

Did the Lack of Motivation from 18-24-year-old Voters Lead to the Outcome of the 2016

United States Presidential Election?

Work Count: 4318

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was an existing correlation between the low voter turnout age range of 18-24 not voting, to the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential election. Prior research shows the reasoning behind why this specific age range continues to not show up to vote on election day however, there is no existing research explaining how it may have affected the presidential election in 2016. Data was collected through meta-analysis and quantitative methods in which a survey process was completed. Participants included were between the ages of 21-27. Initial results showed that survey respondents clearly lacked motivation in the 2016 election. This means many people within this age group did not show up on election day for various reasons explained in the data. Only 3 out of 5 people throughout this age group voted. Therefore, the conclusion can be made through preliminary information and the research conducted in this research project is that the low voter turnout did have an impact on the 2016 presidential election.

Introduction

In 2019, Millennials took the throne of the Baby Boomers in leading America's largest population, but still are America's leading generation with lowest voter turnout (Fry, 2020). How could the largest generation of humans show up with the least amount of voters during elections? If more millennials voted, would the election results have turned out differently? Helpful and educational research was the goal pursued with this research project. It is very important to understand the reasoning behind the low voter turnout within the ages of 18-24. To recognize the possible problems this generation has with a simple civic duty would better

represent the country as a whole when electing representatives into office. More specifically, as for the 2016 United States Presidential Election, a republican by the name of Donald Trump was elected into office and now serves as the country's 45th president (“Wikiversity”, 2020). The reason that party affiliation is mentioned is because the age range of 18-24 tend to lean more liberal with their views and morals (Parker, Graf, Igielnik, 2019). That brings us back to the remaining question, if the most populated generation tends to lean more towards liberal views than conservative, then is it possible if there was a higher voter turnout rate within this generation, that the 2016 Presidential United States Election would have ended with a different president? The hypothesis of the research paper is yes, the low voter turnout did impact the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential election.

Literature Review

Introduction

Is there a correlation between no motivation within the younger generation and the 2016 presidential election? That question is extremely relevant as a new presidential election for the 46th president will take place in a short few months. There is a great amount of existing information surrounding the low voter turnout rate that would benefit the research for this specific topic that is being studied. The existing research includes the reasons why younger individuals lack motivation to perform their civic duty by voting in elections, why 18-24 year olds are an important generation needed on voting day, and potential ways this age group can affect elections when there is such a low-voter turnout rate that consists of millions of people. By answering these questions, we can then determine how to better a candidate’s chance, and how to

get more people to come to the voting polls. Currently, research shows that adults aged 18-24 have the least amount of people to show up on the first Tuesday of November, election day. The bigger question is the reasons behind some would say, “the easiest civic duty”.

Lack of Motivation

One of the biggest reasons that research shows why this age group does not vote is simply because they aren't interested in politics or don't like the candidates. (“4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote”, 2018). Being apathetic when it comes to politics can affect someone's lifestyle. In addition to being not interested and not being up to date on national issues, some people in this age group also feel that their vote does not matter and won't be an effective way to change society with the belief of a corrupt system (“4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote”, 2018). There is an obvious lack of motivation between these ages that affects their particular voter turnout rates.

Many Obstacles Needed to be Overcome

With the assumption of a corrupt system, 18-24 year olds find many excuses to be unavailable on election day. Some don't have the time, some don't want to wait in long lines, and some don't have transportation to the location of the poll site (“4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote”, 2018). Expanding on why this age group believes that there are many barriers to climb just to take one vote, some aren't even registered to vote according to *Youth Service America*. 23% of people between the ages 18-29 who are not registered to vote said that they missed the deadline to register, and 6% said they don't know where or how to take the first step and register as an eligible voter (“4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote”, 2018). This serves as another big reason why this age range doesn't show up to vote.

