

**Examining Trends in Youth Voting: The Effect of Turnout, Competition, and
Candidate Attributes on 18-24 voters from 1972-2004**

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Abstract:

When eighteen year olds gained the right to vote in 1972, political scientists expected this group to vote in large numbers, taking advantage of this new liberty. However, this did not happen as expected. Rather, youth voter turnout has been the lowest of all the voting age population. Many scholars have attempted to explain why the youth voters do not vote in the presidential election. In this paper, we attempt to explain some of the voting behaviors of this age group, and reach a conclusion as to what factors may lead to increases in youth voter turnout. We will look specifically at the competition of the elections and the candidate characteristics believed to be appealing to youth voters to find correlations between these factors and the youth vote.

Introduction

The youth vote has long been an area of interest and analysis for political scientists. In many cases, however, scholars minimize the influence of the youth vote on presidential elections. Young people appear to be less engaged in politics (Bennett 1997). When eighteen year olds first gained the right to vote in 1972, it was expected that they would show up to the polls in large numbers. Many people believed that, with the Vietnam War and the draft in effect, these young people would vote and change the policies that greatly affected them. However, they had the lowest turnout of all age groups. This came as a surprise to many, and political scientists set out to explain the disinterest in politics among this generation.

Other political scientists focused on the young people who did vote and attempted to explain their political influences. According to some, these young people simply vote like their parents (Rundio, 2008). For instance, if their parents are Republicans, they are likely to vote Republican as well. This indicates that their main influences are not the candidates or general policies, but their parents. Therefore much of the literature related to the youth vote focuses on why they vote along the same party lines as their parents (Bennett, 1997; Seagull 1971; Rundio 2008).

Although these parental influences are important, young people can also be influenced by their involvement in civic affairs. They are more likely to become civically active as adults when they get involved in civic affairs when they are young (Sherrod 2003). By high school, most students are involved in the political world in some form or another, but this does not directly translate to political action, such as voting. Therefore, being introduced to the political world does not necessarily equate to voting. However, if they become involved directly through 4-H or other

organizations, they are more likely to vote when they are young. For this reason, some political scientists have set out to explain what actions can be associated with greater voter turnout (Sherrod 2003).

Although parental and civic influences are important, like all voters, young voters are influenced by the candidates and other policies that affect them directly. In general, young voters in the United States do not trust politicians (Bennett 1997). Therefore, if a candidate appeals to the youth and are able to gain their trust, they are more likely to vote for that candidate. There have been numerous attempts by the media and political scientists, which indicates the importance of this area. Even presidential candidates have recognized the need to appeal to the youth vote. Former President Bill Clinton appeared on a television show, appealing specifically to young potential voters (Ifill 1992). Campaigns such as *Vote or Die* and *Rock the Vote* are designed to get this young generation to the polls. These politicians and campaigns recognize the need to appeal to the youth voters.

Young people voting can have an integral role in politics. Typically, if people begin voting when they are young, they are more likely to continue voting throughout their lifetime. Therefore, if youth voter turnout is increased during presidential elections, this would have a positive effect on the voting age population as a whole. However, in order to increase this turnout, the behaviors of the youth voters must be understood.

There is no way to explain all the voting behaviors of young people. However, through this paper we will bridge some of the gaps left by the literature in this field. We will examine what factors are successful in increasing youth voter turnout in presidential elections. We will explore what factors may be able to overcome these setbacks to the youth vote, and would therefore result in increased voter turnout in this age group. In order to do this, however, we must look at the voting patterns of this generation throughout the years since they gained the right to vote. Analyzing the youth voter turnout for each election year, we will explain the trends of this generation

Although youth voters are greatly influenced by their parents' political attitudes, we believe that this cannot explain their behavior by itself. Instead, we

believe that the factors that influence the voters from other age ranges will also influence the youth voters. One influence that we will analyze specifically is level of competition during presidential elections. Voter turnout tends to increase after a highly competitive election. Therefore, we will look specifically at youth voter turnout to see how much competition affects them. We believe that this is an important factor, which will dispel the idea that youth voters are completely disinterested in politics, because in order to know whether or not the election was competitive, they must know what is happening in politics.

The candidate characteristics that appeal to the youth and how these characteristics affect youth voter turnout have often been neglected by researchers. Therefore, we will look at characteristics that have made a political candidate appealing to young voters. Using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES), we will look into presidential candidate characteristics to deduce which appeal to the young voters and whether or not they tend to encourage or discourage youth voting.

We believe that the behaviors of the youth voters must be explained in order to understand what influences them and causes them to vote. Once this is established, it is possible to enact changes that may encourage youth voter turnout and youth political involvement.

Literature Review

The study of American national elections has often focused on the demographics of the participants in order to explain variability in turnout. The degree or level of participation of unions, ethnic groups, women, and various age groups are all areas of interest when reviewing the election results. In this paper, we have elected to focus on what has come to be called "youth voting." We have decided to focus on age the ones that are in their early years of political participation: the new voters. Elections bring a lot of attention to different sub-groups: unions, race, gender, and age seem to bring in the most attention. The reason we have chosen to focus on the younger generation is because they seem to be a major focus of political campaigns. We have also noticed that their voting turnout rate seem to change. With this in mind

we have decided to focus on these questions: what makes them come to the polls?
What gets their political attention?

We will explore factors that contribute to increasing numbers of young voters, attempting to find and examining the characteristics that have made political candidates appealing to young voters. We will be explaining the effect of the party affiliation of the candidate on voter turnout. We will also explain the factors that seem to make the most impact on younger people who are just starting to get into politics.

Gwen Ifill (1992) discusses candidate Bill Clinton's desire to address the MTV generation. Mr. Clinton was on a television program, "Choose or Lose: Facing the Future with Bill Clinton," that was focused on young voters. The broadcast was 90 minutes long and involved 18-24 year olds asking the candidate questions about abortion, the environment, his childhood, etc. The show would be broadcast 6 times over the next couple of days, and network officials expected it to pull in about 15 million viewers. It is thought that Bill Clinton was the first president to truly reach the youth voter, and used an advertisement that's main purpose was to engage young voters to get out and make a difference.

