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Project Title

Political Socialization, Trust in Government, and Voter Turnout Among University Students

This Senior Project is approved as acceptable

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Political Socialization, Trust in Government, and Voter Turnout Among University Students

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between political socialization, voter turnout, and trust in government at a university located in the southeastern region of the United States. Past research has revealed that political participation is influenced by several external factors including family, education, and mass media. Young adults may face many changes when entering adulthood such as enrollment into a university or college, new careers, marriage, having children, and moving out into their own home. These changes can place voting on the back burner, creating an absence of political participation. The study conducted found a statistically significant relationship between voter turnout in the 2020 presidential election and father's political affiliation along with voting in the 2020 presidential election and frequency of news. Another analysis found a statistically significant relationship between trust in government and respondents' mother's education level.

Introduction

According to Pew Research, the United States is ranked 31st among 50 other democracies in comparing turnout among the voting-age population in elections between 2018 and 2022 (DeSilver, 2022). Illegitimate information and "fake news," as former President Donald J. Trump would like to call it, has persuaded the nation that the elections of the United States are illegitimate and bogus, which may lead to lower voter turnout. News networks are giving contrasting opinions on the same stories, leading people to question political news coverage. Inaccurate reports, however, are not the only factors that can lead to low voter turnout.

Past researchers have studied voter turnout among younger generations finding that there are a variety of factors that influence participation in college students (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). College students are granted much more independence and no longer have the guidance of their parents to influence them to the same extent as when they were in high school. Kaat Smets (2015) conducted a study on voter turnout and maturation among young adults and found maturation and major life-events tend to coincide with each other and that the combination of those factors influences voter turnout (p. 232). In the same study, Smets found that adults today are maturing at different paces than their older relatives, meaning voting participation may take longer to occur (2015, p. 227).

Personal life events and increasing age are important factors that influence voting turnout but external factors such as family can also influence political orientation and voter turnout. Political conversation in the household is important to determining political orientation and voting behavior. Researchers Hatemi and Ojeda (2020) found that when using the perception-adoption approach, between 46 and 53 percent of participants across each set of data accurately perceived and adopted their parents party affiliation (p.1107). The perception-adoption approach

presents the parents political attitudes to the parents, the child then creates a perception of their parents' political attitudes and chooses to adopt or reject those attitudes when forming their own opinions (Hatemi & Ojeda, 2020, p. 1099). These results show favorable to political understanding among children, it is important to explore the possibility that if children can adopt party affiliations from their parents, then they may adopt voting behaviors from them as well. Future research should not only address the similarities between parents' political affiliation and child's political affiliation but also the frequency of voting among the two.

To solve low voter turnout in the United States, researchers must evaluate why voter turnout is low. The evaluation of voter turnout in this study can aid in finding the root causes of what deters voting but also what encourages participation. By finding a solution that can increase voter participation, researchers can suggest solutions that can motivate involvement. Independent values like demographics, family, education, and mass media are important components of voter turnout that will be evaluated in this paper.

Literature Review

To solve decreased voter turnout in the United States, researchers have evaluated why voter turnout is low. Literature from past research evaluating voter turnout can serve as guidance in addressing low voter turnout and assist in creating a solution. Independent values like age and education are important components of voter turnout that will be evaluated in this section. This review of the literature examines voter turnout in relation to age, the family, education, and mass media.

Age

The relationship between age and voter turnout will be examined through previous literature. Anderson and Goodyear-Grant (2008) conducted research among high schoolers in

Ontario, CA (grades 10-12) to examine if they saw themselves as future voters. By evaluating the pre-adult years, the scholars believe that it may provide an explanation for why young adults choose to participate or not in elections when they become eligible (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2008). The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between high school classification and voter participation. Anderson and Goodyear-Grant believe that as students begin to reach legal voting age, the act of voting becomes more relevant to one's day-to-day life in addition to civic education they have received. The researchers used a survey to determine voter turnout, asking questions about demographics (e.g., gender, grade, religion, etc.), discussion of politics in the household, group involvements, political learning, and opinions towards our future government (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2008, p. 700-704). Participation in the survey was up to the teacher's discretion of each school in each district that the survey was distributed to. Findings revealed that 78% of high schoolers said they would vote in the upcoming election and 22% said they would not. Socialization experiences including family discussion, peer participation, and political instruction all showed "positive correlation with anticipated turnout" (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2008, p. 706). Lastly, students who were members of the at least peer group had higher intentions of participating in elections through voting than those who weren't in one (peer groups refer to a community of friends).

Like Anderson and Goodyear-Grant, Richard Niemi and Michael Hanmer (2004) conducted a study on a young population regarding voter turnout. Niemi and Hanmer conducted a study with full-time college students (ages 18-24) to determine if their voting behaviors differ from other voters. Factors considered were education, general political interest, and out-of-state college students. The study sample consisted of 285 colleges and universities nationwide with 1,200 students were interviewed (Niemi & Hanmer, 2004, p. 308). The scholars conducted the

survey by telephone, asking students questions, and the survey lasted between ten and fifteen minutes. Results showed that as college students are contacted by political parties, they are more likely to participate in the electoral process. Other factors like distance to polling stations, how far the student lived from home were quite important in the evaluation, being factors influencing participation. Data shows that those living within proximity of their campus were more inclined to vote than those who were 90 minutes or further away from their homes. (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010, p. 312). The results also showed that voter participation among college students was higher in battleground states by 5% and that women vote more than men by 9% points (Niemi & Hanmer, 2010, p. 309). In conclusion, there is a strong correlation between political discussion and voter turnout, and factors such as mobilization.

