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This Time it's Different:
American Youth, Political Activism and Mobilization

By

JILL R. LAUFER
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Political Science

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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Committee in Charge

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Abstract:

Titled “*This Time It’s Different: American Youth, Political Activism, and Mobilization*,” my dissertation investigates the evolving political behavior of contemporary American youth and its implications for democratic participation. Traditionally characterized by low turnout and limited engagement, Americans aged 18 to 29 have shown a notable increase in political activity in recent election cycles, including the 2018 midterms, the 2020 general election, and continuing into 2022. This project explores the drivers behind this shift, emphasizing the role of youth-led movements and peer-driven mobilization efforts in reshaping engagement patterns. Using a mixed-methods approach—including novel experimental survey designs, large-scale time series analysis with the American National Election Studies (ANES), and a quasi-experimental matching method to estimate the mobilization effects of the *March for Our Lives* 2018 Get-Out-the-Vote campaign—I examine how youth respond to mobilization messages, particularly those authored by peers. The dissertation also investigates how youth identity interacts with other salient social identities such as race, class, religion, and ethnicity in shaping political behavior. This research contributes to scholarship on political participation and social movements by offering new insights into how young people develop civic identities and political trust, with practical implications for policy, education, and future engagement strategies.

Dedication:

To my husband, Mike, and my daughter, Sloane—thank you for your constant love, patience, and encouragement through every late night and early morning. To my dad and Sandi, and my sisters, Andrea and Sarah—your belief in me made all the difference. To my friends and family—your unwavering support and understanding carried me through the toughest moments. To my amazing cohort—your camaraderie, advice, and laughter sustained me from day one; I am grateful for every conversation, critique, and celebration we shared. To my cats, Sunny and Lunar—thank you for the purrs and the reminders to pause and breathe.

I am also deeply thankful to my advisor, Dr. Amber Boydston, for her mentorship, guidance, and confidence in my work; and to my committee members, Drs. Cheryl Boudreau and Chris Hare, for their thoughtful feedback and encouragement. Finally, to the faculty of the UC Davis Department of Political Science—your dedication to scholarship and teaching has inspired me throughout this journey. Thank you all for believing in me and for helping me reach this milestone.

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Youth Signaling in Social Media Messaging: An Advocacy Outreach Experiment

1. Introduction

Youth political engagement is often described as a paradox in modern democracies (Dalton 2013). Despite constituting a large and increasingly diverse segment of the electorate, young people (aged 18–29) have historically demonstrated lower levels of political participation than older generations, particularly in voter turnout and institutional trust (Holbein and Hillygus 2020b). This persistent underrepresentation has raised concerns about generational inequalities in political power and policy responsiveness, especially on issues that disproportionately affect young people, such as gun violence, climate change, and racial justice (Kelly 2018).

Yet, some recent trends suggest changes in political participation patterns, with some signs pointing to greater engagement and some pointing to less. Youth voting increased substantially in the 2018 and 2020 midterm and general elections, with turnout in 2020 reaching its highest point in decades (CIRCLE 2023). A surge in youth-led activism has been parallel to this trend of higher electoral participation (Jensen 2023; Maher and Earl 2019). Movements like March for Our Lives (a U.S. youth-led advocacy group campaigning for meaningful anti-gun-violence policy and youth political participation founded in the wake of the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida by student survivors), the Sunrise Movement (a youth-led climate activism network in the U.S., founded in April 2017), and climate strikes led by Greta Thunberg have demonstrated the capacity of young people to organize and mobilize around issues they deem salient (Della Volpe 2022; Giugni and Grasso 2021). However, in 2024, youth voting dropped back to roughly 42–47% from its 2020 peak of 50%. Though still above 2016 levels research suggests that this pullback reflects a mix of

renewed polarization around Trump's return to politics, political burnout after successive crises (from the pandemic to inflation and student-debt pressures), and growing disillusionment that neither party speaks directly to young people's priorities (Medina, Siegel-Stechler, and Suzuki 2025).

These voting patterns suggest that youth are more likely to turn out to vote when encouraged to do so by other youth. This study examines the extent to which this holds true and whether youth signaling—explicitly framing political engagement messaging as coming from and targeting youth—influences broader youth political behavior, an area that remains underexplored in political communication and mobilization. Thus, the main research question asked is: does peer-driven social media messaging more effective at mobilizing political engagement among young Americans than more agnostic messaging?

Young Americans have the potential to be engaged citizens, but they face much higher costs and barriers than adults do when attempting to do so. These include real logistical issues like lower incomes and higher mobility and the lack of experience with political institutions, parties, and networks of political information (Abramson 1979; Holbein and Hillygus 2020b; Muralidharan and Sung 2016; Rice and Moffett 2021). For youth, learned political behaviors are gleaned from friends, families, schools, and regular interactions with one's communities (Flanagan and Sherrod 1998; Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Hyman 1959). In addition, youth are more likely than adults to be active in cause-based interest organizations, like a group for LGBTQ rights, and volunteer for a neighborhood cleanup or perform community service (Andolina 2024; Ekström and Sveningsson 2017; Fandos 2017).

Certain political events can form the foundations for causes and issues that can have particular meaning to young people and gain relevance through shared experiences, pertinence to their lives, and social context (Putnam 2001; Sears and Brown 2013). Formative political events during the pre-adult stage can also produce a catalyzing effect on political agency (Hobbs 2018; Sears and Valentino 1997). Therefore, these salient issues and causes built around them have less of a barrier to penetrate when appealing to youth and signaling a youth identity embedded in a cause-based framework may have the effect of increasing political engagement and participation (Jensen 2023).

Given this context, it is reasonable to hypothesize that peer-to-peer advocacy efforts—messaging that explicitly signals it comes from youth and is directed at youth—may be particularly effective at mobilizing young people. Youth are understood to be more responsive to messages that reflect their lived experiences and social identities (Maher and Earl 2019), and peer-driven strategies may foster greater trust in the message, enhance perceptions of relevance, and strengthen social capital within youth networks (Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017; Putnam 2001). However, empirical evidence testing the effectiveness of youth signaling in mobilization messaging remains limited and inconclusive (Grumbach and Hill 2022).

This study addresses that gap through an original survey experiment fielded as part of the Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) program, using the NORC AmeriSpeak panel. The survey experiment employs a 2x3 factorial design that varies the ideological stance (liberal vs. conservative) and the issue type – salient and non-salient (gun control, climate change, and tax reform). Each condition presents a fictional Instagram post from an advocacy group, either signaling that its peer-driven with a youth identity or presented in generic, age-

agnostic terms. The experimental design allows us to assess how youth signaling in political messaging affects engagement behaviors like intention to vote and group political efficacy. I seek this to test if youth driven advocacy efforts in mobilizing youth political engagement more effective than non-youth driven efforts across issues and ideological stances.

Contrary to theoretical expectations drawn from political socialization and peer influence literature, the findings in this study indicate that youth signaling does not increase political engagement among young respondents uniformly. In fact, signaling youth identity can produce demobilizing effects, particularly among non-liberal youth, when compared to a control group and age-agnostic messaging. These results highlight the complexities of peer-based outreach in a polarized political climate (Tucker et al. 2018; Weaver Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser 2011). Rather than reinforcing participation, youth-centric messaging may inadvertently exacerbate political cynicism and disengagement in some subgroups of young people. And rather than enhancing engagement, peer-focused messaging may backfire in polarized contexts. These findings complicate common assumptions about how to appeal to youth and about the efficacy of youth-centric outreach. Further, it suggests that mobilization strategies must account for ideological heterogeneity and polarization when considering how to reach this important subgroup. Understanding the conditions under which young people engage—or disengage—remains a critical area for further research.

By examining the conditional effects of youth signaling in mobilization efforts on social media, this study contributes to the broader literature on political identity, behavior and communication strategies aimed at young people. It also presents practical insights for advocacy organizations

and policymakers seeking to understand how different modalities and messaging can affect subgroups differently.

2. Literature, Theory and Hypotheses

As discussed in the introduction, youth political engagement has long been characterized by low participation rates in traditional political behaviors, compared to older cohorts. These include voting in national, state, and local elections, contacting elected officials, attending public meetings or town halls, participating in political campaigns as volunteers or donors, and affiliating with or joining political parties (Della Volpe 2022; Delli Carpini 2000; Holbein and Hillygus 2020b). This persistent underrepresentation in electoral participation has contributed to stark generational disparities in political power and policy responsiveness, particularly on salient issues to youth like climate change, gun violence, and racial justice (Andolina 2024; Fisher 2012; Iyengar and Jackman 2003; Kelly 2018).

Beyond voting, young people have demonstrated increased participation rates in non-electoral political activities, including protests and issue-based advocacy (e.g. starting organizations and planning campaigns), again particularly around the salient issues (Della Volpe 2022; Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017; Jensen 2023). Despite these promising trends, and recent elections that showed higher rates, scholars and researchers note that the increase in youth participation has not been consistent across all contexts and populations (Andolina 2024; Jensen 2023; CIRCLE 2024). Structural barriers, political cynicism, and feelings of alienation from traditional political institutions continue to dampen engagement among segments of the youth population (Andolina 2024; Edwards-Levy 2018; Holbein and Hillygus 2020b). Understanding the conditions under which young people engage—or disengage—remains a critical area for further research.

In addition to peer networks and identity, socioeconomic status (SES) remains a critical determinant of political participation. Education, income, and political interest have consistently been identified as strong predictors of both electoral and non-electoral forms of engagement. Higher levels of education are associated with increased political knowledge, efficacy, and participation, as well as greater responsiveness to mobilization efforts (Bartels 2000; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Similarly, income can shape both access to political resources and perceptions of political influence, with lower-income individuals often facing more structural barriers to engagement. Young people are often more mobile, have lower incomes facing these structural barriers with Black and Latino youth persistently being particularly affected by these realities (Delli Carpini 2000; Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Holbein and Hillygus 2020). Other key factors like political interest, can function as both an antecedent and a reinforcing factor in participation, increasing the likelihood that individuals will seek out political information, join networks, and eventually act upon mobilization messages (Campbell 2013; Holt et al. 2013; Sears and Funk 1991).

Peer Influence, Social Networks, and Issue Salience in Youth Mobilization

Youth political engagement is also strongly influenced by peer networks and the processes of political socialization. During adolescence and early adulthood, individuals are particularly susceptible to peer influence, as they are developing their political identities and establishing patterns of civic behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Highton and Wolfinger 2001; Holbein and Hillygus 2020). Youth are often socialized into political engagement through informal networks—friends, classmates, and social groups—rather than through formal institutions. These networks provide not only information but also social reinforcement that can normalize and

encourage participation in political activities (Campbell 2013; Putnam 2001). As Putnam (2001) argues, dense networks of reciprocal social relations create trust and foster cooperation, which can extend to political action. For youth, peer-driven networks often serve as these sites of trust and reciprocity, particularly in the context of online social media platforms (Andolina 2024; Ekström and Sveningsson 2017; Gilardi et al. 2022). Through these platforms, young people can disseminate political information, mobilize participation, and provide visible signals of engagement (Boulianne 2015).

Issue salience further shapes youth political behavior. Young people are more likely to engage politically when issues are perceived as directly relevant to their lives or future prospects (A. Campbell et al. 1960; Krosnick 1990). Salient issues such as gun violence, climate change, and racial justice have consistently motivated youth activism and electoral participation in recent years (Giugni and Grasso 2021; Newman et al. 2021; Wu 2018). Scholars suggest that youth are particularly responsive to issues because they often experience a weaker attachment to traditional party identification, making them more attuned to issue-based appeals (Abramson 1979; Blais 2006; Hobbs 2018; Sears and Brown 2013).

Moreover, youth are at a life stage where identity formation and belonging are especially important. Mobilization efforts that resonate with their identity as young people—especially through peer-to-peer outreach—may foster a stronger sense of collective action and political efficacy (Della Volpe 2022; Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017). By framing political participation as part of a broader youth movement, these efforts can capitalize on shared identity to motivate action.

