

**A Tale of Two Turnouts in 2004: Effects of News Frame Valence and Substance on
College Students' Levels of Trust, Cynicism, and Political Information Efficacy**

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Communication

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April 20, 2007

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Framing, Valence, Substance, Youth Voting, Political Information Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

Following the 2004 U.S. presidential election, articles from the Associated Press and major news organizations came to very different conclusions regarding the impact of young voters on the election outcome. While some outlets framed the youth turnout as a success, others framed it as a failure. This experimental study (N=237) utilized a pre-test/post-test design to build upon research on framing theory and political information efficacy theory. Articles about youth voter turnout in the 2004 election served as the stimuli to test the effects of news frame valence and frame substance on college student respondents' levels of trust, cynicism, and political information efficacy. Results indicated that while valence and level of substance of a news article may affect political attitudes, changes between experimental groups were not significant. Cynicism was negatively correlated with political information efficacy and trust. Attitudinal measures accounted for a significant amount of variance in respondents' interest in the 2006 campaign as well as perceived importance of both political engagement and youth voter turnout in past and future campaigns.

Author's Acknowledgements

This thesis benefited from the insight of the members of my committee, and for that they deserve considerable thanks. First, my gratitude to Dr. Tedesco, who taught me how to design a methodologically sound experiment, and who lent his expertise in quantitative research to this study in assisting with data analysis. I am proud to be extending a theory you helped to create, political information efficacy. To Dr. Denton for stimulating my interest in the dynamic world of political campaigns and challenging me to find real-world applications for my research. You were one of the main reasons I applied to Virginia Tech and it has been an honor to work and study with you. Finally, to Dr. Williams, for taking an interest in my research ideas from our initial meeting, and for being passionate about making a theoretical advance in the study of framing. I hope to have the opportunity to continue to collaborate with all of you on political communication research throughout my academic career.

I would also like to acknowledge some very important people in the Department of Communication. To Scott Dunn, Kristin English, Nadia Aljabri, Matt Giglio and Dave Morin, having you as friends and colleagues made life as a graduate student a lot more fun than it should have been. I wish you all the best of luck in the next phase of your life.

Dedication

To Talya, for all of the compromises you made in reaching your professional dreams so that I could have the best opportunity to succeed at mine.

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I. Rationale

Recent scholarship chronicling the level of youth participation in the political system draws a consistent conclusion: Not enough young people are voting (Bennett, 1991; Delli Carpini, 2000; Hayes, C.E., 1998; Keeter, 2002; Mattson, 2003; Patterson, 2005). While not the only measure of civic engagement, voting is frequently cited as the signature action of an involved citizen. A lack of voting among youth is of concern to many, because early political socialization may impact how they interact with the political system in the future (Leighly, 2004; Miller & Shanks, 1996). As further evidence, some researchers argue that voting is a habitual action, more difficult to begin later in life (Green & Schachar, 2000; Hollihan, 2001; Plutzer, 2002).

Several reasons are offered for why young people are disengaged from the political process, particularly with regard to voting. Among them, researchers theorize that youth are preoccupied and itinerant (Converse & Niemi, 1971; Kaiser, 2000), less trusting of others (Rahn, 1998, cited in Delli Carpini, 2000), feeling ignored by media and politicians (Skaggs & Anthony, 2002), politically unsophisticated and thus easily discouraged (Lau & Erber, 1985), and poorly socialized about the importance of voting (Gans, 2004).

Another reason why young people may shy away from voting is that many of them believe they lack the ability or tools necessary to make an informed political decision. Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000) conducted focus groups with young citizens in 1996 and 2000. They found that young people reported not knowing enough to participate in politics. Spiker et al. (2003) reached a similar conclusion through interviews with college-age citizens. She identified two psychological reasons why youth may not vote. These were “lack of knowledge about the candidates, the political process, and the importance of voting...(and, secondly) political efficacy” (p. 252). This study expands current research on the concept of political efficacy, by evaluating changes in self-reported levels of political information efficacy (PIE), a concept designed to measure how confident one feels in one’s knowledge of politics.

Media effects researchers often focus on the effects that media usage might have on youth attitudes (Pasek, 2006), because it is feared that increasingly, “the information in the mass media becomes the only contact many have with politics” (McCombs &

Shaw, 1972, p.127). Of particular concern is the way exposure to certain types of news coverage may contribute to a decrease in young people's trust of government and levels of efficacy, while increasing their general sense of apathy, cynicism, or "spiral of disaffection" (Pinkleton & Austin, 1998).

Building on Cohen's (1963) argument that the mass media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about," framing theory scholars posit that how the press packages and presents issues may impact both what people think about as well as how they think about it. In other words, news frames may increase the salience of news issues as well as the attributes of those issues (Entman, 1993; Ghanem, 1997; McCombs & Shaw, 1993).

News frames, and framing effects, were applied to the coverage of various social issues, including abortion (Ball, 1990), the environment (Karlber, 1997), civil liberties (Nelson et al., 1997a), physician assisted suicide (Kalwinsky, 1998), animal experimentation (Kruse, 2001), and stem cell research (Nisbet, 2003), as well as many political issues, including election campaign coverage (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Rhee, 1997), and European politics (de Vreese, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999; Williams & Kaid, 2006). However, few research studies explore the effects of news frames on attitudes of college-age youth towards politics in general, or voting in particular. This study aimed to advance framing theory by assessing the affect of two frame categories, frame valence and frame substance, on young people's attitudes towards politics.

II. A Tale of Two Turnouts

Young voters were the targets of both the Kerry and Bush campaigns in the 2004 Presidential election (Stuckey, 2005). In addition, pre-election hype about the youth vote was enhanced by mobilization efforts from within the popular culture community, including Sean “P. Diddy” Combs’ effort *Vote or Die*, and *Smackdown Your Vote!*, a drive run by *World Wrestling Entertainment* (Jones, 2005). With increased attention to young voter mobilization came increased expectations of young voter engagement and turnout. The focus of news media after the election became whether expectations were met.

In the immediate aftermath of the 2004 election, headlines from the Associated Press told two very different stories of youth turnout. On November 2nd, an Associated Press headline read “2004 Not a Breakout for Youth After All,” (“2004 Not a Breakout”, 2004). However, on November 8th, a different headline stated, “Big Voter Turnout Seen Among Young People,” (“Big Voter,” 2004). CBS News Political Unit writer Nicole Yinger captured the reasons for the contradicting messages. “First, there was no clear distinction made between youth ‘turnout rate,’ which refers to the percentage of young eligible voters who turned out, and the youth share of the electorate, which involves the percentage of all voters who were young...So, was the effort to get out the youth vote successful or not? It seems to depend on who is asked” (Yinger, 2004, para. 5). It is likely that news outlets and their audiences were left confused by these seemingly incongruous results. An example of the coverage of these results took place between music mogul Russell Simmons and television host Bill O’Reilly on “The O’Reilly Factor”:

O'Reilly: ...the young people didn't come out any more than they did last time around and that was the great hope.

Simmons: Well, I don't know why you keep saying that because the fact is that they did come out. Twenty percent more people...

O'Reilly: No, the stats say they didn't.

Simmons: Forty-one percent came out last time. Fifty-two percent came out this

time.

O'Reilly: Well, that's not the stat we have. It's about the same.

Simmons: Well, you have the wrong stats then.

O'Reilly: Between 18 and 24?

Simmons: 18 and 29.

O'Reilly: OK. Oh, you go to 29.

Simmons: 18 to 29.

O'Reilly: We figure after 24...

Simmons: Fifty-two percent came out.

O'Reilly: All right. We figure after 24...

Simmons: We reversed an ugly trend.

O'Reilly: All right. 18 to 24, they didn't. 29, if you want to tack on, they were up.

Now, Reverend, were you a -- were you a...

Simmons: That's not true. Wait, wait, wait.

O'Reilly: What?

Simmons: They were up. They were up.

O'Reilly: 18 to 24 was flat.

Simmons: They were up. We turned around an ugly cycle.

O'Reilly: All right. The stats that we have say they were flat, and that's the accepted... (O'Reilly, 2004).

Using framing as its theoretical underpinning, this thesis built on a content analysis of newspaper coverage of young voters in the 2004 election. Williams (2007, in press) found that after the 2004 election, “media coverage presented a mixed opinion of the young voter turnout with 33% of stories framing the turnout positively and 34% framing turnout negatively” (Williams, 2007, in press). Furthermore, he argued that the turnout was framed in three ways: positive, negative, and neutral.

According to Williams (2007, in press) in stories where the turnout was framed positively, the emphasis was on the increase in total number of youth who voted. This is in spite of the fact that they did not represent a larger portion of the total vote. When the turnout was framed negatively, the articles focused on the idea that youth represented the same percentage of total voters as they had in the past, limiting their impact on the outcome. Third, Williams argued that neutral framing “offered truly balanced and factual coverage that did not present the actual young-voter turnout in any positive or negative way but instead just reported the factual information” (Williams, 2007, in press).

Not only did news organizations run with these three differently valenced stories of the young voter turnout, they also had varying amounts of substance. Some articles used statistics and logic to advance their argument and provided substantive information for the news consumer. Others were vague on details, lacked context and did little to inform the consumer.

For example, *The Boston Globe* included the following op-ed as part of its post-election coverage. “Start with the numbers. According to William Galston at the University of Maryland, at least 20.9 million Americans under 30 voted on Tuesday. That is an increase of 4.6 million voters from 2000. Four years ago, just 42.3 percent of young people voted. This year more than 51.6 percent did” (“Youth Came Through”, 2004,

para. 3). This provided a substantive argument why the youth turnout was a success. *The San Francisco Chronicle* provided an example of substantive and negative coverage of the turnout: “Participation among the nation’s 40 million 18-29-year-olds was up – to 20 million, compared with 16.2 million in 2000. But so was voting across the board. With a total voter turnout greater than 120 million, the much ballyhooed youth voters turned out to be 1 out of 10, which is just about exactly the percentage they were four years ago” (“18-24s,” 2004, para. 8). Finally, an article from *USA Today* served to demonstrate how news covered the youth voter turnout negatively, as well as ambiguously. The article read in part, “Democrats needed a sizable turnout by this group to win the election. While we heard their voices, it turned out to be only lip service; those ages 18 to 29 made up a mere 17 % of those who bothered to vote” (“Youth vote,” 2004).

In the aforementioned CBS news story, Hans Reimer, the Washington Director of Rock the Vote, argued, “Saying that (the young)[sic] didn’t turn out is absolutely wrong, but I don’t know if we’ll be able to undo the damage of the original message” (Yinger, 2004, para. 8). Leaders of advocacy and mobilization groups clearly were concerned with the impact of news coverage of their efforts and the youth turnout on subsequent election cycles. This thesis was inspired by the seemingly contradictory media frames and sought to evaluate the effects they would have on youth attitudes, particularly feelings of trust, cynicism and political information efficacy.

III. Literature Review

This thesis first includes a discussion of framing theory, highlighting the growth in the discipline from its roots in psychology and sociology, and its relationship to agenda setting and priming. Next, a description of information processing offers insight into the ways people attend and relate to negative and ambiguous information. Subsequently, the concepts of political information efficacy, cynicism, and trust are defined. Finally, as this study looks at framing from the perspective of its effects on an audience, this thesis provides a review of media effects literature.

III.a. Framing Theory

In a discipline where semantics plays such a central role, it is not surprising that researchers disagree on the way the words “frame” and “framing” are defined and applied. Scholars of political communication disagree whether or to what extent framing research overlaps with research on priming and agenda setting. These paradigms share the belief that the media can impact the knowledge and attitudes of the public. Entman (2007) argued that priming, framing and agenda setting should be conceptualized as integrated methods by which those who create messages also create bias.

Along with the related concepts of priming and agenda setting, framing as a theory is fundamentally concerned with how media coverage affects issue and/or attribute salience. In agenda setting research, scholars traditionally hypothesize that the prevalence and frequency of issue coverage in the media will correlate with the importance ascribed to that issue by the public. Priming, on the other hand, is the mechanism by which a transfer of issue or attribute salience occurs. As a result of being exposed to an issue or attribute (priming), people are likely to similarly mention the issue (agenda setting) or describe it accordingly (framing).

The question persists whether framing is an independent theory, or the second-level of agenda setting (Ghanem, 1997; Kioussis, et al., 1999; McCombs et al., 2000, McCombs & Ghanem, 2003). If framing is to be viewed as “the second level of agenda-setting”, then the frames become the attributes of objects, rather than objects themselves. For McCombs (1997), “framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed” (p. 37). If however, as it is argued, framing is concerned more with the interaction of

elements within a text, or the processing of information, it may fall outside the lines of agenda setting research (Maher, 2003). Framing theorists are not always concerned with the attributes of issues, but in how information is arranged as to guide interpretations. In that regard, framing is separate from agenda setting research.

III.a.i. What is a Frame?

When one writes about frames, one may be referring to a media frame or an audience frame. For instance, Gitlin (1980) wrote that frames “organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports” (p. 7). In this way, the frame is that part of the message which is used to code or decode the meaning in the message. Kinder and Saunders (1990) argued that frames serve the dual function of “devices embedded in political discourse,” and “internal structures of the mind. (p. 74). Frames may be located both in a text and in the mind of their creator or receiver. Reflecting an interactionist perspective, Reese (2001) wrote “frames are *organizing principles* that are socially *shared* and *persistent* over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure* the social world” (p. 11, italics in original).

A frame is often defined by its function. Snow and Benford (1992) offered this definition of a frame, based on their work on social movements and collective action. A frame is “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environments” (p. 137). This definition is tied closely with psychological research on schema (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Graber, 1988).