Evaluating generations is an important factor when evaluating the causes of low voter turnout among younger generations. Both Anderson and Goodyear-Grant (2008) and Niemi and Hanmer (2004) evaluated a small portion of a larger population of voters at one point in time (cross-sectional). However, a longitudinal study can give insight into the major causes of generational voting and its low turnouts in the younger population.

Smets's research required longitudinal data that related with indicators such as education, marriage, children, homeownership, employment, and residential stability (Smets, 2015, p. 232). Unfortunately, she was unable to find longitudinal data. Therefore she used cross-sectional election surveys as well as British Election Studies (Smets, 2015, p. 231). The purpose of her research was to determine if events that lead to adulthood influence voter turnout. Using the data collected from cross-sectional election surveys and British Election Studies, she determines that the transition to adulthood can be observed. She continues reviewing the turnout patterns to establish a relationship between voter turnout and generational maturation. By evaluating

different age groups (i.e., 18-20, 21-25, 26-30, and 31-35), she concludes that political life cycle has changed and that when compared to the age groups of past generations, younger generations today mature at a slower rate than the former (Smets, 2015, p. 227). She finds that as people mature, major life events occur, that eventually lead to increased voter turnout and that by comparing voter turnout and age groups there is a positive correlation.

Smets's other study used quantitative secondary data from the National Election Surveys to examine life-cycle effects, generational differences, age gap in political participation, and cohort effects (Smets, 2012, p. 16-21). As one's age increases, the major life events become increasingly important among the younger generation. This ultimately leads to a lack of interest when it comes to participating in politics as major life events begin to take priority. As the younger generation grows, it is thought that political participation would grow as major life events settle down and policies become more relevant with ones' lives. Other forms of life events occur in the older population as their health begins to decrease, there is a correlation between quality of life and political involvement. Political participation in young adults is low until major life events settle down and then once health problems and increased age occur, voter involvement decreases again. This data has information from Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United States. The data used covers all elections from 1960 to 2006. She claims the significant age gap in voting is due to the life-cycle theory and that specific life events such as "getting married, starting a job, starting a family" can explain "turnout decline among (the) young" (between the ages of 18-30) (Smets, 2012, p. 129). The data shows that the United States has one of the largest gaps in voter turnout by age among the countries evaluated and that voter turnout is lower than most other countries.

The Family

In addition to age, the family is a major social institution that affects voting behavior. Hener and colleagues (2015) sought to examine the relationship between parents and their children's civic engagement in a unique way, by reviewing political participation in non-intact families. Researchers hypothesize that "non-intact family structures during childhood have a negative causal effect on grown-up children's civic engagement" and stating that past literature has ignored this effect (Hener et al., 2015, p. 634). The researchers use the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) in the study and have 6000 participants who matched the required criteria.

To determine a relationship between a non-intact family childhood and future civic engagement, researchers conduct a cross-sectional analysis using an individual sample and a sibling difference model. For the sibling model, respondents are required to have at least one sibling and the siblings' civic outcomes can be measured that year (Hener et al., 2015, p. 637). Requirements for the individual sample included being 18 years old or younger, first year SOEP respondents, living with their mother, and having complete history of their mother's family history (Hener et al., 2015, p. 636). Hener and colleagues used four subcategories to measure civic engagement in their analysis: political interest, party identification, organizational involvement, and individual voluntarism derived from the SOEP. After comparing the results from the individual sample and the sibling sample, Hener and his colleagues conclude that there is a negative effect between non-intact family childhoods and future civic engagement among those children.

Transmission of political views is based upon communication, climate, and values among the parent and the children in the household. Peter Hatemi and Christopher Ojeda (2020)

take it one step further by trying to determine if those factors help a child better "understand their parent's political orientation and/or does that influence their motivations to adopt those orientations" (p. 1099). The aim of the study is to assess how factors such as "education, closeness, parental value strength, and political socialization of the home" influence transmission, motivation, and/or adoption of the parent's political affiliations (Hatemi & Ojeda, 2020, p. 1099).

Data for the study comes from three different sources: the Youth-Parent Socialization Survey (YPSS), the Health and Lifestyles Study (HLS), and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), examining the perception and adoption of orientations across the three studies. The data showed that across all data sets, children accurately perceive their parents' orientations and adopt them. 53% of children accurately perceive father's perceptions and adopt them, the highest average in the study (Hatemi & Ojeda, 2020, p.1107). Between 24-18 percent of participants accurately perceived their parent's orientations but choose to reject them. These results display a positive correlation between parent's orientations and their children's future political orientations.

Education

Another major social institution that affects voting behavior is education. In a study conducted by Neundorf and his colleagues (2016), they used the Belgian Political Panel Study (BPSS) to examine the effects that political education can have on political engagement. The BPSS is the ideal political survey because it offers information between 2006 and 2011 on political attitudes of young adults (p. 14-24), political education, and parent's political behaviors (Neundorf et al., 2016). Although over 6,000 adolescents participated, the dataset used in this observation used data only from respondents who participated in all three waves. Researchers

evaluated, “what elements of civic education and parental socialization matter for the starting levels of development of political engagement during adolescence and young adulthood” (Neundorf et al., 2016). The study showed that civic courses have “a boosting effect in the initial political engagement, as levels are higher among those that received civic courses in school, holding constant parental socialization” (Neundorf et al., 2016).