No Encouragement

The young generation often does not get contacted by political campaigns through mail or email which is an enormous factor that adds to the problem of why 18-24 year olds do not vote. These individuals do not get information on the candidates running if they are not on the contact list. Most 18-24 year olds don't sign up to be on these campaign lists, and therefore won't receive any information or encouragement. Research shows if candidates were to contact more younger voters, they could have more reassurance that they would head to the polls on election day and would get their vote ("4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote", 2018). A young person's home environment can have a massive amount of encouragement or discouragement on the voter ("4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote", 2018). If a family is very active within elections, the new voters in the family will most likely take responsibility and do the same. Encouragement from close friends and family will most likely motivate an eligible voter to visit their poll site. However, adults between 18-24 are most likely not living with family members and then therefore don't receive any encouragement.

Don't Understand the Government

During high school, two of the classes that are included in the requirement to graduate are government and civics. High school civic classes do not appropriately prepare youth for the voting process in this country, along with the skills and steps required (Hartsoe, 2018). The information taught in civics classes is not enough to make a student feel comfortable to vote. Teachers are also apprehensive to discuss politics in the fear of getting in trouble (Hartsoe,

2018). There are ways that teachers can discuss politics with students in an unbiased way, however schools choose to ignore the topic altogether in a school setting, therefore students are unable to learn the basics. Because of this, high school government classes prevent the students from getting the knowledge to be able to differentiate what they would like and dislike in a politician running for office. 20% of young people said they don't think they know enough to be able to vote ("4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote", 2018). After you graduate high school, you are able to vote, but clearly there is a lack of knowledge in politics within the young generation. Some may have not been taught how to vote, some may not have learned how to register to vote, and some may not have learned that the best way to influence their elected representatives is to vote ("4 Reasons Young People Don't Vote", 2018). This generation does not realize that they have the power to vote and make a change. They do have the power to make a significant change as the largest eligible voter demographic.

The Low Voter Turnout Population Tend to Lean More Liberal

In a study done by Harvard Polls that targeted 18-29 year olds, younger voters tend to lean more liberal than conservative (Partisanship and Political Typology). 39% of surveyors said they support the concept of democratic socialism, including support for the government owning and controlling the economy as well as free health care benefits with higher taxes (Milligan, 2018). This is important to include and mention for this research topic because on election day, a large number of democratic and liberal voters do not show up to vote. The low voter turnout rate consists of the ages of many people who have democratic views, therefore the democratic nominee is not gaining their votes.

The Gap

Research shows that these ages presumably don't apply themselves to vote on election day, but how did this affect the 2016 presidential election? The goal of the research conducted is to understand and recognize the problems relating to the voting process this generation has and possibly link it to the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential election. That election was perhaps the most controversial one in the history of the United States. With the invention of social media and technology, elections are much different now. A lot of campaigning happens online. All presidential political debates are viewed by the nation on national television. The election in 2016 was chaotic between the candidates and is definitely one of the memorable and closest elections the United States has seen in a long time. Donald Trump was the republican nominee who ran against Hilary Clinton, the democratic nominee. There is currently no data or research surrounding the 2016 Presidential election and how the low voter turnout rate may have influenced the outcome. Certain generations have high voter turnout rates, and some have low, but this affects the election in what general way? If only some generations vote, is the whole country represented correctly as a whole? If more young voters chose to cast their vote in this particular election, would the results have been different? What was the impact in general of this group not voting in the 2016 presidential election?

Methodology

The method used to conduct the research was meta-analysis. In order to discover the most accurate research and statistics, quantitative research was conducted in the form of surveys. The goal of using quantitative data is to understand the causes and reasonings behind why eligible

voters do not vote. Surveys were the chosen method to collect research on this topic because responders can easily display their thoughts, feelings, and opinions all in a short 5 minute survey. The research question was, “Did the Lack of Motivation from 18-24-year-old Voters Lead to the Outcome of the 2016 United States Presidential Election”, with the target group being individuals aged 21-27. These specific ranges of numbers came from taking the original age and adding three. The reasoning behind this is to simulate what would have happened in 2016 to today (2019). For example, in 2016 when someone would’ve been 18, in 2019 they would now be 21. This is done until 24 is added to get to 27.

Before going into the interview process, the first step was to prepare multiple choice questions that would aid in the research of the low voter turnout and the 2016 election.

Question 1: Are you within the ages of 21-27?