Parties are also looking to recruit candidates that appeal to youth. Steve Rundio (2008, p. 1-3), writes that youth voters are turning out in record numbers and voters who vote for a particular party at a young age are typically loyal to that party throughout their whole lives. Young voters 'came of age' in the late 70s and early 80s during the Carter and Reagan years (Rundio, 2008, p. 1-3). Those who remembered these years, seemed to remember the Carter years as a mess and the Reagan years as much better in contrast with Carter's administration. Therefore, these young voters retained their Republican tendencies throughout the Clinton and Bush years. In contrast, young voters who remembered the Bush and Clinton years tended to lean towards Democrats because of the prosperity under the Clinton administration (Rundio, 2008, p. 1-3). In the 2004 presidential election, Democrats had the largest support of youth voters. According to a 2004 CBS exit poll, senior citizens were more likely to vote for Democrats than those aged 18-29. The poll shows an interesting fact because Democrats tend to more liberal than Republicans and people in their youth tend to be more liberal. The poll, however, suggested that the youth can not always be predicted in how they will vote or view things. In 1976, Carter won the youth vote by

a large enough margin to win the Presidency. But in 1984, Reagan took 54% of the youth vote. Kuhn (2004), also points out that as young voters become more and more a part of the swing vote, for either party, that they will have even greater weight with the parties and thus the candidate. This will lead to more attention being focused on young voters and their issues.

Is the youth vote decreasing?

Voter participation among Americans younger than 30 is typically 20-30 percentage points lower than people over 30. A 1996 research poll found that people under 30 were considerably less likely to read newspapers, watch the news on T.V., or listen to the radio news. Young people do not seem to respond favorably to negative advertisements bashing the opposition (Bennett, 1997, p. 50). Younger people seldom engage in political conversation and do not follow what is going on in the political world. Bennett (1997) states, "Large segments of American youth today cannot tolerate political disagreement, probably because our educational system has not trained them how to assess an argument on behalf of a political position" (p. 52). Our overall goal was to see the youth voter turnout rate over the years and try to understand the factors that change it.

Sherrod (2003) finds that in focus groups with poor and minority youth, they do have opinions, loyalty, and commitment about political issues related to the family, race and religion for example, but these do not directly relate to the country. Sherrod examines these political attitudes and socialization experiences to discover a "hook" that could be used to redirect youth attention and interest to civic engagement. Young people getting involved in civic engagement are more likely to become civically engaged adults. They give the example of 4-H and we offer the example of the Rock the Vote campaign. Youth also take government classes in junior high and high school (Sherrod, 2003, p. 287). They discuss politics using sources such as media coverage, political advertisements, and the Internet.

According to an article by Seagull (1971), the behavior of the current political generation will probably be manifested in less partisan commitment rather than in more intense partisan commitment. Seagull found that party identification is losing saliency, particularly for educated youth (Seagull; 1971). Just as party machines are

no longer necessary to "get out the vote," political parties are also losing their power. Over the course of the study, the Republican college-educated population has declined, but the number of Democrats has not. The impact of students on a national presidential campaign may be marginal at first but the cumulative impact may be substantial on the elections which follow. While the study found commitment to party is declining, they did not find any evidence that interest in issues, ideology, and politics was declining. It could be that the younger voters are just interested in popular issues as opposed to the election process.

Bennett (1997) reaches the conclusion that young voters in the United States do not trust politicians. Bennett used the 1994 National Election Study and found that 77% of Americans under 30 said they trusted the Federal government to do the right thing only "some of the time." In addition, 54% believed the people in government were crooked. The youth voters also believed government was unresponsive to their needs and was too much involved with well-organized special interest groups. According to voters under 30, 79% believed that Washington was run to benefit just "a few big interests looking out for themselves" (Bennett, 1997, p. 47) Young Americans become more cynical and less engaged in politics (p.49). Comparing responses of the 1994 NES to the survey in 1972, the changes in youth attitudes are clear. For example, only 38% of survey respondents under 30 thought the government was crooked. Furthermore, only 40% said they had no say in government.

Or it is increasing?

Sherrod (2003) conducted a survey to analyze the attitudes and political views of youth. Attitudes can measure civic engagement in youth that are not otherwise involved in any activities. This study is unique because most research is focused on knowledge and behaviors. However, by high school, all students are well into the political world in some form or another (Sherrod, 2003, p. 290). They concluded that political knowledge does not relate to political views, but it does relate to political behaviors, such as voting. This could mean a lot more young people are involved but are not credited for their involvement. Breakwell (1989) also conducted a survey in which youth were asked about their political involvement. The article makes a good point that teenagers associate political involvement with government offices and government officials. They do not think of political involvement with organizations,

such as anti-abortion groups or the NRA (p.753). If young voters can't define political involvement, how are they supposed to know if they are politically involved? Bennett is unclear as to his definition and measurement of what "political disagreement" is exactly.

Theory and Hypotheses

From the recent literature in this field, we were able to generate four hypotheses. These are intended to explain some of the trends in youth voting. Our first hypothesis is:

H₁: In general, youth voter turnout in presidential elections is increasing, between 1972 and 2004.

Due to the availability of presidential election research, we are easily able to access the youth voter turnout in each presidential election. Since eighteen year olds didn't gain the right to vote until 1972, we will begin our analysis at that presidential election. Also, through ANES, we are able to run the candidate characteristics against youth voter turnout to determine the correlation of the two factors. We hypothesize that this data will help to explain youth voter activity throughout the years of 1972 and 2004.

H₂: Youth voter turnout is rising as a result of women voting at an increasing rate.

We also hypothesize that young female voting is increasing at a greater rate than young males. We suspect that this is directly correlated to the increased number of young women who are attending college. Therefore, since fewer males get a higher education, we expect that there will be a growing gap between male and female voter turnout, especially among the young voters. We suspect that these female voters will impact the youth voter turnout.

H₃: When the margin of victory in the presidential elections is smaller, youth voter turnout will increase.

We hypothesize that people tend to vote in greater numbers when the elections are competitive, as seen when there is a small margin of victory. If youth are like any other age group, they are also more likely to vote during these competitive elections.

Therefore, we will use the presidential election results from 1972, when eighteen year olds first could vote, through 2004, to determine the level of competition of each election.

H₄: Youth voter turnout will increase when a candidate has the characteristics, which include: higher morals, greater knowledge, better leadership, more caring, and of better intelligence.

Voters can also be influenced by the characteristics of the presidential candidate. If politicians appear to be unintelligent or lacking leadership skills, people may vote in greater numbers to prevent future politicians from having the same flaws. Likewise, if a candidate is viewed by voters as having these positive characteristics, voters may be more apt to vote.

We believe that it is a combination of these factors that are associated with youth voter turnout. However, we must determine how successful each of these factors is in actually getting the youth to turn out and vote. By analyzing each of these hypotheses, we believe we can reach these conclusions.