In another study, Sondheimer and Green looked at government funded research projects that included randomized field trials (p. 2010). After evaluating the lists of projects, three studies were chosen to be used in this experiment. “Two randomized studies, the Perry Preschool Experiment and the Tennessee STAR experiment”, the last one is a quasi-experiment known as “I Have a Dream” (IHAD; Sondheimer & Green, 2010: 176). The Perry Preschool Experiment wanted to see if “intensive preschool” could influence high school graduation outcomes (Sondheimer & Green, 2010). In this experiment, low-income status children were used, and they were randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups. Data showed that the graduation rate of the control group was 44.4% and the experimental group had a 65% graduation rate. Of those participants, 12.7% of the control group participated in the 2000 or 2002 elections and 18.3% of the experimental group. This data suggests that the education that the treatment group received not only increased the likelihood of high school graduation but also voter turnout. The next experiment, the Tennessee STAR experiment, “sought to test the effects of small classes on students in kindergarten through third grade” (Sondheimer & Green, 2010). The study showed that students who had smaller class sizes had higher academic performance, leading to higher graduation rates and ultimately higher voter participation. The IHAD program gives children of low economic status families opportunities to obtain high education by offering tutoring and mentors. This study focused on students from Lafayette, Colorado, and their

qualifications for free and reduced lunches. In years to come, Sondheimer and Green, sent a survey to participants of IHAD in Lafayette to determine if those who received help from IHAD participated in elections. The study showed that of those who received treatment participated 8.8% more than those who did not.

The data presented above suggests a positive correlation between education and voter participation. Byron Massialas (1970) goes into more detail in his literature review about how education contributes to students' political socialization and influencing participation. Massialas gives substantial evidence detailing that the setting of educational institutions is influential on the political socialization of children. He classifies these settings into suburban and inner-city, determining that children see the political system differently depending on the location. Massialas asks the children questions regarding government influence, trust, and change, results varied among the two groups. 63% of suburban students felt the government listened to the people whereas 53% of the inner-city students felt otherwise (Massialas, 1970, p. 33). Both groups believed that writing a letter to the President promoted more change than a protest or demonstration (Massialas, 1970, p. 33-34). He continues by reviewing the current structure of civic education programs, contradicting the notion that these programs "contribute to the development of a good citizen" (Massialas, 1970, p. 34). Several courses offered do not discuss social or controversial issues, ultimately withholding students from the opportunity to openly express their views. Supporting this idea, 52.5% of teachers spend only 0-10 percent of instruction on social issues (Massialas, 1970, p. 34). The solution according to Massialas is to create new realistic programs including current and past social issues with student led discussions.

Mass Media

Social media is a growing network, allowing people all around to connect in various forms and even influencing how they are politically socialized. People can control and limit their media use and broadcasts watch, unlike other socialization factors such as parents, education, and sometimes peers. One's exposure to news media can influence political socialization in many ways such as "political knowledge, norms and values, attitudes, and political participation", all of which influence one's participation in politics (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 2). Social media sites have become increasingly popular, becoming a place where people retrieve their daily news. However, this data is not uniform. Highly recognized and trusted news networks were once the source of the public's news. However because of social media, many obtain their political news from free online sources that lack credibility (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 3).

Social media is also a way people communicate, encounter new people, and express themselves, along with the opinions of others. These virtual interactions with others can inspire some to "adopt the political lifestyles" of others (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 4). Ohme and Vreese (2020, p. 4) give a strong example, stating that a shared post saying "get out and vote" can refresh one's mind about the importance of voting and may even encourage voting. Researchers have found a strong relationship between the use of social media and political participation (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 4). Ohme also found that citizenship can provide a relationship between media and political participation and that political participation is not a duty but an individual path (Ohme, 2018).

Ohme and Vreese's analysis is one of the few about the effects of mass media on political socialization. Gary Byrne is another individual who wanted to examine mass media as an influence, an aspect that is overlooked. He conducted his study in North Carolina on 6th, 10th,

and 11th graders. The sample divided the students by race (Black and white) and separated them even further into rural and urban based upon location (N=387). The aim of the study was to find a "relationship between the television and newspaper exposure of children and their attitudes toward political authority" (Byrne, 1969, p. 141)

To determine attitudes, Byrne asked questions regarding government trust, helpfulness, and performance. Questions were also asked about exposure to newspapers and television. Results showed that African Americans have less exposure to newspapers but just as much exposure to television as whites. Regarding location of each participant, those who live in urban areas are more likely to have newspapers than those who live in rural areas. Those with a lower socio-economic status did not have very much political knowledge or access to television or newspapers, most of the information they knew about politics was learned at school.

When asked about their perceptions of politics, African American children saw the government as being more effective than the white children (Byrne, 1969, p. 142). Questions about perceptions also showed that African Americans and lower socio-economic status students have a more positive view of the government, a possible explanation being that they are exposed to more television than newspapers. Byrne found that there was a close correlation between exposure to newspapers and critical attitudes of the government. The effects between TV and newspapers may differ since most newspapers use more credible sources than those in the field of televised media.

Gap in the Literature

Past research shows a relationship between voter turnout and factors such as age, the family, education, and mass media. In evaluating generational participation in elections, researchers have conducted studies that prove increased voter turnout as age increases.

Researchers have attributed these results to the life-cycle theory that suggests life events such as marriage, career, and family increase voter turnout over time. Researchers have conducted short-term and longitudinal studies to explain the relationship between age and civic engagement, using subjects among various age groups. Two studies conducted by Anderson & Goodyear-Grant (2008) and Richard Niemi & Michael Hanmer (2010) used the younger population (high schoolers and college students) to analyze future and current political participation. Smets (2015) conducts a longitudinal analysis using different data sets that supports the notion that life events become more relevant than voting during early adult years. The credible data theorists give help explain the idea that those younger in age do not participate in elections.

Conversations among the family can influence political opinions and outlooks among the younger generations. Hener and his colleagues look at it a little differently analyzing future political engagement among non-intact families, determining that those who grow up in single parent households are less likely to vote when eligible.

