits and outcomes from candidates who largely ignore youth interests. If new data on the methods of youth mobilization were to be discovered, then it might be expected that fewer politicians would ignore young voters and that more political efforts would be made to appeal to young voters.

There are, of course, limitations to the research done in this study. To begin with, the study was only able to look at one year of polling data. This makes establishing a trend impossible and leaves open the possibility that the outcomes here are extraordinary rather than the norm. Further complicating this issue is the youth outreach component of now President Obama's campaign in that election year which might skew results to favor increased youth turnout. Wattenberg argued that the impact of that program was inconsequential for all but minority voters, but there still exists the chance that the data are affected.

Additionally, as already stated, this study does not offer conclusive evidence for the reasons behind outcomes found. The hypotheses were prepared after scrutiny of existing models and previous research which apparently served well as predictors of outcomes. This is a significant victory for any scientific model; the problem, however, is that there were multiple models consulted which all supported the hypotheses. This means that the outcomes cannot be attributed solely to one model and that it is possible for at least one of the models to be wrong and unable to predict the outcomes of the study if looked at in total isolation and heavy scrutiny.

Both of the major the limitations of this study can be resolved by future research. The issue of limited data can be dealt with by repeat experiments across more election years, and the models can be examined in depth by future experiments seeking to isolate the causes behind the outcomes. The latter has already been discussed as an important next step in the development of the models and as a means to enhance turnout research in the context of the outcomes of this study.

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