The first question asked in the survey was if responders were within the ages of 21-27. In order to successfully get accurate results and data for the research, 21-27 year olds were the only data being collected. The options of answers listed that each responder could pick from was yes or no.

Question 2: Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election?

Next question asked within the survey was if the survey taker had voted in the 2016 presidential election. The whole research topic is focused on if this population of Americans voted during this particular election. The purpose was to examine how many people within a large group of the low voter turnout category did not vote. The options in a multiple choice format that were provided to answer the question were yes and no.

Question 3: What influenced your vote for the particular candidate you voted for?

The next question asked in the survey was what influenced the survey participant in order to make a choice on which certain candidate to vote for. The purpose of adding this question into the survey was to find out how this generation bases or influences their vote off of. The options in a multiple choice format provided were my parents, my friends, the news/media, morals, and other, a spot where someone may choose to fill in another answer that had not been provided. This question's importance was the curiosity of what exactly this age range uses to pick their candidate they chose to vote for, especially when this generation is known to be the least interested in politics.

Question 4: Do you stay on top with current political news or events? For example, watching or reading the news.

The next question asked was if the respondent stayed on top of current politics. Studies show that as you grow older, you start to pay more attention to politics. You start to realize the importance of it, and how it affects your everyday lives. The respondents had answer choices ranging from yes, no, or sometimes. The relevance of this question was to see if as time went by and these adults would now be three years older, do they pay more attention to political news as they are in a more mature state of their life?

Question 5: If you didn't vote in the 2016 presidential election, why?

The fifth question asked in the survey was the most beneficial to the research. For this specific question, there were no multiple choice answers available to click. To get the most descriptive responses to get a better understanding of "why", there was a fill in option. Each responder had the chance to type any response they felt was necessary. This was the best way to capture the responder's true answer.

Question 6: Do you plan on voting in the 2020 election?

For the final question, the participant was asked if they were planning on voting in the 2020 presidential election. The options for the multiple choice answers provided were yes, no, and I'm not sure. This question was asked to get a clear picture if when people grow older, they pay more attention to the government, and start to care more about the future representatives running the country.

Finding Participants

The surveys would be given out strictly to 21-27 aged people. Northern Virginia Community College and George Mason University are great places to find survey takers because these schools provide the education to understand, at most, the basics of voting, and the technology to be able to access the survey. Northern Virginia Community College has many different campuses dispersed throughout Virginia. Some of these locations include Loudoun, Annandale, Woodbridge, and Alexandria. A priority in order to get a wide range of data is to focus on all campus locations for the most diverse responses. Loudoun would be the farthest from Washington DC, our nation's capital, and Alexandria being the closest. George Mason is located in Fairfax, Virginia has a great amount of diversity as the student body comes from all over the United States and not just Virginia. Shopping malls and gyms are also a tremendous place to hang the surveys up to be taken.

Google Forms

The surveys were in an electronic format, as young adults are very tech savvy. A bar code was the easiest way to share the survey with consenting responders. With the bar code, surveyors could simply scan with their phone camera and the link automatically popped up. The link led to

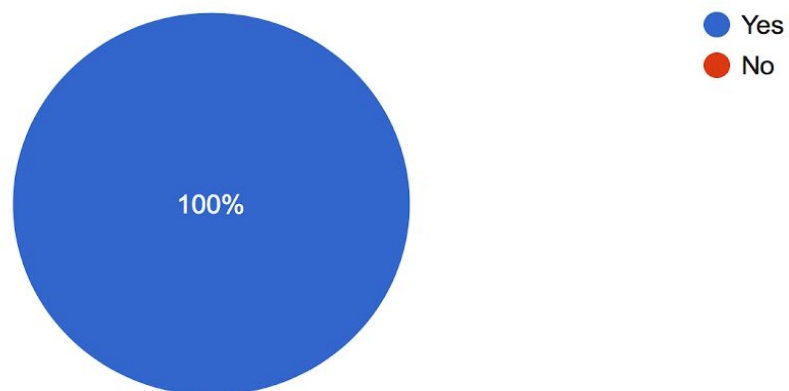
the survey through Google Forms. Google Forms was very easy to operate and when the survey was complete, the results populated in graphs and charts that displayed the data, which is a resourceful visual. The platform was also beneficial because it allowed for surveys to be multiple choice, the preference of a survey for this research. Multiple choice format gives responders a way to exactly pinpoint a response to their answer. Lastly, another positive thing about Google Forms is that it gives you the option to delete a person's entire response to the Google Forms Survey. This tool would be used if surveyors were not aged 21-27 so that the data could remain accurate.