What may make framing scholarship so dynamic is the complexity of its core definitions and its variety of applications. Entman (1993) offered a strong critique of this scholarship, arguing that it is fractured and disorganized. In response, rather than bemoan the study of framing as “fractured,” D’angelo (2002) suggested that as a “research program” the complex nature of framing research is likely to be an advantage as part of the communication discipline.

Scholars have offered different ways of characterizing and categorizing frames. Writing about the political culture of welfare policy, Gamson (1983) described how elements of ideas combine to create “interpretive packages” (p. 398). He suggests that, “it

is possible to suggest the package as a whole by the use of a single element” (p. 398). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) highlighted metaphors, catchphrases, exemplars, depictions, and visual images as effective devices for framing information.

Iyengar (1991) categorized news frames as being thematic or episodic. A thematic news frame offers the audience a way of integrating information into pre-existing schema. An episodic news frame leaves out information that might provide such context, focusing instead on the individual story. de Vreese (2004a) investigated two other types of news frames, those of conflict and economic consequences. The conflict frame present issues as disputed, emphasizing controversy. The economic consequences frame places an issue within the context of its effects on some financial situation. These are examples of generic frames (de Vreese, 2004a; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), ones not tied to a specific issue. Other examples of generic frames include human interest or “human impact” (Neuman et al., 1992), responsibility (Iyengar, 1991), and “horserace” framing of politics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Finally, as de Vreese & Boomgaarden (2003) argued, frames can be categorized as being positive, negative, or neutral.

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) believed that for a frame to be acknowledged it must meet the following criteria. “First, the frame should have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics. Second, it should be commonly observed in journalistic practice. Third, the frames should be able to be reliably distinguished from other frames” (p. 47).

For the purposes of this study, the operationalization of a frame was guided by concepts derived from the work of Gamson and Modigliani (1987), and Tankard et al. (1991). For Gamson and Modigliani (1987), a frame is “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events...” (p. 143). Tankard et al. (1991) further defined a frame as the “central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is using selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (p. 3).

Price et al. (1997) wrote “salient attributes of a message (its organization, selection of content, or thematic structure) render particular thoughts applicable, resulting in their activation and use in evaluations” (p. 486). For instance, frames can be defined by their structure in terms of amount of detail (substantive vs. ambiguous, and organizational

pattern (e.g. narrative, problem-solution). Frames can also be categorized according to stylistic features (ethos, pathos and logos, valence). Finally, the content of a message may become the frame by dominating the intended interpretation. Certain words, phrases or images act as symbols to encourage a particular reading of a text (e.g. consequences, responsibility, human interest). These salient elements then guide the audience's "interpretive schemas" (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309). Based on these definitions, this thesis offers its own operational definition of a frame: A frame is a central structural, stylistic, or content element of a message that guides the construction or interpretation of the meaning of that message.

III.a.ii. Media Framing

Gitlin (1980) defined media frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse" (p. 7). For Gitlin (1980), media frames are discursive elements in news texts. Pan and Kosicki (1992) argued that news texts are "a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of texts" (p. 56). The media are theorized to organize these news texts through the use of frames.

Scholars disagree whether journalists deliberately incorporate frames into their news stories, or whether it is more of an unconscious act. Gandy (2001) expressed the former belief, stating that frames "are used purposively to direct attention and then guide the processing of information so that a preferred reading of the facts comes to dominate public opinion" (p. 365). Gamson et al. (1992) argued that providing ways of understanding the world is one of the media's more important functions.

In addition, Gitlin (1980) wrote, framing may "enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely [and to] package the information for efficient relay to their audiences," (p.7). Entman (1993) describes the role of a communicator this way, "[they] make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief system" (p. 52). Framing is argued to be part of the gatekeeping function of media (Purvis, 2001).

For Mendelsohn (1993), media framing is an action “which transforms an occurrence into a news event, and that in turn, into a news report” (p. 150). Jamieson and Waldman (2002) argued that reporters see the world through “lenses” and then depict the world using “frames.” The metaphor of the lens is closely tied to the way Lippman (1922) described the viewpoint of journalists. He stated a journalist is “like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then other out of darkness and into vision” (p. 229).

With regard to the process of framing, Lang (1959) argued “not only during the campaign but also in the periods between, the mass media provide perspectives, shape images of candidates and parties, help highlight issues around which a campaign will develop, and define the unique atmosphere and areas of sensitivity which will mark any particular campaign” (p. 332).

A key concept in defining a frame is the word “salience.” Holloway (2001) argued that frames are defined by the concepts of selection and salience. Entman (1993) stated that salience means “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (p. 53). What journalists and members of the media do according to framing theory is to make some element of a text more salient. Entman (1993) wrote “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment and recommendation for the item described” (p. 52).

III.a.iii. Audience Framing

The concept of audience framing is closely tied with what cognitive psychologists refer to as a schema, defined by Fiske and Taylor (1991) as “a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes” (p. 98). The theory of audience framing can be traced back to work in psychology and sociology in the early twentieth century. Lippman (1922) believed that the use of stereotypes guides perception. He wrote that man, “employs a shorthand of names and signs and samples” (p. 204). Framing can also be seen as a rhetorical device, guided by word choice, referred to as prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). In their research, for instance, people have

been shown to make decisions differently when the potential outcome is framed as a win or a loss.

This personal lens through which ones views the world is based on one's history and experiences and helps determine future attitudes and behaviors. Goffman (1974) compared the interpersonal usage of frames with those found in the world of theatre. People utilize frames in their discourse, to organize social experiences, while most people cannot describe or identify the particular frame they are using. He writes, "It seems that we can hardly glance at anything without applying a primary framework, thereby forming conjectures as to what occurred before and expectations of what is likely to happen now" (p. 38).

Graber (1988) also suggested that people use schemas to manage and navigate through large amounts of information. This navigation requires less energy, and lower "cost" to use them in comprehending information. With an increase in concept distance and abstraction, humans use typification schemes to categorize people, places and concepts. While sometimes lacking in substance, they are useful heuristics for maintaining the basic information about an entity, The process of typifying information is argued to be a habitualized action (Graber, 1988), repeated for the psychological benefit of having less information to process when finding the meaning of something. Berger (1966) wrote "Language also typifies experiences, allowing me to subsume them under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning not only to myself but also to my fellowman" (39).

For Berger (1966), the universe of reality is understood and organized through the integration of symbols. Knowledge is gained through the sharing of these symbols via common cognitive processes. Berger (1966) wrote the following:

I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seems to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the latter. The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene. The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and

posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life as meaning for me (pp. 21-22).

Berger (1966) believed that those in power might determine the way we define each other and ourselves. He states that there is “the possibility of the universal experts holding an effective monopoly over all ultimate definitions of reality in a society” (121). This is similar to the viewpoint expressed by Carragee and Roefs (2004).

On the other hand, rather than impose restrictions on the way information is organized, Goffman (1974) believed that frames “open up variability” (p. 238). Likewise, Bird and Darenne (1992) envisioned that news serves the function of myths, helping people understand themselves and their relationship to society. The audience is viewed as an active participant in a “ritual” process in this model, rather than solely at the receiving end of the messages. By telling and retelling these myths, the myths become instantly recognizable and malleable. Furthermore, Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992) wrote that audiences “do not slavishly follow the framing of issues presented in the mass media.” Instead, they “actively filter, sort, and reorganize information in personally meaningful ways in constructing an understanding of public issues” (pp. 76-77).

III.a.iv. Frame Effects

Audience frames and the cognitive framing processes that lead to them are often the dependent variables in experimental framing research. This study is concerned with D’Angelo’s (2002) question of “how news frames activate, and interact with an individual’s prior knowledge to affect interpretations, recall of information, decision making, and evaluations...” (p. 873). Berger (1966) stated that “The reporting of an event and its documentation are not only seen as reductions of or abstractions from the original, but are also understood to possibly influence later occurrences of the real thing” (p. 79). In addition to measuring changes in attitudes, this study sought to evaluate the effects of the framing of a historical event, in this case an election, on respondent’s perception of how future events will occur.

Scheufele (1999) argued that framing or “frame setting” should be best thought of as a theory of media effects. A number of studies have found evidence for frame effects. For example, Nelson et al. (1997a) found that attitudes towards welfare were shown to be predictable based on whether subjects were exposed to individual responsibility or social

responsibility frames. Cappella and Jamieson (1997) determined that exposure to strategic news frames activate political cynicism. Kellstedt (2000) identified shifts in the way news framed racial issues and found that the presence of egalitarian frames was positively correlated with support for government action on racial issues. Iyengar (1991) found that exposure to episodic rather than thematic television news frames influenced people to attribute blame for social issues on individuals rather than to larger, system-level causes. Valkenburg, Semetko and de Vreese (1999) conducted an experiment in which they found that exposure to news frames affected the ability of and ways in which respondents recalled information.

While frame effects may be mediated by one's level of knowledge and personal history with a subject (Valentino, 2001), there is evidence for the existence of frame effects. However, frame effects may be exaggerated in experiments because as opposed to the experimental setting, in real life, not everyone is exposed to the frames in question (Kinder, 2007).

This experimental framing study assessed the effects of the way information was packaged and presented. The frames employed in the stimuli were constructed with the words of Entman (1993) in mind: "The *text* contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments" (p. 52, italics in original).

This study asked whether the framing of an issue would influence college students' attitudes about the issue. Two attributes of these generic frame categories were manipulated, frame substance and frame valence. This study is not concerned with a transfer of attribute salience, rather with how a type of frame affects attitudes. The researchers wondered whether exposure to the frames would influence how the respondents processed information and subsequently felt about an issue.

III.b. Negativity, Ambiguity, and Information Processing

The theories of framing and political information efficacy tie in well with models of information processing. People use frames to understand and integrate information with prior knowledge. This experiment sought to advance framing theory by incorporating and evaluating the effects of two frame categories: frame valence and

frame substance. It is therefore important to review research on information processing, specifically how negative or ambiguous information is processed. Researchers develop models of information processing in order to understand what affects how people recall and assign weight, or importance to, a piece of information.

Some researchers theorize that people tend to give greater weight to negative information and thus process it more deeply. Some research has found that “negative information about people and events has more alerting power than equivalent positive information” (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 69). This so called “negative effect” or “negativity bias” “refers to the greater weight given to negative information relative to equally extreme and equally likely positive information in a variety of information-processing tasks” (Lau, 1984, p. 119). Support for this is found in social psychology literature as well (e.g. Ito et al., 1998; Pratto, 1991; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Taylor (1991) wrote, “Specifically, diverse literatures in psychology provide evidence that, other things being equal, negative events appear to elicit more physiological, affective, cognitive, and behavioral activity and prompt more cognitive analysis than neutral or positive events” (p. 67). This is a troubling finding, because Pinkleton and Austin (2004) found that “the potentially harmful effects of negative campaign tactics and information-poor media sources are particularly critical for young citizens” (p. 320).

Not all scholars agree that negative information is more deeply processed. For example, Matlin and Strang (1978) coined the phrase “The Pollyanna principle.” Contrary to the notion that negative information is given greater weight, this theory states that positive material is recalled more often and faster, especially when information is personally relevant. Meffert et al. (2006) found that people actively select negative stories during political campaigns. Interestingly, however, when asked to recall information about a preferred candidate from a negative story, participants responded with more positive evaluations of the candidate. The strength of a negative message may be significantly tempered by the strength of one’s political affiliation, a result that may be explained by cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). According to this idea, people actively select and attend to information congruent with personal beliefs, while ignoring contrasting information, in order to avoid cognitive “tension.”

Mahewaran and Meyers-Levy (1990) argued that motivation plays a mediating role in the effectiveness of valenced frames. When people lack motivation, they process information peripherally, and positive frames have greater impact than negative frames. However, when motivated to process information, negative frames may gain strength.

Clearly, questions persist over the effects of negative information on citizens' attitudes towards politics. For instance, there are conflicting findings about the impact of negativity in political campaigns, specifically in candidate advertisements, on information processing. Some researchers argue that exposure to negativity, often by way of "attack" advertising or negative news, creates a more cynical, less-engaged electorate (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Norris, 2000). Conversely, negative campaigning has been found to act as a motivating and mobilizing force in some cases (Finkel & Greer, 1998; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002; Martin, 2004).

Scholars are also divided as to the effects of ambiguity on the way information is processed. Taylor (1991) wrote, "When people encounter ambiguous information, they tend to interpret it in line with their prior beliefs. Thus, information that is neither clearly positive nor negative is more likely to be interpreted positively than negatively" (p.74).

Goffman (1974) suggested that when information is left ambiguous, or open to interpretation, it is likely that those exposed to that information will show signs of suspicion and/or doubt, especially in situations where "the world ought not to...be opaque" (p. 302). People may experience doubt and insecurity over exposure to ambiguous frames. In addition, ambiguous information may be harder to recall from memory than substantive, detailed information (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Kinder (2007) argued that when people are exposed to "useful" and "helpful" frames, characterized by "serious debate," they are more likely to express an opinion.

The theory of political information efficacy assumes that people process information in accordance with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). The central tenant of ELM is that information is received and stored either centrally or peripherally. The ELM is one of the dual process models used to explain information processing. Political information efficacy theory posits that, "different levels of information processing occur from various sources of political information" (Kaid, McKinney, &

Tedesco, 2007, in press). Furthermore, they argue that young voters in particular process political information peripherally, through the use of heuristics, perhaps because of their overall lack of political knowledge.