Data

Data sources

The data for this project was derived from several sources, including the census report of US Election turnout entitled, Reported Voting Rates in Presidential Elections Years, by Selected Characteristics: November 1964 to 2004, (Study number Table A-9, 2005). We found these data appropriate for our study as it provides voting results through the years we focused on. It provided the voter turnout for people aged 18-24 and allows for comparison to older cohorts of voters. We have learned that youth turnout has not been steady, but variable. These data also contains gendered subgroups, which allow us to compare male and female voters.

The American National Election Study Cumulative File (ANES), (Study number 8475, 02/12/2008), questions, on average, 160 respondents per region on everything from simple demographic information to “feeling thermometers” on all aspects of candidate attributes. This cumulative file contains data from the nation

elections study 1948-2004. These data are an excellent source of voter attitudes across a range of candidate attributes and could be used for uncovering the contours of youth opinion.

Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections website, that lists the results of the presidential elections from 1789-2000, which we found at <http://www.uselectionatlas.org> (retrieved 02/21/2008), allowed us to measure the competitiveness of the presidential election. The primary data sources consist of original publications produced by official election agencies within each state. Generally, these consisted of either the Secretary of State Offices or State Board of Election offices. His aggregation may be found at, www.uselections.org, and contains the relative 1972-2004 elections (Leip, 2004).

Variables constructed for turnout figures by age group originated as raw data in the census study. The census study data is particularly useful, as it contains turnout figures derived from other sources like the U.S Census Bureau surveys from 1968-2004. We attempted to contact MTV, Rock the Vote, for their data but were unsuccessful in collecting it.

Operational definitions:

We computed the following operational variables as follows:

Age Ranges: We will be using the ranges from census data which are: 18-24, 25-44, 45-64, 65-and above. Youth voting is considered to be 18-24 voters, the age ranges excluded from youth voting are 25-65+.

Mean Other: The mean of the percentage of voters that are not in the 18-24 cohort (including 25-44, 45-64, and 65+ voters).

Level of Competition: We have the level of competition (as a percentage) in each of the presidential elections from 1972-2008. We measured level of competition in terms of two-parties because the American system is a two-party system. In this paper, the election is said to be competitive if there is less than a 60-40 split (Elkins 1974) between the winning candidate and the runner up. The third party candidates did not receive enough votes to affect our studies on competition. The level of competition

during a presidential election is based on the margin of victory from aggregate data of the popular vote.

A lagged margin of victory variable was used because we reasoned that competition would result in increased voter turnout. It was created to serve the purpose of describing, mathematically, the relationship we believe to be a functional cause of voter turnout across elections. Thus, the level of competition in a given presidential election (described as the two party winner percentages minus the two- party loser's percentage) has been 'lagged' by four years. For example, in the 1972 election the winner received 60.67 percent of the votes and the runner up received 37.52 percent. In this case the margin of victory was 23.15 percent. In applying the lag variable, we can find how this affects the results on the 1976 presidential election.

Candidate Characteristics: We used the candidate attributes provided by the questions in the ANES codebook¹. We reasoned that these characteristics may have an effect on 18-24 voters. The first characteristic is morality. The question from the ANES codebook asked the respondents if they would describe the Democratic or Republican Presidential candidate as moral. The second characteristic is knowledge. Respondents were asked if they would describe the Democratic or Republican Presidential candidate as knowledgeable. The third characteristic is leadership. The respondents were asked if they believed the Democratic or Republican Presidential candidate provides strong leadership. The fourth characteristic is care. The codebook asked the respondents if they believed the Democratic or Republican Presidential candidate really cared about people like them. The fifth characteristic is intelligence. The respondents were asked if they would describe the Democratic or Republican Presidential candidate as intelligent. We will run these characteristics against youth turnout for each presidential election year to see the correlation

¹ See Appendix A

Analysis

Patterns in youth voter turnout:

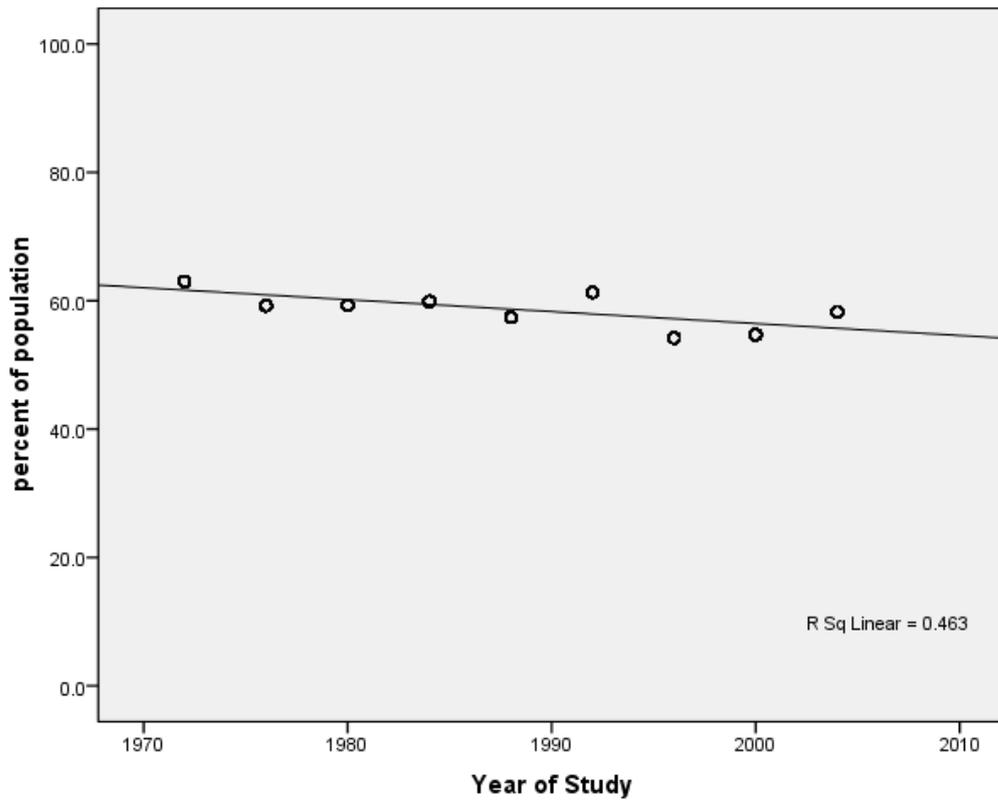
What patterns in youth voting can be determined by analyzing the census data, the ANES codebook, and presidential election results? We reasoned that youth voter turnout in presidential elections would increase as a function of the following factors: gender, competition, and positive candidate attributes (intelligence, morale, knowledge, leadership, and caring). In an attempt to verify these answers, we ran OLS on data from presidential elections between 1972 and 2004. These years deal with a time period from pre-Watergate to the post-Watergate world of politics.