Results and Data

A survey through Google Forms was conducted in January 2020 to properly get a wide range of opinion within the ages of 21-27.

Are you within the ages of 21-27?

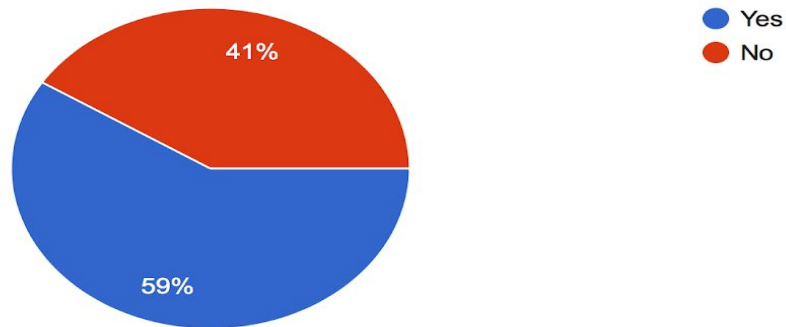
62 responses



The first question surveyed the ages of the responders. 100% of the surveys conducted were from the correct age ranges. Before all of the data was collected, some of the responders mentioned they were not in the specific age range. For example, 12 people under the age of 21 took the survey, which skewed the data. Google forms provided an option to delete an entire response to the survey. The responders that were under age were deleted so that the data remained accurate. Therefore, all of the participants of the survey were of the correct age range.

Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election?

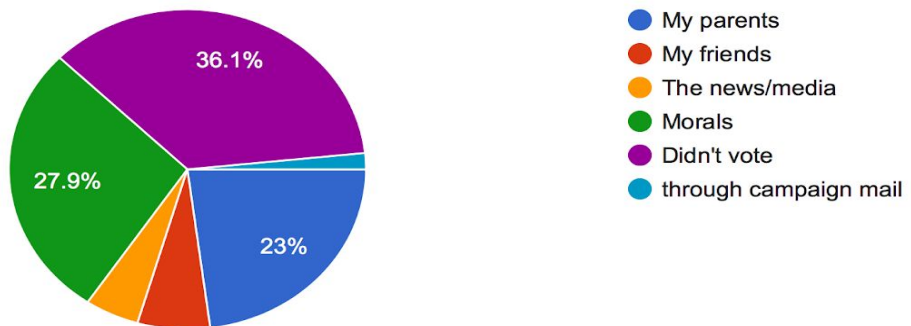
61 responses



59% of responders said they had voted in the 2016 presidential election, and 41% said they did not vote.

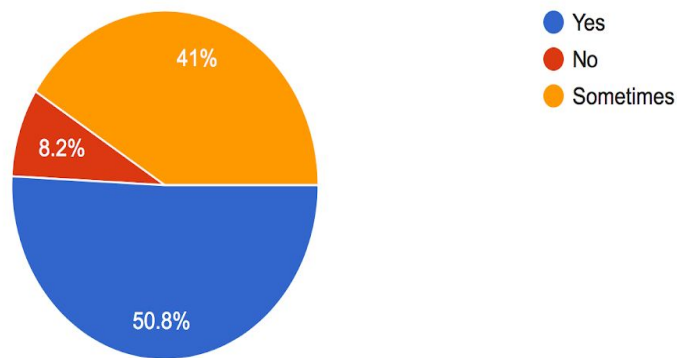
What influenced your vote for the particular candidate you voted for?

61 responses



23% of responders said that their parents influenced their vote in 2016 on the candidate they chose to vote for, 27.9% said their morals, 6.6% said their friends, 4.9% said news/media, and 1.6% said through campaign mail.