III.c. Political Attitudes

An individual's attitudes and orientation towards politics and the political system may be negatively affected by exposure to messages in the media (Kaid, Johnston, & Hale, 1989). In media effects research, oftentimes and with methodological confusion the result, "political alienation (and alienation more generally), mistrust, lack of confidence, powerlessness, political inefficacy, apathy, meaninglessness, normlessness, as well as other terms and phrases have served as synonyms" (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997, p. 139). One of the overarching concepts of these measures is political malaise.

Robinson (1976) tested and found support for the video-malaise hypothesis, which states that the exposure to the way television news treats information, particularly visually, creates or adds to political cynicism. Spiker et al. (2003) wrote that, "a citizen experiencing political malaise lacks trust in the political system, expresses cynicism toward politics, and experiences low political efficacy and high disapprobation toward candidates..." (p. 243). She defines political malaise as "a general sense of citizen uneasiness or ill-being toward the political process" (p. 244). Young people frequently cite a lack of knowledge about politics as a reason for their political disengagement (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2000). Therefore this study focused on the roles of three key indicators of political malaise: political information efficacy (PIE), cynicism and trust. The definitions and theoretical applications of these interrelated attitudinal measures have been modified over time.

The concept of efficacy is traditionally divided into two separate components: internal and external (Acock, Clarke, & Stewart, 1985, Balch, 1974; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Finkel, 1985; McPherson et al., 1997). Internal efficacy is defined as "beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics" (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991, p. 1407). Conversely, external efficacy or "system responsiveness" is defined as one's "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991, p. 1407). Political information efficacy theory is a descendant of political efficacy theory, or

“the feeling that individual political action does have or can have an impact upon the political process...”(Campbell, Gurin & Miller, 1954, p. 187). Political information efficacy can therefore be seen as a type of internal efficacy.

Initially, political efficacy as a concept referred to only to one’s ability to participate in the political process. Over time, the definition shifted towards one’s ability to influence the political process (e.g. Gamson, 1968; Hofstetter, Zunida, & Dozier, 2001; Pinkleton & Austin, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 1986). For instance, measures used by Pinkleton and Austin (2004) included Likert scale items such as “Voting gives people an effective way to influence what the government does,” and “my vote makes a difference” (p. 327).

There has been considerable research on the concept of efficacy with regard to political behavior. Yeich (1994) proposed that the construct of “collective political efficacy” is needed to get a better understanding of how efficacy influences mobilization. He defined this concept as representing “perceptions of systems of responsiveness when masses of people organize to demand change” (Yeich, p. 260). Collective political efficacy then is an individual’s perception of external responsiveness to group demands. Bandura (1986, 1997) found a strong positive correlation between a person’s level of efficacy and their participation in politics. Self-efficacy, knowledge, and motivation all have significant impacts on young people’s political participation and political attitudes (Solhaug, 2006). McClusky et al. (2004) found that the size of the “gap” between a person’s desired and perceived level of efficacy influenced whether they were politically active.

Morrell (2003) explained that there have been numerous attempts at operationalizing and measuring political efficacy, making it difficult for scholars to compare effects across studies. Political efficacy as a construct was originally “unidimensional”, using three questions to assess perception of personal political power. Those questions were first, “People like me don’t have any say in what the government does,” (NOSAY) second, “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on,” (COMPLICATED) and third, “Voting is the only way that people like me can have any say in how the government runs things.” Between 1968 and 1980, the National Election Studies added two other measures to this scale. They were, “Parties are only interested in people’s votes but not in their

opinions,” and “Generally speaking, those we elect to Congress in Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly.”

The NOSAY measure was included as a measure of external efficacy by Craig, Niemi, & Silver (1990). They created their own questions to measure internal efficacy. They were, “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think” (CARE), “I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics,” (QUAL), “I think that I am as well-informed about politics and government as most people,” (INFORM), “I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country,” (UNDERSTAND) and “I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people” (JOB).

Niemi, Craig and Mattei (1991) further developed the two dimensions of political efficacy. To measure external efficacy, they used the NOSAY measure as well as the CARE measure. For internal efficacy, they maintained the same questions, but reworded the INFORM measure to read, “I think I am *better* informed...,” and reinserted the COMPLICATED question to assess both external and internal efficacy.

The theory of political information efficacy returns the focus towards feelings of confidence in one’s political knowledge. An earlier attempt at conceptualizing feelings about one’s ability to participate in politics was called “civic competence” (Almond & Verba, 1963). Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007, in press) defined information efficacy as “the extent to which one is confident in their political knowledge and that one possesses sufficient knowledge to engage the political process (to vote).”

How young people process political information is important, because ultimately, “a “voter's confidence in his/her own political knowledge and its sufficiency to engage the political process (to vote)” may be a determinant of voting behavior (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007, in press). They found that “young voters who do not feel confident in their knowledge levels are less likely to vote than those who feel more confident” (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007, in press).

The PIE scale consists of four, five-point Likert scale measures of cynicism, four of trust and four of political efficacy. Since efficacy is based in part on feelings of empowerment, one’s level of internal and external efficacy may have implications for other attitudinal measures, motivation, and mobilization (Craig, 1980; Craig &

Maggiotto, 1981; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Zimmerman, 1989). To assess efficacy, Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007, in press) used three of the National Election Studies measurements of internal efficacy (QUAL, INFORM, UNDERSTAND) found to be reliable and valid (Acock, Clarke, & Stewart; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Finkel, 1985; Niemi et al., 1991), and added one new question, “If a friend asked me about the election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.” These four items showed high levels of reliability and accounted for up to ten percent of the variance in youth voting behavior in 2000 and 2002 (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007, in press).

Pinkleton and Austin (2004) found evidence to support their hypothesis that cynicism towards politics would positively predict apathy, while apathy would be inversely related to efficacy. Political cynicism is based on the “absence of trust” (Cappella & Jamieson, 2007, p. 141). “Cynicism represents a distancing from the political process, and essentially, a closure to new information” (Pinkleton & Austin, p. 322). Two of the questions used to measure cynicism in the new political information efficacy scale were NOSAY and COMPLICATED. The other two questions designed to measure cynicism were, “Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do,” and , “One never knows what politicians really think.”

The study of trust in government grew in part out of Watergate and Iran Contra scandals (Orren, 1997). As Cappella and Jamieson (1997) wrote “The public’s perceptions of the motivations of actors are what determines their trustworthiness” (p. 142). Furthermore, distrust or normlessness is one of Chen’s (1992) four measures of political alienation. Gamson (1968) hypothesized that the optimal conditions for mobilizing people occurs when they feel highly efficacious and distrustful, though this has not been consistently proven empirically (Sigelman & Feldman, 1983).

Four measure of trust were included in the PIE scale. They were, “One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing”, “ Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over,” “Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think”, and “One cannot always trust what politicians say.”

This study sought to identify how these measures interact, as well as how they each influence attitudes about politics and youth political engagement, specifically in terms of voting. In addition, this study aimed to assess the effects of media frame valence and substance on levels on these attitudinal measures.

III.d. Media Effects Research

This study sought to examine whether "...the content of media messages...might have a positive or negative effect on individuals' political attitudes or civic engagement" (Leighly, p. 166). Therefore, this study was one of effects. The capacity of the media to persuade, intentionally or unintentionally, has long been of great debate (Woodward & Denton, 2004). Those who believe that the media have little or no ability to change the attitudes, beliefs or values of citizens fall under the limited effects model. On the other hand, scholars that argue the media does impact citizens in these ways may be classified as believers of the significant effects model.

At the turn of the twentieth century, public relations became increasingly prominent. Practitioners believed in a "hypodermic needle," "magic bullet" or transmission model of communication effects, whereby audiences would process messages exactly as intended by the company or the government (Scheufele, 1999).

The notion that the media has minimal effects, as the model was originally called, came out of studies done by Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) and Klapper (1960). Klapper (1960) believed that media were more likely to reinforce existing attitudes than change them. As Woodward and Denton (2004) wrote, "In a nutshell, the (limited effects) theory hold(s) that even apparently fluent and effective messages will usually produce only limited effects in their intended receivers" (p. 15). This is widely agreed upon across both models in terms of "core political attitudes,"(p. 325) especially party identification.

Countering this notion, Woodward and Denton (2004) argued that even if experimental effects are minimal, when these effects are generalized to the overall population, the impact could be dramatic. The "6 percent rule" is as follows. "If only 6 percent of all buyers of a product or voters on election day chose other options, enormous change would result" (p. 15).

Purvis (2001) indicated two reasons why the limited effects model founded in the 1940s has lost favor with some. "...They were focused on the direct effects on voter

behavior rather than broad and more indirect impact, including agenda setting. And, of course, those studies predated the rise of television and its great influence” (p. 77).

Another reason for the resurgence of media effects research is the work of Elizabeth Noelle-Newmann. Her book, “Spiral of Silence,” and article, “Return to the Concept of Powerful Mass Media,” were highly influential. By combining multiple research methods, she was able to develop a theory of public opinion that highlighted the impact of the media. This, along with McCombs and Shaw’s (1972) agenda setting study signified a cognitive revolution and served to legitimize social science research on the role and effects of the media.

Media effects research is argued to be in the stage of “social constructivism” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105). He stated that while the media may impact the public agenda, the impact they have is mediated by interpersonal communication. Zaller (1996) argued that while self-reported attitude change may be difficult to detect or measure reliably, researchers have found reliable ways to measure changes in issue and attribute salience, namely through agenda setting, priming, and framing studies.

Furthermore, the incredible amount of money spent on political campaigns, particularly in the area of advertising, indicates that those who put theory into practice certainly have found evidence for media effects. Political advertising has been shown to have significant effects (Kaid, 2002; Tedesco, 2002). This study assumes that with proper controls, experimental research can identify media effects.

IV. Research Questions

Based on this review of literature, this experiment seeks to identify the effects of frame valence and frame substance on trust, cynicism, and political information efficacy. This study is consistent with many others (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2004a; de Vreese, 2004b; de Vreese, 2006; Iyengar, 1991; Kellstedt, 2000; Nelson, 1997a; Nelson et al., 1997b; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Shah et al., 1996) that argue that exposure to media frames may influence audience interpretations and attitudes. Based on contradictory results regarding the impact of negativity and ambiguity on information processing and frame effects, this study will not hypothesize as to the effects of frame valence or substance. Therefore, the following research questions were asked:

RQ1: Do differences in frame valence exposure produce statistically significant differences in levels of trust?

RQ2: Do differences in frame substance exposure produce statistically significant differences in levels of trust?

RQ3: Is there a relationship or interaction between frame substance, frame valence and level of trust?

RQ4: Do differences in frame valence exposure produce statistically significant differences in levels of cynicism?

RQ5: Do differences in frame substance exposure produce statistically significant differences in levels of cynicism?

RQ6: Is there a relationship or interaction between frame substance, frame valence and level of cynicism?

RQ7: Do differences in frame valence exposure produce statistically significant differences in levels of political information efficacy?

RQ8: Do differences in frame substance exposure produce statistically significant differences in levels of political information efficacy?

RQ9: Is there a relationship or interaction between frame substance, frame valence and level of political information efficacy?

Next, this study sought to identify the relationship between the attitudinal measures of cynicism, trust, and political information efficacy. Therefore, the following research question was asked:

RQ10: Is there evidence that trust, cynicism, and political information efficacy are correlated?

Next, this research sought to identify predictors of political engagement.

RQ11: Which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) are the strongest predictors of respondents' perceived importance of political engagement in young voters?

Finally, this research sought to examine whether frame valence or substance will affect the way respondents perceive young voters past and future voting behavior. Therefore, the following research questions were asked:

RQ12: Which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) had the strongest affect on respondents' perceived importance of young voters in the 2004 election?

RQ13: Which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) had the strongest affect on respondents' interest in the 2006 election?

RQ14: Which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) had the strongest affect on respondents' perceived importance of young voters in the 2008 election?

V. Research Methodology

V.a. Sample

Participants were recruited from a University in Virginia, via a departmental research pool. Any student at the University was eligible to participate, however the announcement of the opportunity was made only at the discretion of faculty. A statement was written and served as the faculty's announcement of the research opportunity. Students not interested in participating in this research had alternative opportunities made available to them at the discretion of their faculty. Any attempt at participation resulted in the reception of credit for completion. The method for randomization of the sample is described in the section on data collection.

This study was administered approximately two weeks before the 2006 midterm elections. In the state of Virginia, two candidates (Democrat and challenger Jim Webb and Republican, incumbent, George Allen) campaigned in what was an election of national interest. According to a poll conducted by Rasmussen Reports on October 2nd, 2006, 49% of likely voters intended to cast a ballot for George Allen, compared to 43% for Jim Webb (Rasmussen, 2004). The percentage of eligible young people in Virginia who voted in 2004 decreased by five percent from 2000, ranking the state 44th nationally, according to Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE). (Circle, 2006a).

V.b. Stimuli

This study employed the use of six distinct stimuli in the form of newspaper articles, representing the following combinations of news frames about youth turnout in the 2004 election: (One) Substantive/Positive, (Two) Substantive/Neutral, (Three) Substantive/Negative, (Four) Ambiguous/Positive, (Five) Ambiguous/Neutral, and (Six) Ambiguous/Negative.

The valence and level of substance in the articles were consistent, established, and reinforced throughout each article, from headline to closing sentence. The valence and substance of each article were clearly differentiated, so that manipulated news frames contained valid constructions of these concepts. Construction of the stimuli consisted of multiple drafts, with considerable time dedicated to overall content, each sentence and specific word choice. The stimuli contained overt distinctions in terms of valence and

substance in their manifest content and remained credible news stories. This section details how the stimuli were manipulated and controlled, while remaining credible. (See appendixes B through G.)