Our first hypothesis was:

H₁: In general, youth voter turnout in presidential elections is increasing, between 1972 and 2004.

Figure 1 reports a scatterplot of the relationship between time (year of election) and the percentage voting in the voting age population. This plot reveals that voter turnout in the aggregate is moderately declining. In the aggregate, the decline in voting percentage is steady and systematic, if not dramatic. This plot contains an R^2 , but this statistic needs to be viewed with some skepticism due to the limited number of observations.

FIGURE 1: Relationship between Time and Aggregate Voting Population

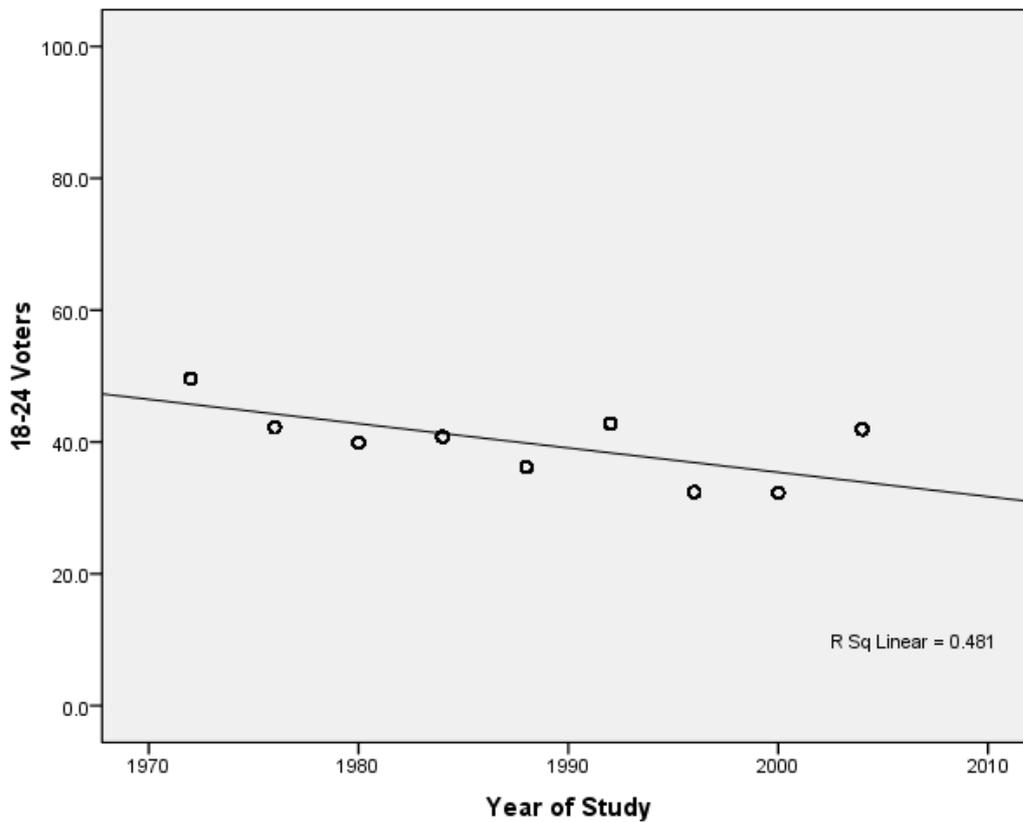


Year	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Level of Turnout (percentage of total VAP)	63.0	53.2	59.3	59.9	57.4	61.3	54.2	54.7	58.3

Range: 8.8

Despite the general decline in voter turnout percentage observed in Figure 1, there is no particular reason to believe that youth voting (18-24 voters) will follow the same pattern. When measured separately, we do see a pattern which is somewhat different, but also follows a downward trend (see Fig. 2).

FIGURE 2: Relationship between Time and Aggregate Voting Population



Year	1972	1976	1980	1984	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Level of Turnout (percentage of total VAP)	49.6	42.2	39.9	40.8	36.2	42.8	32.4	32.3	41.9

Range: 17.3

The pattern of voting in this group reveals a greater variance than in the aggregate voting population. While the range for the aggregate voting population was 8.8, here we see the range is 17.3. Comparing the two figures, we can see that although the general trend is similar, there are important differences between the two.

When analyzing the two graphs together, it is interesting to note the outlier points on both graphs. In the years 1972, 1992, and 2004, the aggregate population and the youth population (18-24 voters) were all above the mean value. In 2004, the point in Figure 2 describes a positive outlier, as the youth vote jumps from 32.3 in

2000 to nearly 42 percent in 2004 – a gain of almost 10 percentage points across the two elections (the gain in the aggregate array is only about 4 points).

The figure below is a scatterplot of the relationship between time (year of election) and 18-24 voters. The 1972 presidential election is removed from this graph. We chose to remove this year because it was the year when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years of age; therefore, 1972 was a significant outlier point on the graph because there was a large number of 18-24 voters. When comparing this figure to the one above that includes the year 1972, one can see that the 1972 point increases the slope of the line. When 1972 is removed from the graph, the slope of the line is smaller. Taking out the 1972 presidential election does not completely eliminate outliers from the scatterplot; however, removing this election does have a significant decrease on the slope of the line (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Relationship between Time and 18-24 Voters without the 1972 Election Year