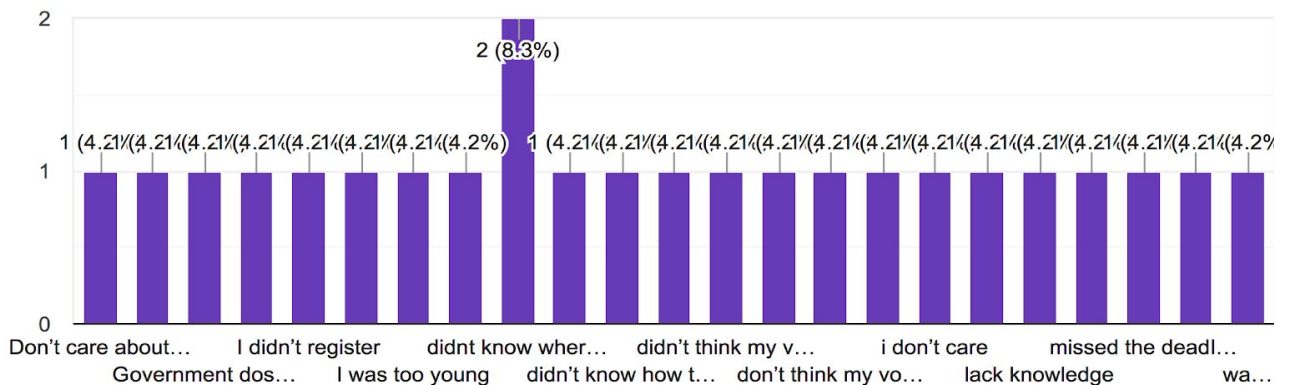
Do you stay on top of current political news or events? For example, reading/watching the news.
61 responses



About half of the respondents said they do stay on top of current political news or events. 41% of respondents answered sometimes, and 8.2% said never to pay attention to current politics.

If you didn't vote in the 2016 presidential election, why?

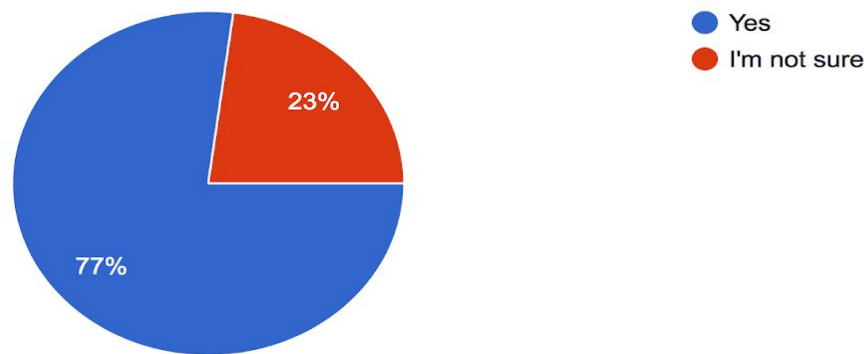
24 responses



Some of the most significant responses asking why the responder chose not to vote were “I didn’t care for the candidates,” “I wasn’t informed on politics,” “I didn’t think my vote mattered,” “the government does not matter,” “I didn’t know where to vote,” “I didn’t register,” “I didn’t know how to register or missed the voter registration deadline,” and finally “don’t support it”.

Do you plan on voting in the 2020 election?

61 responses



Finally, the participant was asked if they were planning on voting in the 2020 United States presidential election. 77% said yes, and 23% said that they were not sure yet.

Conclusions and Analysis of Data

Sufficient Data

With 100% of the results coming from the age range of 21-27, success was established within collecting data. 41% percent of responders did not vote in the 2016 United States presidential election. That’s about only 3 out of 5 people within this age range showing up to