V.c. Variable Consistency

Across all stimuli several things remained constant. All stimuli used a WashingtonPost.com article as its news source. *The Washington Post* is nationally-recognized and respected as a news organization. Online news is something familiar to most college students. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, (Pew, 2005), by the end of 2005, 67% of people between the age of 18 and 29 used the Internet to “get news.” This percentage includes people not enrolled in college, therefore 67% may be a conservative estimate.

The same issues were embedded within each article: education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment. These issues were selected because they are, in fact, the issues reported to be of greatest importance to youth, according to Young Voter Strategies (Young Voter Strategies, 2006). The survey by Young Voter Strategies was conducted at the end of September, 2006, and served as very relevant data.

Each article used the same statistics, real data provided by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). Each article had the same advertisements, one for travel and the other for shoes. These were pulled directly from the Washingtonpost.com homepage. The fonts and layout of the articles were modeled directly after the styles used by *The Washington Post*.

Also, no matter the valence or substance, each article used the same sources for information. In case a respondent wanted to verify the existence of a person or group located in the story, all such items were based on real entities. These included Hans Reimer, Rock the Vote’s president, Matt Presson, a study from Virginia Commonwealth University with a page on Facebook, and Peter Baker a writer for *The Washington Post*.

Internal validity is of primary concern to researchers looking to prove causality in experimental research. In order for an experiment to have internal validity, only the manipulated variables can change from each group to the next. It is therefore highly unlikely that some other independent variable influenced the dependent variable. By

maintaining consistency outside of the manipulated variables, this study seeks to identify what effects exposure to news frames has on respondent's attitudes.

V.d. Variable Manipulation

The manipulated variables were based on the understanding that a frame involves the way news stories are packaged and presented. Only those elements essential to the overall valence and substance of the article, or relation to the youth vote, were changed. In keeping with previous research (de Vreese, 2004a) there was no change to "core news facts" (p. 37).

Overall, substantive articles had greater detail, more contextual information, supporting material and definitive language. Ambiguous articles lacked each of these elements. There were three levels of frame valence: positive, negative, neutral. Neutral framing was operationalized as being objective, and absent of valence. Therefore, the stimuli varied in terms of keywords, valence, level of substance and other language choices.

The articles were broken down into six distinct sections: Headline, prognostic frame, data about the 2004 turnout, mobilization group efforts, issues, and youth use of the Internet.

V.d.i. Headline

Beginning with the headline, each article immediately established the proper valence for the article. Headlines on positively framed articles stated, "Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to Increase in 2006." The headlines on the negatively framed articles read, "Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to Decrease in 2006." The substantive/neutral headline stated, "Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to be Constant in 2006." Constant" was chosen over words such as "stable" or "unchanged" because it reflects the proper degree of neutrality. The ambiguous/neutral headline stated, "Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated in 2006."

V.d.ii. Prognostic Frame

The first two sentences of every article were constructed using a prognostic frame, with the intention of introducing the respondent to the context of the article. For instance, the substantive/positive and ambiguous articles began with the following sentence. "Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a

larger turnout among young voters.” This is a clearly positive statement, compared with the negatively framed articles, which stated, “Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a smaller turnout among young voters.” The substantive/neutral article used the word “consistent” to describe the anticipated turnout, while the ambiguous/neutral article stated only, “...political analysts anticipate turnout among young voters.”

The second sentence continued to use the prognostic frame. The positively framed articles read, “Based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), their optimism about 2006 appears justified.” The negatively framed articles substituted the word “pessimism” for “optimism.” The substantive/neutral article used the word “prediction.” The ambiguous/neutral article stated, “These predictions are based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).”

The body of the article was constructed using a diagnostic frame, using reasons for the level of turnout as evidence of the diagnosis. The diagnosis was based on the same four topics in each article: data about the 2004 turnout, mobilization group efforts, issues, and youth Internet use.

V.d.iii. Data about the 2004 Turnout

The diagnostic frame offered an explanation of what occurred in 2004 as well as the effects. As mentioned earlier, the 2004 youth voter turnout could be framed in either a positive, negative, or neutral light. The second paragraph of each article dealt with the turnout in 2004, using the same statistics. Things that changed and this make each article clearly valenced are the order given to the statistics, and the terminology used. Therefore, the articles did not vary in the information used, only in how it was framed. For instance, the second paragraph of the substantive/positive article stated:

Young voters accounted for 17% of the total vote in 2004, as consistent with 2000. But the total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted rose considerably by 4.3 million ballots. In addition, CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004, a noteworthy increase from 40% in 2000. This upsurge marked a

level of political participation from this age group not seen in over a decade, and numerous mobilization efforts are considered key reasons for this increase.

The substantive/negative article provided a different perspective:

Young voters accounted for only 17% of the total vote in 2004, as consistent with 2000. And the total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted only rose by 4.3 million ballots. In addition, CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004, a slight increase from 40% in 2000. This turnout marked a continued static level of political participation from this age group, typical of turnout over the last decade. Despite numerous mobilization efforts, however, there was no increase in the percentage of young citizens voting in the overall electorate.

The neutral articles simply provided the statistics for the reader, with no value associated with them. To differentiate the levels of substance in this paragraph, the ambiguous articles did not compare any of the information from 2004 to the year 2000. Thus, they left out context and meaning found in the substantive articles.

V.d.iv. Mobilization Group Efforts

The third and fourth paragraphs of the articles dealt with the role of mobilization groups. The first sentence of the third paragraph of every article was the same: “One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote.”

The substantive/positive article followed with this statement: “Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the increase in young voter participation to several factors. These factors Reimer asserts include the tight, negative campaign between Bush and Kerry, the emphasis on issues relevant to young people, and numerous, well-organized mobilization efforts.” In the substantive/negative stimulus, Reimer attributed the “decrease” to “the tight, negative campaign between Bush and Kerry, the lack of emphasis on issues relevant to young people, and numerous, inconsistent mobilization efforts.” The substantive/neutral article read, “the tight, negative campaign between Bush and Kerry, the emphasis on issues, and numerous mobilization efforts.” The fact that the campaign was tight and negative was kept consistent because it is factually accurate and does not directly impact the way the youth turnout is being framed.

To frame this part of the article ambiguously, the third paragraph stated only, “Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the increase/decrease in young voter participation to

several factors.” The ambiguous neutral article’s third paragraph read, “Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the level of young voter participation to several factors.” The ambiguous articles did not elaborate on the reasons for the level of turnout.

After that, each article contained a quote from Reimer regarding his attitude about the future. Positive framing of this quote stated, “I’m optimistic, Reimer said, “and our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain strong in 2006.” Framed negatively, this quote read, “I’m optimistic, Reimer said, “but our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain a challenge in 2006.” By including the phrase “I’m optimistic” even in the negative stimuli, this read like a credible and honest statement from someone at the head of an organization, while still framing their effort negatively.

The substantive/neutral framing of this quote was, “I’m optimistic, Reimer said. “Our ability to increase the youth turnout will a goal in 2006.” Ambiguous/neutral framing of Reimer’s quote was simply, “Our ability to impact the youth turnout will remain a goal in 2006.” “relevant/irrelevant” and “inconsistent/well organized.” The ambiguously framed articles only said that Reimer attributed the turnout to “various factors.”

V.d.v. Issues

The fifth part of each article dealt with findings about issues relevant to youth reported in a recent poll by Young Voter Strategies (Young Voter Strategies, 2006). It was divided into two paragraphs. The first statement in the first paragraph on issues started the same for each article: “A recent survey conducted by The George Washington University’s Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates...” The positively framed articles ended this sentence with “the increase in young voter political engagement is issue driven.” The negatively framed articles ended the sentence by saying, “the low level of young voter political engagement is due to apathy towards the issues.” Neutral framing ended with, “the level of young voter political engagement is due to the issues.” The first paragraph about issues ended the same way in each article: “According to the survey, the issues that are motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment.”

The second paragraph in the section on issues was only present in the substantive articles. The issues were not changed in terms of valence, because that is not central to this thesis. All of the substantive articles framed the issues relevant to youth this way:

“For education, the rising cost of college and availability of student loans were most frequently mentioned. With regard to the economy, worries about a volatile job market and outsourcing were expressed. When mentioned the Iraq War, respondents highlighted the ongoing U.S. presence in the Iraq and global perception of U.S. foreign policy. The focus on national security was specifically on the recent and continuing terrorist threats and border security. At the forefront of environmental issues were the effects of global warming and energy sustainability.”

V.d.vi. Youth Use of the Internet

The sixth and final part of each article was a story about a young person in college. It was divided into three parts: Youth attitudes and introduction to student, Facebook quote, and final thought. The first paragraph started by making another clearly valenced statement. Positive framing of youth attitudes stated, “It is clear that young citizens are active, informed, and motivated about 2006.” Framed negatively, this read, “It is of concern that young citizens are inactive, uninformed, and not motivated about 2006.” In the neutral conditions, the statement was only, “Young citizens continue to be appealed to in 2006.”

The reader was then introduced to Matt Presson, who was either “attempting” to get his peers to “just” vote (negative), or “using” the Internet to get his peers to “vote.” (positive and neutral).

The substantive articles then included a quote directly from Matt Presson’s Facebook group. It was not manipulated for valence. The quote read: “Conservative, Liberal, Moderate, Mixed...no matter how you feel about the issues of our society, it's entirely up to each one of us to stand up and be counted as an active member of our own national, state, and local communities.” The ambiguous articles did not contain this quote. Finally, the author of the article made a valenced statement about the student’s Internet group. In the substantive/positive condition, it read, “This type of e-mobilization effort exemplifies the way young citizens like Presson are using the Internet to

communicate and organize at the grassroots level.” In both of the negative stimuli, the effort was framed as ‘superficial.’ In the neutral versions, the effort was “representative.”

V.e. Instrument

This study measured respondents’ cognitive and affective change scores, as well as self-reported behavioral measures. The questions in the instrument provided the data needed to answer the research questions asked.

Data about political information efficacy, cynicism and trust was collected through the use of Likert-type scales. Most of the questions on the instrument were derived from questionnaires used in National Election Studies over the past half century. Items pertaining to political information efficacy were extracted from the work of Kaid, Tedesco, and McKinney (2007, in press). As mentioned earlier, this scale combines four elements designed to measure cynicism, four to measure trust, and four to measure efficacy. To answer this study’s research questions, multiple statistical procedures were run to assess the relationship between these variables.

Both pre- and post-tests contained all of the attitudinal measures. The pre-test also had several questions not directly related to the study. These were included to temper any priming effect that taking the pre-test might have on respondents. The post-test also had a number of open-ended questions not seen on the pre-test. These will be used to provide deeper understanding of how the participants respond to the stimuli, and to give specific examples of any change in attitude. Questions in the pre-test regarding media framing of youth voting and Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) initiatives were modified in the post-test to understand how the article in particular framed these items.

Specific steps were taken to ensure the validity of the scales. For instance, the questions designed to assess the study’s three main dependent variables were arranged such that there are no ordering effects. The first two questions assessed trust, the second set cynicism, and the third set political information efficacy. This organizational pattern repeated for the final six questions in that part of the survey.

To answer the research questions about changes in vote intention and interest in the campaign, the study used identical five point Likert scale measures in the pre- and post-tests. (Appendix A).

V.f. Data Collection

A pre-/post-test design was employed. In order to receive access to the experiment, participants submitted their e-mail addresses via a departmental research pool. The investigator randomly assigned participants to one of six experimental conditions. At no time was the investigator able to link the responses to the questionnaires to a specific person, maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. The investigators aimed to have at least thirty people in each experimental group, for a total sample of around 210. To administer the survey, this study utilized Survey Monkey, an online research tool.

To begin, participants directed their Web browser to the survey address located in their e-mail. The pre-test took approximately thirty minutes to complete. Following that, each of the six experimental groups was asked to read a short article. This took approximately ten minutes. Finally, a post-test was administered. This took an additional twenty minutes. The total expected time for participation was estimated at one hour. To prove causality, an experiment must have temporal precedence, covariation of the cause and effect, and the absence of other possible explanations. In a multiple-group design, the greatest threats to internal validity are selection bias and selection threat. This study avoided these pitfalls by randomly assigning participants to one of six experimental groups. This study design helped remove opportunities for social threats to internal validity. The participants were not in the presence of the researchers during the experiment, eliminating experimenter bias or the need to “give the experimenter what he/she wants.”

This experiment was externally valid to the extent that the sample was representative of the population in question, college-age students. Also, this study addressed the problem of external validity of lab research by allowing the subjects to participate at their leisure, at a location of their choosing.

VI. Results

This study sought to determine whether the frame valence and/or level of frame substance of a news article about youth voting would influence the attitudes of young people. Research Question 1 (RQ1) asked whether exposure to different levels of frame valence would produce statistically significant changes in trust scores. To answer this, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run to compare the level of valence (positive, negative, neutral), with mean trust scores.

