

Increasing Polarization of the Youth Vote

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ABSTRACT

On July 1, 1971, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified which prohibits the United States and individual states from denying citizens the right to vote based on age after attaining the age of eighteen. Having passed 96-0 in the Senate and 401-19 in the House of Representatives and subsequently ratified by the states in less than four months, the amendment was widely considered a bipartisan effort with minimal resistance from within the two major political parties.

This paper seeks to determine how this largely politically unifying amendment process became so politicized since its passage, including an analysis and comparison of factions who fought against initial passage with those who seek to suppress the youth vote. A historical analysis will look deeper into how those battles were won with the ultimate passage of the amendment. Using a mixed methodology approach including a quantitative analysis of polling data and a qualitative analysis of partisan methods to influence youth voter turnout, the paper shows a trend towards increased politicization that has peaked in today's political landscape. Three specific elections serve as case studies and a lens through which to analyze changes in the law, changes in campaign strategies, changes in rhetoric, and changes in salient issues.

Youth engagement is particularly valuable to political leaders and to the nation. In American politics, youth voter turnout has become less of a normative good--in many cases it has been deeply politicized. There is a strong association between specific methods taken by political parties and interest groups and their efforts to mobilize or disincentive youth voter turnout.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

A Constitutional amendment requires two-thirds of the House of Representatives and two-thirds of the Senate to propose it and then must be ratified by three-fourths of the states. This process is difficult to accomplish and one that requires bipartisanship in Congress and must have broad support throughout the nation. Outside of the original Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments, only seventeen amendments have been ratified since the inception of the Constitution.

The Twenty-Sixth Amendment is an important milestone in the history of the United States as it ultimately lowered the voting age to 18 throughout the country. The amendment passed 96-0 in the Senate and 401-19 in the House of Representatives and was passed by the necessary number of states in less than four months. It marked the quickest ratification timeline of any amendment in the history of the United States. The amendment was a largely bipartisan effort with minimal resistance from within the two major political parties.

This paper seeks to determine how this largely politically unifying amendment process has become so politicized since its passage. The paper shows a trend towards increased politicization that has peaked in today's political landscape. Three specific elections serve as case studies and a lens through which to analyze changes in attitudes about young voters.

As a high school teacher who values the importance of youth engagement and voting, I provide some strategies that I believe will help overcome the level of polarization and voter suppression laws that have recently been enacted. Both of the two major political parties have an incentive to engage young voters and encourage them to show up for their side.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As a high school social studies teacher for thirteen years now, my passion has been educating young people about American history and government. My emphasis has always been on encouraging students to become better citizens by increasing their political awareness and interest in engaging with political processes--the most important of which is voting. Students in my classes are required to participate in political campaigns as part of their course requirement to learn about this form of political engagement in an up-close and personal way. We also have voter registration drives run by students to encourage students and their families to vote. However, during my time as a teacher, I have always been shocked by the lack of interest in the political process (i.e. voting, campaigning, being informed on the issues, etc.) on the part of many of my students. When I am able to touch base with students I taught several years ago, many indicate to me that they have never even voted despite my best efforts to encourage them to be more politically active and engaged while they were in my class.

While young citizen voter turnout is low, young citizen political engagement is high. Young citizens do not see voting as the most important way to connect to the government; engaging in a protest or school walkout, using social media to promote their favorite candidate, and campaigning for their policy preferences are more important to them. This project grew out of my ultimate desire to increase voter turnout among this group. I want to investigate further what programs, methods, and laws are best suited to accomplish this goal, and make recommendations based on my research as well as my own experience in the classroom.

Youth engagement is valuable to political leaders and the nation, but the ultimate aim of this project is to explain the factors that have resulted in the intense politicization of the youth vote, and then discuss the impact this has had on youth turnout. The passage of the 26th Amendment was a largely bipartisan process--how has it become so politicized in the current era? What factors have been most instrumental to create an increasingly politicized movement?

The project accomplishes three major features:

1. Studying the drafting and historical context of the 26th Amendment, and placing an emphasis on the relative bipartisanship of this process during the time period it took place in.
2. Examining the reasons for low voter turnout among young people in America by way of contemporary American political behavior literature as context for specific case studies which will include studies of the ways in which young people today engage in the political processes, specifically voting. Explaining the factors that have resulted in intense politicization of the youth vote, and discussing the impact this has had on youth turnout.
3. Analyzing various existing policies that have stunted the political engagement of young people, and proposed policies that may improve such engagement. Finally, providing personal experience and anecdotes as a classroom teacher in an effort to show strategies to depoliticize this process.

The target audience of this research is policy-makers who are entertaining these types of initiatives and educators who wish to promote more student engagement in the political process. It is also designed to spotlight some of the efforts already underway that are already showing results in increasing young voter turnout. Political leaders are ultimately the actors who make decisions about how, who, and when people can vote. Teachers are uniquely positioned to

encourage young citizens to become informed citizens and engage in the political process. By following the advice that I will offer in this project, policy-makers can use this set of voters to advance their agenda and affect change and it will yield useful insights for educators. Teachers can have the satisfaction of knowing that their classroom methodology helped better prepare a new generation of informed citizens and reverse the trend of low voter turnout for this demographic. This project is meant to connect my practical interests with research-based effective modules of achieving these goals.

Once again, the inspiration from this project stems from my recent studies as well as my long-term professional experiences and interests. Two of the most influential texts I read during my Master's coursework were Wolin's *Presence of the Past* and Ricci's *The Tragedy of Political Science*. These two authors are most concerned with analyzing political phenomena in a way that interests them and offering solutions that they felt would improve their field of study. They worried that political science had become concerned with methodology and precise figures while leaving behind some of the great debates and analysis that had been of important interest. They talked extensively about the importance of quantitative data, and I agree with their sentiment, but I wanted to write about my experiences as a high school teacher and offer my suggestions to changing the issue of young voter turnout. Wolin discusses how we learn history not necessarily by memorizing dates and facts in a classroom setting, but by critically considering our own personal narratives and family histories in the context of what theorists call political time. There is a duality of a power-restrained government and the power of "the people" in conjunction with our collective memory of the past. While democracy is "the best for the vast majority of human beings" (Wolin 4), Wolin is concerned about the durability of the Constitution in the present

American political environment. He argues that the Founders were determined to reduce the common man's influence in government, through voting restrictions: citizens should be "watchers of how their powers are being used rather than as participants in those uses" (Wolin 11). If young citizens continue to be simply "watchers," they can expect politicians to continue to ignore their wishes and act counter to their aims. The increased politicization of the youth vote will continue to grow.

While quantitative studies of political participation are important, they do not exhaust the empirically relevant aspects of the field. Historical approaches, such as what I propose to undertake, not only inform our understanding of quantitative studies, but also yield a unique range of insights regarding the practical and theoretical implications of policies and institutions. Instead of a purely quantitative analysis of the topic, I am free to include my own research-based opinions about topics that I have pondered for a decade. Finally, drawing on my research of the events surrounding the 26th Amendment, I can use those lessons to make recommendations on how to depoliticize the youth vote, particularly as it relates to high school students.

I believe this will make my research a more tangible, readily-accessible project for my intended audience--policy-makers and high school educators. I want this research to be utilized outside of purely academic circles and have real-world applications that can easily be consumed. Ultimately, my vision is to have my audience see a logical sequence of events: the history and successes of the passage of the 26th Amendment, which methods are empirically most effective, and a quantitative analysis of how politicization has increased. I am not conducting new empirical research or completing new statistical analyses of data, but rather drawing on existing research to draw new conclusions and recommendations.

A relevant firsthand experience is my personal desire to see increased--and nonpartisan--effort towards voter registration of high school students. Working in conjunction with several organizations including the School Board and the League of Women Voters, my county saw a tripling of registrations for new voters. It's my belief that my efforts at my school are the reason why we won the High School Voter Registration Challenge last year for the second year in a row. Extra emphasis by the Governor of Virginia has expanded this event and is evidence of the success of specific policies. This is an area where quantitative data will be important in my project. It could also be where I distinguish differences between national efforts and local-level efforts that exist to engage young voters and specifically encourage higher turnout.

Brief Literature Review

Along with Wolin, my intellectual approach in this project is also influenced by David Ricci's *The Tragedy of Political Science*, wherein Ricci also worries that there is too much of an effort to turn political science into a "true" science. In doing this, the field has been denied the importance of studying the classics and has focused less on the philosophical and historical components of politics and its study. Ricci suggests that "What must be sought, in the end, is a personal rather than a collective understanding of politics" (Ricci 317). While this does not mean that standard political science should be marginalized, it calls for the de-marginalization of other forms of political knowledge. I want to take Ricci's attitude of pushing our field into a more solution-oriented realm to help inform politicians and decision-makers about the choices they

make. My research in this project is designed to do exactly that--offer tentative historically as well as practically-informed suggestions to invigorate and energize the youth vote.

One final author and book that was influential and that will guide my approach in this thesis is Wendy Brown's *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Brown makes several startling and convincing arguments. First, the idea that citizens are constantly being asked to sacrifice as a way to balance out markets is a poignant one. "'Shared sacrifice' may refer to the effects of curtailed state investment in education, infrastructure, public transportation, public parks, or public services" (Brown 211). The shared sacrifice doesn't appear to be shared by anyone else--corporations, namely--except for the citizenry, namely young people, who depend on these services. Brown has talked about how progressive and liberal (Democratic) leaders have tried to take back the narrative and sell the importance of these programs. Brown emphasizes that it is the young who are often the most hurt by these cuts in social programs; this is one of the cornerstones of my project. I believe young voters have the most to lose when they are not engaged in the political process yet remain the least likely to vote. This project will also stress to high school students the importance of voter turnout.

Anticipated Research Impact

Efforts led by state legislatures to require photo identification, limit acceptable ID's, or restrict absentee ballots, disproportionately affect young people. The Brennan Center for Justice has conducted extensive research on the disproportionate impact that voter ID laws have, particularly on communities of color and young people. Some states do not allow college identification as an acceptable form of ID to vote, while they allow concealed gun permits to be

used. Interest groups often have a vested interest in driving down youth voter turnout as well and may back politicians who engage in these tactics. The research shows that in states that have implemented these types of measures, voter turnout is down among all citizens, but they hit minorities, the poor, and young particularly hard. In my final section, overturning these Voter ID laws will be central to the conclusions I make. Reducing barriers to voting should have a depoliticizing impact on the process.