Identity Signaling and Persuasion in Mobilization

Research on political persuasion highlights the importance of heuristics and source cues in shaping individuals' reception of political information. Heuristics—mental shortcuts that allow individuals to make judgments with minimal cognitive effort—play a central role in how political messages are processed, particularly in low-information contexts (Boudreau 2009; Lupia and McCubbins 1998). For young people, who often have less political experience and lower levels of political knowledge compared to older cohorts, source cues and signals embedded in mobilization messages may be especially influential.

Youth signaling (or explicitly framing political messages as coming from youth) and targeting youth, may serve as a trust cue. Prior research suggests that individuals are more likely to trust and act upon information from sources they perceive as sharing their social identity or lived experiences (Druckman 2022). In the context of youth political engagement, messages from peer-led advocacy organizations or campaigns that emphasize youth identity may be perceived as more authentic and relevant than messages from adult-led or generic organizations.

Additionally, peer-driven messaging may activate social identity processes that enhance the persuasive power of mobilization appeals. When political messages signal in-group membership—such as a shared youth identity—they can foster a sense of belonging and collective purpose, which in turn can motivate participation (Benjamin 2017; Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2015). This effect may be particularly salient in online spaces, where young people frequently encounter political content shared by their peers and where social media platforms amplify the visibility and reach of identity-based signals.

Despite these theoretical expectations, the empirical literature has not fully examined the effects of youth signaling on political engagement. While peer-based outreach is commonly employed by advocacy organizations targeting young people, few studies systematically test whether youth-driven messaging enhances political trust and mobilization relative to more neutral or adult-centered approaches. This study seeks to fill this gap by experimentally testing the effects of youth signaling in political engagement messages across different issue areas and ideological contexts.

Counterfactual: Demobilization, Cynicism, and Polarization

While much of the mobilization literature focuses on factors that encourage political engagement, a growing body of research examines why individuals, particularly young people, may disengage from political participation. Political cynicism, disillusionment with institutions, and information overload are commonly cited as barriers to sustained engagement among youth (Andolina 2024; Holbein and Hillygus 2020b; Weaver Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser 2011). Despite efforts to mobilize young voters through issue-based advocacy and peer-driven outreach, these factors can undermine participation and facilitate withdrawal from the political process.

One key factor is the intensification of political polarization, which can lead to heightened feelings of alienation and frustration among young people, especially those who do not identify strongly with the dominant ideological narratives (Giugni and Grasso 2021; Tucker et al. 2018). In highly polarized contexts, advocacy messages that emphasize identity—such as youth signaling—may backfire by reinforcing perceptions of in-group and out-group conflict. This dynamic may be particularly pronounced among conservative youth, who often perceive youth-

oriented political messaging as biased toward progressive agendas, contributing to skepticism and disengagement (Andolina 2024).

Misinformation and the proliferation of low-trust information environments further complicate efforts to engage young people. Exposure to misleading or polarizing content can reduce trust in political messages and institutions, increasing political apathy (Berinsky 2017). Even when mobilization messages are well-intentioned and peer-driven, they may inadvertently trigger skepticism or fatigue, especially among individuals already wary of political messaging.

Additionally, longstanding challenges in youth political participation persist. Despite increased efforts by organizations to get out the youth vote, participation gaps remain, with many young people expressing doubts about the efficacy of their participation and the responsiveness of political institutions to their concerns (Holbein and Hillygus 2020b).

Taken together, this research area suggests that mobilization efforts targeting youth, particularly those employing peer signaling strategies, may have complex and conditional effects. In some cases, such strategies may not only fail to engage but may actively demobilize segments of the youth population. Understanding these counterfactual outcomes is critical to developing more effective and inclusive engagement strategies.

This study builds on theories of political socialization, peer influence, and social identity to examine the conditional effects of youth signaling in mobilization messaging. Political socialization theory suggests that early adulthood is a critical period in the formation of political attitudes and behaviors, with peers serving as influential agents of socialization (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017). Messages that are framed as originating

from youth groups, essentially a group signal, may therefore be more persuasive for young people, enhancing perceptions of authenticity and trustworthiness of the information contained (Druckman 2022; Perez 2016).

Social identity theory further suggests that individuals are motivated to engage in behaviors that reinforce a positive sense of group membership (Huddy 2001, 2013). When youth perceive mobilization messages as coming from their peer group, they may experience a heightened sense of in-group belonging, which can increase political efficacy and willingness to engage (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2015; Maher and Earl 2019). Youth-driven messages, particularly those signaling shared identity, are expected to tap into these social identity mechanisms.

However, this theoretical framework must be considered alongside the growing evidence that political polarization and cynicism can limit the effectiveness of identity-based appeals. Young people who do not align with the ideological positions commonly associated with youth movements—especially non-liberal youth—may view youth-driven messaging with skepticism or even hostility, leading to disengagement rather than mobilization (Giugni and Grasso 2021; Andolina 2024).

With these frameworks in mind, I seek to test the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses

H1a: Youth respondents exposed to advocacy messages that signal youth identity will report higher levels of intention to vote in the 2024 election (VOTE) compared to those exposed to a control condition.

H1b: Youth respondents exposed to advocacy messages that signal youth identity will report higher levels of VOTE compared to those exposed to generic, age-agnostic messages.

H2a: Youth respondents exposed to advocacy messages that signal youth identity will report higher levels of group political attachment (VOICES) compared to those exposed to a control condition.

H2b: Youth respondents exposed to advocacy messages that signal youth identity will report higher levels of VOICES compared to those exposed to generic, age-agnostic messages.

H3: The effects of youth signaling on VOTE and VOICES will be moderated by ideology. Liberal youth will show stronger positive effects of youth signaling relative to non-liberal youth, when compared to both the control condition and generic messaging.

H4: Youth respondents exposed to youth signaling will exhibit differential levels of VOTE and VOICES compared to adult respondents exposed to the same messaging conditions, with youth expected to be more responsive to peer-driven advocacy.

3. Research Design and Methods

This experiment explores the connections between peer-to peer youth-driven advocacy and political engagement by testing social media exposure to youth vs. non-youth-driven advocacy messaging on an issue. Specifically, I test the impact of embedding the group signal of “youth” as both a source test of group identity and as a mobilizer, compared to a more generic, age agnostic, signal about an issue. This is done by varying both the group name and group message. By varying the type of advocacy group, I can test if peer-to peer youth-driven advocacy is more effective at increasing political engagement on both sides of an issue compared to the less-targeted language. By including two salient issues (climate change and gun control) and a non-salient issue (taxes), along with a control group, I can test the variability, if any, and the generalizability of the effect across issue types and across the political spectrum¹. The primary

¹ Here, the American political spectrum of liberal and conservative issue stances.

goal is to test the effects of youth peer-to-peer signaling in advocacy messaging on political engagement outcomes.

Experimental Design

This study uses a survey experiment fielded through the Time-sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences (TESS) program², administered by NORC AmeriSpeak Panel. The experiment targeted a nationally representative adult sample, with an oversample of young respondents (ages 18–29) and additional oversampling of youth who do not identify as liberal, ensuring adequate representation for subgroup analysis.

Experimental Conditions

The experiment used a 2x2x3 factorial design, plus a control group, manipulating:

1. **Issue Area:** Gun control, climate change, and tax reform.
2. **Ideological Position:** Liberal or conservative advocacy stance.
3. **Source Group Type:** Youth-driven advocacy organizations vs. generic/adult-driven organizations.

Table 1 displays the proposed 2 x 2 x 3 design, varying the ideological position (liberal vs. conservative) of a fictitious (but made to look realistic) Instagram-style post (See Table 2 for climate condition images) from an advocacy group that is either generic vs. explicitly youth-identifying) across three issues (gun control, climate change, and taxes). The message itself is a call to action to attend a rally to register voters.

Table 1. Grid of Experimental Conditions

Issues: Gun Control, Climate Change and Taxes			
		<i>Position</i>	
		<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Conservative</i>
<i>Group Type</i>	Generic/Adult	1	2
	Youth	3	4

² This project won the TESS Young Investigator’s Competition

Treatment Materials

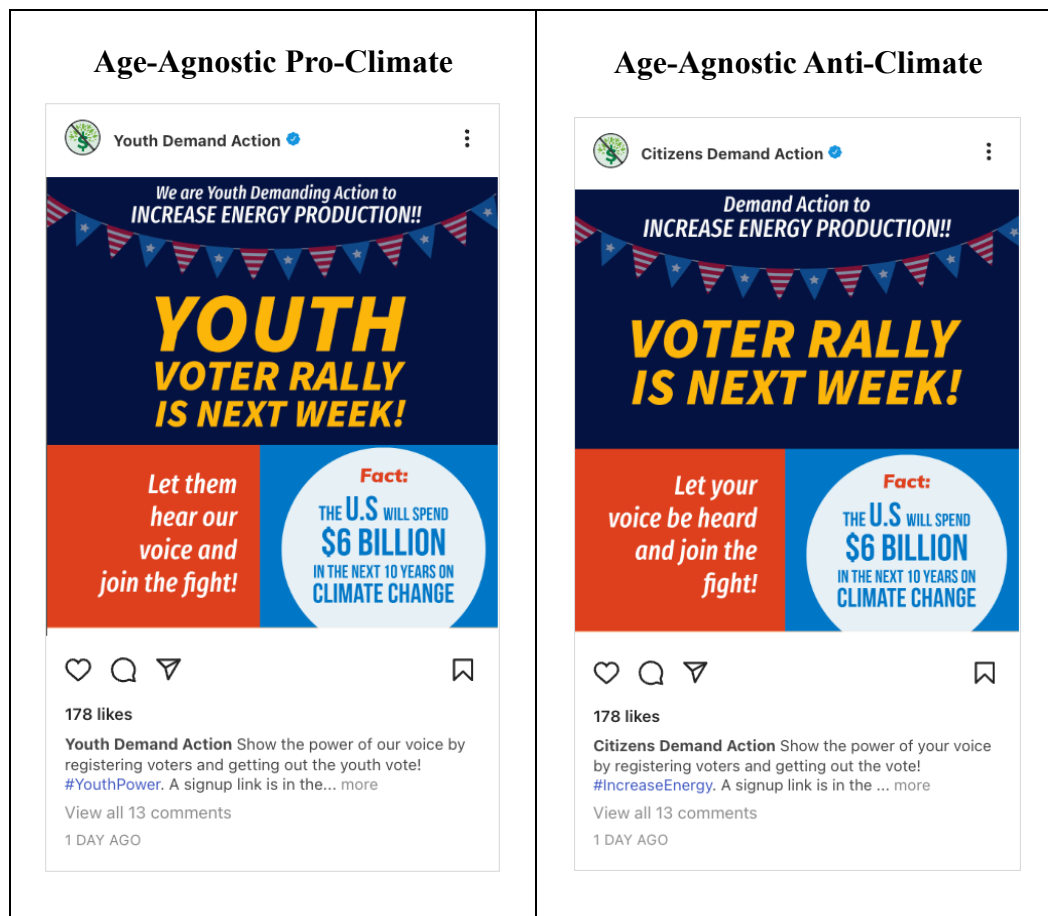
The experimental stimuli were fictional but realistic Instagram mock-ups from advocacy groups. Each respondent was randomly assigned to view one of twelve treatment conditions, presented as fictional Instagram posts. A control group did not receive any post stimulus. The call-to-action in all treatments invited participants to attend a voter registration rally, with variations in group identity cues and ideological stance.

- Youth-driven groups explicitly signaled youth identity, such as "Youth Demand Action."
- Generic/adult-driven groups used neutral names, like "Citizens Demand Action."

Visual content was standardized in design and tone. Respondents were randomly assigned across the 12 treatment conditions and the control group, ensuring balanced representation.