The mean trust scores ranged from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most trustful. Table 1 shows the mean trust scores for each of the three levels of frame valence in the pre- and post-test. The mean trust scores were not significantly different in the pre-test, $F(2,234)=.206, p=.804$, which indicates that the randomization procedure was effective. Trust increased significantly in respondents exposed to the negatively valenced article, $t(80)=2.80, p=.006$. Results for RQ1, however, indicate that between groups exposed to different frame valences, changes in trust scores were not found to differ significantly $F(2,234)=.393, p=.675$.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) asked whether the level of frame substance in the news article would affect changes in respondent's trust scores. To answer this, a t-test was performed to compare the level of substance (substantive, ambiguous), with mean trust scores. Table 1 shows the mean trust scores for respondents in both the substantive and ambiguous conditions in the pre- and post-test. Unexpectedly, pre-test trust scores between these two groups were significantly different, $t(235)=2.263, p=.025$. In the post-test, trust scores were also significantly different between these groups, $t(235)=2.314, p=.022$. Those exposed to the substantively framed article showed an increase in trust of .1012, a statistically significant change, $t(120)=2.474, p=.015$, while those exposed to the ambiguously framed article increased .0884, which was also significant, $t(115)=2.252, p=.026$. However, a t-test revealed that the increase in trust between these two groups was not significantly different, $t(235)=.227, p=.821$. Results for RQ2 indicate that frame substance alone did not significantly affect changes in trust scores.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Research Question 3 (RQ3) asked whether there was a relationship or interaction between frame valence, amount of substance in the news article, and the respondent's change in trust scores. An ANOVA was performed to compare pre- and post-test mean trust scores and change in trust scores for each of the six experimental conditions.

Table 2 shows the mean pre- and post-test trust scores for respondents in each condition. As expected due to randomization, there was no significant difference between the mean pre-test trust scores in the experimental conditions, $F(5,231)=1.086, p=.369$. The mean trust score for all respondents was 2.335 in the pre-test and 2.43 in the post-test. Mean trust scores increased a small amount regardless of experimental condition, except for the substantive/neutral condition, where mean scores decreased $-.0058$. Trust increased significantly in the substantive/negative condition, $t(41)=2.574, p=.014$, and the ambiguous/neutral condition, $t(40)=2.364, p=.023$. However, results for RQ3 indicate that no significant difference was found in the amount of change in trust scores between all six experimental conditions $F(5,231) = 1.408, p=.222$.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Research Question 4 (RQ4) asked whether exposure to different levels of frame valence would produce statistically significant changes in cynicism scores. To answer this, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare the level of valence (positive, negative, neutral), with mean cynicism scores.

The mean cynicism scores ranged from 1 to 5, with 5 representing the highest level of cynicism. Table 3 shows the mean cynicism scores for each of the three levels of frame valence in the pre- and post-test. As anticipated, an ANOVA of mean pre-test cynicism scores revealed no statistically significant differences between these groups $F(2,234)=2.60, p=.772$. Cynicism increased significantly in those exposed to the negatively framed article, $t(80)=9.113, p\leq.001$, the neutral framed article, $t(83)=7.978, p\leq.001$, and the positively framed article, $t(71)=7.793, p\leq.001$. However, results for RQ4 indicate that between groups exposed to different frame valences, changes in cynicism scores were not found to be differ significantly, $F(2,234)=.209, p=.811$.

Research Question 5 (RQ5) asked whether the level of frame substance in the news article would affect changes in respondent's cynicism score. To answer this, a t-test was performed to compare the level of substance (substantive, ambiguous), with mean cynicism scores. Table 3 shows the mean cynicism scores for respondents in both the substantive and ambiguous conditions in the pre-and post-test. Pre-test cynicism scores were not found to be significantly different, $t(235)=.759, p=.448$. Those exposed to the substantively framed article showed a statistically significant increase in cynicism, $t(120)=10.124, p\leq.001$, while those exposed to the ambiguously framed article also showed a significant increase in cynicism, $t(115)=10.36, p\leq.001$. However, results for RQ5 indicate that between those exposed to different levels of frame substance, changes in cynicism scores were not found to differ in a statistically significant way, $t(235)=.957, p=.339$.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Research Question 6 (RQ6) asked whether there was a relationship or interaction between frame valence, amount of substance in the news article, and the change in a respondent's cynicism score. An ANOVA was performed to compare pre- and post-test mean cynicism scores and change in cynicism scores for each of the six experimental conditions.

Table 4 shows the mean pre- and post-test cynicism scores for respondents in each condition. As expected due to randomization, there was no significant difference between the mean pre-test trust scores in the experimental conditions, $F(5,231)=.870, p=.502$. The mean cynicism score for all respondents was 2.464 in the pre-test and 2.982 in the post-test. Mean cynicism scores increased regardless of experimental condition. The mean cynicism scores increased significantly in all conditions: the ambiguous/neutral condition, $t(40)=8.492, p\leq.001$, the ambiguous/negative condition, $t(40)=4.889, p\leq.001$, the ambiguous/positive condition, $t(35)=5.236, p\leq.001$, the substantive/neutral condition, $t(42)=4.426, p\leq.001$, the substantive/negative condition, $t(41)=8.246, p\leq.001$, and the substantive/positive condition, $t(35)=5.717, p\leq.001$. However, results for RQ3 indicate that while there was an increase in cynicism overall, there was no significant difference

in the amount of change in cynicism scores between experimental conditions
 $F(5,231)=1.253, p=.285$.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Research Question 7 (RQ7) asked whether exposure to different levels of frame valence would produce statistically significant changes in political information efficacy (PIE) scores. To answer this, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare the level of valence (positive, negative, neutral), with mean PIE scores.

The mean PIE scores ranged from 1 to 5, with 5 representing the highest level of PIE. Table 5 shows the mean PIE scores for each of the three levels of frame valence in the pre- and post-test. As expected from random assignment, the mean PIE scores were not significantly different in the pre-test, $F(2,234)=.151, p=.860$. There was no significant change in PIE score as a result of exposure to any of the frame valences. Results for RQ7 indicate that between groups exposed to different frame valences, changes in PIE scores were not found to be significantly different, $F(2,234)=.393, p=.675$.

Research Question 8 (RQ8) asked whether the level of frame substance in the news article would affect changes in respondent's PIE score. To answer this, a t-test was performed to compare the level of substance (substantive, ambiguous), with mean PIE scores. Table 5 shows the mean PIE scores for respondents in both the substantive and ambiguous conditions in the pre- and post-test. Pre-test PIE scores between these two groups were not significantly different, $t(235)=.165, p=.869$. PIE scores increased significantly in the those exposed to the substantive frame, $t(120)=2.121, p=.036$. However, results for RQ8 revealed that the increase in trust between these two groups was not significantly different $t(235)=1.454, p=.147$.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

Research Question 9 (RQ9) asked whether there was a relationship or interaction between frame valence, amount of substance in the news article, and the respondent's

change in PIE score. An ANOVA was performed to compare pre- and post-test mean PIE scores and change in PIE scores for each of the six experimental conditions.

Table 6 shows the mean pre- and post-test PIE scores for respondents in each condition. As expected due to randomization, there was no significant difference between the mean pre-test PIE scores in the experimental conditions, $F(5,231)=1.71, p=.133$. The mean PIE score for all respondents was 2.878 in the pre-test and 2.909 in the post-test. Mean PIE scores did not change significantly in any of the experimental conditions. Respondents who were exposed to the ambiguous article scored lower on the post-test measure of PIE (-.0065), as did those in the ambiguous/negative experimental condition (-.0513). The greatest increase in mean PIE score occurred in those exposed to the substantive/positive article, an increase of .111. However, an ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference in the amount of change in PIE scores between all six experimental conditions $F(5,231)=.896, p=.485$.

[Insert Table 6 about here]

Tables 1 through 6 indicate the mean scores for each of the political attitudes by valence, substance, and condition. Statistically significant changes in attitude are noted. Table 7 contains the ANOVA and t-tests for each of the political attitudes. They are broken down by pre-test and change scores for valence, substance and experimental condition. The ANOVA reveal that the amounts of change in attitudes between levels of frame valence, frame substance, and experimental condition were not different in a statistically significant way.

[Insert Table 7 about here]

Research Question 10 (RQ10) asked if there was evidence that trust, cynicism, and political information efficacy are correlated. A Pearson's correlation was conducted in the pre-test, revealing that cynicism was negatively correlated with trust (-.365) and PIE (-.288). This correlation was significant at the $p \leq .001$ level. In the post-test, cynicism was more negatively correlated with trust (-.464) and less negatively associated with PIE (-.208). These results were also significant at the $p \leq .01$ level. Table 8 shows the ways in

which these attitudinal measures were correlated with each other in the pre- and post-test. Results for RQ10 indicate that, as assumed, cynicism is negatively correlated with feelings of trust and political information efficacy.

[Insert Table 8 about here]

Research Question 11 (RQ11) asked what factors (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) account for the variance in respondents' perceived importance of being politically engaged. Statistical regressions were computed for the eight measure of civic engagement in the post-test, using the factors listed above. Table 9 lists the significant predictors of each measure of political engagement. The first measure of civic engagement was the perceived importance of "attending political meetings or rallies to get first-hand political information." One factor, post-test level of political information efficacy (PIE) accounted for roughly 26% of the variance ($R^2 = .066$). PIE was also the only significant predictor of the second measure of political engagement, "gather political information from TV news or newspapers", amounting to 23% of the variance ($R^2 = .051$). PIE also served as a predictor for 27% of the variance in the third measure, "express their opinions by writing or phoning representatives ($R^2 = .07$).

"Listen to important views expressed on talk radio or call-in television programs" was the fourth measure of political engagement, whose perceived importance was predictable 15% of the time based on one's level of trust ($R^2 = .023$). PIE accounted for 16% of the variance in the fifth measure, "demonstrate their support for candidates by displaying stickers, posters, buttons, etc" ($R^2 = .026$), as well as 18% of the variance in the statement, "talking with friends and associates about politics" ($R^2 = .034$).

When combined with a low level of cynicism, PIE was found to account for 27% of the variance in responses to the perceived importance of young people going to "visit websites for information about volunteering in a campaign" ($R^2 = .063$). Finally, lower cynicism accounts for 23% of the variance in respondents' perceived importance of "voting" ($R^2 = .053$). Results for RQ11 indicate that high levels of PIE are strong predictors of most measures of political engagement. High levels of trust affected

respondent's perceived importance of listening to important views, while low levels of cynicism predict an increase in the perceived importance of visiting websites and voting.

[Insert Table 9 about here]

Research Question 12 (RQ12) asked which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) had the strongest affect on respondents' perceived importance of young voters in the 2004 election. Statistical regressions were computed using the variables listed above. The respondents' level of cynicism in the pre-test accounted for 28% of the variance in perceived importance of young citizens in the 2004 election ($R^2 = .079$), while in the post-test, cynicism accounted for 37% of the variance ($R^2 = .139$). Table 10 lists the significant predictors for how important young people were perceived by respondents. Results for RQ12 indicate that cynicism negatively predicted perceived importance of young voters.

[Insert Table 10 about here]

Research Question 13 (RQ13) asked which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) had the strongest affect on respondents' interest in the 2006 election. In the pre-test, the factors of PIE and cynicism accounted for 58% of the variance in interest in the 2006 campaign ($R^2 = .339$). In the post-test, PIE score and trust score combined to account for 62% of the variance in interest in the campaign ($R^2 = .382$). Table 11 lists the significant predictors for how interested respondents claimed to be in the campaign. Results for RQ13 show that political information efficacy and trust are key determinants of interest in a campaign.

[Insert Table 11 about here]

Research Question 14 (RQ14) asked which variables (frame substance, frame valence, trust, cynicism, political information efficacy) had the strongest affect on respondents' perceived importance of young voters in the 2008 election. Cynicism

accounted for 32% of the variance in this score in the pre-test ($R^2 = .106$), and 36% of the variance in post-test perceptions of young people's potential importance ($R^2 = .128$).

Table 12 lists the significant predictors for how important young people were predicted to be in 2008 by respondents.

[Insert Table 12 about here]

VII. Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore whether frame valence or amount of frame substance in a news story about past young voter turnout would affect young people's political attitudes. Results indicated that while the attitudes of respondents in some of the conditions changed significantly, despite how the turnout was framed, the amount of change between groups was not significant..

The first three research questions were concerned with how trust would be affected by frame valence or frame substance. Respondents' levels of trust were low overall, averaging 2.335 out of 5 in the pre-test, and changes in trust were not significantly different between groups exposed to different levels of frame valence or substance. It is perhaps not surprising that respondents feelings about the trustworthiness of politicians and government in general was not affected by these frames. The news articles did not focus on issues of voter trust or on the trustworthiness of politicians, but rather the strength and impact of the youth vote. What was surprising, however, was that those exposed to the negative frame showed a statistically significant increase in trust scores (.1296). In addition, the mean trust score in both the substantive/negative and ambiguous/neutral conditions increased significantly, (.1786, and .1707, respectively).

This paradoxical finding may be explained by the nature of the questions that make up the trust score. For instance, strongly agreeing to the statement, "One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing," may be a sign of disengagement as much as it is a sign of trust. That statement could be interpreted as "Leaving politics to politicians."

The second set of research questions focused on whether cynicism would be affected by exposure to different frame valences or level of substance. Respondents reported mid to low levels of cynicism in the pre-test, (2.464 out of 5), a surprising finding given the consistency with which this demographic is described as a cynical generation in the literature. Though not hypothesized, the researchers did assume that positively framed stories would equate with lower cynicism and vice versa. However, despite frame valence or level of frame substance, cynicism scores rose in this experiment, often significantly. Mean cynicism scores changed much more than scores for trust or PIE. It may be that cynicism as an attitudinal measure is more easily triggered

and subsequently increased. While respondents reported lower than anticipated cynicism scores in the pre-test, exposure to any form of political communication seems to trigger cynicism.