I hope that this project may provide some basis of study for historians and future historians to study the impact and ramifications of the 26th Amendment. I also want this project to help fellow educators, administration teams, and school boards learn how to reach out to young people to show them the importance of registering to vote and encouraging them to do so in a non-partisan, non-political manner. Through my personal experiences dealing with youth voter turnout, I believe educators can bypass oppressive laws that are designed to drive down youth voter turnout. I will have outlined advice and strategies that have been well-researched to aid in that effort. Some politicians and interest groups deliberately engage in policies that specifically disenfranchise young voters and I hope that this project will highlight them in a non-partisan manner.

Finally, I hope that young people and their interests may use this project as a wake-up call to stay involved and informed on topics that are important to them. Efforts are continually made to erode youth voter turnout, but there are effective ways to improve it at the national, state, and local level. This project will show how ballots led to effective change, as turning out the vote *must* be a critical part of any functioning democracy.

Chapter 2

The suffrage debate, on the basis of age, dates back to colonial America. In its modern context, during World War II a more forceful call for lowering the voting age emerged as numerous legislators at the state and federal level introduced and debated proposals. “Old Enough to Fight - Old Enough to Vote” was a popular rallying cry for those serving overseas on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific. This slogan had new relevance against the backdrop of the contentious Vietnam War and eventually helped usher in the 26th Amendment.

The 26th Amendment: A Historical Analysis

Compulsory military service was undeniably linked with the movement to lower the voting age; proponents of the latter argued that draftees should have the right to choose the elected officials who sent them off to war. This remained one of the most formidable arguments for the cause on both sides of the political spectrum. In 1954, Senator William Langer (R-ND), proclaimed, “Some of these tremendously complicated instruments of warfare require a knowledge and understanding which would confound many an older person [. . .]To my mind, the maturity required to exercise these feats of warfare are commensurate with the maturity required to choose between candidates for election to a public office.” Representative John Rooney (D-NY) agreed, “I have great feeling for all the youth who today face the dilemma of being expected to react and perform as adults even to making the supreme sacrifice for their country in the rice paddies of Vietnam yet being categorized as children.” Almost all proponents of lowering the voting age agreed that military service was not a mandatory reason for lowering

the voting age, only that it met an important benchmark. (Extension of Voting Rights to Citizens at Age of 18, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., Congressional Record 100 (May 18, 1954): 6958.)

The debate over suffrage being extended to those under the age of eighteen has origins dating back to the Civil War. It wouldn't be until World War II where it finally captured a large public's attention. In October 1942, the first attempt to amend the Constitution to lower the voting age to 18 occurred when Democratic House Representative Victor Wickersham offered an amendment. Days later, Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg and Democratic Representative Jennings Randolph both introduced similar proposals. At the time, Georgia was the only state that extended suffrage to eighteen-year-olds (Henderson).

Wendell Cultice's exhaustive research in "Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America," further highlights the link between military service and ballot access. He suggests that "the ballot or suffrage right to participate in any form of representative government has been married to military effort of some description", providing numerous examples from Ancient Greece and Rome where citizens who reached a designated age were automatically required to train for combat and to recite complicated oaths swearing allegiance to their homeland. George Washington suggested early on in the Revolutionary War of mandatory service for all men aged 18-50. In these early democracies, debate was minimal about the merits and necessity of having a well regulated standing army while also allowing for fair participation in civic life, namely voting. (Cultice)

On the other side, opponents of extending suffrage to eighteen-year-olds sought to break the link between military service and the ability to vote. In 1968, debate reached a fever pitch as the Vietnam war entered its deadliest year. Democratic Senator Spessard Holland argued, "The

draft age and the voting age are as different as night and day . . . citizens of the female sex are not subject to be drafted but do have a right to vote, just as citizens of the male sex do.”

Republican Senator Roman Hruska concurred, “The idea of ‘they are old enough to fight,’[. . .] means that women would be left out, and that would not be fair; would it, because some of the women are smart enough to vote, too. In fact, all of them are.” Some opponents, like Republican Senator Richard Russell countered, “This amendment likewise will grant suffrage to girls of 18. Are we to say that we are voting for this proposal because we intend to vote for a draft of women in the next war, and that because they are old enough to vote we intend to make them fight, and send them along with the boys?” These arguments found only marginal support in the fight to lower the voting age and were heavily outweighed by the counterargument. These flimsy red herring fallacies gained little traction and were ultimately a minor distraction towards passage of the amendment. (Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments of the Committee of the Judiciary United States Senate Ninety-First Congress Second Session, 91st Cong., 2d sess., February 17, 1970, 83.)

Other lines of reasoning, such as the fact that eighteen year olds already paid taxes and were subject to the criminal code in a new way, also permeated the discussions. Young people under the age of eighteen pay sales taxes and paid \$711 million in income taxes in 2011 (Hodge).

A valid argument could be made that young people of the 1960’s were much more politically astute and informed because of technology and advancements in education. Advances in television, radio, and air travel allowed goods and information to move around the world more quickly which would impact political participation and awareness in a positive and profound

way. Republican Representative Edward H. Jenison confirmed this in 1951, saying, “The present [voting age] of 21 was determined in a period when the public was without the means for obtaining with ease a general knowledge of public affairs, public issues, and candidates for public office. Greater educational opportunities and present-day newspaper, radio, and television facilities bring the problems of the day to all the people, young persons included.” (University of Illinois Students Urge Voting Age Be Lowered to 18, 82d Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record 97 (October 20, 1951): A6743.)

At the turn of the century most young people didn’t even attend high school let alone take courses in philosophy, politics, and civics. Republican Senator Everett Dirksen best summarized this argument in 1954:

It is rather interesting to consider what a young man of 18 was up against in the backwoods days, as compared with the situation today. In the old days, such a young man probably grew up in a log cabin, and probably drank water from a gourd which he dipped into a wooden bucket—a practice which today by any standard probably would be classed as insanitary. Yet somehow or other, those young people lived through those conditions. They lived on bacon and corn pone. They were no dulcet tones of orchestra music coming, via the air waves, from Kansas City, to waft them to sleep. There were no McCarthy hearings to be seen on the TV in the mornings and in the afternoons. Oh Mr. President, how lacking they were in the availability of information and knowledge, and one thing and another. Today, information and knowledge are at the beck

and call or everyone, both the young and the old. (Extension of Voting Rights to Citizens at Age of 18, S.J. Res. 53, 83rd Cong., 2d sess., Congressional Record 100 (May 21, 1954): 6971.)

In 1968, presidential candidate Richard Nixon put it, “The reason the voting age should be lowered is not that 18-year-olds are old enough to fight—it is because they are smart enough to vote. They are more socially conscious, more politically aware, and much better educated than their parents were at age 18. Youth today is just not as young as it used to be.” (Woolley). Other congressional leaders weighed in on this line of reasoning, like Democratic Senator Stephen Young, who said, “The real reason 18-year-olds are entitled to vote is that a youngster of today upon graduation from high school has attained a better education and is better informed than a college graduate of 30 or 40 years ago.” (Voting Age Should be Lowered to 18, 91st Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record 115, (July 24, 1969): 20699.)

By most measures, young people are much better equipped to make complex political decisions than their parents and grandparents ever were at their age. This new group of voters could bring about new, fresh ideas to complicated issues mired by obstruction and gridlock. Democratic Representative John Rooney echoed this sentiment by optimistically proclaiming, “Too often a successful candidate finds himself a lonely and discouraged individual. Too often the criticisms leveled at him for doing some things and not doing others outnumber by far any recognition of the job he is doing on behalf of his noncomplaining constituents. But young people possess an inherent honesty which makes them feel equally inclined to praise as to complain to their elected representatives.” (The President’s Requested Legislation to Lower the

National Voting Age to 18 Years, 90th Cong., 2d sess., Congressional Record 114 (July 12, 1968): 21069.).

The idea of college-age citizens having the intellectual abilities to competently express their political beliefs via the ballot box helped to blunt some of the detractors who denigrated the movement as an extension of the “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” campaign. It helped blunt the idea that the slogan did not include women and weakened opposition to it. Others likely opined in private that the young radicals of the 1960’s would cause too much upheaval to be trusted with the enfranchisement.

The social upheaval of the late 1960’s allowed opponents of a lowered voting age to gain traction. As student protests increased and videos of young demonstrators were plastered on television, these opponents claimed that this particular group of the population were obviously unable to control their dangerous, radical emotions and therefore should not be trusted with suffrage. Opposition came from both sides of the political spectrum.

Republican Senator Jack Miller of Iowa complained, “Many teenagers, lacking the experience and maturity, are prone to take an extreme point of view and to push their ideas to the exclusion of all others. One need only look at what has happened, and is happening, on the campuses of some of our great universities to see the results of this lack of maturity.” Certainly he was referring to the protests on the campus of Columbia University when it was discovered the college had ties to institutional involvement in the Vietnam War, among others. Democratic U.S. Representative John Rarick openly questioned the idea that young people were capable of making informed decisions: “To the contrary,” he stated, “records in our public schools, the Selective Service System, and our Armed Forces show a constant decline in both intelligence

and aptitude averages. The common experience of adults – especially employers – is that today’s young people cannot spell, cannot read, and cannot reason” (91st Cong., 2d sess., Congressional Record 116 (March 20, 1970): 8493.).

At the peak of the unrest in 1968, New York Democratic Representative John Rooney explained a common feeling:

They [eighteen year-olds] represent the socially immature who respond to pressures by emotional reactions rather than by any mental process. They are the ones who think with their glands instead of their brains. They are the ones who find it easier not to conform to society’s established rules and customs but to protest and demonstrate without actually being aware of what they are against or what they are for. They are the ones who in protest against the ‘establishment’ find themselves the willing slaves of the lunatic fringe who manipulate them as though they were puppets on a string. They are the ones who think that an unkempt appearance – whether it be beards and flowing hair, unwashed bodies and filthy garments, or loose and shoddy morals – give them the solace and distinction to which they aspire. (The President’s Requested Legislation to Lower the National Voting Age to 18 Years. 90th Cong., 2d sess., Congressional Record 114 (July 12, 1968): 21069.)

In the end, those who fought against lowering the voting age did not have the capability to argue successfully against the forceful tide of their opposition. Even the most vocal opponents of lowering the voting age eventually supported a constitutional amendment and hoped the

ability to vote would serve as a “release valve” for young people to express their opinions rather than erupting in the violent uprisings that occurred in the 1960’s. To this end, opponents claimed that these young people were drawn to protest not because they actually believed the worth of these displays of defiance, but rather that they lacked other options, namely voting, to express themselves politically; extending suffrage to eighteen-year-olds effectively undercut this line of reasoning. Congressional leaders argued that passage of a bill to lower the voting age would be a vote of confidence in America’s young people and would encourage them to actively participate in the political process in ways they were previously unable to access. This suffrage movement, unlike the movements that extended voting rights to African-American men and eventually to women, was generally a crusade advanced in a bipartisan manner by members of Congress rather than by the disenfranchised themselves.