Table 2: Climate Treatments (1 of 3 Issue Conditions)

Youth Liberal	Youth Conservative
 Youth Demand Action • We are Youth Demanding Action to STOP CLIMATE CHANGE!! YOUTH VOTER RALLY IS NEXT WEEK! Let them hear our voice and join the fight! Fact: THE U.S WILL SPEND \$6 BILLION IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS ON CLIMATE CHANGE 178 likes Youth Demand Action Show the power of our voice by registering voters and getting out the youth vote! #YouthPower. A signup link is in the... more View all 13 comments 1 DAY AGO	 Citizens Demand Action • Demand Action to STOP CLIMATE CHANGE!! VOTER RALLY IS NEXT WEEK! Let your voice be heard and join the fight! Fact: THE U.S WILL SPEND \$6 BILLION IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS ON CLIMATE CHANGE 178 likes Citizens Demand Action Show the power of your voice by registering voters and getting out the vote! #StopClimateChange. A signup link is in t... more View all 13 comments 1 DAY AGO



Outcome Measures

After viewing and being asked to read the post, two direct treatment effect questions are asked about intention to vote and group political attachment to politics. These are also asked of the control group, allowing an approximate measurement of treatment effect, if any. A manipulation check question was then asked to ensure respondents understood what they saw: a social media post from an advocacy group.

All respondents answered questions related to two primary dependent variables:

- *Intention to Vote in the 2024 Election (VOTE):* "Do you plan on voting in the 2024 election?" measured on a 0–10 scale.

- *Group Political Voice (VOICES)*: "It is important for people like me to make their voices heard about political issues facing the country," also measured on a 0–10 scale.

Relevant Covariates and Profile Variables

I collected a range of covariates to contextualize treatment effects and explore heterogeneous responses to some theories of political mobilization:

- *Socioeconomic Status (SES)*: Education level, household income (Blais 2006; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995).
- *Political Interest*: Frequency of following government/public affairs (Weaver Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser 2011).
- *Ideology and Party Identification*: Self-placement on liberal-conservative and party ID scales (Abramowitz and Saunders 2006).

Other profile variables are also measured:

- *Media Consumption Habits*: Primary sources of news and information (Andolina 2024; Boulianne 2015; Brader, Tucker, and Therriault 2014).
- *Internet Use*: Average daily hours spent online.

6. Results / Findings

NORC at the University of Chicago conducted the TESS 158 Youth Peer-to-Peer Signaling Experiment using its AmeriSpeak® probability-based panel to produce a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults (age 18+), with an intentional oversample of 18–29 year-olds. Invitations were issued to 13,756 panelists stratified across 60 cells defined by age, race/ethnicity, education, and gender, yielding 2,351 complete, English-language, self-administered web interviews between July 25 and August 8, 2024. The survey achieved a 100%

observed eligibility rate, a design effect of 2.67, and a margin of error of ± 3.3 percentage points. To ensure transparency and rigor, NORC adhered to AAPOR's Transparency Initiative, applied multi-stage weighting—beginning with AmeriSpeak panel base weights, adjusting for sample selection probabilities and nonresponse, raking to Census benchmarks, and trimming extreme weights—and documented all procedures in a comprehensive methods report.

Descriptive Statistics

The analytic sample includes 2366 respondents, with an oversample of young adults aged 18–29 and non-liberal youth respondents. Basic demographic characteristics of the sample are consistent with national benchmarks. The youth subsample (18–29) is just under 50% of the sample. Respondents were evenly distributed across treatment conditions and the control group.

Analysis Plan

- 1. Between Group Analysis (Youth vs. Adult Treatment effects)*
- 2. Within Group Analysis (Youth Only Effects)*

I adopted a stepwise regression modeling strategy to evaluate the effects of youth signaling in mobilization messaging on two key outcomes: intention to vote in the 2024 election (VOTE) and importance of group political voice (VOICES).

For each dependent variable (VOTE and VOICES), I first estimated a simple model (Model 1) that included only the key predictors—youth versus non-youth respondent status and experimental treatment conditions—without any covariates or interaction terms. This provided a baseline understanding of the main effects of the treatment conditions on the dependent

variables. Second, I introduced interaction terms between youth status and treatment conditions (Model 2) to assess whether the effects of youth signaling varied by age group. Next, I expanded the model to include covariates, such as income, education, ideology, gender, and political interest, but without interaction terms (Model 3). This allowed me to control for important confounding variables and isolate the direct effects of the treatments. Finally, I estimated a full interaction model that incorporated both covariates and interaction terms between youth status and treatment conditions (Model 4). This final model assessed how the treatment effects differed for youth and non-youth respondents while accounting for demographic and attitudinal factors. Across all models, I report coefficients and robust standard errors and data plots in the appendix. Across all four models, treated youth respondents consistently report lower voting intentions than treated non-youth respondents, and in some conditions, are lower than the control group. This finding holds in both the bivariate and multivariate models, underscoring the persistent gap in reported voting intention between younger and older participants. The youth coefficient in Model 1 (-1.08, $p < 0.001$) demonstrates the size of this gap, which remains in some cases as additional covariates and interaction terms are introduced in subsequent models.

1. Between Group Analysis (Youth vs. Adult Treatment Effects- VOTE and VOICES)

VOTE Between Group Analysis

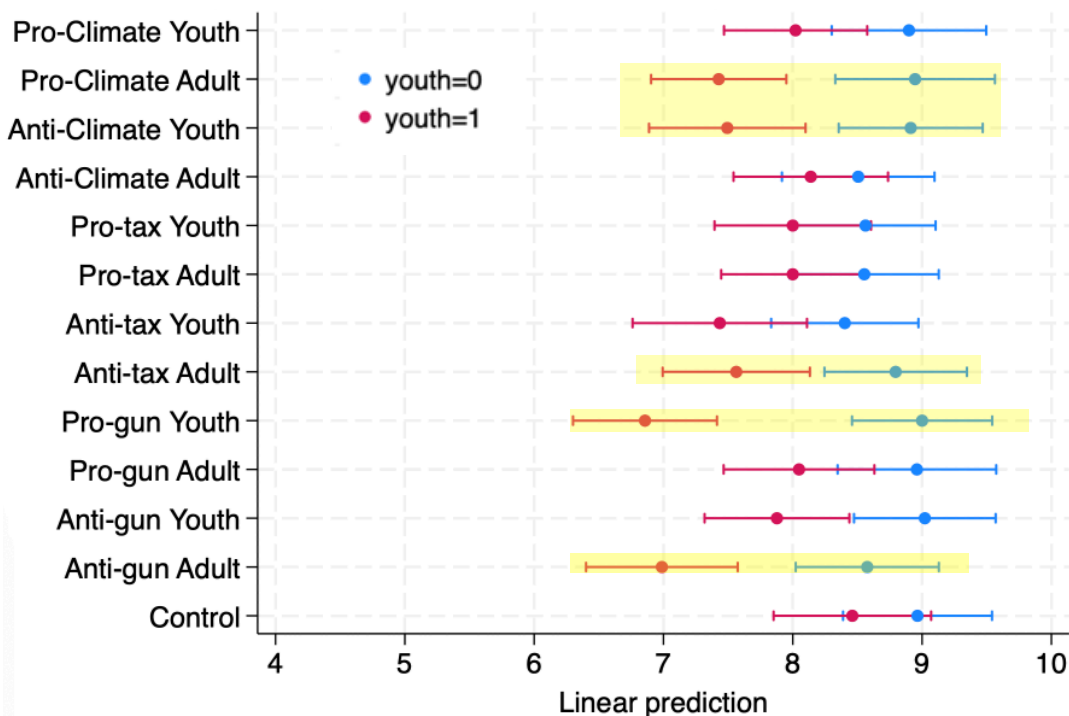
Bivariate Models

Here respondents were asked: "Do you plan on voting in the 2024 election?" measured on a 0–10 scale with 10 being the strongest plan for a vote. The basic bivariate model (Model 1), which includes treatment conditions and youth status but no interactions or covariates, several treatment

conditions are associated with lower voting intentions relative to the control group. Notably, respondents exposed to the *Anti-Gun Adult* and *Pro-Gun Youth* messages report significantly lower likelihood of voting, across respondents. Youth respondents, as discussed, regardless of treatment condition, report lower voting intentions than their older counterparts. Youth in the control group report the highest levels of intention to vote in this simple model (See Appendix for Model 1).

Model 2 adds interaction terms between youth status and treatment conditions. These interactions help clarify whether the effect of specific messages differs for youth compared to non-youth respondents. In several cases—such as the *Pro-Gun Youth* treatment—the interaction terms indicate that youth are disproportionately demobilized compared to adults. The interaction coefficient for *Pro-Gun Youth X Youth* (-1.64 , $p = 0.005$) shows that youth in this condition report substantially lower voting intentions than non-youth in the same condition. However, not all interactions are significant, and in some cases, interaction terms reduce the gap between youth and non-youth respondents. For the purposes of primary points of discussion (differential responses), I present the bivariate model 2 plot only below in Figure 1 with significant differences between the groups highlighted in yellow.

Figure 1. Youth vs Non-Youth Marginal plots for VOTE
By Treatment (including Control)
Model 2, Bivariate w/ Youth x Tx Interaction



(All respondents, Predictive Margins, 95% Confidence Intervals, 0-10 scale)

Multivariate Models and Covariates

Model 3 introduces controls for ideology, party identification, race/ethnicity, education, income, internet use, gender, and region but omits interaction terms. Even after including these covariates, treatment effects such as Anti-Gun Adult messaging remain significant, although somewhat reduced in magnitude. Ideology and party identification are among the strongest predictors of voting intention. Respondents who identify as somewhat conservative (-1.12 , $p < 0.001$) or independent (-2.18 , $p < 0.001$) report significantly lower voting intentions compared to liberal respondents. Higher levels of education and income are also associated with higher voting

likelihood, consistent with broader trends in political participation (See Appendix for plot of Model 3).

In addition to ideological differences, race also shaped patterns of reported voting intention. Across the models, Black and Hispanic respondents consistently reported lower voting intentions compared to white respondents, even after controlling for treatment condition and other covariates. This gap was evident in both youth and non-youth groups, suggesting that racial disparities in political engagement persist independently of age.

Model 4 combines covariates with interaction terms between youth status and treatment conditions. The results confirm that differential treatment effects by age group persist, even after accounting for other factors. Youth respondents remain more negatively affected by specific treatments—particularly those that emphasize youth identity for non-liberal issue stances—compared to non-youth respondents. The adjusted R-squared increases to 0.24 in Model 4, suggesting that the combination of treatment, interaction, and covariate effects explains a substantial portion of the variance in voting intention (See Appendix for plot of Model 4).

VOTE Findings Summary

In sum, across all models, youth respondents report lower voting intentions compared to non-youth respondents. Peer-driven messages that explicitly signal youth identity can, in some cases, even further reduce voting intention, especially among non-liberal youth. The inclusion of covariates and interaction terms shows that these dynamics are not simply the result of underlying demographic or ideological differences but are influenced by the content and framing of the advocacy messages themselves.

VOICES Between Group Analysis

Here respondents were asked: *It is important for people like me to make their voices heard about political about issues facing the country”*

The analysis of the measurement of group political voice reveals consistent patterns across all four models. In general, youth respondents (ages 18–29) report lower levels of political voice compared to non-youth respondents, regardless of the treatment condition. This finding holds whether or not covariates are included in the models and whether or not interaction terms are specified. Again, for purpose of the discussion, I present the marginal plot from Model 2 only (bivariate, youth x treatment interaction). Regression tables and other Model plots can be found in the Appendix.