Theorists like Sondheimer and Green (2010) and Neundorf and colleagues (2016) connote that education is relevant to voter turnout by conducting studies on young adults to determine if knowledge impacts electoral participation using the BPSS and other government funded research projects. They provide evidence that as education increases, voter participation increases. The results from these studies can help create solutions that can restore voter participation and motivate others to register to vote and turn in a ballot.

Mass media is another growing subject, in the real world and as an influence in political participation. As people begin to turn to social media rather than TV and newspapers for their daily news, researchers are beginning to see it has a greater impact on one's political socialization. As people grow up, researchers like Ohme and Vreese (2020) have found that

individuals are not only getting their news from sources that lack credibility but also the people who they follow have the potential to influence voting behavior.

The current study will review and analyze the important aspects research has failed to address when conducting studies regarding voter turnout. There are many studies in countries such as Canada, Britain, and Germany but very little in the United States. This study will examine the impact that the family, education, and mass media have on voter turnout. Within the family, this study will examine the political affiliation and education of university students' parents and its effect on voter turnout. Within education, there will be an examination of the relationship between university civic courses and voter turnout. Mass media will be evaluated through the frequency and types of news stations students watch and voting behavior. The upcoming section will describe the methods used to answer these statements.

Theoretical Framework

Political scholars began studying political socialization in the 1950's to study political behavior, eventually concluding that political behavior is learned behavior. Myron Kent Jennings is believed to be one of the first to conduct political socialization research, suggesting that to gain a better understanding of individual political views we must first look "at how political thinking is formed in the childhood" (Jennings, 2001). During childhood, political socialization occurs in multiple social institutions, including the family, educational institutions, and mass media. This socialization occurs through primary (i.e., inside the household) and secondary socialization (e.g., outside of the household).

In the family, children may learn about politics from conversations in the home with their parents/guardians and other family members. Parents and elders conversate among each other

about politics and government that children hear. Political conversation in the household influences a child's perception of the world of politics in a positive or negative way, especially if politics is a topic that is not discussed often. As the children grow and join political conversation with their parents, they obtain new knowledge about their parent's political affiliation, some with no opposing political views. "The greater the involvement, the more effective the teaching", integrating the individual into a similar role as the teacher (Searing, 1986). Through repetitive hearing, one's political view can be passed on to another. Observational learning is another influential factor associated with political socialization. As a child grows up and sees their parents being civically engaged, it inclines them to be civically engaged in the future. Seeing a parent vote at a polling station familiarizes the child with the environment and influences them to vote in the future (Gidengil, 2016).

Political socialization also occurs in educational institutions. For example, if a student walks into a classroom at school they may see posters of former presidents or political documents hanging on the wall. In this instance, scholars may study the political knowledge of children and their interaction with political information in school. Educational courses that do not highlight the importance of civic engagement can have a future impact on an individual's participation. As young adults attend higher educational institutions, they are entering a world of their own without the daily influences of high school teachers and parents telling them what to do. Also outside of the household, people are socialized by their peers. As peers give their input and opinion on political ideals, one becomes socialized with new political information that may influence their beliefs. Finally, mass media is a crucial social institution that affects political behaviors. News stations such as CNN and FOX are used to obtain relevant information, along with those, social media has become an increasingly popular platform that is used to obtain free

news. Our society takes in and releases large amounts of information and electronic sources are the main avenue to obtaining this material.

Political views can be influenced by multiple social institutions, dictating one's political involvement, and possibly, voter turnout. Following political socialization theory, various social institutions can have an impact on one's voting behavior in the future. Therefore, this study examines voter turnout among university students and how external forces and prior knowledge of civics can impact one's likelihood to participate in democratic elections.

Methods

The data in this study comes a survey conducted among college students Southeast University[1]. Southeast University (SU) is in the southeastern region of the United States and is affiliated with the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation. SU has a current enrollment of 1,345 students. This university is designated as a Predominately Black Institution (PBI) with more than 40% of the students being black and 25% white (J. Kelly, personal communication, November 10th, 2023). Also at SU, 12% are international students (J. Kelly, personal communication, November 10th, 2023).

The survey consisted of a variety of questions regarding demographics and socialization in education, mass media, family, and friends/peers' institutions. Respondents' age varied between 18 to 26 and were only given access to the survey through their student email. The survey was sent to all university students via email on August 21, 2023, and was also accessible via posters with QR codes that were displayed in common areas across campus. Participants were also recruited in classrooms where they completed the survey.

[1] Southeast University is a pseudonym that will be used to hide the anonymity of the institution and respondents.

The data collected by Qualtrics was then transferred into Stata, to be used to code the data. Stata is a statistical software that can conduct statistical testing.

Dependent Variable

Voter Turnout in the 2020 Presidential Election. A dependent variable being used in this study is derived from the question "Did you vote in the 2020 Presidential Election. Data was coded as "Yes" and "No" which coincided with the answer choices given to respondents.

Voting Turnout in the 2022 Midterm Election. Another dependent variable being used in this study is derived from the question "Did you vote in 2022 Midterm Election"?

Trust in the government. Another dependent variable being used in this study is derived from questions about belief and trust in the government: "Based on knowledge in these courses, do you agree that you can change government policy" and "Do you trust the government". The answer choices given to respondents for "Based on knowledge in these courses, do you agree that you can change government policy" were "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Neutral", "Agree", and "Strongly Agree". The answer choices given to respondents for "Do you trust the government" were "Just about always", "Most of the time", "Only some of the time", and "Never".

Independent Variables

Race, Gender, Mother's Political Affiliation, Father's Political Affiliation, Mother's Highest Level of Education, Father's Highest Level of Education, Number of Government Courses Taken, Frequency of Watching News Stations, Political Affiliation and Voter Turnout. The independent variables in this study were derived from questions in the Qualtrics XM survey

created. Questions asking race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's highest level of education, father's highest level of education, the number of government courses taken, the frequency of watching news stations, political affiliation, and voter turnout proved to be significant in voter turnout among students at Southeast University.