Young people, especially college students, tend to vote for members of the Democratic Party over the Republican Party. According to CIRCLE, young people aged 18 to 24 supported John Kerry 56% of the time, as opposed to 43% for George W. Bush (CIRCLE, 2004). It may be that no matter how many positive details respondents read about the youth voter turnout in 2004 they would consider the outcome of the campaign, the re-election of George W. Bush, as a failure, and thus feel cynical and disenfranchised.

The focus of the third set of research questions was whether political information efficacy would be affected by exposure to different frame valences and levels of substance. While not hypothesized, the researchers did assume that respondents provided with more information and detail would exhibit higher levels of PIE. In fact, those exposed to the substantively framed article did show a statistically significant increase in PIE. In addition, PIE increased the most in the substantive/positive group (.1111) and decreased the most in the ambiguous/negative group (-.0513). Though the difference in change of PIE scores between experimental groups was not statistically significant, this does show a trend that may be more evident with repeated exposures and more sophisticated analysis.

Research Question 10 sought to identify the extent to which the attitudinal measures were correlated. Not surprisingly, cynicism had a strong negative correlation with PIE and trust. The strongest correlations were found between pre- and post-test analysis of the same measure. This shows that for the most part, the political attitudes of respondents were strong enough to withstand exposure to the news stories. Over the short term, after exposure to one article, political attitudes in young people were relatively stable.

The measures of civic engagement in Research Question 11 also revealed interesting results. Political information efficacy accounted for a large percentage of the variance of most of these measures. Perceived importance of visiting websites and voting, two of the foci of the news articles, were not directly predictable based on whether respondents were exposed to different frame valences or level of substance. Instead,

respondents' post-test level of PIE and cynicism accounted for the largest percentage of variance. Once again, the political attitudes of young people were shown to be strong, resilient, and predictive.

Research Questions 12 through 14 asked respondents for their perceptions about past, current and future campaigns. Before and after reading the articles about the 2004 youth vote, respondents were asked how important they thought young people were in the last election. The one variable that predicted the importance they bestowed young people was cynicism. In addition, looking ahead to the next Presidential Election in 2008, the respondent's level of cynicism accounted for roughly one third of the variance in perceived prospective importance. This study found that cynicism is a powerful predictor of political perceptions of past and future performances.

With regard to the 2006 campaign, two variables, both attitudinal measures, indicated to a large degree how interested respondents would be. In the pre-test, PIE and cynicism combined to account for over half of the variance in mean scores for interest. A high level of PIE and a low level of cynicism were found to be the predictive of higher interest in the campaign. In the post-test, PIE, when combined with trust accounted for over 60% of the variance. Interestingly, as findings from Research Question 10 indicated, PIE and trust scores were not strongly correlated. However, after engaging with the news article, PIE in combination with trust accounted for a large percent of the variance. One's level of political information efficacy is a key determinant of interest in campaigns, an interest made even stronger by low levels of cynicism or high levels of trust.

One possible explanation for these findings may be that young people are highly cynical of the news media, particularly traditional news. Future replications of this type of study would benefit by increasing the number of exposures to news articles per respondent and varying the medium within which the frames are contained. For instance, would exposure to a blog or televised news segment geared towards youth have greater influence? In other words, did using the *Washington Post* have any impact? Researchers may find that news cynicism is a mediating factor in framing effects studies.

Researchers were also concerned that the article's headline may have acted as a prime for some respondents. From the comments given on the post-test, the researchers were able to determine that the headline was only one of the things that the respondents

remembered most clearly. A cursory review of the comments left by respondents to open-ended questions indicates that in the substantive/positive condition, roughly 60% mentioned the overall increase, roughly 35% of the respondents mentioned something about issues, 20% mentioned GOTV groups and 15% mentioned the Internet. In the ambiguous/positive group, 77% mentioned overall increase, 22% mentioned issues, 22% mentioned groups and 30% mentioned Internet. This indicates that the level of substance in the article did impact what information was retained by the respondents.

However, from looking at the responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire, there is some evidence that pre-existing attitudes affect the strength of media frames. For instance, in the substantive/positive condition, the news article was deliberately designed to contain details and context, while delivering a positive message. Surprisingly, some of the respondents did not interpret the article as was intended. When asked how this article covered young voters, one respondent said, "Very vaguely, they only interviewed one guy," while another wrote, "Not very well. It wasn't specific enough." While the majority of respondents did tend to at least see the article as framing youth turnout positively, personal bias towards news coverage seems to have affected the degree to which some respondents processed this information.

In support of the findings of Taylor (1991), respondents exposed to neutral content seemed to recall it more positively than negatively. For instance, in the ambiguous/neutral condition, one respondent wrote, "It covered them really good, because it gave background information, how many voted in 2004 and what actual campaigns are going on and how they are different to older voters." For this respondent, even the ambiguous frame was seen as informative. Frame substance, then, may be relative to personal expertise or familiarity with a subject.

Even when a neutral valence and substantive frame are deliberately created, some young people feel that news is slanted, has a specific valence and is not covered with enough detail. The effects of negativity and ambiguity, if any, remain unclear. Young people may perceive negativity and ambiguity even when it is not intended to be present. While significant framing effects have been found before, the fact that such sensitive methodologies are necessary to locate them seems to indicate that audience frames are more resilient than previously thought.

VII.a. Limitations

This study took place in a naturalistic setting, without the presence of the researchers. The internal validity of the study may be affected by relinquishing control in this way. For instance, while the total time taken to complete the questionnaire was available, the researchers were unable to determine how long each respondent spent reading the article. Thus, exposure time may have varied considerably. On the other hand, the external validity of the study may be stronger because participants accessed the experiment at their leisure, a more probable setting. As a measure to check that the article had been read, respondents were asked to identify the percentage of young people who voted in 2004, (49%), a key part of each article. Only respondents who identified the correct percentage or one of the other numbers stated in the article were included in the final analysis.

This study took place at one college, in one state, before one election. Clearly, it cannot be easily generalized to all colleges or states, and certainly not all elections. The fact that this was a relatively close race will impact the levels of interest in the campaign. In addition, asking young people to recall their perceptions of a campaign two years after the fact leaves a lot of room for error and/or bias. Similarly, there was no way to determine how the information contained in this one story resonated with other knowledge respondents may have had about the campaigns. This type of forced exposure to one stimulus is not a realistic model for how young people selectively access and attend to political information.

Finally, frame effects may be nullified in the competitive media environment or strengthened by repeated exposure to similarly framed information (Chong & Druckman, 2007). In addition, Scheufele (2004) argued that because the respondents in studies like this are only exposed to the stimuli once and asked immediately to complete a post-test questionnaire, they most likely do not process the information at more than a temporal level (Scheufele, 2004). He also argued that taking a pre-test before being exposed to frames may prime the audience's interpretations (Scheufele, 2004).

VII.b. Implications

Scholars and political practitioners continue to search for ways to frame effective messages aimed at mobilizing young people to vote. This study aimed to advance

political communication research by examining how news frame valence and level of frame substance affect political attitudes central to youth engagement. Despite the limitations mentioned, this study provided insights into the strength of attitudes towards politics in the face of different types of coverage of an issue. These political attitudes, as measured in this experiment, remained unfazed by exposure to negative or ambiguous frames. While frames may influence interpretation as was noted earlier, audiences “do not slavishly follow the framing of issues presented in the mass media.” Instead, as has been theorized, they “actively filter, sort, and reorganize information in personally meaningful ways in constructing an understanding of public issues” (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992, pp. 76-77).

This finding is important for mass media practitioners, political candidates, and mobilization groups, who are attempting to engage young citizens in the political process, particularly by voting. If journalists do deliberately incorporate frames in their news stories in order to encourage particular interpretations as Gandy (2001) argued, they may be engaging in a futile exercise. Young people have strong, resilient feelings regarding politics.

Concern about the negative coverage of youth voter turnout in 2004 by scholars and GOTV groups appears to be unfounded. People interested in getting young people to vote should not concern themselves with positive and negative messages about past turnouts, because they lack a mobilizing function. Speculation on past performance does not shape this group’s self-reported behavioral intentions and attitudinal measures.

In addition, when presented with information about the voting behavior of their demographic, young people will show an increase in cynicism, regardless of the tone and amount of coverage. Directing messages about turnout to young people may be counterproductive in this sense, unless it can be proven that increased cynicism acts as a mobilizing force.

VII.c. Future Research

There are a number of ways in which this research can be extended and improved upon. This thesis focused on young voters in one state. With a larger sample size comes the possibility of greater sensitivity in statistical measurement. In addition, research should focus on audience framing of news content, through the use of open-ended

questions, to obtain a clearer sense of what young people think about the way their age group has been portrayed in the media. By performing a content analysis of the manifest content in their responses, researchers may be able to tell just how strong the media frames were and what frames are most likely to be processed by young people.

This study found that political information efficacy was a strong predictor of interest in campaigns and in perceived importance of political engagement. Continued study of this concept as well as its relationship with other political attitudes is needed.

X. Conclusion:

The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) reported that 24 percent of people aged 18 to 29 voted in the 2006 midterm election, representing 13 percent of the total vote. This represented a small increase from 2002, when 21 percent of this age group voted, accounting for 11 percent of the total vote (CIRCLE, 2006a). While these numbers pale in comparison with turnout figures for 2004, a smaller percentage of all demographic groups typically vote in non-Presidential elections. What this experiment indicated, on a smaller scale, was the fact that past performances do not necessarily influence the future voting behavior of a particular demographic. This study found that young people's level of trust, cynicism, and political information efficacy are resilient and predictive of their political perceptions, even when exposed to coverage of past voter turnout among their age group framed positively, negatively, substantively, or ambiguously.

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XII. Appendixes

A. Pre-Post Questionnaire

Pretest

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study. To begin, you will be asked a series of questions. Please answer honestly and to the best of your ability.

1. How interested are you in politics?

Very interested 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Not interested at all

2. When you think about an ideal elected official, what qualities should he/she have?

3. How informed do you think you are about the 2006 campaign?

Very informed 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Very uninformed

4. How interested are you in the 2006 campaign?

Very interested 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Not interested at all

5. What do you think are the most important issues facing the country today? (list up to 5)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

6. For each of the issues you listed as the five most important facing our country, please describe how you feel about them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

7. If voting was like an exam you have to take at the end of the semester, what would you need to do to prepare for the voting/exam? What do you think you would need to know? How and where would you find out what you needed to know?

8. The following are some feelings about politics and politicians. For each one, please check whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly.

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

b. One never knows what politicians really think.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

c. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

d. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

e. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

f. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

g. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

h. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

i. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

j. One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

k. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

l. If a friend asked me about the 2006 election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

9. For each of the statements below, please circle whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly.

a. When I come across information about candidates or issues in the election, I find myself tying the information to ideas I had before.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

b. I try to keep track of the opinions my friends have about political candidates and issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

c. When I see or read a news story about an issue, I try to figure out if it is biased.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

d. When I hear news about politics, I try to figure out what is REALLY going on.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

e. News about people running for office makes me wonder how they might change things.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

f. When I join in political conversations, I find myself tying the arguments to ideas I already have.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

10. The next series of statements deal with specific election issues. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by circling the abbreviation that best reflects your opinion toward the statement. Again, the abbreviations stand for the following: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NO=No Opinion/Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|---|----|
| a. The 2004 Presidential election helped me to realize the importance of my vote. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| b. The U.S. needs new voting procedures to ensure that elections are fair. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| c. Politicians do not care about the 18 to 25-year-old voting age population. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| d. Because of the threat of terrorism, it is important for Americans to show their support for our democracy by voting in elections. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| e. Because of the threat of terrorism, I am more likely to follow political affairs as a sign of support for American democracy. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| f. Voting is an important symbolic gesture of my patriotism. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| g. I've become more politically interested since the war with Iraq started. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| h. Because of the threat of terrorism, I think it is more important to volunteer in civic or community affairs. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |

i. I am more likely to vote in 2006 because the US is at war. SA A NO D SD

j. The 2004 Presidential election outcome showed me
that no matter the young voter turnout, my vote doesn't really matter. SA A NO D SD

11. For the next set of statements, please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement by circling whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), have no opinion (NO), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

a. News organizations, such as newspapers and television news,
try to manipulate public opinion. SA A NO D SD

b. News organizations often fail to get all of the facts straight. SA A NO D SD

c. News organizations often don't deal fairly with all sides of
a political or social issue. SA A NO D SD

d. News organizations do a poor job of separating facts from opinions. SA A NO D SD

e. News organizations are concerned with the community's well-being. SA A NO D SD

f. News organizations watch out for my interests. SA A NO D SD

g. News organizations are concerned mainly about the public welfare. SA A NO D SD

12. Different people use different sources to get information about the politics. Listed below are several sources from which people may gather political information. Please indicate how much you use each of the sources below to obtain information about the 2006 election.

Local television news 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)

National television news 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., *360 with Anderson Cooper*, *Nightly News with Brian Williams*)

Television talk shows 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., *Meet the Press*, *Face the Nation*, *Crossfire*, *Equal Time*)

Television late night shows 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., Jay Leno, David Letterman, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, Conan O'Brien)

Morning television shows 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., *Good Morning America*, *Today*, *This Morning*, *Fox and Friends*)

Campus newspaper 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., *Collegiate Times*)

Newspapers 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., state or local newspaper, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*)

News magazines 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*)

Candidate websites 5 (a lot) 4 3 2 1 (rarely) 0 (never)
(e.g., state or local politician's website)

Political websites (e.g., moveon.org)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)
News websites (e.g., cnn.com, foxnews.com)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)
Blogs (e.g., dailykos.com, instapundit.com)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)
Social Networking Sites (e.g., Facebook, Myspace)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)
Radio news (e.g., local news on the radio, national news briefs given on the hour or half hour)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)
Political radio talk shows (e.g., Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, Jim Hightower, NPR)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)
Speaking with others (e.g., family, friends, co-workers)	5 (a lot)	4	3	2	1 (rarely)	0(never)

13. It is argued that the role of the media is to inform. Do you think that media do a good job about informing you about some of the political issues concerning young voters? Please explain your perspective.