American political society throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s was marked by economic growth and an increase of college attendance rates. The mostly apolitical Eisenhower administration allowed for a robust dialogue to exist on political topics, unlike the politically toxic environment that seems to exist today. The ‘50’s were characterized by Americans’ optimistic view of their station in life and an increase in standards of living, particularly seen in healthcare advancements and a healthy economy. The baby boom generation, it would seem, would turn eighteen facing a particularly turbulent economy or global war as their parents and grandparents had experienced. National optimism was centered on this new generation of Americans, a phenomenon that has held true throughout the late 20th and early 21st century. It was expected that this generation would be richer and more successful than any generation in the past. These factors and others left fertile ground for suffrage expansion that was not possible a

generation earlier. Landon Y. Jones, author of *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* wrote,

By the mid-sixties . . . the size and economic power of the boom generation had helped it muscle its way onto the center stage of the nation's life. Most Americans were delighted at what they saw. This generation of the young was richer and stronger than theirs had been. It was confident and articulate about its dreams. Its ideals were outstripping those of previous generations bogged down by Depression and war [. . .] The editors of Time honored the 'Under-25 Generation' as its Man of the Year in 1967. In its lifetime, Time wrote, this promising generation could land on the moon, cure cancer and the common cold, lay out blight-proof, smog-free cities, help end racial prejudice, enrich the underdeveloped world, and no doubt, write an end to poverty and war.

The debate over lowering the voting age peaked in 1970, marking the end of an explosive decade. Extending suffrage to eighteen-year-olds was linked with some of the most important events of the 1960's, particularly the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. The turning point in the debate over whether to lower the voting age to 18 is important to analyze in the context of the Vietnam war and, in particular, college student protests around the nation. Culminating with the tragic events in May 1970 at Jackson State University and Kent State University--where 6 students were killed by National Guardsmen--the time had come for a

change to the voting age. Some proponents even suggested that lowering the voting age would help curb some of the more violent antiwar protests and encourage young people to focus their attention on more peaceful methods such as voting. Members of Congress began to believe that providing young people with a peaceful way to express their opinions could potentially create stability and prevent further violent dissent.

When portions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were up for renewal in 1970, it was Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy who saw an opportunity to insert provisions that would finally establish the eighteen-year-old vote. Through some political maneuvering, the House and Senate passed the rider and President Nixon signed it. However, by attempting to solve the issue through legislation rather than a constitutional amendment, there were opportunities for significant legal challenges. As the legislation gained more momentum, other lawmakers called for a more permanent solution--adding a new constitutional amendment. A proposed Twenty-Sixth amendment would enshrine the cause into the Constitution rendering legal challenges to the proposals moot. Months later, the legislation was argued before the Supreme Court and a decision was rendered in December 1970.

In *Oregon v. Mitchell*, the Supreme Court ultimately supported the relevant provision of the Voting Rights Act at the federal level, but with complex caveats for the states to abide by. The 5-4 split showcased deep divisions between the justices; Justice Hugo Black, writing for the majority, upheld the provision for federal elections, but struck it down as it applied to state and local elections. He ultimately said that Congress had the authority to allow eighteen year olds the right to vote under the necessary and proper clause of the Constitution and Congress' ability to make or alter regulations in national elections. Chief Justice Warren Burger, with Justices Harlan,

Stewart, and Blackmun, asserted that Congress did not have the authority to lower the voting age in either elections, be it federal or state. The outcome of the case ultimately suggested that Congress had the power to establish voter qualifications for national elections but had drastically less ability to regulate state elections. (Cornell Law)

Many state legislators immediately proposed state amendments to lower the voting age to eighteen as they feared a nightmare scenario of separate sets of voter rolls for federal and state elections. With less than two years between *Oregon v. Mitchell* and the next presidential election, states looked to Congress to finalize a solution through federal legislation or a constitutional amendment. On March 10, 1971, the Senate formally passed the proposed amendment, a joint resolution, to lower the voting age to eighteen. Only thirteen days later, the House followed suit. Though there were pockets of Congressional dissent, the resolution passed 401-19 in the House of Representatives (UCLA Department of Political Science). The opposing votes were cast by Democrats from Louisiana, Texas, and South Carolina as well as conservative Republicans. On the same day, five states that represented a wide ideological spectrum--Connecticut, Delaware, Minnesota, Tennessee, and Washington--ratified the new constitutional amendment. By July 1st, North Carolina became the 38th state to ratify the amendment, meaning that it was approved by the necessary three-quarters of states to become the 26th amendment. It was a record-setting time table with support across ideological, geographic, and demographic divisions. Over time, suffrage for eighteen-year-olds became more closely affiliated with the Democratic Party, although support also came from the Republican Party.

Contemporary Disputes Over Youth Suffrage

Since the ratification of the 26th Amendment, groups at both ends of the political spectrum have acknowledged young voters' potential to mandate political change; what has changed is the politicization of this demographic in relation to the development of hyper-partisanship and specific policy issues. In the 1970s, discontent with dominant American power structures and institutions intersected in social and political arenas that influenced the tone of the discourse over lowering the voting age. Conservative groups at the time were anxious about young voters' gravitation towards candidates supporting peace, whereas leftist-leaning groups pushed for this demographic's increased political engagement knowing full well that young voters tended to support liberal candidates who promoted anti-war sentiments. Certainly some elements of those sentiments remain today. (Swift)

College-age voters are a demographic often targeted by get-out-the-vote efforts due to their modest turnout record for national elections and rare presence at local elections [citation probably needed but I'm sure one of your other sources mentions this]. However, Ardoin et al (2015) notes that the Republican Party has repeatedly pushed for measures that aim to limit the effect of college-student voters on local politics on the grounds that such voters have a "lack of...understanding of the local community" (Ardoin, Bell, and Ragozzino) whose officials they have a hand in electing. In North Carolina, for example, Republicans in the state legislature advocated for the Equalize Voter Rights Bill, which penalized the parents of students whose voter registration lists their college address, and in 2013 Republicans in this same legislative body passed a law specifically invalidating the use of university-issued photo ID cards for voter identification. These are not unexpected actions from the GOP; the party has historically

demonstrated anxiety over the potential for the youth vote to significantly affect the outcome of elections.

In contrast, Democrats argue that this kind of legislation effectively disenfranchises young voters—a bloc which tends to vote for Democratic candidates [citation]—given that the majority of college students attend schools not part of the districts in which they are registered to vote. This blatant partisan effort to either encourage or suppress the political voice of college students is motivated by both parties' preeminent objective of winning elections at the expense of the opposing party, treating the youth vote as a “monolithic group” (Ardoin, Bell, and Ragozzino) with the legislators fighting over this demographic divided strictly down party lines.

Today, the same discontent exists among American youth, evident in their enthusiasm for far-left-leaning policies such as the Green New Deal, higher taxes on the wealthy, and a high minimum wage. However, efforts to either suppress or encourage the turnout of youth voters are primarily a partisan issue, with Democrats trumpeting get-out-the vote sentiments and Republicans passing legislation setting barriers to youth voters' ability to cast ballots.

At Austin Community College in Texas, the school used its own funds to set up temporary early-voting sites on most of its campuses. However, the Republican-led Texas Legislature outlawed polling places that didn't stay open for the entire early-voting period. In New Hampshire, many college students come from outside the state. The state's Republican House speaker at the time, William O'Brien, vowed to stop voting by these transplanted college students, calling them “kids voting liberal, voting their feelings, with no life experience.” Florida's Republican secretary of state outlawed early-voting sites at state universities in 2014 which was eventually overturned in court. In 2019, the Republican-led State Legislature

effectively reinstated it, requiring all early-voting sites to offer “sufficient non-permitted parking” which is notoriously in short supply at universities around the country. (Wines)

It may be easy to outright claim that mobilizing young voters and encouraging them to register to vote is an automatic advantage for Democrats. In “The Resurgent ‘Youth’ Voter in the United States,” Emanuel Boussios shoots down the idea that higher youth turnout always leads to advantages for the Democrats. He argues that this group has taken on a distinctive and unique personality and that in every Presidential election from 1972 to 2008, young voters have sided with the candidate that won the electoral college and the popular vote. “This voting bloc is no longer following, but has exhibited behavior distinct from that of their adult counterparts [and that] party contact was relevant to whether or not a young voter goes out and votes - and whom they vote for - may indicate that the mobilization of these voters requires unique measures (and message)” (Boussios).

Chapter 3

In this chapter I will outline the gradual progression of the politicalization of the youth vote over three recent election cycles: 1992, 2008, and 2018. Before 1992, little attention was paid to the impact of the youth vote nor how it could be courted and won. The first few election cycles after the 26th amendment saw large Republican advantages which evened in the 1990's and turned into large margins for the Democrats in recent elections.

Case Studies: The 26th Amendment Becomes Increasingly Politicized

1992

On July 1, 1971, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified which prohibits the United States and individual states from denying citizens the right to vote based on age after attaining the age of eighteen. Having passed 96-0 in the Senate and 401-19 in the House of Representatives, the amendment was widely considered a bipartisan effort with minimal resistance from within the two major political parties. The amendment had the quickest ratification process of any constitutional amendment and passed the threshold for ratification in large and small states from every geographic region of the country. The amendment reads:

Section 1.

The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

Section 2.

The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Republican President Richard Nixon, noted at the adoption ceremony: “As I meet with this group today, I sense that we can have confidence that America’s new voters, America’s young generation, will provide what America needs as we approach our 200th birthday, not just strength and not just wealth but the ‘Spirit of ‘76,’ a spirit of moral courage, a spirit of high idealism in which we believe in the American dream, but in which we realize that the American dream can never be fulfilled until every American has an equal chance to fulfill it in their own life” (Woolley).

The 1972 election saw both parties attempt to persuade the 25 million-strong voting bloc who were enfranchised as a result of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment. While the Democratic challenger, George McGovern, saw a lot of enthusiasm among younger voters in the primary, there was still uncertainty about which way these new voters would tilt in the general election against the incumbent Republican Richard Nixon. It was the Republican campaign who vigorously sought the youth vote by creating a Young Voters for the President, a loosely organized group to mobilize young conservatives to support Richard Nixon’s reelection. Nixon’s campaign pledged \$1,000,000 to the group and amassed 400,000 members. This group supported Nixon’s promise to end the draft and pushed him to embrace marijuana reform and stronger environmental regulations. George McGovern assumed his anti-war message and liberal agenda would carry the youth vote but it was not the case as election returns showed a split between the two candidates. (Blumenthal)

The election of 1992 marked the first large-scale effort to court young voters since 1972, the first presidential election year after the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was passed. In 1984, 64%

of the 18-24-year-old subgroup voted for Republican candidate Ronald Reagan while only 39% supported his liberal opponent, Democratic challenger Walter Mondale. This 25-point gap represented the Republican party's largest margin of victory in this age group and was only ever wider in the 2008 election, in favor of Democrats. This advantage for Republicans would continue in 1988 when 53% of young voters supported Reagan's vice president, George H.W. Bush, in his victory. 1992 was the beginning of six straight presidential elections where the youth vote turned out in favor of Democrats. It also provided a roadmap for how Democrats seemingly worked harder to court this voting bloc for decades to come (Roper Center).