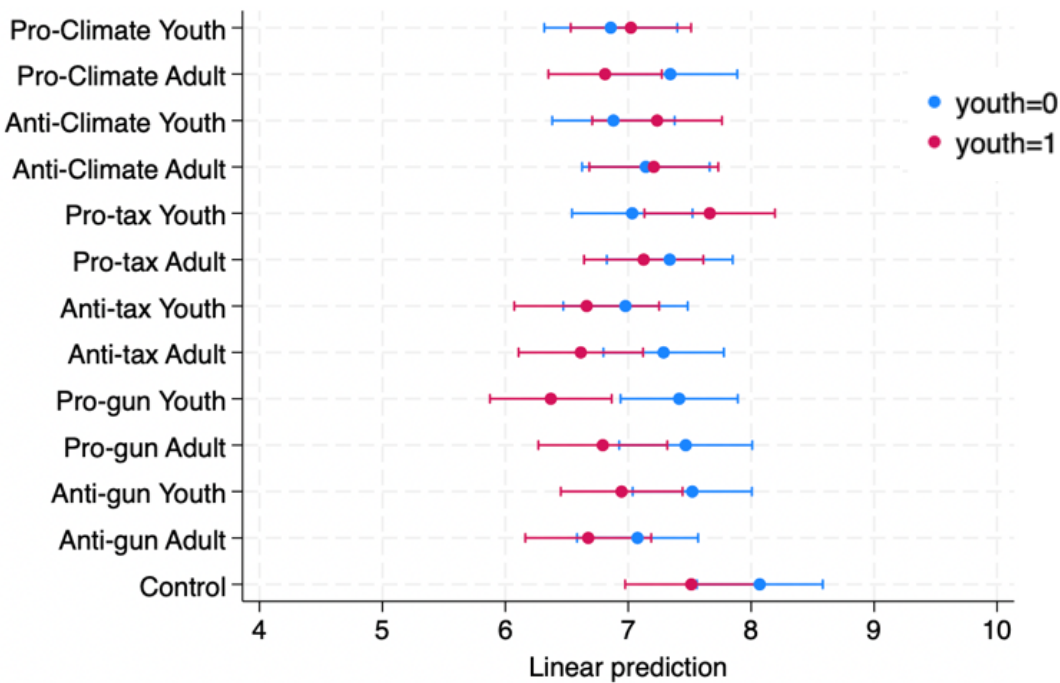
Bivariate Models (1 and 2)

In the basic bivariate model without interactions (Model 1), youth consistently report lower scores across all treatment conditions. The control group—which did not receive any messaging treatment—produces the highest predicted scores for both youth and non-youth respondents. This suggests that exposure to mobilization messaging, whether youth-signaling or age-agnostic, generally results in lower perceptions of group political voice compared to no messaging at all. Importantly, there is little variation between treatment conditions, although youth respondents show consistently lower outcomes than adults across the board. (See Appendix for a plot of Model 1).

When interaction terms between youth status and treatment conditions are introduced in Model 2 (Figure 2), the differences between youth and non-youth become more pronounced. Youth in certain treatment groups—such as *Anti-Tax Youth* and *Pro-Gun Youth*—report substantially lower scores compared to their non-youth counterparts. In a few cases, the gaps between youth and adults are narrower, particularly in the *Pro-Tax Youth* and *Pro-Climate Youth* conditions, but the overall pattern of lower scores among youth remains. These results suggest that some messaging strategies may exacerbate youth perceptions of exclusion from the political process rather than foster a sense of political empowerment.

Figure 2. Youth vs Non-Youth Marginal Effect, by Treatment (including Control)

Model 2: Simple w/ Youth x Tx Interaction



When interaction terms between youth status and treatment conditions are introduced in Model 2, the differences between youth and non-youth become more pronounced. Youth in certain

treatment groups—such as *Anti-Tax Youth* and *Pro-Gun Youth*—report substantially lower scores compared to their non-youth counterparts. In a few cases, the gaps between youth and adults are narrower, particularly in the *Pro-Tax Youth* and *Pro-Climate Youth* conditions, but the overall pattern of lower scores among youth remains. These results suggest that some messaging strategies may exacerbate youth perceptions of exclusion from the political process rather than foster a sense of political empowerment.

Multivariate Models (3 and 4)

The multivariate model without interactions (Model 3) introduces covariates, including ideology, party identification, education, income, and other demographic factors. Even when controlling for these factors, the pattern persists: youth respondents report lower scores than non-youth respondents, and treatment conditions are generally associated with lower scores compared to the control group. However, some of the negative effects of treatment messaging are slightly attenuated after adjusting for covariates, indicating that individual characteristics account for a portion of the variation in responses.

Finally, in Model 4, which includes both covariates and interaction terms, the analysis confirms the robustness of these findings. Youth respondents, particularly those exposed to youth-signaling treatments, continue to report lower perceptions of political voice relative to adults. The *Anti-Tax Youth* and *Pro-Gun Youth* treatments are especially associated with demobilizing effects for youth respondents. Once again, *the control condition produces the highest predicted VOICES scores*, reinforcing the conclusion that, in this study, no message at all may be more effective at fostering political voice than the mobilization messages tested.

The VOICES analysis suggests that youth-focused mobilization messages, rather than enhancing young people's sense of political voice, may in some cases diminish it. These effects are consistent across models, highlighting the complexity of identity-based outreach strategies and the potential for well-intentioned peer-driven advocacy to backfire, particularly among ideologically diverse youth populations.

Analysis Across Dependent Variables for Between-Group Analysis

When comparing the analyses of voting intention (VOTE) and group political voice (VOICES), several key similarities and differences emerge. In both outcomes, youth respondents report lower baseline scores than non-youth respondents, and exposure to youth-signaling advocacy messages tends to produce demobilizing effects, particularly when compared to the control group. Across both dependent variables, treatments that explicitly signal youth identity often result in significantly lower scores relative to generic messaging or no messaging at all.

However, there are important distinctions. The magnitude of the demobilization effect appears somewhat greater for VOTE than for VOICES, particularly in the youth sample. While both outcomes reveal demobilizing effects, VOICES scores tend to show smaller between-group differences when comparing youth and non-youth respondents, suggesting that perceptions of political voice may be less sensitive to youth identity signaling than vote intention.

2. Within Group Analysis – Youth Only

Next, I do a within-group analysis at the subgroup level and take a closer look at what is driving the negative findings among youth. I take a closer look at the youth-only sample (n = 1156) and run bivariate and multivariate models to see any variation by treatment group effect, compared to

control. Here I present two plots (Figures 3a and b) that display regression coefficients of each treatment group relative to the control group, with 95% confidence intervals. The plots compare youth against the control group across treatment conditions to gain a deeper look at the within-group youth effects. I also plot the effects across the ideological spectrum where we see the most variation within the group (Figures 4).

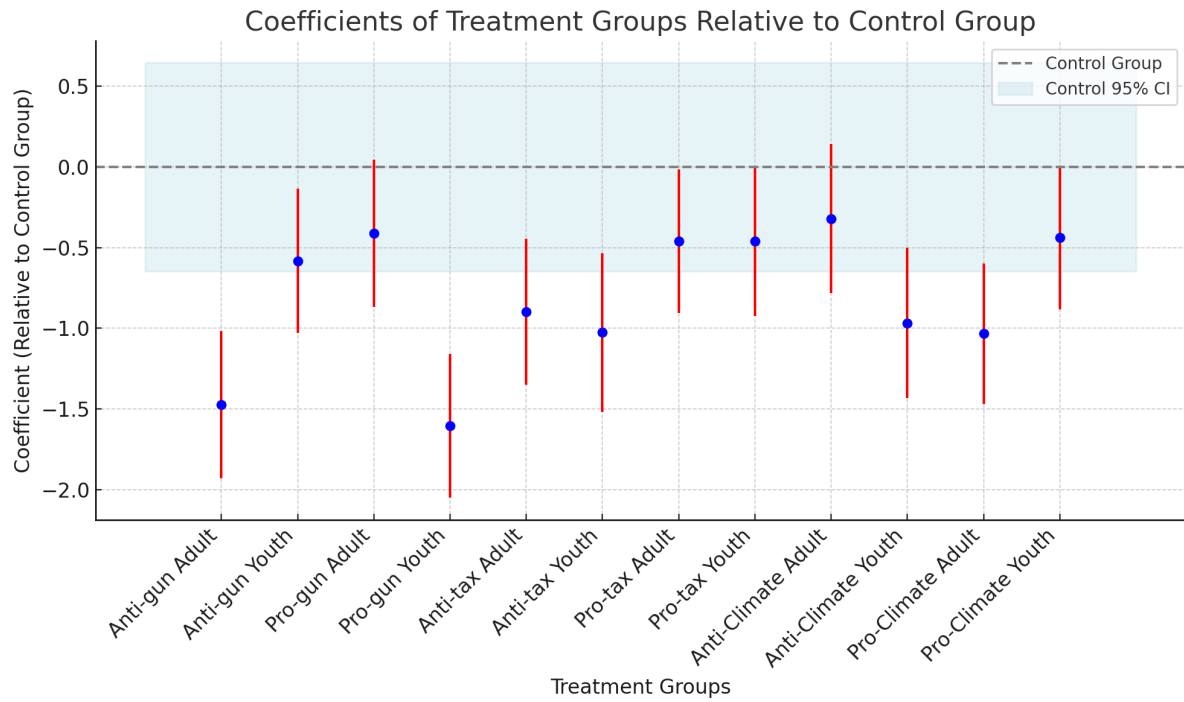
VOTE Within Group Findings

Bivariate Model (1 and 2)

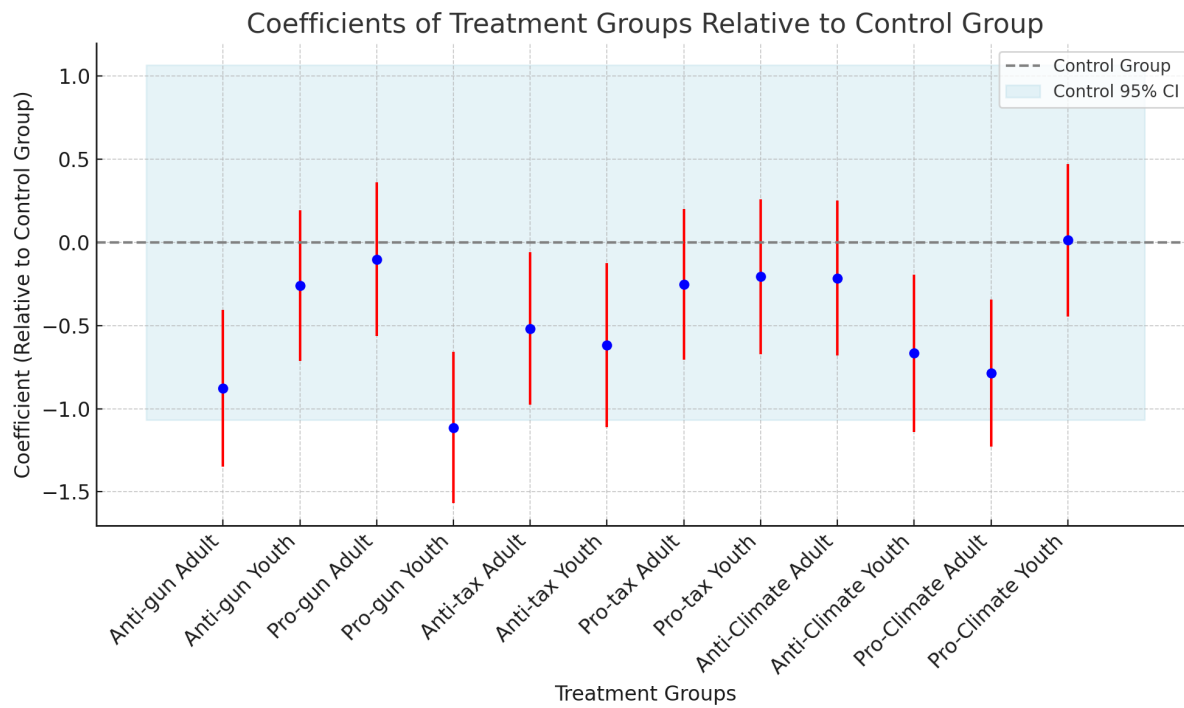
In the bivariate model (Figure 3a), which includes no covariates, almost all treatment conditions are associated with a negative effect on voting intention, compared to the control group. The largest and most statistically significant negative effects appear in the *Anti-Gun Youth*, *Pro-Gun Youth*, and *Anti-Tax Youth* treatment groups. These conditions show coefficients well below zero, suggesting that exposure to these messages significantly reduces youth respondents' reported likelihood of voting compared to the control group.

Figures 3: Marginal Effects of Treatment Relative to Control DV: VOTE

A. Bivariate Model – Youth-only sample DV: VOTE



B. Multivariate Model- Youth-only sample– DV: VOTE



Multivariate Model

The multivariate model (Figure 3b) controls for additional covariates such as ideology, party identification, education, income, and other demographic factors. After adjusting for these variables, the overall pattern of treatment effects remains largely consistent, though the magnitude of some coefficients shifts slightly. In the multivariate model, *Anti-Gun Youth*, *Pro-Gun Youth*, and *Anti-Tax Youth* treatments continue to exhibit significant negative effects on voting intention. These effects are robust to the inclusion of covariates, suggesting that the demobilizing influence of these treatments persists even when accounting for differences in ideology, socioeconomic status, and political affiliation.