Race. Race is coded based off the responses given by participants. The majority of respondents selected (1) "White" or (2) "Black" as their race while a small amount selected (3) "Other".

Gender. Gender is coded based off the responses given by participants. The majority of respondents selected (1) "Female (or Cisgender female)" or (2) "Male (or Cisgender male)" as the gender they identify as while a small amount selected other listed genders. Those who selected "Non-binary" or "Decline to Answer" were coded as (3) "Other" because of the small percentage of participants who selected it.

Mother's political affiliation. Mother's political affiliation is coded based off the responses given by participants. The coding for mother's political affiliation remained the same as for the answer choices (1) Democratic, (2) Republican, (3) Independent) except for the answer choice "Other (4)". Students who selected "Other" either stated that they did not know their mother's political affiliation or left the text entry blank, this data was coded as missing.

Father's political affiliation. Father's political affiliation is coded based off the responses given by participants. The coding for father's political affiliation remained the same as for the answer choices ((1) Democratic, (2) Republican, (3) Independent) except for the answer choice "Other (4)". Students who selected "Other" either stated that they did not know their father's political affiliation or left the text entry blank, this data was coded as missing.

Mother's education level. Mother's highest level of education was coded as "MotherHighestLevelEducation". Data is coded as (1) "Some High School, No Degree", (2) "High School or GED", (3) "Some College, No Degree", (4) "associate degree", (5) "bachelor's degree", (6) "master's degree", and (7) "Doctorate", coinciding with their respective answer choices. No respondents selected "No formal education" as an answer.

Father's education level. Father's highest level of education is coded as "FatherHighestLevelEducation". Data for the answer choices "No formal education" and "Some high school, no degree" are coded as (1) "No High School Diploma or GED" because both answer choices result in having no high school diploma. Other answer choices are coded as (2) "High school or GED", (3) "Some College, No Degree", (4) "associate degree", (5) "bachelor's degree", (6) "master's degree", and (7) "Doctorate".

Government courses taken. Number of government courses taken is coded according to the responses given by participants. Participants have taken at least one government course at the university so the answer choice "0" is not coded. The data is coded "1", "2", and "3+".

Frequency of news. Frequency of news is coded according to the responses given by participants. The data coded coincided with the answer choices: (1) "Daily", (2) "4-6 times a week", (3) "2-3 times a week", (4) "once a week", and (5) "Never".

Political affiliation. Political affiliation is coded according to the responses given by participants. The data is coded as (1) "Democrat", (2) Republican, (3) "Independent", and (4) "Other".

Findings

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent Variables					
Voting in the 2020 Presidential Election	77	0.48	0.50	0	1
Trust in the Government	23	1.83	0.72	1	3
Independent Variables					
Mother's Education Level	94	4.04	1.48	1	7
Father's Education Level	94	3.23	1.57	1	7
Mother's Political Affiliation	85	1.76	0.77	1	3
Father's Political Affiliation	81	1.83	0.74	1	3
Political Affiliation	101	2.21	0.96	1	4
Friends Political Affiliation	84	3	1.22	1	4
Race	103	1.70	0.80	1	3
Gender	103	1.43	0.54	1	3

Table 1 shows the summary statistics of the dependent and independent variables of the study. For the first dependent variable, voting in the 2020 Presidential Election, the mean is 0.48 which means that respondents are more likely to vote than not. 51.9% of students stated that they did vote and 48.1% stated they did not, which is a very close margin. For the other dependent variable, Trust in the Government, the mean of 1.83 reveals that on average students only trust the government some of the time.

One of the independent variables, Race, shows that the average respondent in this study was white, 51.5% of respondents were white while 27.2% were Black. For Gender, the mean was

1.43, stating that many respondents were female at 58.7%. The average level of education for respondents' mothers is between an associate and bachelor's degree with an average of 4.04 and as for respondents' fathers, the average level of education came to 3.23 at some college, no degree. The average political affiliation among respondents' mothers is between Republican and democrat at 1.76. With a mean of 1.83, respondents' fathers are more likely to be Republican than respondents' mothers. The average respondent according to this study is a Republican with a mean of 2.21, it is important to note that the majority, 40.6%, of respondents identify as independent. A mean of 3 for the political affiliation of friends reveals that the average respondent's friend(s) is independent, it is important to note, however, that 46 of the 84 respondents stated that their friends were democrat and republican.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Analysis on Voting in the 2020 Presidential Election (n=59)

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**
Political Affiliation: Republican	0.13(0.69)	0.78(0.98)	0.91(1.00)	0.81(1.03)	0.62(1.14)
Political Affiliation: Independent	0.11(0.60)	0.80(0.99)	0.75(1.01)	0.69(1.05)	0.37(1.29)
Political Affiliation: Other	0.57(0.93)	0.69(1.45)	0.80(1.47)	0.97(1.57)	0.40(2.07)
Mother's Political Affiliation		0.87(0.70)	0.52(0.77)	0.41(0.83)	0.49(0.91)
Father's Political Affiliation		0.08(0.65)	0.06(0.71)	0.04(0.76) *	0.02(0.95) *
Mother's Education Level			0.80(0.22)	0.76(0.24)	0.94(0.26)
Father's Education Level			0.96(0.21)	0.49(0.24)	0.69(0.26)
Frequency of News				0.05(09)	0.04(0.33) *
Friend's Political Affiliation					0.71(0.31)
Race	0.54(0.32)	0.97(0.40)	0.92(0.42)	0.55(0.43)	0.52(0.73)
Gender	0.35(0.46)	0.98(0.60)	0.48(2.08)	0.66(0.66)	0.09(2.77)

Table includes unstandardized regression coefficient and robust standard error in parentheses. **p<0.05

Table 2 contains details about a logistic (logit) regression analysis on voting in the 2020 presidential election according to respondents' data. A logistic regression was performed to examine the influence of political affiliation, respondent's parents' political affiliation, respondents' parents' education level, frequency of news, respondents' friends' political affiliation, race, and gender on voting in the 2020 presidential election to predict the probability of a respondent voting in the 2020 presidential election.