Efforts to reach younger voters on television included examples like John F. Kennedy's 1959 appearance on "The Tonight Show with Jack Paar." In 1968, Richard Nixon made a cameo on "Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In," and Ronald Reagan even appeared on "The Sonny & Cher Comedy Hour" and "The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson" while governor of California. Both parties made these appearances to make their candidates more relatable to a heavily-skewed younger audience. Perhaps the biggest purposeful effort to court younger voters was when Bill Clinton made his appearance on the Arsenio Hall show in 1992. This iconic pop culture moment did much to turn Clinton into a memorable presidential candidate to run for the Presidency; he was the first baby-boomer to court the youth vote through mediums the younger generation were attached to. The strategic appearance occurred at a time when Clinton trailed in the national polls to the incumbent President George Bush and needed to change the trajectory of his campaign. While this singular moment helped fuel the appeal to a younger audience, it was only one aspect of a much larger effort underway to court the youth vote in that election. A week before the election, director of the Center for the Study of the American Electorate Curtis Gans claimed in

the New York Times, "the Democrats have not done anything like this to capture the youth vote since 1972, and meanwhile the Republicans seem to be taking it for granted." (Suro)

An appearance on the Arsenio Hall show was just one of many talk show appearances that Democratic candidates pursued to appeal to young voters. MTV extended an invitation to both campaigns to be a guest at a special election town hall in October but only Bill Clinton appeared. MTV had about 20 million viewers leading up to the 1992 election; two-thirds were between the ages of 18 and 34, of which, only 44% had voted in the 1988 Presidential election. (Miller) In contrast, Republican George H.W. Bush's strategy to bring in younger voters was notably lacking, as much of the Republican campaign's talking points revolved around discrediting Clinton's performances as beneath the dignity of the office he ran for. Bush made a somewhat serious gaffe when he personally criticized Clinton's appearance on an MTV program and vowed never to appear on a "a teeny bopper network." Tom Freston, a cofounder of MTV, retorted, "In 1988, those teeny-boppers voted, 50 to 41%, for George Bush. I hope eventually the G.O.P. will question the wisdom of writing them off." (Miller) For the first time, there was explicit courtship of youth vote by an American political party while the other party seemed to laugh off the strategy. While it seemed that political parties were developing strategies to achieve higher voter turnout of young people, some members of Congress also sought to institutionalize those efforts through federal legislation.

For young people particularly, traveling to the state agency that issues licenses is often a coming-of-age moment. Today in all fifty states and the District of Columbia, young people are also given the opportunity to also register to vote when they receive their driver's licenses. This, of course, was not always the case. In February, 1994, on the floor of the House of

Representatives, Congressman, Bobby Rush (D-IL) specifically mentioned young people as the major beneficiary of the new National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), saying, “The three registration methods contained in the bill will reach the entire eligible population, including our young people. America's young adults have often been left out of the democratic process and ignored by our generation. This act will provide registration facilities where young people are most likely to be found, driver’s license and motor vehicle registration facilities.” (Congressional Record February 4th, 1993 p. 2427)

Attempts by the federal government in the 1970’s and 1980’s to require states to provide additional ways to make registering voters less restrictive had failed multiple times. In 1989, a bill requiring state Departments of Motor Vehicles (or applicable state agency) to offer voter registration passed the U.S. House of Representatives with bipartisan support but was subsequently killed by a Republican majority in the U.S. Senate. In the mid ‘80’s various voter registration reforms were made by members of Congress. Some reforms would have established a national voter registration system based on postcard registration while others would have provided “strings-attached” incentives to the states to encourage a simple and open registration system. Some hearings took place in committee but no measure ever reached the floor of either the Senate or the House. (Crocker)

The 1988 Presidential election featured historically low turnout and again efforts were made to encourage citizens to turn out to vote. Again in 1991, a similar bill made its way through both houses of Congress only to be vetoed by Republican President George H.W. Bush. Unequivocally, allowing these state license agencies the ability to register new voters would

encourage new, younger voters and a likely reason that Republicans overwhelmingly rejected it (Crocker).

On May 20th, 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), also known as the Motor Voter Act. MTV's Rock the Vote campaign was an early and vocal supporter of the law, which required state governments to offer voter registration to any eligible person who applies for or renews a driver's license and for those who apply for public assistance such as social security or welfare. The aims of the law are highlighted in Section 2:

- to increase the number of registered voters
- to enhance voter participation
- to protect election integrity and
- to ensure states maintain accurate voter rolls.

(U.S. Department of Justice)

Opposition to the NVRA came mainly from Republican legislators who attempted to filibuster the bill in a time when this tactic was still somewhat rare. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) was one of such opponent; on the Senate floor he claimed that the new law would “cost the States, all 50 of them, and their respective taxpayers, millions of dollars while making it even easier for illegal aliens to register to vote and obtain welfare benefits...This bill should be called the Illegal Aliens' Voter Registration Act.” (Congressional Record February 4th, 1993 p. 963). Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), manager of the bill for the Republicans, echoed Helms' sentiments in stating, “Citizens who rely on government checks to eat, pay the rent, and feed their children are particularly vulnerable to intimidation, be it overt or implicit. A social service worker with a check in one hand and a voter registration form in the other? Yes, that will be

intimidating. It will be at least as intimidating for these citizens as it would be for taxpayers being registered to vote by an Internal Revenue Service auditor.” In reference to the often nicknamed Motor Voter law, Senator McConnell joked it should be called the “auto-fraudo.” (Congressional Record May 19th, 1993 p. 9631) To date, no credible study has connected the National Voter Registration Act to any large-scale voter fraud. In 2013, the Congressional Research Service issued a 20-year report on the NVRA and “was unable to find any systematic evidence or empirical study for or against an increase in voter registration fraud as a result of the implementation of the NVRA, nor have the Federal Election Commission (FEC) or the Election Administration Commission (EAC) ever mentioned this as a problem that the states have brought up” (Crocker).

Some Republicans outright accused the Democrat Party of passing the National Voter Registration Act simply to boost their own electoral victories. As the bill was being debated in 1993, Republican Phill Gramm of Texas lamented, “My colleagues on the left-hand side of this Chamber say they are trying to help the process [...] maybe I am cynical, I think they are trying to help themselves.” Republican Representative John Linder of Georgia further claimed that Democrats “will bend public policy to help them no matter what it takes” (Congressional Record, May 19th, 1993, p. S 6870). Seven states refused to implement the provisions of the NVRA, all of which were led by Republican governors who filed ultimately unsuccessful court challenges (Knack and White) against the legislation. Democratic senators, on the other hand, loudly proclaimed support of expanding voter registration, particularly for first-time voters. Kentucky Senator Wendell Ford made a clear case for the proposed bill, declaring “I would like to make one point about this bill, and that is the goal. Motor-voter seeks to connect people to their

Government by placing them on the rolls of eligible voters, so that if they want to vote, they can. It is that simple. Motor-voter reconnects citizens to their Government by expanding the opportunities for people to register to vote.” Maine’s Democratic Senator George Mitchell put the bill in simple terms as well, “This is a bill that would make it easier for Americans to register to vote. It is hard enough to understand why anybody would be against such a bill, let alone to filibuster against a bill to prevent a vote from occurring” (Congressional Record, May 19th, 1993p 9634).

Ultimately the Senate voted to pass the law with a vote of 62-36 and 2 abstentions. The vote was almost entirely along party lines with most Republicans predictably voting against the legislation and Democrats voting in favor of it. However, five Republican Senators split from the rest of their party and joined Democrats to vote in support of the legislation--Senators Domenici (NM), Durenberger (MN), Hatfield (OR), Packwood (OR), and Specter (PA). (Roll Call Vote 103rd Congress - 1st Session. Vote 118) It should be noted that these senators were considered among the most liberal Republican senators; both Oregonian Senators were considered the most liberal Republicans in the Senate at the time and Senator Specter of Pennsylvania later defected to the Democratic Party.

Weeks later, the bill passed 259-160 in the House of Representatives with 11 abstentions. Only 21 out of the chamber’s 167 Republican votes were cast in favor of the legislation with the remaining 146 cast in opposition. Democratic support for the bill was high with only 14 Democratic representatives voting against it. (Congressional Record, February 17th, 1992 p. 9634) Several Republican representatives voiced their concerns, such as Representative Cass Ballenger (NC) who spoke at length about the speculative costs of implementing the program.

Similarly, Representatives Tillie Fowler (FL) and Jack Kingston (GA) used tough rhetoric to infer there that the legislation would necessitate huge tax increases, coercion of welfare recipients to vote for preferred candidates, and big government knocking at the door.

Republican Congressman Martin Hoke issued a dire warning if the bill was passed and restated a phrase that Senator McConnell had made popular, “Motor-voter, also known as auto fraudo, will guarantee voter fraud. Every dead person's vote, every illegal alien's vote, and every multiple vote by a party hack dilutes the voice of law-abiding Americans exercising their franchise legally” (Congressional Record, February 17th, 1992 p. 2430).

Democrats presented a mostly united front in support of the NVRA. A central figure was the late Civil Rights icon, Congressman John Lewis of Georgia. A man who knew firsthand the struggles of extending suffrage rights, he advocated for passage of the legislation, saying that the bill “[offered] us a new beginning. We can expand democracy by supporting the legislation. Voting is a fundamental right. It is a responsibility of citizenship. Yet, for many Americans, it is not easy to register to vote. It is difficult. This legislation will make it easier and more convenient for people to vote. It will increase voter participation.” Florida Congresswoman Carrie Meek also spoke at length in support of the legislation and spoke about the burdensome registration policies that were in place. She also alluded to the struggles of voter registration particularly during the Civil Rights Movement, “The history of voter registration, particularly in the South, demonstrates the importance of procedures. Poorly understood voter registration procedures have the greatest impact on the less educated on the poor. Making registration more accessible will substantially increase registration among these groups” (Congressional Record, February 17th, 1992 p. 2428).