vote. The data collected also found that 27.9% of responders based their vote on their morals and beliefs, while 23% of responders used their parent's beliefs. This question was asked to determine if the current studies on this topic are valid. Studies currently show that at a young age, a child or young adult will use their parent's beliefs, rather than making their own conclusion as it seems to be easier and the correct choice coming from trusted loved ones. Quite surprisingly, the hypothesis was correct. Young adults in this age group use their parent's beliefs to help guide their vote. Since the low voter age range is 18-24, another question asked if some of the responders have now changed their habits with their civic duties. The two questions asked that were related to each other were, "Do you stay on top of current political events?" and "Do you plan on voting in the 2020 election?" The results show that 77% of people plan to vote in the presidential election in 2020 and that 50% of responders do currently stay on top of current politics and news. This data proved my hypothesis to be correct and support that as people grow older, they realize the importance of voting. Lastly, for the most important question in the survey, "If you didn't vote in the 2016 presidential election, why?" This question was the most important because the research question is focused on studying why this age group has such a low number of voters on election days. Most of the answers that were received within the survey were responses like "don't care," "don't support it," "I didn't register in time," "didn't think my vote mattered," or "lack of knowledge". The data from this question 100% proves the hypothesis as people in this age range lack motivation and education to vote.

Analysis

Now circling back to the original research question, "Did the Lack of Motivation from 18-24-year-old Voters Lead to the Outcome of the 2016 United States Presidential Election?"

The data received through the surveys show that there is a clear lack of motivation within the ages of 18-24. Some of the reasonings found in the data explain why there is such a large absence on election day. Those include: apathy, don't know enough about the candidates, didn't register to vote, and the belief that the vote would not matter or affect their way of living. There is a direct correlation between the 2016 presidential election and the data received from the surveys. The hypothesis was proven correct because the lack of motivation did have an impact over the outcome of the 2016 election. Studies shown from Harvard Polls in the Literature Review show that a great number of voters that chose to be absent on election day, tend to vote democrat. With existing research and the data conducted in this research project, it can be inferred that if more of the democrat voters had cast a vote, that possibly the 45th president of the United States would be a democrat, instead of a republican.

Limitations

There were a few limitations within the survey. First, with a public survey, available for anyone to take, some individuals who were not in the target age group responded. Luckily, a convenient option Google Forms provides is an option to delete an entire response of the survey. With the people under and over the age limits 21-27, their answers were deleted so that the data was not skewed and could remain valuable. Another limitation faced throughout the data collection was that the goal was to study people's opinions from all different places within the United States. It was extremely hard to find people outside the surrounding area. Several attempts to get people to take the survey were made in different areas and places to get a wide range of data, however the responses were not as diverse as wished. A diverse response group is beneficial to this project to study and observe the entire United States as a whole. Some family

members within the age ranges of 21-27 live in the Chicago area. They took the surveys and proceeded to hand the surveys out to their friends. Lastly, the original goal of collecting 500 survey responses was more difficult than expected as the process of collecting surveys started. It was a challenge to locate people within the specific age group to take the survey.

Implications

The data collected surrounding this research topic can be quite helpful to many people. First, it could help many politicians. They can use this information to reach out to this specific age group and help them understand that it is important to perform their civic duty, and possibly help these potential voters make a choice by enlightening them with their beliefs and ideas for when in office. Teachers can also benefit from the data shown throughout this research process. It shows that young adult voters are not getting the information they need to be able to feel confident on election day. Whether that be how to register to vote and where to vote, or how the election process works. They can use this information to better help students feel as if they have all the resources needed to cast a vote in the nation's election. This age group does not understand the importance of voting. The reasons why the low voter turnout rate is within this age group are clear as shown in the data, but it can be fixed. Teachers and politicians could influence this age group greatly. When these young adults don't have any more excuses to not show up at the voting polls, the percentage of people not voting will decrease. When it does decrease, the country will be better represented in the elections with an increased amount of voters.

Future Research

There is still more research to be done on this topic. Future research could specifically target the 2020 United States Presidential Election. Studying the low voter turnout within the next election could give our nation the knowledge to decrease this percentage and get more voters to the polls. Expanding insight on this specific research topic could enlighten the country in multiple ways. It can help politicians with campaign plans, it can increase the percentage of voters that show up on election day, elected officials will represent more of the country if more voters from different age groups vote, and teachers can understand what students need to be taught more on. The content that students need to be better informed could include a teacher taking the action and helping a student register to vote when they turn 18, helping them understand how the government and election process works, or helping the student figure out what they like and/or dislike in a candidate or running a country. Future research on this topic is clearly encouraged as it is an extremely relevant and current topic.

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