Based on Model 1, a one unit increase in the variable Republican increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 0.72 times, controlling for race and gender.

There will also be a one unit increase in the variable Independent increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 1.57 times, controlling for race and gender. Based on Model 2, a one unit increase in the variable Republican increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 0.89 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, and father's political affiliation. As for the Independent variable, a one unit increase will increase the probability that a respondent will vote by 1.92 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, and father's political affiliation.

Based on Model 3, a one unit increase in the variable Republican increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 1.09 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, and father's education level. As for the Independent variable, a one-unit increase will increase the probability that a respondent will vote by 2.61 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, and father's education level.

In Model 4, a one unit increase in the variable Republican increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 0.98 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation,

father's political affiliation, mother's education level, father's education level, and frequency of news. There will also be a one unit increase in the variable Independent increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 2.25 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, father's education level, and frequency of news.

In Model 5, a one unit increase in the variable Republican increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 0.93 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, father's education level, frequency of news, and friend's political affiliation. There will also be a one unit increase in the variable Independent increases the probability that the respondent will vote by 1.73 times, controlling for race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, father's education level, frequency of news, and friend's political affiliation. This model shows statistical significance between father's political affiliation and voting in the 2020 presidential election along with frequency of news and voting in the 2020 presidential election.

Table 3: OLS Regression Analysis on Trusting the Government (n=21)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Political Affiliation: Republican	0.65(0.40)	0.97(0.48)	0.43(0.39)	0.37(0.39)
Political Affiliation: Independent	0.07(0.33)	0.14(0.41)	0.47(0.34)	0.56(0.34)
Mother's Political Affiliation		0.35(0.49)	0.55(0.43)	0.87(0.46)
Father's Political Affiliation		0.95(0.48)	0.69(0.38)	0.45(0.41)
Mother's Education Level			0.01(0.08) *	0.01(0.08) *
Father's Education Level			0.65(0.10)	0.88(0.10)
Frequency of News				0.33(0.08)
Race (White)	0.12(0.21)	0.04(0.31) *	0.01(0.25) *	0.01(0.24) *
Gender (Female)	0.19(0.17)	0.09(0.21)	0.01(0.17) *	0.02(0.17)*

Table includes unstandardized regression coefficient and robust standard error in parentheses.
**p<0.05

Table 3 contains details about an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis on trust in government according to respondents' data. An OLS regression was performed to examine the influence of political affiliation, respondent's parents' political affiliation, respondents' parents' education level, frequency of news, race, and gender on trust in government to predict the value of trust in government.

Table 3 contains details about an ordinary least squares regression (OLS) analysis on trust in government according to respondents' data. Looking at Model 1 in table 3, we would expect a 0.19 decrease in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Republican and a 0.64 increase in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Independent, controlling for race and gender.

Model 2 in Table 3, we would expect a 0.02 decrease in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Republican and a 0,64 increase in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Independent, controlling for race and gender, mother's political

affiliation, and father's political affiliation. The model shows statistical significance between race and trust in government.

Model 3 in Table 3, we would expect a 0.31 decrease in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Republican and a 0.25 increase in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Independent, controlling for race and gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, and father's education level. The model shows statistical significance between race and trust in government, mother's education level and trust in government, and gender and trust in government.

Data from Model 4 of Table 3, allows use to expect a 0.37 decrease in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Republican and a 0.21 increase in government trust for every one unit increase in the variable Independent, controlling race, gender, mother's political affiliation, father's political affiliation, mother's education level, father's education level, and frequency of news. The model shows statistical significance between race and trust in government, mother's education level and trust in government, and gender and trust in government.

Discussion & Conclusions

The current study aims to examine external factors that influence voting among university students at Southeastern University. Although literature reveals that variables such as family, friends, education and mass media influence participation in elections, the current study found that father's political affiliation and voting in the 2020 presidential election hold a statistically significant relationship. Father's political affiliation became significant when the variable frequency of news was introduced into Table 2. Utilizing political socialization theory,

we can interpret the findings to hold significance in that fathers tend to be the leader of the household and in most cases controls the news stations on the television. Of respondents who said their father was Republican also listed that they watch the news more frequently than democrats and independents. The 2020 presidential election introduced a boisterous voice into politics, a republican, Donald J. Trump. This new figure could have influenced an increase in news broadcasting among Republican fathers in their household, ultimately influencing voter participation in respondents.

Findings also revealed a statistically significant relationship between government trust and several variables that the literature evaluates. For example, Table 3 shows an overarching statistically significant relationship between government trust and political affiliation, controlling for race and gender. As other control variables are introduced (i.e., mother/father political affiliation, mother/father education level, frequency of news) the statistical significance between government trust and political affiliation weakens yet remains statistically significant (below $p<0.05$). Using the literature and past studies, government trust decreases as external factors are introduced because people socialize at different institutions and these institutions may express conflicting beliefs that lead individuals to question their trust in government.