VOTE Findings Summary for Within Group

The youth conditions in the *Pro-Climate* and *Anti-Gun*, reflecting the liberal side of the issue, the youth conditions are more positive (less negative) than non-youth, but not significantly so. The Control group still has a higher likelihood to report intention to vote overall, compared to the treatments and only the *Pro-Climate Youth* condition mean is above the Control group mean, but not significantly. In the case of the *Pro-Gun* and *Anti-Climate* conditions, both reflecting conservative ideology, the non-youth treatment conditions are less negative, compared to the Control, and in the case of the *Pro-Gun* treatments, it is not significantly so.

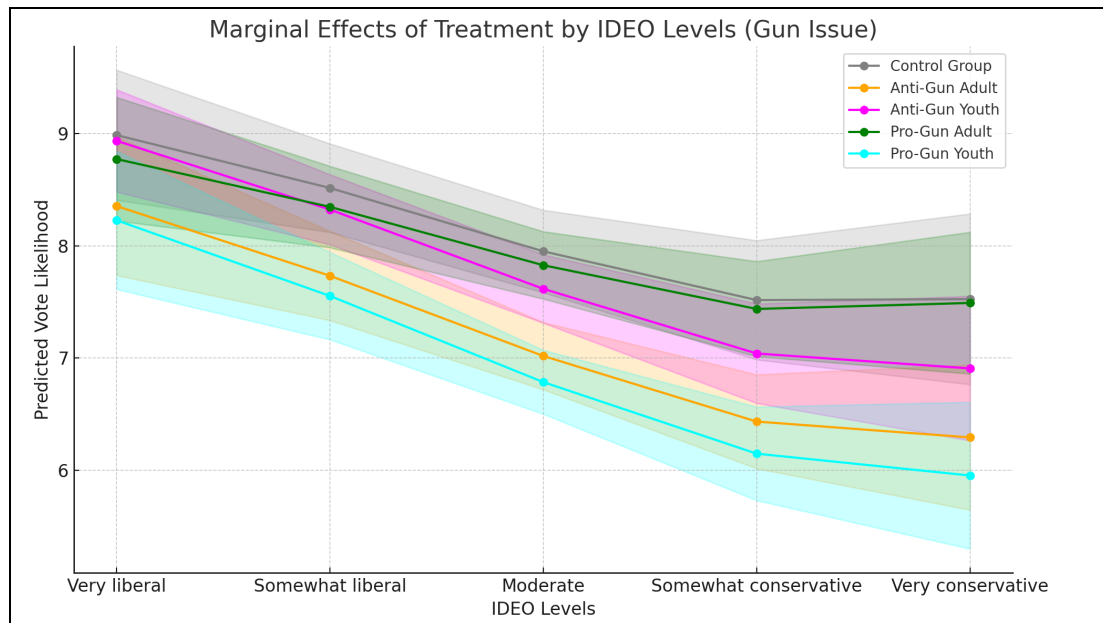
Taken together, these results indicate that within the youth sample, exposure to peer-driven advocacy messaging—whether youth-signaling or generic—generally results in lower reported likelihood of voting compared to the Control condition. The demobilizing effects are particularly strong for treatments that include anti-government messaging (*Anti-Tax Youth*) and pro-gun

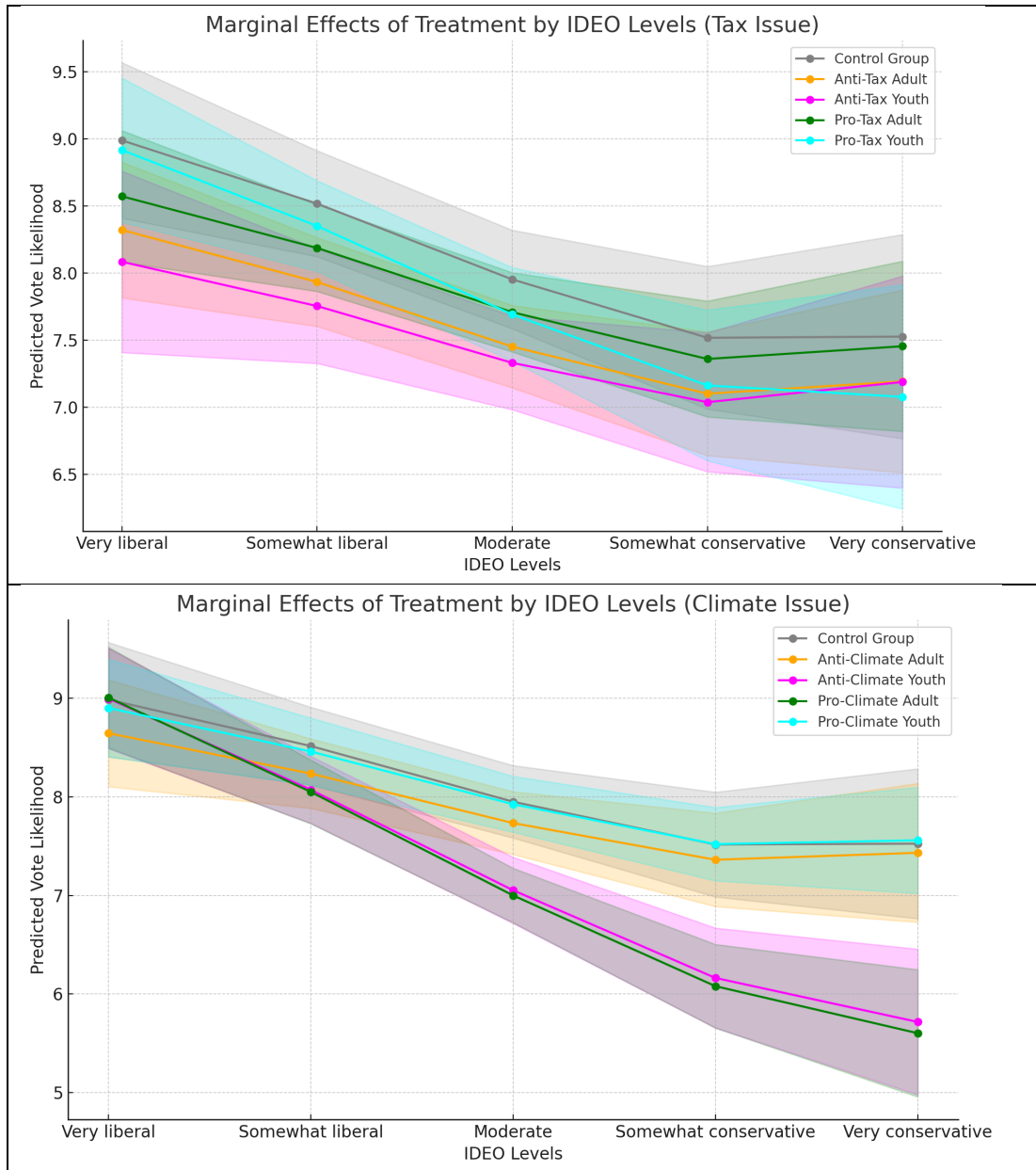
advocacy, suggesting that ideological misalignment between the message and youth respondents may be driving some of the negative effects.

Ideological Group Analysis

Across ideological groups (Figure 4), predicted vote likelihood declines as respondents move from very liberal to very conservative ideological self-identification. Youth in the Control group consistently report higher voting intentions than those exposed to any treatment condition, particularly among moderates and conservatives. This suggests that exposure to mobilization messaging—whether youth-driven or adult-driven—often results in lower reported voting intentions compared to no messaging at all.

Figure 4: Marginal Effects of Treatment, Across Ideology, by Issue Treatment Type – Youth-Only (Multivariate model)





Among the treatment groups, peer-driven youth advocacy messages frequently produce the strongest demobilization effects, especially on Gun control. *Pro-Gun Youth* treatments, in particular, are associated with the steepest declines in voting intentions as respondents become less liberal. On Taxes, the differences between treatments are less pronounced, but youth-exposed messages still generally underperform the control. However, for Climate, the *Pro-*

Climate Youth condition produced some results similar to the Control group but only at the non-liberal end of the spectrum; no other treatment group, youth signaled or otherwise, reached those levels. These results highlight the conditional nature of mobilization messaging among youth, emphasizing that ideological alignment is a key moderator. Messaging strategies that emphasize youth signaling may backfire among non-liberal youth, further dampening their political engagement.

VOICES Within Group Findings

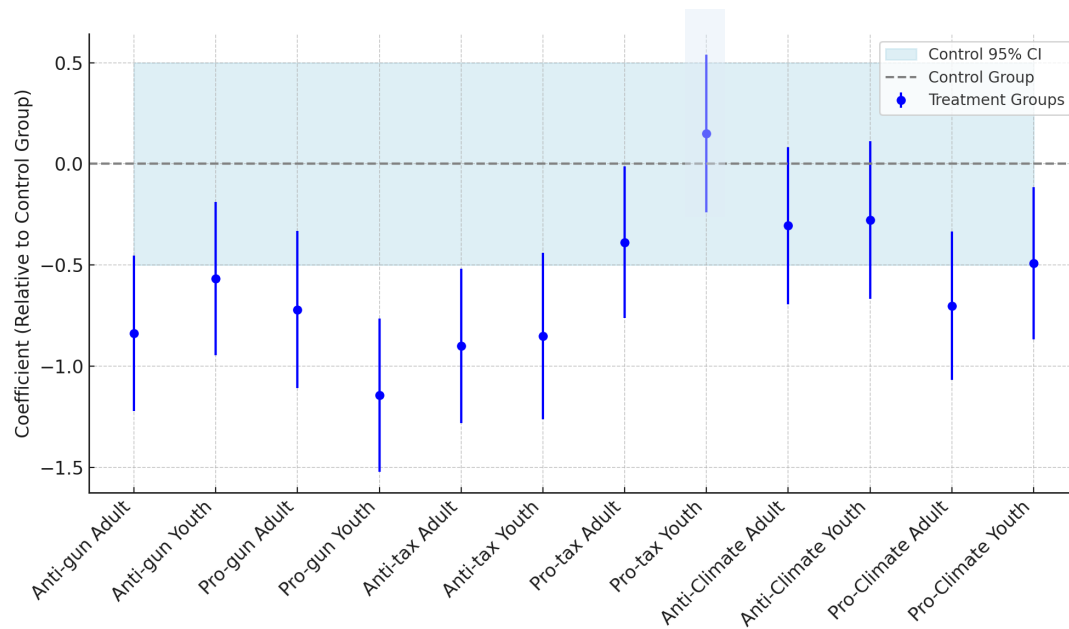
The youth-only analysis of the VOICES DV confirms the findings and a consistent pattern of demobilization across treatment groups compared to the control group.

Bivariate Model

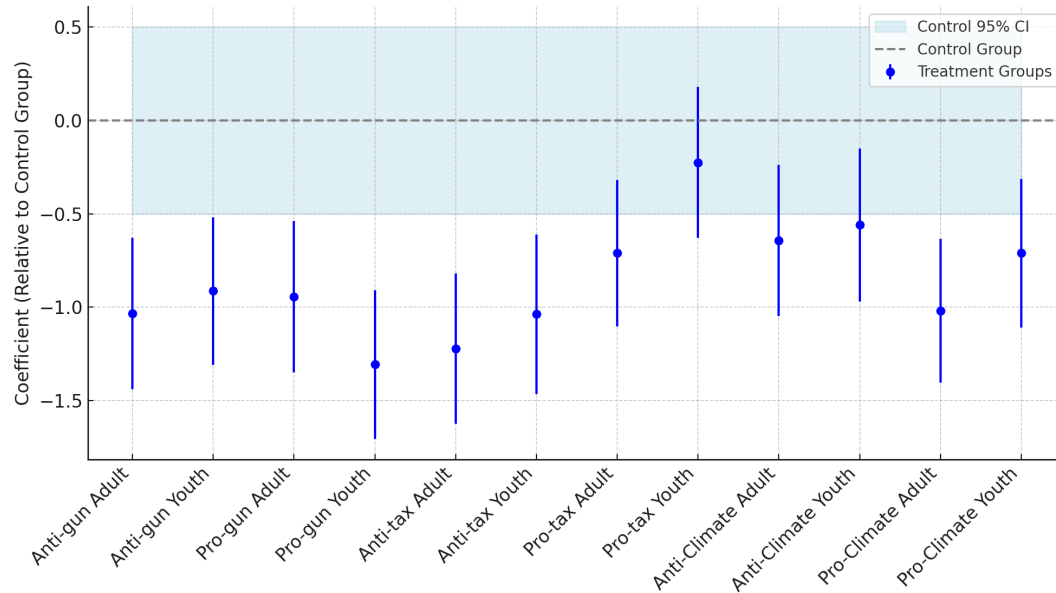
In the bivariate model (Figure 5a), all treatment conditions are associated with lower scores on VOICES relative to the Control. The effects are particularly negative for conservative-framed treatments, such as the *Pro-gun Youth*, where respondents report substantially diminished perceptions of their political voice. *Pro-tax Youth* showed the most positive effects; while the confidence intervals vary across treatments, most treatment groups show effects that are statistically distinguishable from zero and fall below the control group mean.