The legacy of the NVRA is a complicated one. Currently, about 1 in 3 respondents are unaware that one is able to register to vote at a motor vehicle agency. Further, about a quarter of those polled mistakenly said that when they move, government agencies will automatically update their voter registration. These sorts of misunderstandings pose an additional challenge to successful implementation of the law. The state of New Mexico introduced a series of reforms at the state level including the creation of a system that requires citizens to act on their registration status during all licensing transactions and hiring a state NVRA coordinator. The Pew Charitable trust recommends five ways to improve the NVRA but without bipartisan support these modifications are unlikely to be implemented:

- Prioritize, automate, and centralize Motor Voter data collection.
- Increase coordination among licensing agencies and election administrators.
- Develop common strategies and terminology related to Motor Voter transactions.
- Promote effective education and training for motor vehicle agency personnel.
- Track information confirmations as a type of Motor Voter transaction.

(Pew Charitable Trusts)

While there are many instances of elected officials opposing a reduction of the voting age to 18, most of it was not along any consistent ideological line. There was no consistent geographic or party affiliation correlation to be found in the runup to the passage of the 26th amendment in 1973. However, the 1992 election, and the few years preceding it, for the first time began to show increasing polarization between the two political parties on promoting youth voter registration and turnout. Ultimately, Bill Clinton's efforts to reach out to young voters (and

George Bush's reluctance to do so) proved to be a huge tactical advantage in his ascension to the White House.

2008

In 2008, young voters aged 18-29 supported Democratic Presidential candidate Barack Obama (66%) over Republican challenger John McCain (31%). It was the largest share of young voters that either party received since the passage of the 26th amendment. While much can be attributed to these statistics reflecting a generational shift in political leanings, the efforts that progressive candidates and groups made to court young voters should also be contrasted with tactics undertaken by conservative candidates and groups and what they did to suppress the youth vote. Young voters are increasingly more racially and ethnically diverse and lean more towards agnostic or atheist religious beliefs. These characteristics, among others others, incline them to align with Democratic beliefs and heavily support liberal social policies including same sex marriage and relaxed abortion regulations.

Shifting political ideology and increased political polarization among young people heavily influenced the 2008 presidential election. Like Bill Clinton in 1992, Barack Obama's campaign launched a huge effort to court younger voters. Clinton's ability to shrink a 25-point Republican advantage among young people in 1984 to a 20-point Democratic advantage, helped lay the groundwork for a strategy that led to an over-30-point advantage Obama enjoyed in 2008. In comparison, during the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 Democratic presidential candidates Al Gore and John Kerry only mustered a 1- and 8-point respective advantage over their Republican opponents. Certainly Obama's energetic and youthful image, when compared to

the previous two Democratic challengers is striking, but tangible efforts were underway to court younger voters in the 2008 campaign (Rosentiel).

According to Pew Research, the Obama campaign created a massive outreach network that made contact with millions of young voters around the country. When asked if they had been contacted directly by a presidential campaign, 25% of 18 to 29-year-olds replied that the Obama campaign had reached out to them while only 13% reported contact by the McCain campaign. In key swing states, Obama's advantage among youth voters was even higher. Pennsylvania boasted a 24-point advantage for the Obama campaign, as well advantages by 17 points in North Carolina, 16 points in Florida, 17 points in Virginia, and a staggering 35 points in Nevada. Obama won each of these states on the way to a 365 - 173 Electoral College landslide (Horowitz and Keeter).

Both presidential candidates made appeals to a younger audience with appearances on late-night network shows that attract younger viewers. During the 2008 Presidential campaign, The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA) at George Mason University tracked 110 late night appearances by the candidates and, perhaps surprisingly, McCain made the most number of appearances (17) followed by Mike Huckabee (16) and Barack Obama (15). CMPA President Dr. Robert Lichter noted, "Talk show hosts have replaced editorial boards in vetting candidates for voters. David Letterman wasn't kidding when he said, 'The road to the White House runs through me.'" A Pew Research Center poll found that 16% of Americans receive their primary political information from late-night comedy shows, and that number spikes to 26% among voters who are less than 30 years old. This under-30 crowd reportedly relies on comedy shows even more than newspapers or television news programs. This effort to appear on these

programs, by both campaigns, displayed a renewed desire to reach young voters through avenues the bloc could relate to, though it's unclear who ultimately benefited from these appearances (Rieck).

However, the Obama campaign's ability to harness new technology for campaign purposes connected very well with young voters while McCain's campaign floundered in this area. The 2008 campaign marked the first time candidates sent text messages to cell phones. A recent study, Nairne and Soule found that text messages increase young voter turnout by an average of 4.6%. Among Americans under 30, 66% have a profile on a social network page like Facebook or Myspace and roughly half of young social networking users used their pages to get or share information about the campaign. Overall, supporters of Obama, specifically, were more likely to access political news, including coverage of debates and campaign speeches, through digital avenues than McCain supporters (Nairne and Soule, 2009).

Certainly the 2008 Obama campaign leveraged the internet and telecommunication technologies for fundraising, information, and volunteer opportunities more effectively than any past campaigns. There are some key differences between Obama and McCain voters when utilizing the internet and certainly this drove the Obama campaign to capitalize on this potential advantage. Even though McCain supporters were more likely to utilize the internet, Obama supporters were more likely to post political content (26% - 15%), engage politically on a social media network (25% - 16%), donate money online (15% - 6%), and volunteer online (11% - 4%). 49% of Obama voters shared text messages about the campaign while only 29% of McCain voters did so. While 17% of Obama supporters received text messages directly from a candidate or party, only 7% of McCain supporters reported receiving political texts. These polar opposite

approaches to use technology to get campaign messages out is part of the reason Obama won the youth vote so handily (Smith).

Young people, specifically, influenced and were influenced by these campaigns' leveraging of media and technology. As another example of increased politicization of the youth vote in the 2008 campaign, the differences are stark when comparing the two major political parties and their ideologies. Because young people support Democratic candidates at increasingly higher rates and have a higher propensity to use online platforms, it provides a net benefit for Democratic candidates. 72% of 18-29 year olds used the internet for some political purpose in the 2008 campaign. Contrast that with 65% for 30 - 49 year olds, 51% for 50 - 64 year olds and only 22% for 65+. Citizens who engage in political discussions online, between the ages of 18 and 29, are also the most likely age group to receive customized political or campaign news, post their own original content, and take part in political activities on social media. 18- to 24-year-olds are most likely to have a social media profile (83%) and they were more likely than any other age group to discover which candidate their friends voted, post political content, reveal which presidential candidate they voted for, start or join a political cause or group, and sign up as a "friend" of one or more candidates (Smith).

2018

In the decade between the historic 2008 presidential election and the midterm elections of 2018, increased efforts were made by conservative interests to openly and explicitly suppress the youth vote. However, the first presidential election where 18-year-olds could vote was in 1972 when Republican candidate Richard Nixon held an advantage for young voters over Democratic

challenger George McGovern on his way to a White House victory. In the '80's, Republican President Ronald Reagan enjoyed particular support from young voters. What happened to this obvious advantage for conservative presidential candidates, and have efforts to recapture these young voters been outweighed by efforts to suppress them instead?

On August 6th, 1965, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act which enshrined legal protections for voters in the United States. Before Congress officially took up efforts to pass the 26th amendment, some legislators, notably Ted Kennedy (D-MA), proposed amending the Voting Rights Act to extend suffrage to 18-year-olds. While this ultimately became unnecessary due to the passage of the aforementioned amendment, the Voting Rights Act had become the cornerstone for protecting the sacred right of voting among minority communities, but had also been a key protection for young voters' ability to cast ballots. In 2006, the law was reauthorized with wide bipartisan support in Congress--98-0 in the Senate and 390-33 in the House--and was signed by Republican President George W. Bush (Roper).

Public opinion on the Voting Rights Act has also enjoyed bipartisan support since its initial passage in 1965. 86% of Americans believed that Congress should give "Negroes equal rights in voting" and after the bill was passed, 95% stated they agreed with the new law. While there are some differences in attitudes about the Voting Rights Act, particularly along racial lines, a wide majority of Americans believe it is still needed. Polling conducted in 2015 asked whether people believe the Act remains necessary and concluded that African-Americans are much more likely to say the law is still needed today (86%) than are whites (56%) (Roper).

In 2013, in a 5-4 decision conservative members of the Supreme Court gutted important protections guaranteed in the Voting Rights Act of 1965, most notably Section 4. Section 4 provided a formula for the federal government to use in identifying local and state election boards with problematic histories of racial discrimination. The court ruled in *Shelby County v. Holder* that Section 4(b) was unconstitutional because it was "based on 40 year-old facts having no logical relationship to the present day." As a result, the ruling made it easier for state officials to implement obstacles to prevent racial minorities and young voters from casting ballots. In the years after the ruling, nearly a thousand polling places--many in counties with high populations of minority groups--closed; research shows that the changing of voter locations and reduction in voting locations can reduce voter turnout. (Vasilogambros) Newly created state laws led to cuts in early voting hours, massive purges of voter rolls, and imposition of strict voter ID laws. A 2020 study found that the areas which had previously been covered by legal protections massively increased the rate of voter registration purges after the *Shelby* case (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights). In almost any instance, restrictions on voting were put in place by Republicans.

The effects of the *Shelby* decision were felt immediately as Republican-led governors and state legislatures mobilized to prevent citizens from registering to vote and eventually casting their ballots. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, within 24 hours of the court's *Shelby* ruling, Texas's Republican Governor announced that it would implement one of the strictest photo ID laws in the country. Only a few types of identification were accepted with little room for exemptions: a state driver's license or ID card, a concealed handgun license, a U.S. passport, a military ID card, or a U.S citizenship certificate with a photo. The Republican Attorney General of Texas (and later Governor) Greg Abbott, moved quickly, Two additional states,

Mississippi and Alabama, followed the Texan example and also began to enforce restrictive and previously-prohibited photo ID laws. Less than two months after the *Shelby* decision, the Republican-led North Carolina state legislature enacted a sweeping bill that took aim at voting rights. House Bill 589 implemented a strict photo ID requirement, rolled back early voting, eliminated same day voter registration, restricted pre-registration for 16 and 17 year olds, ended government-lead voter registration drives, and eliminated the autonomy of county boards of elections to keep polls open after they had closed (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020).

As the 2018 midterm elections approached, some states passed other restrictive laws pertaining to casting a ballot. Voters in 23 states faced tougher restrictions than they did in 2010; while the most common restrictions involved voter ID laws, they also included additional burdens on registration as well as limits on early voting locations and absentee voting availability. These laws have the potential to make it harder for Americans to vote, and reduce participation particularly among communities of color, low-income voters, young people, older citizens, and people with disabilities. These restrictive laws were passed almost exclusively by Republican-led legislatures and Governor's mansions held by Republicans (Weisler and Feldman).