Mother's education proved statistically significant (see Table 3) regarding government trust and remained significant when frequency of news was introduced as a controlling variable. Responses given by participants revealed that mothers are more educated than fathers. Respondents' mothers who hold a higher level of education (associate degree, bachelor's degree, or doctorate) trust the government less than respondents whose mothers' hold lower levels of education (no High School, no GED, some High School) trust the government more. A significant relationship between mothers' education and government trust could be accredited to

a blind eye in government trust due to lower level of education. Mothers are considered nurturers that care for and educate their children in their younger years. A lower level of education may lead mothers to misinterpret biased information creating a blind eye for government trust that could spread to her children.

Southeastern University is a predominately black institution with 40% of its enrollment being African American. Results from the study showed the white females were the majority of the respondents, closely followed by white males.

While interesting that family had a significant impact on voter turnout and trust in government, it is troubling to see that civic courses were not significant in influencing the dependent variables. Although the sample size for the study is small, it may be beneficial to encourage university students to take more civics courses. Education begins far before higher education begins; primary schools should emphasize teaching government courses throughout adolescence.

Limitations

Like other studies, there are limitations that can affect the outcome of the study. SU has a large international population consisting of 12% of the student body. Unfortunately, they are unable to vote and were excluded from this study. The 2020 presidential election occurred 3 years ago, because of the time gap between the study and the election there were students who could not participate because they were not eligible during that time. The time gap limited the number of participants in that only a small population of upper classman were eligible to vote. The enrollment at SU is quite small with only 1,345 students, with that and the small portion of students eligible to vote, this limited the number of respondents we got. Of those who completed

the survey, there were some participants who did not complete the survey in its entirety. Our results show that there is no relationship between voting behavior and friendships, this could be because only one question was asked regarding friendships (The majority of my friends are politically affiliated as) and/or student population. The survey questioned students on their religion, but a question regarding whether the individually actively practiced said religion was never asked. A question relating to religious activity is relevant because of the university's association to the Methodist church. The Qualtrics XM survey has skip patterns and a skip will occur depending on the answer choice selected, a skip pattern was put in place if the answer "Yes" was selected for a question asking, "Have you ever taken a civics/government course(s) in college?", participants were able to answer questions regarding trust and belief in changing the government. Students who selected "No" or "I don't know" were not sent to these questions and unfortunately not able to answer them, causing use to have a smaller number of responses for one of our dependent variables.

After conducting a collinearity test, results showed a strong correspondence between respondents' mother's political affiliation and respondents' father's political affiliation. This is a limitation because the association between these two predictor variables can affect the statistical significance in the analyses conducted.

Future Research

Future research should evaluate the relationship between the family and voter turnout beyond parents to explore other political influences. This could include looking at siblings, grandparents, and other guardians/family members. Comparing voter participation and government trust between students who live at home and those who live in on-campus housing

would provide insight regarding the continued familial influences along with the addition of higher education. Understanding if more civic courses influence the dependent variables can prove beneficial and serve as justification for requiring students to take more civic courses. Many respondents stated that they receive their news from social media outlets, further research should evaluate the legitimacy of information being released on these outlets and compare them to broadcasting news networks. In doing so, results could reveal how behaviors or opinions are different based on the way that people discover information about political institutions.

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Appendix A: Logistics Regression Analysis on Voting in the 2022 Midterm Election

Table 4: Logit Regression Analysis on Voting in the 2022 Midterm Election (n=59)

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**	**Model 5**
Political Affiliation: Republican	**0.64(0.71)**	**0.90(0.91)**	**0.93(0.96)**	**0.99(1.00)**	**0.94(1.01)**
Political Affiliation: Independent	**0.50(0.68)**	**0.50(0.97)**	**0.34(1.01)**	**0.42(1.02)**	**0.60(1.05)**
Mother's Political Affiliation		0.08(0.92)	0.06(1.27)	0.06(1.40)	0.06(1.35)
Father's Political Affiliation		0.08(0.89)	0.06(1.25	0.04(1.40)	0.03(1.38)
Mother's Education Level		0.16(0.45)	0.05(0.27) *	0.05(0.28)	0.07(0.28)
Father's Education Level		0.37(0.55)	0.90(0.23)	0.96(0.24)	0.96(0.24)
Frequency of News				**0.08(0.29)**	**0.07(0.29)**
Friend's Political Affiliation					0.53(0.32)
Race	0.10(0.39)	0.16(0.45)	0.14(0.50)	0.13(0.52)	0.17(0.54)
Gender	0.40(0.48)	0.37(0.55)	0.76(0.58)	0.74(0.65)	0.77(0.66)

Table includes unstandardized regression coefficient and robust standard error in parentheses. **p<0.05

Appendix B: Qualtrics XM Survey Questions

1. I am asking you to participate in my research study. Participation is voluntary. Answers and responses will be kept confidential. Do you consent to participating in the survey?
    A. Yes
    B. No
2. Do you attend North Carolina Wesleyan University?
    A. Yes
    B. No
3. What is your citizenship status?
    A. I am a U.S. Citizen
    B. I currently have a student visa (F1)
4. Were you born prior to October 21, 2004?
    A. Yes
    B. No
5. When is your birthday? Mm/dd/yyyy
    [Text Box]
6. I identify as:
    A. Male (or Cisgender male)
    B. Female (or Cisgender female)
    C. Non-binary
    D. Transgender male
    E. Transgender female
    F. Other: _____
    G. Decline to Answer
7. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?
    A. Hispanic/Latinx
    B. Non-Hispanic/Latinx

8. Which of the following best describes your race? Select ALL that apply.
    A. American Indian or Alaska Native
    B. Asian
    C. Black or African American
    D. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    E. White
    F. Other: _____
9. Which one of the following best describes the religion which you were raised? Please be as specific as possible.
    A. Catholic
    B. Episcopalian
    C. Protestant
    D. Methodist
    E. Christian (Other): _____
    F. Islam
    G. Judaism
10. What is your major? Select ALL that apply.
    A. Accounting
    B. Business Administration
    C. Computer Information Systems
    D. Healthcare Administration
    E. Supply Chain Management
    F. Marketing
    G. Organizational Leadership
    H. Sports Administration
    I. Criminal Justice
    J. History
    K. Political Science
    L. Psychology
    M. Sociology
    N. Teacher Education