Figures 5: A. Marginal Effects of Treatment Relative to Control DV: VOICES

A. Bivariate Model – Youth-only sample Bivariate Model, Youth-only



B. Multivariate Model, Youth-only sample, by Tx – DV: VOICES



The multivariate model (Figure 5b), which controls for key covariates produces a very similar pattern of results. The negative treatment effects persist and are, in some cases, slightly stronger once these factors are accounted for. Treatments that combine youth signaling with conservative issue framing (e.g., *Pro-gun Youth*, *Anti-tax Youth*) continue to be associated with the lowest VOICES scores. This suggests that the demobilizing impact of these messages is robust to demographic and ideological controls. Importantly, the control group's consistently higher VOICES scores indicate that, relative to no messaging, most treatments—especially those employing youth signaling—lead to a reduction in youth respondents' sense of political voice. I also ran these across ideology and the findings followed a similar pattern to the VOTE analysis in Figure 4.

The overall pattern is clear: youth signaling in mobilization messages does not uniformly enhance engagement or political efficacy among young respondents. In fact, compared to the control group, youth-centric messaging is associated with lower scores on both VOTE and VOICES, particularly for non-liberal youth. These findings reinforce the conclusion that identity-based mobilization strategies can have complex and, at times, counterproductive effects depending on the ideological and demographic characteristics of the target audience. Nearly all of the hypotheses fail when tested, except for some mixed results for Hypotheses 3 and 4 showing higher engagement levels for liberal youth compared to non-liberal youth and differential effects according to age.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis reveals consistent differences in how youth and non-youth responded to the treatments. As expected, youth were overall less likely to report that they planned to vote, even

before considering treatment effects. However, the treatments had a notably different impact on youth compared to non-youth respondents.

Among non-youth participants, there was little variation in voting intention across treatment groups. Across the different issues and message framings, their responses generally remained close to the control group, showing no strong demobilizing or mobilizing effects. In contrast, youth respondents were more likely to report reduced voting intention in response to the treatments. Compared to the Control group, youth exposed to advocacy messages—especially those signaling youth identity—were consistently more demobilized.

Within the youth sample, clear distinctions emerged by ideological orientation. Non-liberal youth were significantly more likely to report lower voting intentions, regardless of treatment condition. Liberal youth, on the other hand, were generally more resilient, with voting intentions closer to those of the control group. However, even among liberal youth, the overall effect of the treatments remained more negative than positive.

In the multivariate models, Asian-Pacific Islander respondents also reported significantly lower voting intentions, aligning with broader patterns of lower political engagement in some racial and ethnic subgroups (See Appendix for regression tables). However, the effects of the treatments themselves did not vary significantly by race, indicating that while baseline differences in voting intention are clear, the treatments did not exacerbate or mitigate these gaps in a statistically significant way. Notably, the demobilizing effects of certain treatments appeared more pronounced among non-white respondents, particularly in messages related to gun policy and climate change. These issues may resonate differently based on lived experiences and structural inequalities, contributing to variation in responses across racial groups.

Issue salience played a role in these dynamics. The treatments on less salient, more polarizing issues—specifically gun policy and climate change—produced stronger demobilizing effects among youth than those focusing on taxes. This pattern was most pronounced among non-liberal youth, who appeared especially responsive to polarizing messages on guns and climate.

However, when the treatments aligned with non-liberal ideological positions—such as pro-gun youth messages—this seemed to lower voting intention across the entire sample, not just among youth. It’s important to note that while ideology consistently predicted differences in voting intention, party identification did not have the same explanatory power. Ideology, rather than party ID, was the more significant factor in understanding who was demobilized by the treatments.

This study set out to examine whether peer-driven youth signaling in advocacy messaging can effectively mobilize young people to engage in political participation, specifically in terms of their intention to vote and their sense of political voice. Despite theoretical expectations derived from political socialization and social identity frameworks, the findings reveal a more complex and nuanced set of outcomes. Youth signaling did not produce uniformly positive effects on political engagement across the youth demographic. Instead, the effects varied significantly by respondents’ ideological orientation and age group.

Among liberal youth, peer-driven messaging that emphasized youth identity was generally associated with higher levels of perceived political voice and a greater intention to vote, particularly when the message addressed issues like gun control and climate change. These findings align with prior research suggesting that young people are more likely to engage when

advocacy appeals resonate with their group identity and salient issue concerns (Maher and Earl 2019; Giugni and Grasso 2021).

However, the results also indicate that youth signaling may backfire among non-liberal youth. Exposure to peer-driven messages that explicitly signaled youth identity was associated with lower levels of perceived political voice and reduced intention to vote among this group, relative to both generic messaging and control conditions. This demobilization effect underscores the risks of assuming that youth constitute a monolithic group that uniformly responds to identity-based mobilization strategies. These findings reflect broader trends in political polarization and skepticism toward advocacy messaging, particularly among individuals who do not align with dominant ideological narratives within youth political movements (Andolina 2024; Giugni and Grasso 2021).

While peer-driven messages can enhance engagement among segments of the youth population, they can simultaneously alienate others. For advocacy organizations and practitioners, these results highlight the importance of tailoring mobilization strategies to account for ideological diversity within youth populations. Targeted peer messaging may not only be ineffective but could inadvertently demobilize key subgroups. In short, these results call attention to the need for further research into the mechanisms underlying these differential responses.

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Appendix:

Item 1: NORC Survey Instrument



Survey Questions*

TESS 0158 Laufer 2024

Conducted for: University of Rochester

Conducted by: NORC at the University of Chicago

Sample Source: AmeriSpeak Probability-Based Panel

Sampled Population: General Population Age 18+ with oversamples of 18–29-year-olds who identify as moderate to very conservative

Date Fielded: 7/25/2024 – 8/8/2024

WINTRO_1.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our new AmeriSpeak survey!

This survey is about your political opinions.

Q1.

How important are each of the following issues?

[SPACE]

Select your top 3 issues.

RESPONSE OPTIONS [RANDOMIZE AND RECORD ORDER]:

1. Homelessness/Affordable housing
2. Education & schools
3. Reproductive rights
4. Economy/Jobs
5. Health care
6. Poverty & income inequality
7. Gun control
8. Climate change

- 9. Student loans
 - 10. Taxes
 - 11. Transportation
 - 12. Freedom of speech
 - 13. Government spending
 - 14. Inflation
-

#[SHOW IF P_COND=1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, OR 12]

Q2.

Please look at the post below, read the text, and then click 'Continue'.

[IF P_COND=1 SHOW ANTI-GUN_ADULT_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=2 SHOW ANTI-GUN_YOUTH_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=3 SHOW PRO-GUN_ADULT_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=4 SHOW PRO-GUN_YOUTH_v3.PNG
IF P_COND=5 SHOW PRO-TAX_ADULT_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=6 SHOW PRO-TAX_YOUTH_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=7 SHOW ANTI-TAX_ADULT_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=8 SHOW ANTI-TAX_YOUTH_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=9 SHOW ANTI-CLIM_ADULT_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=10 SHOW ANTI-CLIM_YOUTH_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=11 SHOW PRO-CLIM_ADULT_v2.PNG
IF P_COND=12 SHOW PRO-CLIM_YOUTH_v2.PNG]

#[SHOW IF P_COND=1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, OR 12]

Q3.

If this post popped up in your feed would you ...

Select all that apply.

RESPONSE OPTIONS [RANDOMIZE AND RECORD ORDER OF RESPONSE OPTIONS 1, 2, AND 3]:

- 1. Consider clicking on the post to learn more about the rally?
 - 2. Consider "liking" the post?
 - 3. Consider sharing it (say, on a reel, as a post, or with your friends)?
 - 4. I would not consider any of these options [SP] [ANCHOR]
 - 5. I do not use social media [SP] [ANCHOR]
-

#[SHOW IF P_COND=1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, OR 12]

Q4.

The post contained information and statistics about [IF P_COND=1,2,3 OR 4 gun policy; IF P_COND=5,6,7, OR 8 taxes; IF P_COND=9, 10, 11, OR 12 the environment]. Did you trust that the information was accurate and true? Use the slider to rate your trust level.

Move the slider to the left to indicate less trust and to the right to indicate more trust.

[SLIDER: 0 TO 3 'Less Trust' 7 TO 9 'More Trust']

#[SHOW IF P_COND=1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, OR 12]

Q5.

How much do you agree with the following statement?

This post addresses an issue important to people like me.

Move the slider left if you feel more strongly disagree and to the right if you strongly agree with the statement.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10 1 TO 3 'Disagree' 7 TO 9 'Agree']

#[SHOW IF P_COND=1, 2, 3, OR 4]

Q6.

Use the slider to indicate your level of support for gun control vs. gun rights/2nd amendment.

Move the slider to the left to indicate more support for gun rights and the right to indicate more support for gun control.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10: 0 TO 3 'Gun Rights'; 7 TO 9 'Gun Control']

#[SHOW IF P_COND=5, 6, 7, OR 8]

Q7.

Use the slider below to indicate your level of support for progressive tax policy vs. lower tax policies.

Move the slider to the left to indicate more support for progressive tax policies and the right to indicate more support for lower tax policies.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10: 1 TO 3 'Progressive tax policies'; 7 TO 9 'Lower tax policies']

#[SHOW IF P_COND=9, 10, 11, OR 12]

Q8.

Use the slider to indicate your level of support for more climate change action vs. less climate change actions and more energy production.

Move the slider to the left to indicate more support for climate change action and the right to indicate less support for climate change action.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10: 1 TO 3 'More climate change action'; 7 TO 9 'Less climate change action']

#[SHOW IF P_COND=1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, OR 12]

Q9.

Please tell us any other reactions, feelings, or thoughts you have about what you read:

[TEXTBOX]

Q10.

How much do you agree with the following statement?

It is important for people like me to make their voices heard political about issues facing the country.

Move the slider left if you feel more strongly disagree and to the right if you strongly agree about the statement.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10 1 TO 3 'Disagree' 7 TO 9 'Agree']

Q12.

How likely is it that you will vote in the next presidential election (2024)?

Move the slider left if you are very unlikely to vote and to the right if you are very likely to vote.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10 1 TO 3 'Unlikely' 7 TO 9 'Likely']

Q13.

Some people don't pay much attention to politics generally. From day to day, when there isn't any big election campaign going on, would you say you are not interested, not very interested, somewhat interested, very interested, or extremely interested?

Move the slider to the left to indicate that you are not interested and to the right to indicate that you are interested.

[SLIDER: RANGE 0 TO 10 1 TO 3 'Not very interested' 7 TO 9 'Very interested']

Q14.

Here's a list of activities some people might participate in. For each, please tell us if you have performed it in the past 12 months (or did not). Can be in-person or online.

In the past 12 months, have you...