Other examples of Republican-led voter suppression efforts are currently in place which specifically target younger voters. College students in particular often face unique barriers to voting--in some states a college-issued student ID is not considered a valid form of voter ID. Georgia and Indiana only accept state-run university ID cards as valid identification, and Indiana's law further requires that the IDs must display visible expiration dates. Kentucky accepts either public or private universities' IDs only with visible signatures. Wisconsin accepts

university ID cards from public and private schools as long as the ID has a variety of identifiers and is presented with proof of enrollment. North Carolina requires each university-enrolled student to submit an application to the State Board of Elections for their student IDs to be considered a valid voter ID (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020).

Another voter suppression tactic was highly visible in the 2018 midterm election--gerrymandering. While both sides of the aisle have engaged in overtly partisan redistricting practices, many of the most extreme cases in the last decade have been efforts of the Republican Party. Despite historic gains by the Democrats in the House of Representatives during the 2018 Congressional election, gerrymandering prevented even more of a landslide. In both Ohio and North Carolina, Democrats won around half the vote but failed to capture any additional House seats and kept their share of these seats at 3 of 13 seats in North Carolina and 4 of 16 seats in Ohio. In Michigan, another heavily gerrymandered state, Democrats were able to flip Republican districts in the Detroit suburbs only because of a double-digit shift toward Democrats in neighboring Oakland County (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020).

One of the most blatant examples of Republican efforts to suppress youth turnout happened on the campus of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. Before Republican redistricting in 2016, the campus and its over 10,000 students were condensed into Democratic Representative Alma Adams' district, an African-American alumni of N.C. A&T. Today it's split between two white male Republicans: Representatives Mark Walker and Ted Budd. Perhaps more shockingly, the architects of the gerrymandered maps did not hide their purpose. Representative David Lewis, a Republican said "We want to make clear that we, to the

extent are going to use political data in drawing this map — it is to gain partisan advantage on the map. I want that criteria to be clearly stated and understood” (Nilson).

Democratic state governors and legislatures have emphatically opposed these Republican-enacted restrictive practices and worked to combat them in a variety of ways. While many of the legislative efforts served to suppress the turnout of voters, particularly the youth bloc, most of the laws in place faced legal challenges; new legislation to circumnavigate these restrictive laws has also been proposed. One specific way has been in predominantly Democratic-controlled states where they have introduced Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). The United States is almost alone among industrial, democratically-led countries in placing most of the burden of registering to vote on individual voters, a complex process that partially explains why turnout rates in the U.S. are lower than in most other countries. AVR legislation works to alleviate that burden, as citizens are automatically registered to vote when requesting services at government offices unless they specifically decline the registration. This is clearly a benefit to young people, nearly all of whom require services at the DMV to acquire a drivers’ license. Furthermore, AVR reduces the need for paper applications and costly data-entry processes while keeping voter information updated each time citizens interact with a state government agency in any capacity. AVR is a no-nonsense reform which promotes participation in the democratic process while improving the accuracy of voter rolls and brings elections into the 21st century; the reasons behind blocking such legislation are blatant examples of voter suppression. Opponents of AVR worry that the government should not be telling citizens that they must register to vote and that it should remain optional in a “free” society. This argument often falls flat as there are plenty of requirements that American citizens are forced to comply with daily.

In 2016 Oregon became the first state in the nation to implement AVR and since then the state has seen registration rates quadruple at DMV locations. Furthermore, Oregon's voter turnout increased by 4% between 2012 and 2016. Similarly, in the first six months after AVR was implemented in Vermont in 2017, registration rates increased 62% within a single year. (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020)

Currently 16 states and the District of Columbia have passed AVR legislation. While some partisan variation exists in that number as "red" states like Utah and Alaska are included, most AVR states are led by Democratic legislatures. However, AVR legislation is not always characterized by hyperpartisanship--it should be noted that West Virginia has a Republican legislature and passed an AVR bill while its Democratic governor signed it into law in 2011. Furthermore, in the Illinois legislature, the Democratic majority passed AVR and its Republican governor signed it into law in 2016--in fact, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner became the first Republican governor to sign any AVR legislation. Similarly, Alaskans passed AVR by ballot initiative with nearly 65% support. In Maryland, a Democratic legislature enacted their version of AVR while their Republican governor refused to sign it nor veto it (Weisler and Feldman). These examples further the case of widely increasing cleavages between the two parties in their desire to expand voting opportunities and examples of bipartisan cooperation are few and far between.

2018 saw the highest midterm voter turnout (49%) since 1914 and some states even exceeded their 2016 presidential election turnout levels. Overall voter turnout increased by 11 percentage points from 2014, which was a 74-year low. Eight states increased turnout by more than 15%: Missouri (19.6 percent), Nevada (17.9), Virginia (17.8), Texas (17.5), Indiana (17.4),

California (17.1) Georgia (16.4) and Vermont (15.5) (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020).

These states represent a variety of so-called blue and red state states as well as important battleground states of the 2020 election. This could heavily influence a wide range of voting reforms and public policy proposals that could impact generations to come. Traditional ‘red states’ like Texas and Indiana have already implemented policies to try to curb the number of newly registered voters (who skew younger and more people of color) while ‘blue states’ like Virginia and California have worked to capitalize on increasing registration numbers and secure it even further.

Chapter 4

Section 2 of the 26th amendment reads, “The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” In this chapter, I will discuss some of the policies that have been enacted in other countries with overwhelming support relating to voter registration, particularly that of new voters; these recommendations could fall under the purview of Section 2. I also discuss how some of the proposals may involve changes at the state/local levels which may not depend on congressional action. Some of the policies that have passed in other countries in a bipartisan manner, have faced increasing politicization in the United States when attempting to enact similar solutions.

Policy Proposals

Since the bipartisan passage of the 26th Amendment in 1973, attitudes concerning the youth vote have become increasingly politicized along ideological lines. While there was never a long-standing, bipartisan agreement that the age for suffrage should be set at eighteen, by 1973 a strong and convincing case was made that eighteen-year-olds were more than capable to have universal suffrage rights. A clear majority of both members of Congress and the public agreed that this group of Americans could be trusted to make political choices.

Though to date there has been no explicit effort to repeal the 26th Amendment, strong and persistent efforts including various voter suppression techniques have been deployed to limit the impact of these young voters. In this chapter I propose several ways to not only protect young people's ability to register and cast ballots, but also to expand these opportunities with tested

methods that have succeeded around the country. Many of these methods--including some that I have personally implemented in my capacity as a public high school teacher--are currently working their way through various political systems.

While overall voter turnout shot up for the 2018 elections, it is important to specifically examine the huge surge in youth voting that occurred. Among 18 to 29 year olds, voter turnout went from 20% percent in 2014 to 36% in 2018, the largest percentage increase (79%) for any age group. The largest turnout gains were among groups that have traditionally supported Democratic candidates, which contributed to the party's 8.6-point victory during the election cycle. About six in ten college graduates favored Democratic candidates, correlating with wide Democratic majorities among Hispanic and Asian voters. Democrats also won 67% support among voters younger than 30, firmly solidifying their preference for more progressive candidates in the past two decades (Clement).

For The People Act

As Democrats rode a youth-voter-fueled "Blue Wave" to a powerful House majority in 2018, they looked to build upon expanding voting opportunities for all. The For The People Act (H.R. 1; S. 949), was proposed by John Sarbanes (D-MD) on January 3, 2019 as the first official legislation of the 116th United States Congress. Two months later, the bill was passed by the House by a vote of 234–193; no Republicans voted for the bill. Republicans, having a majority in the U.S. Senate, refused to even bring the bill forward for a vote. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY), long an opponent of expanding voting opportunities dating back to the debate over the Motor Voter Law, called the bill "a one-sided power grab" for the Democrats. Freshman

Congressman Dan Crenshaw (R-TX) criticized the bill by saying it would legalize election fraud surrounding absentee ballots.

The bill proposes a myriad of provisions including a legal end to gerrymandering, statehood for Washington D.C., campaign finance reform, and ethics reforms for the Supreme Court. In regards to expanding voting rights, the bill would create a national voter-registration program, make Election Day a federal holiday, limit efforts to purge voting rolls and allow felons to vote. D.C. statehood alone would enfranchise over 700,000 voters, of which about 66,000 are aged 18-25 . At 34 years old, Washington, D.C. has the lowest median age compared to the 50 states (U.S. Census).

Title I of the For The People Act would bring voter registration processes for federal elections into the modern era by eliminating burdensome barriers. The United States has one of the lowest voter turnout rates among developed nations, with nearly one in four eligible voters not registered (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020). One solution would be to require each state to provide an online voter registration to be received by election officials electronically and to allow registered voters to update their voter registration information online; this has been implemented in 39 states already. It would also make same-day voter registration a reality by ensuring that all eligible voters can participate in an election. Same-day registration also protects against registration system errors, foreign interference, cyber-attacks, and accidental purges. This would end the requirement to register in advance of an election where the voter registration deadline is more than four weeks before a given election in some states (H.R. 1 - For the People Act of 2019).

H.R. 1 would also require states to use Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) for federal elections nationwide. AVR, already implemented in sixteen states, allows eligible citizens to automatically register to vote, or have their existing information updated, unless they opt out after providing information to a government agency like the Department of Motor Vehicles. It would require agencies to transfer voter registration information to election officials electronically--effectively cutting costly paper registrations--and would further compel states to allow registered voters to update their address information at polling locations. As a case study, Arizona experienced a reduction in per-registration costs from 83 cents per paper registration to 3 cents per online registration. The law notes that “existing voter registration systems can be inaccurate, costly, inaccessible and confusing, with damaging effects on voter participation in elections and disproportionate impacts on young people, persons with disabilities, and racial and ethnic minorities. If H.R. 1 was passed, the AVR provision could register up to 50 million new eligible voters while making voter registration rolls more accurate, saving money, and cutting down on confusion and other problems at the polls. (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020)

The For The People Act would also fully restore the Voting Rights Act which was essentially gutted in 2013 by the conservative-leaning Supreme Court. The law has empirically been perceived as synonymous with advancing the cause of minorities’ access to the ballot, but has also been essential to providing opportunities for young people to cast a ballot. It would permanently restore the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and reauthorize its ability to help historically marginalized groups access the polls; the legislation would also allow them to make grants to states to help boost youth involvement in state election activities. The EAC has come under intense scrutiny recently as critics claim the agency is acting in a partisan manner to

purge voter rolls and assist the controversial effort to make census forms include citizenship questions.