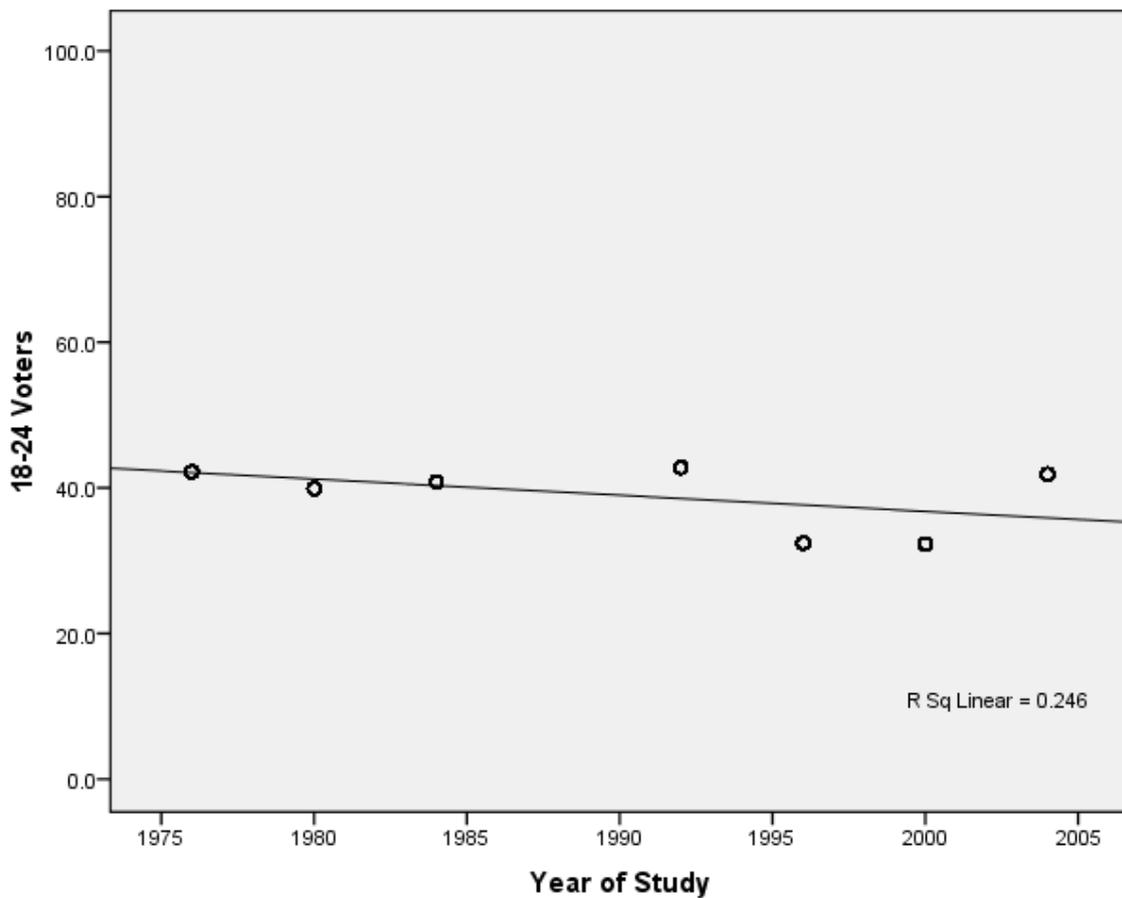
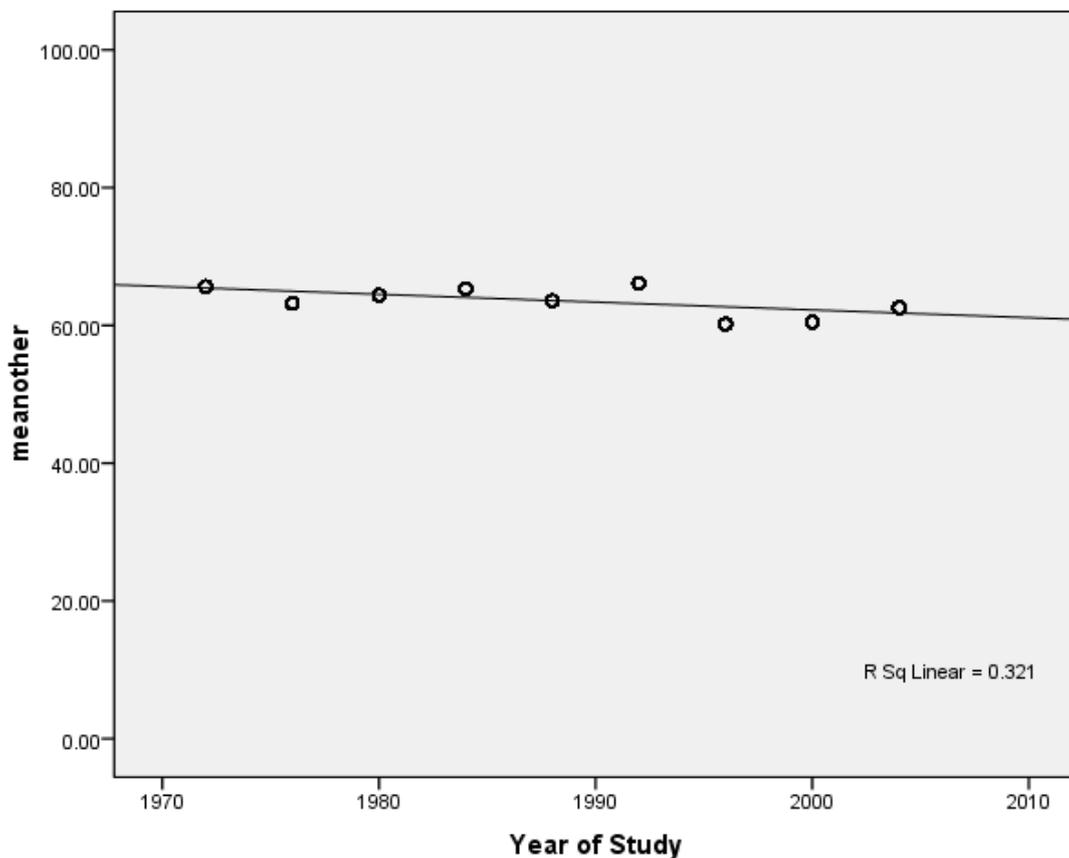


Figure 4 reports a scatterplot of the relationship between time (year of election) and the percentage of voting that are not in the 18-24 cohort (includes 24-44, 45-64, and 65+ voters). We separated these voting cohorts to look at the difference in outlier points without the 18-24 voters. We can see from the graph that the scatterplot has no significant outliers. There are no significant outliers because these cohorts vote at a fairly steady rate. 18-24 voters have significant outliers because they have more room to increase their voter turnout when they become more involved.