GRID ITEMS [RANDOMIZE AND RECORD ORDER]:

- A. Attended a political rally or speech or organized protest
- B. Followed, listened, liked, or shared a candidate's social media post
- C. Attended a meeting on local, town or school affairs (Zoom counts)
- D. Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate
- E. Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, (not a political party)
- F. Joined or have been an active part of a cultural, ethnic or community-focused group or organization
- G. Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Yes, I have done this
 - 2. No, I have not done this
 - 77. Don't know/Not sure
-

Q15.

... and, in the coming 6-12 months, including the upcoming election, indicate which activities you might be or plan to participate in. Can be online or in-person.

GRID ITEMS [SHOW GRID ITEMS IN SAME ORDER AT Q14]:

- A. Attend a political rally or speech or organized protest
- B. Follow, listen, like, or share a candidate's social media post
- C. Attend a meeting on local, town or school affairs (Zoom counts)
- D. Work or volunteer for a political party or candidate
- E. Be an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, (not a political party)
- F. Join or be an active part of a cultural, ethnic or community-focused group or organization
- G. Work with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

- 1. Yes, I am planning on doing this
 - 2. Maybe, I might do this
 - 3. No, I will not do this
 - 77. Not sure/Undecided
-

#[SHOW IF ANY]Q3_1 TO Q3_4=1]

Q16.

On an average weekday, approximately how many hours do you spend using social media for personal purposes?

RESPONSE OPTIONS:

1. Less than 1 hour
 2. 1-3 hours
 3. 3-5 hours
 4. 5-7 hours
 5. More than 7 hours a day
-

Q17.

Where do you primarily get your news and information (political or otherwise) from?

Please select your top three media types.

RESPONSE OPTIONS [RANDOMIZE AND RECORD ORDER]:

1. Television/Cable news channels
 2. Social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
 3. YouTube or similar video platform
 4. Online news websites, including print media sites (e.g. Washington Post)
 5. Radio broadcasts (e.g. NPR)
 6. Podcasts
 7. Printed newspapers or magazines
 8. Other (please specify) [TEXTBOX] [ANCHOR]
-

Q18.

Which issues do you see as the most important and require immediate attention at the national level?

Select your top 3 issues.

RESPONSE OPTIONS [RANDOMIZE AND RECORD ORDER]:

1. Affordable housing/Homelessness
2. Education & school funding
3. Reproductive rights
4. Economy/Jobs
5. Health care
6. Poverty & inequality
7. Gun control
8. Climate change

9. Student loans
10. Taxes
11. Transportation
12. Freedom of speech
13. Inflation
14. Government spending

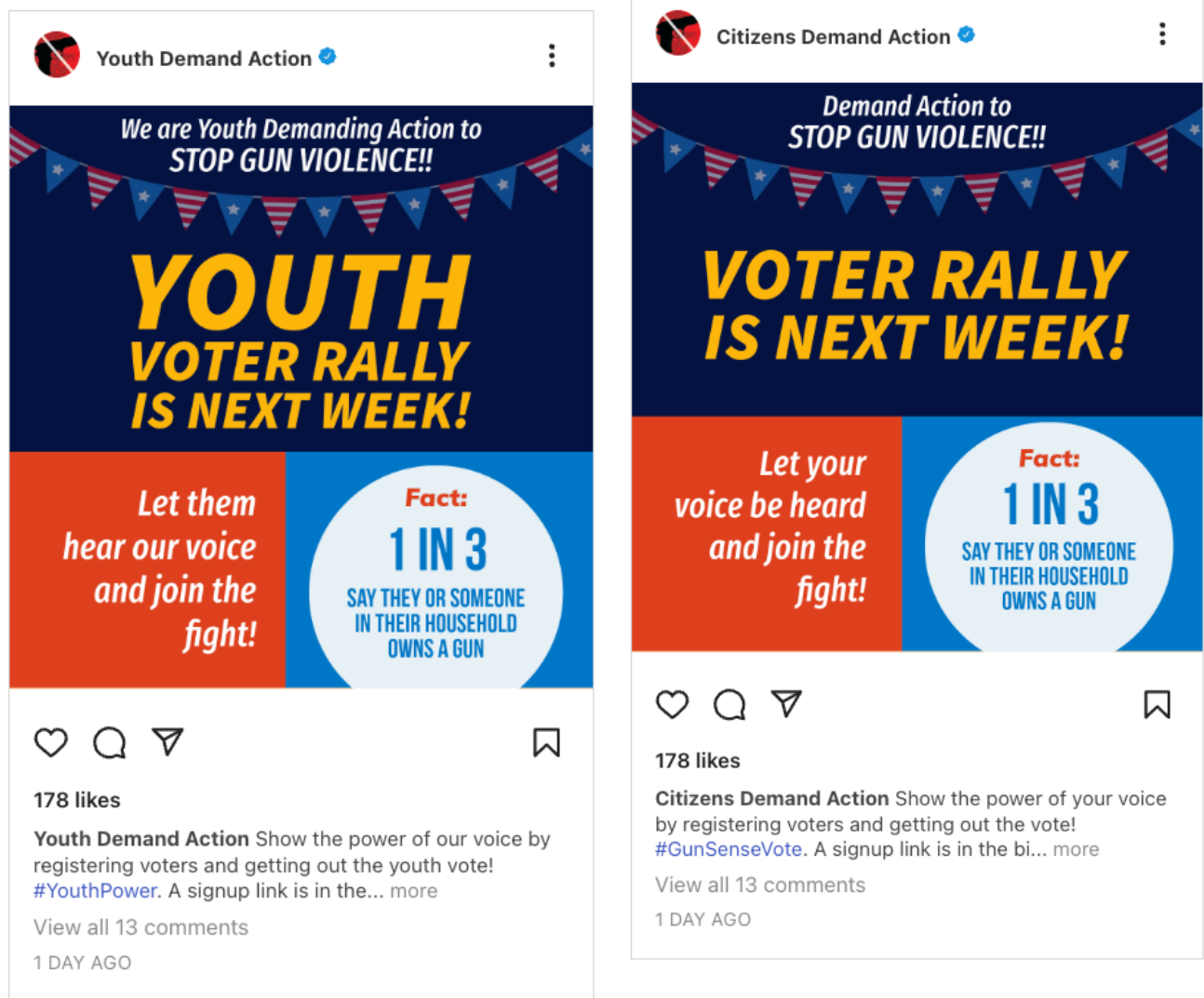
Demographic Profile:
Additional questions asked of panelists prior to this survey
and are included in the survey data

Variable	Values
Gender	1 = Male
	2 = Female
Age	Age in years
Age (7 categories)	1 = 18-24; 2 = 25-34; 3 = 35-44; 4 = 45-54; 5 = 55-64; 6 = 65-74; 7 = 75+
Age (4 categories)	1 = 18-29; 2 = 30-44; 3 = 45-59; 4 = 60+
Education (5 categories)	1 = Less than HS
	2 = HS graduate
	3 = Some college/associates degree
	4 = Bachelor's degree
	5 = Post grad study/professional degree
Race/Ethnicity	1 = White, Non-Hispanic
	2 = Black, Non-Hispanic
	3 = Other, Non-Hispanic
	4 = Hispanic
	5 = 2+ races, Non-Hispanic
	6 = Asian/Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic
Housing Type	1 = A one-family house detached from any other house
	2 = A one-family house attached to one or more houses
	3 = A building with 2 or more apartments
	4 = A mobile home or trailer
	5 = Boat, RV, van, etc.
Household Income (18 categories)	1 = Less than \$5,000 2 = \$5,000 to \$9,999
	3 = \$10,000 to \$14,999 4 = \$15,000 to \$19,999
	5 = \$20,000 to \$24,999 6 = \$25,000 to \$29,999
	7 = \$30,000 to \$34,999 8 = \$35,000 to \$39,999
	9 = \$40,000 to \$49,999 10 = \$50,000 to \$59,999
	11 = \$60,000 to \$74,999 12 = \$75,000 to \$84,999
	13 = \$85,000 to \$99,999 14 = \$100,000 to \$124,999
	15 = \$125,000 to \$149,999 16 = \$150,000 to \$174,999
	17 = \$175,000 to \$199,999 18 = \$200,000 or more
Household Income (9 categories)	1 = Less than \$10,000
	2 = \$10,000 to \$19,999
	3 = \$20,000 to \$29,999
	4 = \$30,000 to \$39,999
	5 = \$40,000 to \$49,999

	6 = \$50,000 to \$74,999
	7 = \$75,000 to \$99,999
	8 = \$100,000 to \$149,999
	9 = \$150,000 or more
Household Income (4 categories)	1 = Less than \$30,000
	2 = \$30,000 to \$59,999
	3 = \$60,000 to \$99,999
	4 = \$100,000 or more
Marital Status	1 = Married
	2 = Widowed
	3 = Divorced
	4 = Separated
	5 = Never married
Metropolitan Statistical Area Status	0 = Non-Metro
	1 = Metro (as defined US OMB Core-Based Statistical Area)
Home Internet Access	0 = No
	1 = Yes
Telephone Service	1 = Landline telephone only
	2 = Have a landline, but mostly use cellphone
	3 = Have cellphone, but mostly use landline
	4 = Cellphone only
	5 = No telephone service
Ownership of Living Quarters	1 = Owned or being bought by you or someone in your household
	2 = Rented for cash
	3 = Occupied without payment of cash rent
Region 4 (US Census)	1 = Northeast
	2 = Midwest
	3 = South
	4 = West
Region 9 (US Census)	1 = New England
	2 = Mid-Atlantic
	3 = East-North Central
	4 = West-North Central
	5 = South Atlantic
	6 = East-South Central
	7 = West-South Central
	8 = Mountain
	9 = Pacific
State	State of residence
Household Size	Total number of members in household
HH members, age 0-1	Known number of household members in age group
HH members, age 2-5	Known number of household members in age group
HH members, age 6-12	Known number of household members in age group
HH members, age 13-17	Known number of household members in age group
HH members, age 18+	Known number of household members in age group
Current Employment Status	1 = Working - as a paid employee
	2 = Working - self-employed
	3 = Not working - on temporary layoff from a job
	4 = Not working - looking for work
	5 = Not working – retired

	6 = Not working – disabled
	7 = Not working – other
S_PARTY7ID	1 = Strong Democrat
	2 = Not So Strong Democrat
	3 = Lean Democrat
	4 = Don't Lean
	5 = Lean Republican
	6 = Not So Strong Republican
	7 = Strong Republican
S_PARTY5ID	-1 = Unknown
	1 = Democrat
	2 = Lean Democrat
	3 = Don't Lean/Independent/None
	4 = Lean Republican
S_IDEO20	5 = Republican
	1 = Very liberal
	2 = Somewhat liberal
	3 = Moderate
	4 = Somewhat conservative
P_RELIG	5 = Very conservative
	1 = Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Non-denominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness, etc.)
	2 = Roman Catholic (Catholic)
	3 = Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints/LDS)
	4 = Orthodox (Greek, Russian, or some other orthodox church)
	5 = Jewish (Judaism)
	6 = Muslim (Islam)
	7 = Buddhist
	8 = Hindu
	9 = Atheist (do not believe in God)
	10 = Agnostic (not sure if there is a God)
	11 = Nothing in particular
	12 = Just Christian
	13 = Unitarian (Universalist)
P_ATTEND	14 = Something else, please specify: [TEXTBOX]
	1 = Never
	2 = Less than once per year
	3 = About once or twice a year
	4 = Several times a year
	5 = About once a month
	6 = 2-3 times a month
	7 = Nearly every week
	8 = Every week
	9 = Several times a week

Appendix Figure 1. Additional Treatments (Gun Control)



Appendix Table 1: OLS Regression outputs for VOTE, Model 1-4, Control group is reference, (All respondents, with a “youth” (18-29) dummy)