After a flood of voter suppression laws came about in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby v. Holder*, 2019 saw nearly 700 pro-voter bills being introduced in 46 states. Virginia and Maine enacted automatic voter registration, while New Mexico enacted same day registration. Felons' voting rights were restored or expanded in Kentucky, Colorado, Nevada, Illinois, Louisiana, and New Jersey. In the run up to the 2020 Presidential election, every major Democratic presidential candidate ran with democracy reform as a top goal. Reforms in The For The People Act have been proven to work in other Western Democracies, particularly when it comes to encourage youth voting (Waldman, Hira, Cohen, & Pérez, 2020).

Voter Registration Reform

When it comes to registering their citizens to vote, most democracies do the work themselves rather than rely on citizens taking initiative. In a 2009 Brennan Center study of 16 countries, the United States joined The Bahamas, Mexico, Belize, and Burundi as the only countries who place the onus of registering on individuals. Of these 16 countries, the United States ranked last in voter registration rates at only 68% of eligible citizens registered. The countries who automatically registered their citizens often did so in unobtrusive ways that often link local or regional governments with the central government and streamline processes to prevent duplication. Countries can therefore cut costs of registering voting by sharing data across the country and using simple technology to drive these efforts. Other countries, like Indonesia

and South Africa, use extensive door-to-door efforts powered by thousands of temporary workers to register every potential voter (Rosenberg and Chen).

The United States could draw some inspiration for voting reforms from Canada. In Canada, efforts to register all citizens to vote is a non-partisan issue directed by the Elections Canada Commission which reports directly to Parliament. Since 1993, Canadian citizens have had the ability to register to vote on election day provided another registered citizen vouches for them at their polling location. Efforts by Elections Canada led to the creation of a National Register of Electors to minimize duplication of voter registration across provinces which reduced costs for these efforts; the Register was estimated to have saved \$31 million at the provincial and municipal levels and over \$60 million net savings at the federal level. Total estimated savings from the National Register of Electors amounted to over \$100 million in 2005 alone. In addition, Canada has allowed universal early voting and allowed prisoners to vote, two moves that are decidedly polarizing in the United States (Elections Canada).

There is some movement underway in Canada to lower the federal voting age to 16. The Center-left party, New Democrats, proposed an amendment to the Canada Elections Act in 2020. MP Don Davies spoke in Parliament about its importance, saying “Young Canadians are engaged, well-informed and passionate advocates for a better future, for their future. Many young people work and pay taxes, but they have no say in how those tax dollars are spent. This disenfranchisement is unjustified and must change. I call on all Parliamentarians to make young people equal participants in our democracy by supporting this vital legislation.” These sentiments have been echoed by some Democratic legislators at the state and federal level, as well (Open Parliament Canada).

Perhaps Canada is the best example of ways that the United States could update and modernize their voter registration process as their technological advancements, democratic traditions, and political and cultural sentiments are most similar to our own. A long-standing representative democracy, Canada only recently moved to Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). Even before AVR, Canada had a voter database, known as the National Register of Electors, which included 93% of eligible voters. The National Register of Electors is updated continuously, based on information that 40 different government agencies routinely provide to Elections Canada, their federal election authority bureaucratic agency. Provincial and territorial departments of motor vehicles, the national postal service, electoral agencies, and the federal tax authority all provide data to Elections Canada. National elections in Canada take place over the course of several days, and “same day” registration is available throughout the voting window (Rosenberg and Chen).

Because the Canadian government assumes the primary role of registering voters, as opposed to the United States’ individualistic approach, they employ a wide variety of low-cost methods to capture new voters. One cross-governmental agency example that Elections Canada uses is a program to determine whether young voters identified through the federal tax agency are citizens. The program searches existing voter information to determine whether a newly identified voter lives in the same residence and shares the same last name as someone who is already registered to vote. If a match is found, Elections Canada assumes with confidence that the younger person is a relative and a citizen and is added to the rolls. Multiple agencies provide Elections Canada with a monthly address update and deceased voters are similarly automatic. As

a result, addresses are kept current without voters having to interact directly with election officials (Rosenberg and Chen).

21st century technology exists to fundamentally change the way the United States registers citizens to vote. Other western-style democratic countries have already done this with great success and with savings of millions of dollars in bureaucratic costs. Reforms in these countries, notably Canada, rebuilt their registration systems in the 1990s. Their experiences demonstrate that data-sharing across regional governments (i.e. states) can make voter rolls more accurate, less labor intensive, environmentally friendly, and perhaps most appealing: less costly to maintain. The United States already has voter registration databases in each state with the capability to share data across state and federal boundaries, simply giving them the green-light to do so would require bipartisan agreement in Congress. This is likely the biggest obstacle to seeing change come anytime soon as voter registration remains a deeply divided topic along ideological lines.

Chapter 5

Recommendations

Extending Suffrage to 16-year-olds

The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 states “any person who has not been adjudged an incompetent and who has completed the sixth grade [...] where instruction is carried on predominantly in the English language, possesses sufficient literacy, comprehension, and intelligence to vote in any election.” This description forms the basis of the increasingly-popular case that the youth vote could be further expanded to include 16- and 17-year-olds. In fact, young people of this age can drive in all 50 states, and over one million have jobs that contribute millions of tax dollars to the national economy. Atkins and Hart (2010) analyzed national survey data and concluded that by age 16, Americans have levels of development in each quality of citizenship (defined as: membership, concern for rights, and participation in society) that are approximately the same as adults who are allowed to vote. They argued that the lack of relevant differences in capacities for citizenship between 16- and 17-year-olds and those legally enfranchised makes voting laws inconsistent. The authors also examined claims that adolescents are neither neurologically nor socially mature enough to vote responsibly and concluded that 16- and 17-year-olds sufficiently pass both of those benchmarks to be granted the vote. In fact, 16-year-old Americans score higher in areas related to civic knowledge than those in their early twenties (Atkins and Hart).

Austria was the first European country to lower the voting age to 16 in 2007. Studies conducted in Austria found an increase in political interest among young people aged sixteen and

seventeen after the voting age was lowered. In a regional Vienna mayoral race, data showed that turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds was not significantly lower than overall turnout and the general trend that turnout of young people is by far lower than in the overall electorate cannot be applied to 16- and 17-year-old Austrian voters (Zeglovits & Aichholzer).

Some localities in the United States have also experimented with lowering the voting age. One of those places was in Takoma Park, Maryland, when in 2013, it became the first municipality in the United States to lower the voting age to sixteen when the city council passed a law to lower the voting age for local elections. In the elections since the changes, the city has seen sixteen and seventeen year olds who are registered to vote turn out at higher rates than older voter blocs. Generally, citizens of the community have indicated that lowering the voting age has been a positive: many political candidates and local elected officials have increased their interactions with high school students and some young people have become more active in local politics. Proponents of lowering the voting age cite numerous reasons for considering such a move: it can create habitual voters at a younger age, it can incentivize schools to teach civic education, 16- and 17-year-olds are demonstrably mature enough to make informed votes, and they deserve to have a meaningful voice in matters that affect their local communities (Generation Citizen).

Expanding Opportunities in High School Classrooms

Democrats swept into control of the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2018 midterm elections--fueled largely by a surge in youth voter turnout--and just a year later they also took control of both houses of the Virginia General Assembly for the first time in two decades. With

this achievement came a flurry of progressive laws surrounding voting rights and voter registration. Republicans, perhaps predictably, were against it as the laws were passed strictly along partisan lines. Many of the same excuses and counterpoints that were tried at the federal level such as expanding suffrage to 18 year olds, Civil Rights legislation and Motor-Voter Laws, were used by Virginia's Republican leaders. They warned that opening up the election process too much would weaken safeguards against voter fraud. "We have lost any hope of voter integrity in the commonwealth with the huge number of election bills that went through that were not properly considered," said Clara Belle Wheeler, a former Republican member of the State Board of Elections (Moomaw).

Debate was notably tense in the Virginia General Assembly as Republicans repeatedly raised objections over voter fraud allegations. Anyone caught falsely signing an affidavit could be charged with a felony. Republican Delegate Tony Wilt asked who the police would arrest if someone had illegally cast a vote when you showed up to vote. Democratic Delegate Mark Sickles responded "When a felony has been committed, the police have things called investigators. They investigate a crime. That's what they do. That's what we pay them to do" (Moomaw).

As Virginians prepared for the Presidential election of 2020, Democrats passed additional voting reforms to make it easier to vote during the global pandemic. New legislation made it easier to cast votes via absentee ballot, extend early voting, and create dropboxes around the state maintained by the Department of Elections. Republicans again balked at the premise. Republican State Senator Steve Newman said "This seems to me to be the biggest invitation to fraud for the upcoming election that we've ever seen. And we're using coronavirus, a terrible

thing, to kind of cover up for the fact that we're making these adjustments." Despite the protestations of Republicans, these policies went into effect.

In many ways, Virginia has become a model for how to reform and update voter laws in the mold of what other countries have already done. Notably, the General Assembly dismissed an outdated Voter ID requirement, established Election Day as an official state holiday, expanded Election Day in-person polling hours, implemented automatic voter registration at DMVs, and expanded the early-voting period. As evidence of increasing politicization, Senate Bill NO. 219 passed 21-19 along strict party lines in the Virginia State Senate and 52-47 along mostly partisan lines in the Virginia House of Delegates.

Perhaps most importantly among these voting reforms, public schools were required to offer voter registration opportunities during the school day. "Each public high school shall provide to any enrolled student who is of voting age or is eligible to register to vote pursuant to § 24.2-403 (i) mail voter registration applications and voter registration information provided by the Department of Elections or (ii) access to the Virginia online voter registration system on a school-owned computing device that is accessible to such student. Each student who is eligible to register to vote shall be provided the opportunity to complete an application form during the normal course of the school day" (Virginia Law).

This recent Virginia law requiring voter registration efforts to be provided during the school day strengthens the likelihood of young people registering to vote. While some do not, many high school government and civics teachers can point to specific opportunities in which they provide their students with the opportunity to register to vote. Registration opportunities may range from simple, like distributing a stack of voter registration forms during class, to more

engaging opportunities such as inviting guest speakers or organizations to speak to students about the importance of registering to vote.

In 2016, Virginia launched the Governor's High School Voter Registration Challenge formed by a partnership between the Governor's office in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Elections, and the League of Women Voters (LWV) of Virginia. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, a Democrat, proclaimed in 2020 that "Making voter registration easy and accessible and engaging young Virginians in the voting process will help ensure they are active and informed citizens. The strength of our democracy depends upon the participation of our diverse population, and encouraging young people to register and vote is a necessary part of ensuring that all voices are heard at the ballot box." Promoting this challenge at the state level provided a welcomed boost to young people registering to vote.