FIGURE 4: Relationship Between Time and Percentage of Voters Not In 18-24 cohort



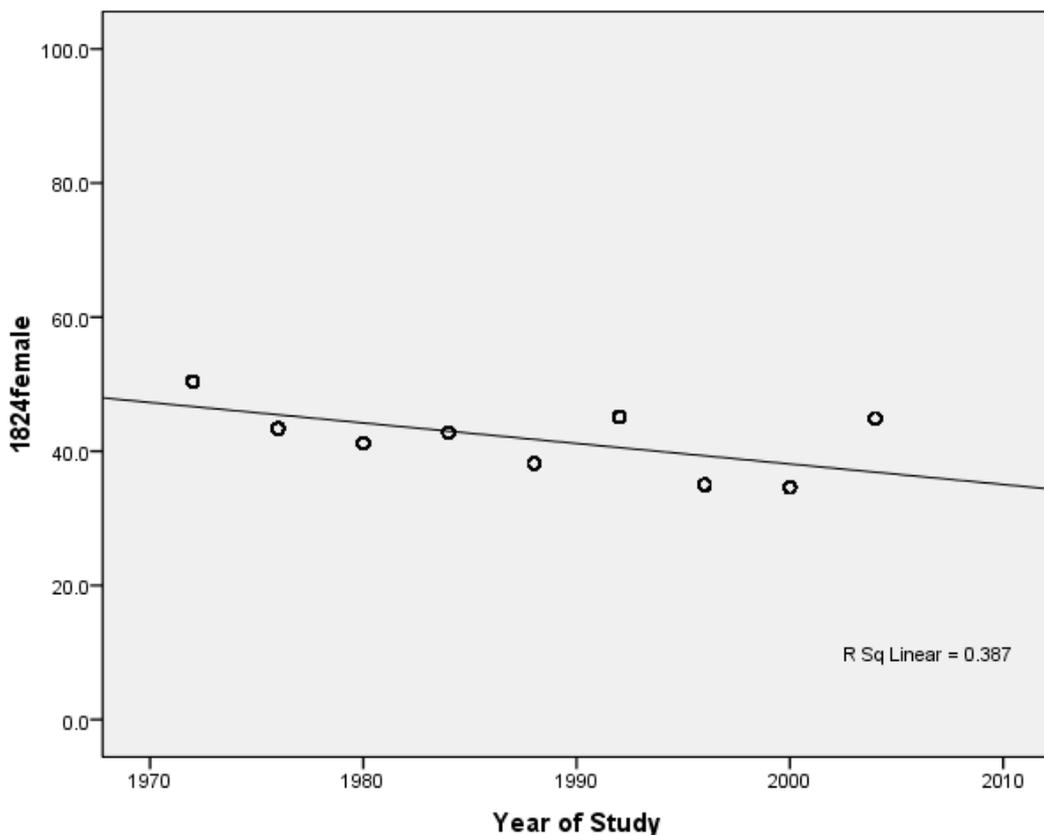
Our second hypothesis was that:

H₂: Youth voter turnout is rising as a result of women voting at an increasing rate.

We have cited a number of factors which may account for a positive difference in voting among women (including an increasing number of women seeking post-secondary education), we reasoned that women would be voting at greater rates as these features became manifest (i.e., college graduates are more likely

to vote and more and more graduates are female). While we did not find an increase in 18-24 voters, we did analyze 18-24 males and 18-24 females separately. We found that males are voting at a more rapidly declining rate than females. The features referred to above may explain this phenomenon. As a result of this finding, our hypothesis is partially correct. We originally thought that youth voter turnout (18-24 voters) in presidential elections would be increasing between 1972 and 2004. Female 18-24 voters are actually voting more than their increasingly declining male counterparts. Therefore, one of the gender groups (females) has an increasing turnout rate (see Figures 5 & 6)

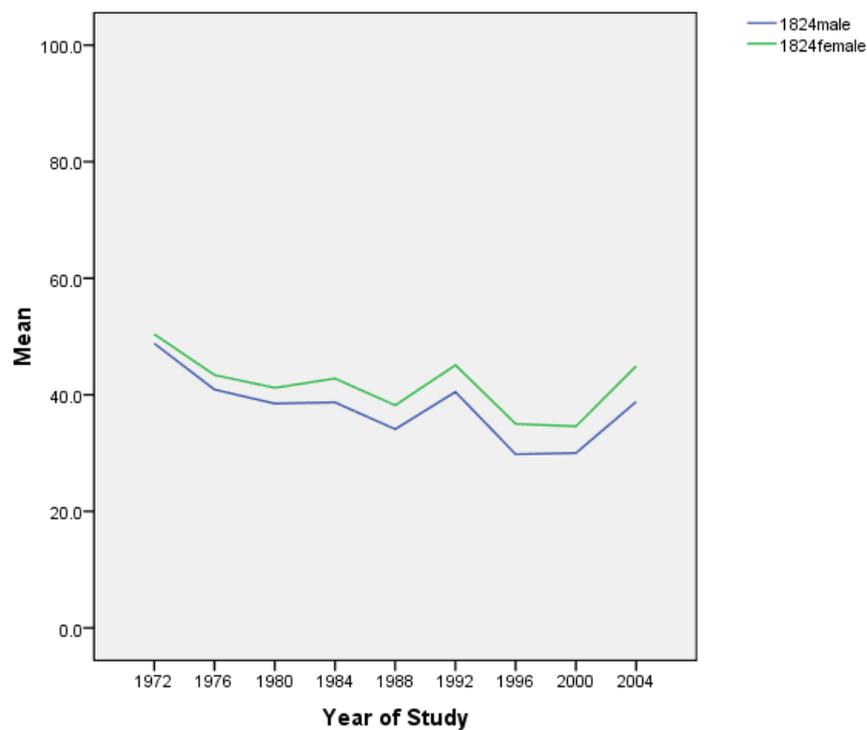
FIGURE 5 & 6: Relationship Between Time and Percentage of Voters Not In 18 - 24 cohort



The gap between male and female youth voting initially started very narrow in 1972. The gap was at the largest from 1996 to 2000, and it has narrowed somewhat in comparison since 2000. The gap is continuous throughout the years in our data set (see Figure 7). We believe this gap can be largely attributed to the increasing number

of female college graduates, although further analysis would be necessary to demonstrate this.

FIGURE 7: The Gap Between Voter Turnout among Males and Females in the 18-24 cohort



Our third hypothesis was that:

H₃: When the margin of victory in the presidential elections is smaller, youth voter turnout will increase.