Please respond to the following statements.

14. How do you describe the way media cover young voters?

15. How important do you feel young voters were in the 2004 campaign?

Very important 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Very unimportant

16. Please elaborate on your response.

17. Do you recall any of the voter initiative or mobilization “Get out the Vote” groups in the 2004 campaign? If yes, please name them.

_____ I do not recall any voter initiative, mobilization, or “Get out the Vote” groups

18. If yes, please describe efforts of the voter initiative or mobilization “Get out the Vote” groups.

19. How do you feel the media portrayed the voter initiative or mobilization "Get out the Vote" groups?

20. How do you feel the 2004 youth voter turnout impacted the outcome of the election?

21. How do you feel the media portrayed the final youth voter turnout in terms of its impact on the outcome of the election?

22. How often have you been exposed to media coverage of the 2006 campaign in the past week? (mark one)

A lot 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Rarely OR ____ Never

23. How often have you talked with other people about 2006 campaign in the past week? (mark one)

A lot 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Rarely OR ____ Never

24. For the next set of statements, please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement by circling whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), have no opinion (NO), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

It is important for young voters to:

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|---|----|
| a. Attend political meetings or rallies to get first-hand political information. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| b. Gather political information from TV news or newspapers | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| c. Express their opinions by writing or phoning representatives | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| d. Listen to important views expressed on talk radio or call-in television programs | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| e. Demonstrate their support for candidates by displaying stickers, posters, buttons, etc. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| f. Talking with their friends and associates about politics | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| g. Visit websites for information about volunteering in campaign | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| h. Vote | SA | A | NO | D | SD |

25. Are you registered to vote? (1) YES (2) NO

26. If you answered no to question 24, what is the primary reason you are not registered to vote?

I am registered to vote (skip this question)

Age

Unsure how to register

Out of state

No interest in this election

Will register before election day

Other (explain _____)

27. Have you voted before? (1) YES (2) NO

28. Do you intend to vote in the 2006 election? (1) YES (2) NO

29. Looking towards the next presidential election in 2008, how important do you feel young voters will be in the campaign?

Very important 5:____:____:____:____:____:1 Not important at all

Now we'd like to get a little information about you:

30. Please mark one: _____ male _____ female

31. Age _____

32. Which of the following best represents your ethnic background (circle one):

- (1) Asian or Pacific Islander (2) Non-Hispanic White (Caucasian)
 (3) African-American (4) Spanish or Hispanic origin
 (5) Multi-racial or mixed race (6) Native American
 (7) Other (name): _____

33. Which of the following best represents your political beliefs? Check ONLY ONE of the following choices.

- (a) _____ Democrat (b) _____ Republican (c) _____ Libertarian
 (d) _____ Green (e) _____ Independent (f) _____ Other (name): _____

34. Thinking of the party affiliation that you have just identified, what is the strength of your affiliation?

Strong:____:____:____:____:____:Weak

(INSERT STIMULUS HERE)

Post-Test

Earlier, you gave us some of your feelings about issues and politicians. We'd like to get your opinions again on these same items and a few different ones.

1. What do you think are the most important issues facing the country today? (list up to 5)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

2. For each of the issues you listed as the five most important facing our country, please describe how you feel about them.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

3. What information do you recall about the article?

4. Of course there are many ways of looking at the information presented in this article. If you had to explain this article to someone else, how would you describe it? Please try to describe all of the aspects that are important to you in understanding this information.

5. In your opinion, what are the most important statements in the article?

6. What percentage of young citizens voted in 2004?

7. The following are some feelings about politics and politicians. For each one, please circle whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly.

a. Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

b. One never knows what politicians really think.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

c. One can be confident that politicians will always do the right thing.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

d. Politicians often quickly forget their election promises after a political campaign is over.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

e. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

f. I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

g. People like me don't have any say about what the government does.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

h. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

i. Politicians are more interested in power than in what the people think.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

j. One cannot always trust what politicians say.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

k. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

l. If a friend asked me about the 2006 election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

8. For each of the statements below, please circle whether you strongly agree, agree somewhat, have no opinion, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly.

a. When I come across information about candidates or issues in the election, I find myself tying the information to ideas I had before.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

b. I try to keep track of the opinions my friends have about political candidates and issues.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

c. When I see or read a news story about an issue, I try to figure out if it is biased.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

d. When I hear news about politics, I try to figure out what is REALLY going on.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

e. News about people running for office makes me wonder how they might change things.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

f. When I join in political conversations, I find myself tying the arguments to ideas I already have.

Strongly Agree Agree Somewhat Have no Opinion Disagree Somewhat Disagree Strongly

9. The next series of statements deal with specific election issues. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by circling the abbreviation that best reflects your opinion toward the statement. Again, the abbreviations stand for the following: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, NO=No Opinion/Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|---|----|
| a. The 2004 Presidential election helped me to realize the importance of my vote. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| b. The U.S. needs new voting procedures to ensure that elections are fair. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| c. Politicians do not care about the 18 to 25-year-old voting age population. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| d. Because of the threat of terrorism, it is important for Americans to show their support for our democracy by voting in elections. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| e. Because of the threat of terrorism, I am more likely to follow political affairs as a sign of support for American democracy. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| f. Voting is an important symbolic gesture of my patriotism. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| g. I've become more politically interested since the war with Iraq started. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| h. Because of the threat of terrorism, I think it is more important to volunteer in civic or community affairs. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| i. I am more likely to vote in 2006 because the US is at war. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| j. The 2004 Presidential election outcome showed me that no matter the young voter turnout, my vote doesn't really matter. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |

10. If voting was like an exam you have to take at the end of the semester, what would you need to do to prepare for the voting/exam? What do you think you would need to know? How and where would you find out what you needed to know?

11. For the next set of statements, please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement by circling whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), have no opinion (NO), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD).

It is important for young voters to:

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|---|----|
| a. Attend political meetings or rallies to get first-hand political information. | SA | A | NO | D | SD |
| b. Gather political information from TV news or newspapers | SA | A | NO | D | SD |

c. Express their opinions by writing or phoning representatives	SA	A	NO	D	SD
d. Listen to important views expressed on talk radio or call-in television programs	SA	A	NO	D	SD
e. Demonstrate their support for candidates by displaying stickers, posters, buttons, etc.	SA	A	NO	D	SD
f. Talking with their friends and associates about politics	SA	A	NO	D	SD
g. Visit websites for information about volunteering in campaign	SA	A	NO	D	SD
h. Vote	SA	A	NO	D	SD

12. After reading this article, what characteristics of young voters stand out in your mind?

13. More specifically, how do you feel this article covered young voters?

14. How do you feel the article portrayed the final youth voter turnout in terms of its impact on the outcome of the election?

15. As mentioned earlier, it is argued that the role of the media is to inform. Do you think that this article does a good job of informing you about some of the political issues concerning young voters? Please elaborate.

16. How do you feel this article portrayed voter initiative or mobilization groups?

17. Do you think this article reflects typical media coverage of politics or political issues? Please elaborate.

18. How informed do you think you are about the 2006 campaign?

Very informed 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Very uninformed

19. How interested are you in the 2006 campaign?

Very interested 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Not interested at all

20. Looking towards the next presidential election in 2008, how important do you feel young voters will be in the campaign?

Very important 5: ____:____:____:____:____:1 Not important at all

SUBMIT

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this research study. We are interested in finding out how the way news organizations talk about youth voting affects the way young people feel about themselves. The articles you read were manipulated to contain different kinds of tone and substance. Quotes from people in the articles were manipulated as well. For more information on this study, please feel free to contact Jason Moldoff at Jmoldoff@vt.edu

In order to receive credit for participating, please click *here*. Please complete the participation form and print off one copy of this form for your records and another for your instructor. At no time will the responses you gave be matched with your identity. You are responsible for saving and printing this. Lastly, we ask that you please not discuss this study with other students, so that their responses will not be affected and your anonymity as a research participant will be maintained.

Thank you again for your participation.

B. Substantive/Positive Fake News Article

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Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to Increase in 2006

Thursday, October 5, 2006; A02

Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a larger turnout among young voters. Based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), their optimism about 2006 appears justified.

Young voters accounted for 17% of the total vote in 2004, as consistent with 2000. But the total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted rose considerably by 4.3 million ballots. In addition, CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004, a noteworthy increase from 40% in 2000. This upsurge marked a level of political participation from this age group not seen in over a decade, and numerous mobilization efforts are considered key reasons for this increase.

One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote. Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the increase in young voter participation to several factors. These factors Reimer asserts include the tight, negative campaign between Bush and Kerry, the emphasis on issues relevant to young people, and numerous, well-organized mobilization efforts.

"I'm optimistic," Reimer said, "and our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain strong in 2006."

A recent survey conducted by The George Washington University's Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not-for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates the increase in young voter political engagement is issue-driven. According to the survey, the issues motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment.



The YVS survey found respondents had specific concerns associated with each of these issues. For education, the rising cost of college and availability of student loans were most frequently mentioned. With regard to the economy, worries about a volatile job market and outsourcing were expressed. When mentioned the Iraq War, respondents highlighted the ongoing U.S. presence in the Iraq and global perception of U.S. foreign policy. The focus on national security was specifically on the recent and continuing terrorist threats and border security. At the forefront of environmental issues were the effects of global warming and energy sustainability.

It is clear that young citizens are active, informed and motivated about 2006. For example, Matt Presson, a student from Virginia Commonwealth University, is using Facebook, an online social-networking site with 9.5 million members, to encourage his peers to vote.

“Conservative, Liberal, Moderate, Mixed...no matter how you feel about the issues of our society, it’s entirely up to each one of us to stand up and be counted as an active member of our own national, state, and local communities,” Presson says in a blog posting.

This type of e-mobilization effort exemplifies the way young citizens like Presson are using the Internet to communicate and organize at the grassroots level.

C. Substantive/Negative Fake News Article

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Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to Decrease in 2006

Thursday, October 5, 2006; A02

Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a smaller turnout among young voters. Based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), their pessimism about 2006 appears justified.

Young voters accounted for only 17% of the total vote in 2004, as consistent with 2000. And the total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted only rose by 4.3 million ballots. In addition, CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004, a slight increase from 40% in 2000. This turnout marked a continued static level of total political participation from this age group, typical of turnout over the last decade. Despite numerous mobilization efforts, however, there was no increase in the percentage of young citizens voting in the overall electorate.

One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote. Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the lack of increase in young voter participation to several factors. These factors Reimer asserts include the tight negative campaign between Bush and Kerry, the lack of emphasis on issues relevant to young people, and numerous, inconsistent mobilization efforts.

"I'm optimistic," Reimer said, "but our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain a challenge in 2006."

A recent poll conducted by The George Washington University's Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not-for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates the low level of young voter political engagement is due to apathy towards the



issues. According to the survey, the issues that are motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment.

The poll found respondents had specific concerns associated with each of these issues. For education, the rising cost of college and availability of student loans were most frequently mentioned. With regard to the economy, worries about a volatile job market and outsourcing were expressed. When mentioned the Iraq War, respondents highlighted the ongoing U.S. presence in the Iraq and global perception of U.S. foreign policy. The focus on national security was specifically on the recent and continuing terrorist threats and border security. At the forefront of environmental issues were the effects of global warming and energy sustainability.

It is of concern that young citizens are inactive, uninformed and not motivated about 2006. For example, Matt Presson, a student from Virginia Commonwealth University, is attempting to use Facebook, an online social-networking site with 9.5 million members, in an effort to encourage his peers just to vote.

“Conservative, Liberal, Moderate, Mixed...no matter how you feel about the issues of our society, it’s entirely up to each one of us to stand up and be counted as an active member of our own national, state, and local communities,” Presson says in a blog posting.

This type of superficial e-mobilization effort exemplifies the way young citizens like Presson are trying to use the Internet to communicate and organize at the grassroots level.

D. Substantive/Neutral Fake News Article

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Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to be Constant in 2006

Thursday, October 5, 2006; A02

Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a consistent turnout among young voters. Based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), their prediction about 2006 appears justified.

Young voters accounted for 17% of the total vote in 2004, similar to 2000. The total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted rose by 4.3 million ballots. CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004, an increase from 40% in 2000. This marked a continued level of political participation from this age group, typical of total voter turnout over the last decade. There were numerous mobilization efforts, more young people voted, but there was no overall increase in the percentage of young citizens who voted.

One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote. Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the level of young voter participation to several factors. These factors Reimer asserts include the tight, negative campaign between Bush and Kerry, the emphasis on issues, and numerous mobilization efforts.

"I'm optimistic," Reimer said. "Our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain a goal in 2006."

A recent survey conducted by The George Washington University's Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates the level of young voter political engagement is due to the issues. According to the survey, the issues motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the



environment.

The YVS survey found respondents had specific concerns associated with each of these issues. For education, the rising cost of college and availability of student loans were most frequently mentioned. With regard to the economy, worries about a volatile job market and outsourcing were expressed. When mentioned the Iraq War, respondents highlighted the ongoing U.S. presence in the Iraq and global perception of U.S. foreign policy. The focus on national security was specifically on the recent and continuing terrorist threats and border security. At the forefront of environmental issues were the effects of global warming and energy sustainability.