In conjunction with the Governor's Challenge, the League of Women Voters (LWV) of Fairfax County launched their own contest. The school that registered the highest percentage of eligible students would be awarded with a trophy and celebrated for their accomplishments. The LWV boasts that in the three years of the competition, they have registered more than 15,000 Fairfax County Public School students. This contest has quadrupled the number of registered students since they began keeping a record of it in the 2014-2015 school year. The first year of the contest (2018-2019) they registered 5,794 students; Hayfield Secondary (where I am the department chair and oversee voter registration) won the inaugural contest. The next year saw registration increase to 5,794 county wide and also saw Hayfield Secondary win the contest again. Even in the pandemic-shortened school year of 2019-2020, the LWV registered their highest total number of students to date: 6,320 (League of Women Voters).

The Fairfax County School Board has formally recognized the winner of this contest in formal resolutions during their regular meetings. They promote its participation and mention it alongside its commitment to make graduates of its schools a global and ethical citizen as their FCPS Portrait of a Graduate fundamentals. Individual schools within FCPS also have systems in place to support and prioritize young people getting involved in their community.

Hayfield Secondary provides students with an “honor cord” to wear at graduation showcasing that they completed 50 hours of community service. Hayfield government teachers also promote students to work on political campaigns in the fall, which count towards that 50 hour threshold, as Virginia is one of only a handful of states that has state and/or national elections every November. By inviting representatives from various political campaigns and creating a page dedicated to politically-oriented community service, students have a number of opportunities to volunteer through text-banking, door-knocking, and clerical work.

The school also has established a reputation of bringing in elected officials on a regular basis throughout the school year. United States Congressman Don Beyer has attended student-led forums, senior breakfast events, and classroom visits for years. Virginia State Senators Scott Surovell and George Barker and Virginia House of Delegates Mark Sickles, Vivian Watts, Kathy Tran, and Paul Krizek have attended more regularly. Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Jeff McKay and Rodney Lusk and Fairfax County School Board members Ryan McElveen and Tamara Deverenak-Kaufax have made yearly visits to Hayfield. These officials have even made their visits to the school in a virtual setting during the Covid-19 pandemic. The key to these visits is simple: send a short email asking for a visit. Elected officials have never outright declined an

invitation to visit classrooms at Hayfield. With a flexible schedule, one can almost always make it work.

While voter turnout for young people remains low, there has been some evidence of increases as recently as the 2018 midterms and 2020 Presidential elections. As a classroom teacher I have personally witnessed an increase in awareness and participation from young people who advocate for the changes they wish to see. Even though that may not always translate as increased voter turnout, young people are pushing for a wide range of reforms. Two of my students were co-chairs for One Virginia, a nonpartisan group advocating to end gerrymandering in Virginia. Several students from the Student Government Association lead walkouts in 2019 over increased gun violence in the wake of the Parkland High School shootings. Students in my AP government course started important conversations with the Fairfax County Public Schools School Board which led to equity and inclusiveness training for the entire school district. This fall, students from select high schools in the county held a town hall forum with Senator Tim Kaine to highlight the importance of registering to vote in the upcoming 2020 Presidential election; I was honored as the “coach” of the students and helped practice and refine their questions.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

There are a myriad of ways that the national government can help promote and prioritize young people's ability and willingness to participate in politics. Obviously, that can be a challenging task in a highly polarizing and politicized atmosphere. At the state level, particularly ones like Virginia which are largely controlled by a single party, huge changes can completely shift voter registration challenges. And, at the local level, city councils and mayors can change local statutes to promote civic engagement by lowering the voting age in local elections. School boards and local civic organizations can help promote non-partisan voter registration drives through contests and rewarding young people for engaging in the political process. Registering young people to vote and providing them with opportunities to participate in the policy process should not be a political issue, but one that all political ideologies should come together to promote.

It's easy to dismiss many of these recommendations as unrealistic and unattainable with increasingly polarized political parties who are unwilling to compromise. One could say that any well-intentioned and deserved change was out of reach at some point; suffrage for African Americans, women, and 18 year olds faced similar challenges. Focusing on what we perceive to be "realistic" allows the status quo to continue without making any major changes to what I believe I have identified is problematic in today's society. In a way, everything is politicized but that doesn't mean we shouldn't fight for what is right or nothing will be done.

Incentivizing those who are resistant to these changes is a key aspect to achieving the policy goals I proposed in the final chapter. Specifically, how will the Republican Party grow

their ranks when they continue to promote outright anti-democratic policies that don't promote youth voter turnout, but work to stifle it? From a purely numerical advantage, soon, enough of the baby boomer and silent generation will no longer control Congress. It will be made up of millennials & gen Z legislators who have come of age in this oppressive climate; ones who have learned of these blatant tactics to severely restrict their access to the ballot box. Younger people have increasingly seen the Republican Party's economic and political platforms as unsustainable. To continue the status quo, as presented in this project, they are turning further and further away from the party's key principles. Conservatives, in general, will need to work to incorporate these ideals and embrace an increasingly hostile youth vote. Only then, perhaps, can true opportunities be made available to younger people and society as a whole.

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Gelman, Andrew et al. "Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What's the Matter with Connecticut?" Quarterly Journal of Political Science. (2007). Online.

Generation Citizen. LOWERING THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS IN TAKOMA PARK AND HYATTSVILLE, MD. (2016, October). Retrieved January 05, 2021, from <http://vote16usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Final-MD-Case-Study.pdf>

Gibson, Rachel. Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of 'Citizen-Initiated' Campaigning Party Politics March 2015 21: 183-197. Web. 20 July 2015.

The article looks at the role of grass-roots organizations in the UK, mainly, and their impact on campaigns. It looks at the success of U.S. President Barack Obama's 2008

social media campaign as a basis for their research, especially among young people. Gibson highlights ideas for UK political parties, particularly those who are less mainstream, to look to social media to fill the gap in mobilization efforts. Ultimately, UK political parties are more reluctant to use social media than American parties, but are using it more and more with new opportunities to raise money and get their message across. Essentially, social media outsources tasks like fundraising to ordinary citizens and can be a huge cost-saver. This could be used as a way to get more information to voters, particularly when it comes to the nominating process.

Green, D. P., & Gerber, A. S. (2015). *Get out the vote: how to increase voter turnout*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

The authors promote the idea that the most important element in elections is getting voters to the polls—these efforts make the difference between winning and losing. They introduce a very scientific approach to the challenge of voter mobilization that influences how campaigns operate. They discuss on the cost and efficiency of various campaign tactics, including door-to-door canvassing, email, direct mail, and telephone calls. The most interesting chapter is on the effectiveness of registration drives and messaging tactics; one that I do as a high school teacher.

Gil de Zúñiga, H., Jung, N., & Valenzuela, S. (2012). Social media use for news and individuals' social capital, civic engagement and political participation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 319-336. Web. 20 July 2015.

This Journal article cites several reasons how those who search for news and information via social media networks have higher levels of civic engagement and political efficacy. This gives candidates a greater ability to persuade the electorate and show the candidate to be 'credible.' Examples in the article that highlight this are immigration marches started on social media and the success of Obama's social media presence to successfully recruit volunteers. They also conducted scientifically-completed research polls, some open-ended and some multiple choice, to show this correlation. The authors admit that more research is yet to be done, but their initial findings are that there is a positive correlation between social media political activity and civic engagement and ultimately civic action.

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Hendricks, J. A. (2015). *Presidential campaigning and social media an analysis of the 2012 campaign*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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Hong, Sounman, and Daniel Nadler. Government Information Quarterly: Which Candidates do the Public Discuss Online in an Election Campaign?: The use of Social Media by 2012 Presidential Candidates and its Impact on Candidate Salience. 29 Vol. Elsevier, 10/01/2012. Web. 21 July 2015.

This article makes the argument that social media, in particular Twitter, played a role in the 2012 Presidential election, but it did not ultimately change the outcome. It uses a lot of empirical data that breaks down the number of times the candidate was mentioned by social media users and also the level of activity associated with the account. Candidates find it easier and more accessible to the public and their followers to get information rather than display it on a website. More and more, candidates are dismissing 'traditional' news outlets and interviews to reach out to 'new' media users. Examples include President Obama's virtual news conference via Twitter and Nancy Pelosi announcing her run for Minority Leader via Twitter. The use of social media is one that is absolutely necessary and a candidate who did not embrace it would certainly be doomed. However, there is little evidence that it makes a discernible difference in electability.

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Knack, Stephen and James White (1995, January 01). Did States' Motor Voter Programs Help the Democrats? - 1998. Retrieved May 20, 2020, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1532673x9802600304>

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- I found this article of particular interest because it highlighted some of the flaws that modern political scientists make when looking at social media data. One big argument was that political scientists don't note that different social media platforms are trafficked by different groups of people, for instance: Instagram is more popular among minorities while Pinterest is more popular among females with upper class incomes. The article calls for a more careful analysis of the data to more accurately make predictions on elections. Just because a candidate has more 'retweets' or 'likes' on a particular platform does not accurately predict outcomes. I found this to be a sobering article that will aid me in my research.
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Stoffer, T. (2014). The Use and Impact of Social Media in Political Elections. Web. 25 July 2015

This was an article published by a graduate school student from the University of Maryland but I found the research to be very focused and done quite well. It focused on the Facebook profiles of Anthony Brown and Doug Gansler during the 2014 Maryland Democratic Gubernatorial Primaries and looked at patterns for outcomes. It also mentions the success of the 2008 Obama campaign in which 70% of its donors gave \$2000 or less. Stoffer cites other research that links statistically significant gains by candidates who had aggressive online media presences. Ultimately the results are inconclusive, barring additional research, but Stoffer did note that there was a positive correlation from the winning candidate (Brown) having more 'likes' and interactions on Facebook.

Storsul, T. (2014). Deliberation or Self-presentation?: Young People, Politics and Social Media. *Nordicom Review*, 35(2), 17-28. Web. 10 July 2015.

The article looks at the dichotomy between a shrinking level of political voter turnout for young voters while also being optimistic about the prospects of growing social media presence by these voters who are talking more and more about being politically engaged. While the main purpose of social media is still socializing, there is growing evidence that they are becoming ever important to political campaigns, especially among young people. While the study was done with Norwegian teens, the evidence was clear that social media had replaced traditional methods of political activities. The other interesting point was that when discussing politics on social media, they often stayed within segregated communities and rarely ventured off or challenged opposing viewpoints.

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politics (i.e., demonstrations and protests), but in 1971 the 26th Amendment took effect, enfranchising millions of young voters and changing the arena of political activity.

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