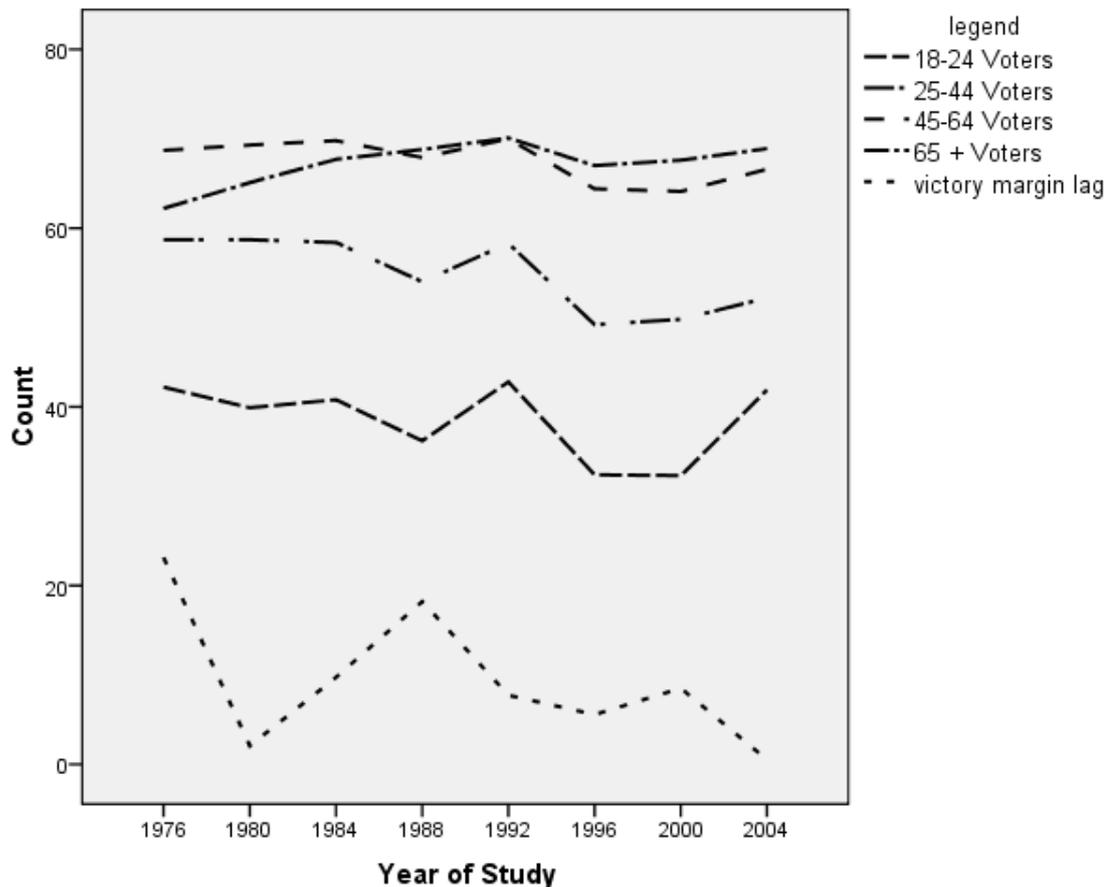
We reasoned that 18-24 voters would be more likely to vote during a competitive presidential election because their turnout rate seems to be more driven by competition. However, a competitive election does not increase voter turnout in that election. Instead, we see an increased voter turnout in the following election. In order to see the effect of a small margin of victory on the turnout in the next presidential election, we decided to create a lagged margin of victory variable to graph with voter turnout.

To create the lagged margin of victory variable, we took the winner's percentage in the two party vote and subtracted the loser's percentage in the two party

vote. The margin of victory variable was then ‘lagged’ by one presidential election. This lagged variable allows us to examine the voter turnout effects of one presidential election on the next presidential election.

We used the lagged margin of victory variable with all voter groups. For 18-24 voters, we analyzed the lag effect of competition on their voting behavior. There was a large spike in 18-24 voters in 1992, following a non-competitive election. In 2004, there was an additional large spike in turnout after a highly competitive 2000 election. The 18-24 voters did not appear to be significantly affected by lagged margins of victory given that all voter groups saw a significant increase in the 2004 election. We would argue that one reason for this phenomenon could be the small margin of victory in the 2000 election transition. Over time, the 65+ voters seem to be the demographic least affected by competition (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: The Relationship Between the Voting Cohorts and the Lagged Margin of Victory



In 1976, voter turnout decreased among all age groups, especially in 18-24 voters. We would argue one cause for this decline could be the non-competitive election in 1972. Another reason for the decline could be the novelty of the 1972 election was wearing off. In 1988, voter turnout declined, except for 65+ voters, because the 1984 election was not very competitive. In 1992, voter turnout increased in all ages, especially the 18-24 voters. This may have been caused by the competitive election in 1988. However, in 1996 all voter turnout decreased even though the 1992 election was competitive. While this year does not support our hypothesis, we recognize that there are many other factors in a given presidential election that can affect voter turnout. For example, there could be severe weather, a potential voter may not be registered, and the polls are only open for a certain period of time. Our point here is to present one possible explanation for the variation in turnout overtime. The 2000 election was extremely competitive, so all voter age groups increased in 2004, particularly the 18-24 voters. This analysis fits with our other findings about the increased voter turnout across all age groups in 2004 (see Figure 8).

Our fourth hypothesis asserted that:

H₄: Youth voter turnout will increase when a candidate has the characteristics, which include: higher morals, greater knowledge, better leadership, more caring, and of better intelligence.