Young citizens continue to be appealed to in 2006. For example, Matt Presson, a student from Virginia Commonwealth University, is using Facebook, an online social-networking site with 9.5 million members, to encourage his peers to vote.

“Conservative, Liberal, Moderate, Mixed...no matter how you feel about the issues of our society, it’s entirely up to each one of us to stand up and be counted as an active member of our own national, state, and local communities,” Presson says in a blog posting.

This type of e-mobilization effort is representative of the way young citizens like Presson are using the Internet to communicate and organize at the grassroots level.

E. Ambiguous/Positive Fake News Article

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Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to Increase in 2006

Thursday, October 5, 2006; A02

Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a larger turnout among young voters. Based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), their optimism about 2006 appears justified.

Young voters accounted for 17% of the total vote in 2004. But the total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted rose considerably by 4.3 million ballots. CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004. This marked an increase in the level of political participation from this age group.

One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote. Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the increase in young voter participation to several factors.

"I'm optimistic," Reimer said, "and our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain strong in 2006."

A recent survey conducted by The George Washington University's Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates the increase in young voter political engagement is issue-driven. According to the survey, the issues motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment.

It is clear that young citizens are active, informed



and motivated about 2006. For example, Matt Presson, a student from Virginia Commonwealth University, is using Facebook, an online social-networking site with 9.5 million members, to encourage his peers to vote.

This type of e-mobilization effort exemplifies the way young citizens like Presson are using the Internet to communicate and organize at the grassroots level.

F. Ambiguous/Negative Fake News Article

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Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated to Decrease in 2006

Thursday, October 5, 2006; A02

Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate a smaller turnout among young voters. Based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), their pessimism about 2006 appears justified.

Young voters accounted for only 17% of the total vote in 2004. And the total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted only rose by 4.3 million ballots. CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004. This turnout marked a continued static level of total political participation from this age group.

One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote. Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the lack of increase in young voter participation to several factors.

"I'm optimistic," Reimer said, "but our ability to increase the youth turnout will remain a challenge in 2006."

A recent poll conducted by The George Washington University's Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not-for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates the low level of young voter political engagement is due to apathy towards the issues. According to the survey, the issues that are motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment.

It is of concern that young citizens are inactive,



uninformed and not motivated about 2006. For example, Matt Presson, a student from Virginia Commonwealth University, is attempting to use Facebook, an online social-networking site with 9.5 million members, in an effort to encourage his peers just to vote.

This type of superficial e-mobilization effort exemplifies the way young citizens like Presson are trying to use the Internet to communicate and organize at the grassroots level.

G. Ambiguous/Neutral Fake News Article

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Youth Voter Turnout Anticipated in 2006

Thursday, October 5, 2006; A02

Midterm elections are only one month away, and political analysts anticipate turnout among young voters. These predictions about 2006 are based on information about the 2004 election from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).

Young voters accounted for 17% of the total vote in 2004. The total number of 18 to 29 year-olds who voted rose by 4.3 million ballots. CIRCLE reports that 49% of this demographic voted in 2004. This marked a normal level of political participation from this age group.

One of the most prominent youth mobilization organizations is Rock the Vote. Its president, Hans Reimer, attributes the level of young voter participation to several factors.

Reimer said, "Our ability to impact the youth turnout will remain a goal in 2006."

A recent survey conducted by The George Washington University's Young Voter Strategies (YVS), a nonpartisan, not-for-profit project with support from the PEW Charitable Trusts indicates the level of young voter political engagement is due to the issues. According to the survey, the issues motivating young citizens are education, the economy, the war in Iraq, national security, and the environment.

Young citizens continue to be appealed to in 2006. For example, Matt Presson, a student from Virginia Commonwealth University, is using Facebook, an online social-networking site with 9.5 million members, to encourage his peers to vote.



This type of e-mobilization effort is representative of the way young citizens like Presson are using the Internet to communicate and organize at the grassroots level.

XIII. Tables

Table 1. Pre and Post Mean Trust Scores and Change Scores by Valence and Substance

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Substantive	Ambiguous	Overall
Pre	2.302	2.370	2.330	2.429	2.237	2.335
Post	2.375	2.5	2.411	2.531	2.325	2.43
Change	.0729	.1296**	.0803	.1012*	.0883*	.065
N	72	81	84	121	116	237

* Significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

**Significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

Table 2. Pre and Post Mean Trust Scores and Change Scores by Experimental Condition

	SubPos	SubNeg	SubNeu	AmbPos	AmbNeg	AmbNeu	Overall
Pre	2.396	2.458	2.430	2.208	2.276	2.226	2.335
Post	2.535	2.637	2.424	2.215	2.353	2.396	2.43
Change	.1389	.1786*	-.0058	.007	.077	.1707*	.065
N	36	42	43	36	39	41	237

* Significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Table 3. Pre and Post Mean Cynicism Scores and Change Scores by Valence and Substance

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Substantive	Ambiguous	Overall
Pre	2.5	2.419	2.477	2.429	2.5	2.464
Post	3.028	2.969	2.955	2.981	2.983	2.982
Change	.5278**	.5493**	.4787**	.5516	.4828	.518
N	72	81	84	121	116	237

**Significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

Table 4. Pre and Post Mean Cynicism Scores and Change Scores by Experimental Condition

	SubPos	SubNeg	SubNeu	AmbPos	AmbNeg	AmbNeu	Overall
Pre	2.396	2.333	2.552	2.604	2.513	2.396	2.464
Post	2.944	3.012	2.983	3.111	2.923	2.927	2.982
Change	.5486**	.6786**	.4303**	.5069**	.4103**	.5305**	.518**
N	36	42	43	36	39	41	237

**Significant at the $p \leq .01$ level

Table 5. Pre and Post Mean PIE Scores and Change Scores by Valence and Substance

	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Substantive	Ambiguous	Overall
Pre	2.826	2.883	2.917	2.888	2.866	2.878
Post	2.889	2.861	2.973	2.957	2.859	2.909
Change	.0625	-.0216	.0565	.0682*	-.0065	.031
N	72	81	84	121	116	237

*Significant at the $p \leq .05$ level

Table 6. Pre and Post Mean PIE Scores and Change Scores by Experimental Condition

	SubPos	SubNeg	SubNeu	AmbPos	AmbNeg	AmbNeu	Overall
Pre	2.639	3.137	2.855	3.014	2.609	2.982	2.878
Post	2.75	3.143	2.948	3.028	2.558	3.0	2.909
Change	.111	.0006	.093	.0139	-.0513	.0183	.031
N	36	42	43	36	39	41	237

Table 7. Analysis of Variance for Attitudinal Scores by Valence, Substance, or Condition

Pre-test ANOVA		df		<i>F</i>	ρ
Trust					
	Valence	2	234	.206	.804
	Condition	5	231	1.086	.369
Cynicism					
	Valence	2	234	2.60	.772
	Condition	5	231	.870	.502
PIE					
	Valence	2	234	.151	.860
	Condition				
Change ANOVA		df		<i>F</i>	ρ
Trust					
	Valence	2	234	.393	.675
	Condition	5	231	1.408	.222
Cynicism					
	Valence	2	234	.209	.811
	Condition	5	231	1.253	.285
PIE					
	Valence	2	234	.393	.675
	Condition	5	231	.896	.485
Pre-test T-test		df		τ	ρ
Trust					
	Substance		235	2.263	.025
Cynicism					
	Substance		235	.759	.448
PIE					
	Substance		235	.165	.869
Post-test T-test		df		τ	ρ
Trust					
	Substance		235	2.314	.022
Change T-Test		df		τ	ρ
Trust					
	Substance		235	.227	.821
Cynicism					
	Substance		235	.957	.339
PIE					
	Substance		235	1.454	.147

Table 8. Correlations between Mean Attitude Scores in pre-and post-test (N=237)

	Pre_Cyn	Pre_Trust	Pre_PIE	Post_Cyn	Post_Trust	Post_PIE
Pre_Cyn	1	----	----	.705**	-.485**	-.195**
Pre_Trust	-.464**	1	----	-.395**	.792**	.006
Pre_PIE	-.208**	.027	1	-.297**	.015	.926**
Post_Cyn	----	----	----	1	-.365**	-.288**
Post_Trust	----	----	----	----	1	.013
Post_PIE	----	----	----	----	----	1

**Significant at $p \leq .01$ level (two tailed).

Table 9. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Importance of Measures of Youth Civic Engagement (N=237)

	β	τ	ρ
Attend Political Meetings PIE $R^2 = .066$	.258	4.091	0.00
Gather Political Information PIE $R^2 = .051$	.226	3.557	0.00
Express Opinions PIE $R^2 = .07$	.265	4.207	0.00
Listen to Different Views Trust $R^2 = .023$	.152	2.357	.019
Demonstrate their Support PIE $R^2 = .026$	.162	2.513	.013
Talk with Friends about Politics PIE $R^2 = .034$	.184	2.876	.004
Visit Political Web sites PIE $R^2 = .047$	.184	2.857	.005
Cynicism $R^2 = .071$	-.158	-2.456	.015
Vote Cynicism $R^2 = .071$	-.23	-.3616	0.00

Table 10. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Importance of Youth Vote in 2004 Campaign (N=237)

	β	τ	ρ
Pre-test			
Cynicism $R^2 = .079$	-.282	-4.5	0.00
Post-test			
Cynicism $R^2 = .139$	-.373	-6.162	0.00

Table 11. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Interest in 2006 Campaign (N=237)

	β	τ	ρ
Pre-test			
PIE $R^2 = .322$	.528	9.503	0.00
Cynicism $R^2 = .339$	-.137	-2.475	.014
Post-test			
PIE $R^2 = .589$	.584	11.352	.000
Trust $R^2 = .618$	.188	3.652	.000

Table 12. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Importance of Youth Vote in 2008 Campaign (N=237)

	β	τ	ρ
Pre-test			
Cynicism $R^2 = .106$	-.325	-5.27	0.00
Post-test			
Cynicism $R^2 = .128$	-.358	-5.878	0.00

XIV. Curriculum Vitae

Jason A. Moldoff

EDUCATION

Master of Arts Candidate, Communication, Expected May 2007
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Blacksburg, VA

Thesis: *A Tale of Two Turnouts in 2004: Effects of News Frame Valence and Substance on College Students' Levels of Trust, Cynicism, and Political Information Efficacy*

Advisor: Dr. Andrew Paul Williams

Bachelor of Arts, Communication, Psychology, May 2003
University of Massachusetts (UMass), Amherst, MA

PUBLICATIONS

Moldoff, J.A., & Williams, A.P. (2007, forthcoming). Let Puerto Rico Decide: A Content Analysis of an Advocacy Group's Website. *Business Research Yearbook*.

Moldoff, Jason A. (2007, forthcoming). Editorials. In L.L. Kaid, & C. Holtz-Bacha. (2007) *Encyclopedia of Political Communication*.

Moldoff, Jason A. (2007, forthcoming). Pew Center for People & Press. In L.L. Kaid, & C. Holtz-Bacha. (2007) *Encyclopedia of Political Communication*.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Moldoff, Jason A. (2006). Content Analysis of Rock the Vote and Choose or Lose Websites before the 2004 Election. *Paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association Conference*, Philadelphia.

Moldoff, J.A., & Williams, A.P. (2006). Let Puerto Rico Decide: A Content Analysis of an Advocacy Group's Website. *Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the National Communication Association*, San Antonio.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

(8/05-Present) Communication Department, Virginia Tech
Instructor, Public Speaking

- Taught 1 to 3 sections per semester, average class size 25 students

- Worked with team of instructors to develop course structure and content
- Received consistently high scores across on all measures on student evaluations

(8/05-12/05) Communication Department, Virginia Tech

Graduate Teaching Assistant for Robert E. Denton Jr., Political Communication

- Developed and ran review sessions for students
- Corrected term papers

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

(6/03- 7/05) Meyers Primary Care Institute; Worcester, Massachusetts

Medical research assistant

- Coordinated multi-site study on patient safety in nursing homes
- Developed and maintained Access and SPSS databases
- Recruited participants in doctor-patient communication study
- Created and modified web pages for educational initiatives
- Designed video module on interdisciplinary teamwork for web
- Organized day-long seminar on health policy for medical students
- Surveyed medical students' knowledge and attitudes about health policy

SERVICE

(2006-Present) National Communication Association

Submissions Reviewer, Political Communication Division

(2006-2007) Department of Communication, Virginia Tech

Graduate Student Representative, Graduate Committee

(2006-2007) Communication Graduate Student Association, Virginia Tech

Chair, Development Committee

(2006) Eastern Communication Association

Panel Chair

XV. IRB Approval


Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board
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 E-mail: moored@vt.edu
 www.irb.vt.edu

FWA00000572(expires 7/20/07)
 IRB # is IRB00000667.

DATE: September 12, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Andrew Williams
 Jason Moldoff

Approval date: 9/11/2006
 Continuing Review Due Date: 8/27/2007
 Expiration Date: 9/10/2007

FROM: David M. Moore 

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "Evaluating Effects of Media Framing of Young Voter Turnout on Political Information Efficacy" , IRB # 06-473

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective September 11, 2006.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, this approval letter must state that the IRB has compared the OSP grant application and IRB application and found the documents to be consistent. Otherwise, this approval letter is invalid for OSP to release funds. Visit our website at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/newstudy.htm#OSP> for further information.

cc: File

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