O. Biology
P. Biomedical Science
Q. Chemistry
R. Environmental Science
S. Exercise Science
T. General Science
U. Health Promotion
V. Mathematics
W. RN to BSN Program
X. English
Y. Entertainment Arts
Z. Communication
AA. Religious Studies
BB. Visual Arts

11. What is your minor? Select ALL that apply.

A. Accounting
B. Business Administration
C. Computer Information Systems
D. Marketing
E. Criminal Justice
F. History
G. Political Science
H. Psychology
I. Sociology
J. Secondary Education
K. Environmental Science
L. General Science
M. Public Health
N. English
O. Journalism
P. Music Production

Q. Religious Studies

R. Theatre

S. Visual Arts

T. No Minor

12. What is your anticipated graduation month and year?

A. May 2023

B. December 2023

C. May 2024

D. December 2024

E. May 2025

F. December 2025

G. May 2026

H. December 2026

13. Are you registered to vote?

A. Yes
B. No
C. I don't know.

14. What state are you registered to vote in?

A. Alabama
B. Alaska
C. Arizona
D. Arkansas
E. California
F. Colorado
G. Connecticut
H. Delaware
I. Florida
J. Georgia
K. Hawaii
L. Idaho
M. Illinois
N. Indiana
O. Iowa
P. Kansas
Q. Kentucky
R. Louisiana
S. Maine
T. Maryland
U. Massachusetts

V. Michigan
W. Minnesota
X. Mississippi
Y. Missouri
Z. Montana
AA. Nebraska
BB. Nevada
CC. New Hampshire
DD. New Jersey
EE. New Mexico
FF. New York
GG. North Carolina
HH. North Dakota
II. Ohio
JJ. Oklahoma
KK. Oregon
LL. Pennsylvania
MM. Rhode Island
NN. South Carolina
OO. South Dakota
PP. Tennessee
QQ. Texas
RR. Utah
SS. Vermont
TT. Virginia
UU. Washington
VV. West Virginia
WW. Wisconsin
XX. Wyoming

15. What is your political affiliation?
A. Democrat
B. Republican
C. Independent
D. Other: _____

16. To what degree do you identify with your political affiliation?
A. Strong Republican
B. Weak Republican
C. Independent
D. Weak Democrat
E. Strong Democrat
F. Other: ___

17. Did you vote in the 2020 Presidential Election?
A. Yes
B. No
C. Ineligible

18. How did you vote in the 2020 Presidential Election?
    A. In-person
    B. Mail-in ballot
19. Did you vote in the 2022 Midterm Election (the election that occurs halfway through the presidential term, individuals vote for their state representatives)?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. I don't know.
    D. Ineligible
20. How did you vote in the 2020 Presidential Election?
    A. In-person
    B. Mail-in ballot
21. Have you ever taken a civics/government course(s) high school?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. I don't know.
22. How many civic/government course(s) did you take in high school?
    A. 0
    B. 1
    C. 2
    D. 3+
23. Have you ever taken civics/government course(s) in college?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. I don't know.
24. How many civic/government course(s) did you take in high school?
    A. 0
    B. 1
    C. 2
    D. 3+
25. Based on knowledge in these courses, do you agree that you can change government policy
    A. Strongly Disagree
    B. Disagree
    C. Neutral
    D. Agree
    E. Strongly Agree
26. Do you trust the government?
    A. Just about always
    B. Most of the time
    C. Only some of the time
    D. Never
27. Do you follow politicians on social media?
    A. Yes
    B. No
    C. I don't know.

28. On what social media platform do you follow politicians on? Select ALL that apply.
    A. Instagram
    B. Twitter
    C. Facebook
    D. Snapchat
    E. TikTok
29. What politicians do you follow on social media?
    [Text Entry]
30. How often do you follow the news?
    A. Daily
    B. 4-6 times a week
    C. 2-3 times a week
    D. Once a week
    E. Never
31. What news networks do you follow? Select ALL that apply.
    A. CNN
    B. CBS
    C. ABC
    D. NBC
    E. FOX
    F. CNN
    G. Other: _____
32. Have you ever been involved in a political campaign?
    A. Yes
    B. No
33. What is your mother's highest level of education?
    A. No formal education
    B. Some High School, No degree
    C. High School or GED
    D. Some College, No degree
    E. Associate degree
    F. Bachelor's Degree
    G. Master's Degree
    H. Doctorate
34. What is your father's highest level of education?
    A. No formal education
    B. Some High School, No degree
    C. High School or GED
    D. Some College, No degree
    E. Associate degree
    F. Bachelor's Degree
    G. Master's Degree
    H. Doctorate

35. What is your mother's political affiliation?
    A. Democratic
    B. Republican
    C. Independent
    D. Other: ___
36. What is your father's political affiliation?
    A. Democratic
    B. Republican
    C. Independent
    D. Other: ___
37. Do either of your parents work with/in government?
    A. Yes
    B. No
38. How often is politics discussed...

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Very Often (4)	Always (5)
with family (1)	○	○	○	○	○
in the classroom (12)	○	○	○	○	○

39. The majority of my friends are politically affiliated as…
    A. Democratic
    B. Republican
    C. Independent
    D. Other: ___
40. Please list any additional information regarding how you have been socialized into politics.
    [Text Entry]
41. Thank you for completing the survey. Your feedback is important, please let us know if there are any improvements that can be done.
    [Text Entry]