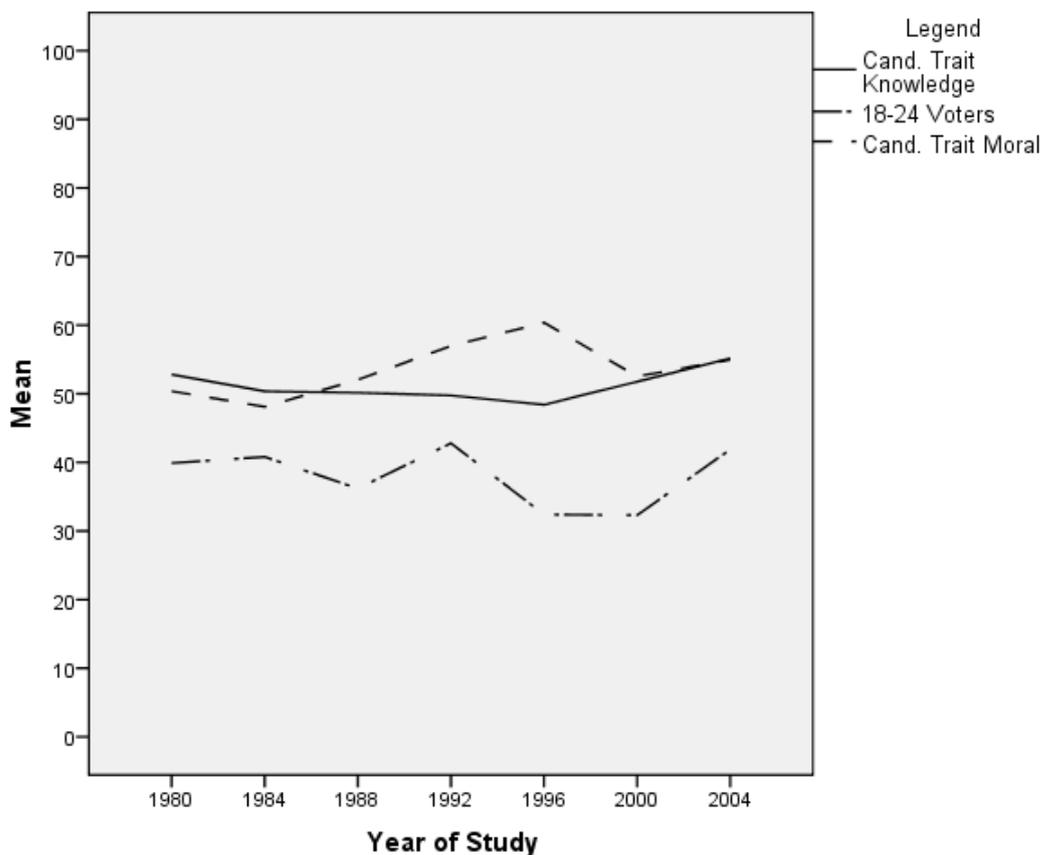
After examining at competition levels, we also retrieved data from the ANES codebook about candidate attributes. We chose to explore general candidate attributes between 1972 and 2004. We investigated the contributions of compassion, decent, inspiring, moral, leadership, cares, intelligent, and knowledgeable. We were forced to eliminate some of these variables because they were only asked in two or three survey years. The characteristics we were able to analyze include intelligence, morality, knowledgeable, leadership, and caring. They are scored 1 to 8 with 1 being the most excellent. We compared voter turnout from 1972 through 2004 to see if there was a correlation between negative candidate traits and voter turnout.

To properly analyze the relationship between 18-24 voters and candidate attributes, we ran a correlation table. We ran all attributes with 18-24 voters and found that all attributes are related to each other. The attribute that is most important

to 18-24 voters is knowledge². It had the highest significance with .04. 18-24 voters were seemingly indifferent on caring and leadership. The attributes that were least important to 18-24 voters were intelligence and morality. They were both significantly negative. One has to cautiously look at these figures because we can assume that 18-24 voters in this sample were more liberal and less concerned with conservative issues such as morality. It is important to note that we have artificially created variance because of the small number of points in our data set.

Even with the artificial variance, the significance of the knowledge trait still supports our hypothesis. In respect to 18-24 voters, candidate knowledge is something that drives them to the polls. Examining Figure 9, 18-24 voter turnout goes up as they believe knowledge of candidates decreases. The same can be said for voters' views on candidate morality, even though it is negatively significant. There was a rising concern with morality from 1988-1992 involving a high turnout of newly registered young Republicans.

Figure 9: Candidate Knowledge and Moral in Relation to 18-24 Voters



² We ran OLS regression of significant variables, and it tends to support this conclusion.

Conclusion

From this analysis, we can draw several conclusions regarding the 18-24 voters in the presidential elections between 1972 and 2004. Contrary to our expectations, youth voter turnout is actually declining throughout this time period, as is the aggregate. However, we found that there is greater variance among the youth voters than the aggregate. The youth voter turnout also has more significant outliers, most notably in 1972 when 18 year olds first gained the right to vote. Also, there was a noticeable increase in youth voter turnout between 2000 and 2004. Although this could just be an outlier, it could also be a future trend in the youth vote. Therefore, we encourage further analysis in this field.

We reasoned that with more women pursuing post-secondary education, more women may also be voting than before. Therefore this would lead to an increase in overall youth voter turnout. Although we did not find an increase in the 18-24 voters collectively as we expected, we did find that 18-24 female voter turnout was significantly greater than 18-24 male voter turnout. The males in this group are declining more rapidly than the females. This gender gap has been growing since 1972, although it narrowed somewhat since 2000. Therefore, although youth voter turnout is not increasing, as we suspected in our hypothesis, the 18-24 females are voting more than the 18-24 males, which we expected.

We also hypothesized that 18-24 voters would vote in greater numbers when a presidential election is more competitive. As we anticipated, this effect was best seen when we created a lagged margin of victory variable, because competition generally leads to an increase in votes the following election. We found that, in general, youth voter turnout, as well as the aggregate turnout, increased the election following an election with a small margin of victory. Although we cannot attribute this one factor to the increased voter turnout, we can clearly show that there is a strong correlation between the margin of victory and youth voter turnout. It is also important to note the relevance of this lagged margin of victory variable to explain some turnout variations.

Using candidate characteristics from the ANES codebook (intelligence, moral, knowledgeable, leadership, and caring), we sought a correlation between these characteristics and voter turnout. Our data was limited, as some of the questions were

only asked in two or three years and there may have been other influential factors not accounted for in our research, so this must be viewed with caution. Through our analysis, however, we found that knowledge was the most important for the 18-24 voters. Turnout in this age group increases as candidate knowledge decreases. We also found that intelligence and morality were least important to this age group. Therefore, as we expected in our hypothesis, these characteristics may influence the youth voter turnout. We caution that we were using limited data for a limited number of years, and we created an artificial variance because of this lack of data points. However, we are still able to draw these conclusions, which support our hypothesis.

Although some of the results were contrary to our original hypotheses, we were able to establish some clear explanations for the behavior of 18-24 voters. Although youth voter turnout has decreased since 1972, there is a large amount of variance over the years, with several outliers. Our years of study were limited by the number of elections since 1972. Therefore it is difficult to explain the 18-24 voter behavior on a larger scale. However, we believe that these analyses provide a solid framework for explaining some of these voting trends.

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Appendix A: Characteristics Questions

VCF0354

QUESTION:

Democratic/Republican Presidential candidate trait - knowledgeable

VCF0355

QUESTION:

Democratic/Republican Presidential candidate trait – moral

VCF0356

QUESTION:

Democratic/Republican Presidential candidate trait - provides strong leadership

VCF0357

QUESTION:

Democratic/Republican Presidential candidate trait - really cares about people like
you

VCF0362

QUESTION:

Republican/Democratic Presidential candidate trait - intelligent