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Anti-gun Adult	-0.90 (0.28)	-0.39 (0.40)	-0.57 (0.28)	-0.34 (0.37)
Anti-gun Youth	-0.24 (0.29)	0.06 (0.40)	-0.20 (0.27)	-0.19 (0.37)
Pro-gun Adult	-0.18 (0.30)	-0.05 (0.44)	-0.06 (0.29)	-0.14 (0.39)
Pro-gun Youth	-0.75 (0.29)	0.03 (0.40)	-0.56 (0.28)	-0.13 (0.37)
Anti-tax Adult	-0.51 (0.29)	-0.17 (0.40)	-0.45 (0.28)	-0.36 (0.37)
Anti-tax Youth	-0.78 (0.31)	-0.56 (0.41)	-0.65 (0.29)	-0.48 (0.38)
Pro-tax Adult	-0.41 (0.29)	-0.41 (0.41)	-0.41 (0.28)	-0.45 (0.38)
Pro-tax Youth	-0.44 (0.30)	-0.40 (0.40)	-0.33 (0.28)	-0.37 (0.37)
Anti-Climate Adult	-0.38 (0.30)	-0.46 (0.42)	-0.41 (0.29)	-0.61 (0.38)
Anti-Climate Youth	-0.48 (0.30)	-0.05 (0.40)	-0.36 (0.2)	-0.23 (0.37)
Pro-Climate Adult	-0.54 (0.30)	-0.02 (0.43)	-0.41 (0.28)	-0.16 (0.39)
Pro-Climate Youth	-0.23 (0.30)	-0.06 (0.42)	-0.15 (0.28)	-0.13 (0.39)
Youth	-1.07 (0.11)	-0.50 (0.43)	-0.44 (0.11)	-0.26 (0.38)

Anti-gun Adult # Youth	-1.08 (0.59)	-0.51 (0.53)		
Anti-gun Youth # Youth	-0.64 (0.58)	-0.05 (0.52)		
Pro-gun Adult # Youth	-0.40 (0.60)	0.11 (0.54)		
Pro-gun Youth # Youth	-1.64 (0.58)	-0.92 (0.52)		
Anti-tax Adult # Youth	-0.73 (0.58)	-0.21 (0.53)		
Anti-tax Youth # Youth	-0.46 (0.62)	-0.41 (0.56)		
Pro-tax Adult # Youth	-0.05 (0.59)	0.03 (0.53)		
Pro-tax Youth # Youth	-0.06 (0.59)	0.08 (0.53)		
Anti-Climate Adult # Youth	0.13 (0.60)	0.37 (0.54)		
Anti-Climate Youth # Youth	-0.91 (0.56)	-0.29 (0.54)		
Pro-Climate Adult # Youth	-1.01 (0.59)	-0.50 (0.53)		
Pro-Climate Youth # Youth	-0.37 (0.59)	-0.09 (0.53)		
IDEO: Somewhat liberal	-0.59 (0.20)	-0.573 (0.20)		
IDEO: Moderate	-0.75 (0.17)	-0.744 (0.18)		
IDEO: Somewhat conservative	-1.12 (0.23)	-1.102 (0.23)		
IDEO: Very conservative	-0.61 (0.27)	-0.60 (0.28)		
PartyID: Not so strong Dem	-0.20 (0.19)	-0.20 (0.19)		
PartyID: Lean Democrat	-0.42 (0.20)	-0.42 (0.20)		
PartyID: Ind/None	-2.18 (0.20)	-2.17 (0.20)		
PartyID: Lean Republican	-0.54 (0.23)	-0.53 (0.23)		
PartyID: Not so strong Rep	-0.39 (0.23)	-0.39 (0.23)		
PartyID: Strong Republican	0.12 (0.26)	0.12 (0.26)		
Race: Black, non-Hispanic	-0.88 (0.20)	-0.86 (0.20)		
Race: Other, non-Hispanic	-1.24 (0.50)	-1.19 (0.51)		
Race: Hispanic	-0.72 (0.14)	-0.72 (0.14)		
Race: 2+, non-Hispanic	-0.36 (0.29)	-0.36 (0.29)		
Race: Asian-Pacific Islander	-0.91 (0.23)	-0.92 (0.23)		
EDUC5 (Education Continuous)	0.42 (0.05)	0.42 (0.05)		
INCOME4 (Income Continuous)	0.13 (0.05)	0.14 (0.05)		
Internet use	-0.019 (0.05)	-0.014 (0.04)		
GENDER: Female	-0.25 (0.11)	-0.256 (0.11)		
REGION: Midwest	-0.03 (0.17)	-0.04 (0.17)		
REGION: South	0.03 (0.16)	0.03 (0.17)		
REGION: West	0.29 (0.17)	0.28 (0.17)		
Constant	9.23 (0.22)	8.96 (0.29)	8.81 (0.35)	8.70 (0.39)
R Squared	0.04	0.07	0.24	0.24

Note: Bold coefficients are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.
Control group is reference, white is racial group reference, Liberal and
Strong Democrat is reference, Southeast is Regional Reference

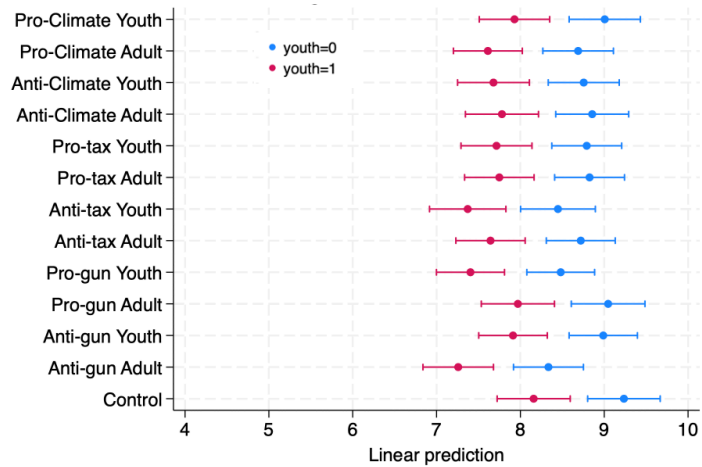
Appendix Table 2: OLS Regression Outputs for VOICES (All respondents)

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Anti-gun Adult	** -0.921 ** (0.262)	** -0.994 ** (0.362)	** -1.078 ** (0.268)	** -1.174 ** (0.356)
Anti-gun Youth	** -0.561 ** (0.259)	-0.549 (0.360)	** -0.856 ** (0.263)	** -0.804 ** (0.353)
Pro-gun Adult	** -0.673 ** (0.270)	-0.602 (0.380)	** -0.904 ** (0.276)	** -0.915 ** (0.376)
Pro-gun Youth	** -0.892 ** (0.258)	-0.656 (0.357)	** -1.020 ** (0.265)	** -0.854 ** (0.352)
Anti-tax Adult	** -0.841 ** (0.261)	** -0.783 ** (0.361)	** -1.085 ** (0.266)	** -1.012 ** (0.355)
Anti-tax Youth	** -0.977 ** (0.273)	** -1.092 ** (0.367)	** -1.176 ** (0.277)	** -1.307 ** (0.361)

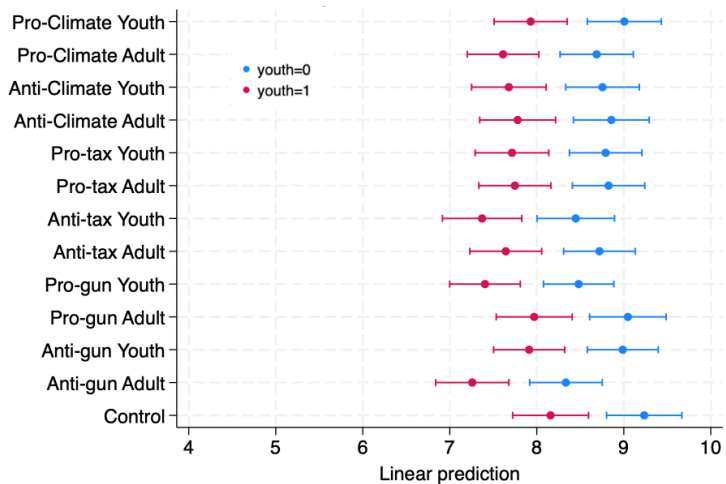
Pro-tax Adult	** -0.564** (0.261)	** -0.733** (0.369)	** -0.814** (0.266)	** -0.932** (0.362)
Pro-tax Youth	-0.488 (0.264)	** -1.038** (0.361)	** -0.696** (0.268)	** -1.173** (0.355)
Anti-Climate Adult	** -0.625** (0.267)	** -0.927** (0.372)	** -0.907** (0.272)	** -1.167** (0.365)
Anti-Climate Youth	** -0.760** (0.265)	** -1.191** (0.364)	** -0.970** (0.270)	** -1.459** (0.358)
Pro-Climate Adult	** -0.740** (0.262)	-0.728 (0.381)	** -0.906** (0.268)	** -0.894** (0.375)
Pro-Climate Youth	** -0.835** (0.265)	** -1.213** (0.380)	** -1.077** (0.273)	** -1.372** (0.375)
Youth	** -0.298** (0.102)	-0.557 (0.379)	** -0.357** (0.113)	-0.606 (0.364)
<i>Anti-gun Adult # Youth</i>	—	0.156 (0.524)	—	0.200 (0.504)
<i>Anti-gun Youth # Youth</i>	—	-0.018 (0.518)	—	-0.099 (0.497)
<i>Pro-gun Adult # Youth</i>	—	-0.118 (0.540)	—	0.046 (0.517)
<i>Pro-gun Youth # Youth</i>	—	-0.488 (0.516)	—	-0.344 (0.496)
<i>Anti-tax Adult # Youth</i>	—	-0.117 (0.522)	—	-0.144 (0.502)
<i>Anti-tax Youth # Youth</i>	—	0.241 (0.548)	—	0.285 (0.526)
<i>Pro-tax Adult # Youth</i>	—	0.345 (0.522)	—	0.245 (0.501)
<i>Pro-tax Youth # Youth</i>	—	** 1.188** (0.528)	—	** 1.030** (0.506)
<i>Anti-Climate Adult # Youth</i>	—	0.621 (0.534)	—	0.541 (0.512)
<i>Anti-Climate Youth # Youth</i>	—	0.912 (0.530)	—	** 1.042** (0.509)
<i>Pro-Climate Adult # Youth</i>	—	0.026 (0.525)	—	0.024 (0.504)
<i>Pro-Climate Youth # Youth</i>	—	0.721 (0.531)	—	0.571 (0.510)
IDEO: Somewhat liberal	—	—	** -0.829** (0.191)	** -0.810** (0.191)
IDEO: Moderate	—	—	** -1.075** (0.169)	** -1.054** (0.169)
IDEO: Somewhat conservative	—	—	** -1.344** (0.220)	** -1.332** (0.221)
IDEO: Very conservative	—	—	** -0.799** (0.263)	** -0.797** (0.263)
PartyID: Not so strong Dem	—	—	-0.333 (0.182)	-0.351 (0.182)
PartyID: Lean Democrat	—	—	-0.095 (0.192)	-0.107 (0.193)
PartyID: Ind/None	—	—	** -1.072** (0.186)	** -1.064** (0.187)
PartyID: Lean Republican	—	—	** -0.543** (0.225)	** -0.548** (0.225)
PartyID: Not so strong Rep	—	—	-0.384 (0.220)	-0.391 (0.220)
PartyID: Strong Republican	—	—	-0.243 (0.246)	-0.245 (0.246)
Race: Black, non-Hispanic	—	—	0.322 (0.191)	0.339 (0.191)
Race: Other, non-Hispanic	—	—	0.068 (0.473)	0.069 (0.474)
Race: Hispanic	—	—	0.106 (0.133)	0.087 (0.133)
Race: 2+, non-Hispanic	—	—	-0.095 (0.277)	-0.124 (0.277)
Race: Asian-Pacific Islander	—	—	-0.260 (0.219)	-0.303 (0.220)
EDUC5 (Education)	—	—	** 0.224** (0.049)	** 0.222** (0.049)
INCOME4 (Income)	—	—	0.049 (0.048)	0.055 (0.048)
Internet use	—	—	** 0.119** (0.044)	** 0.119** (0.044)
GENDER: Female	—	—	0.076 (0.103)	0.071 (0.103)
REGION: Midwest	—	—	0.075 (0.168)	0.077 (0.168)
REGION: South	—	—	0.299 (0.161)	0.312 (0.160)
REGION: West	—	—	0.165 (0.167)	0.184 (0.167)
Constant	** 7.947** (0.196)	** 8.070** (0.261)	** 8.184** (0.338)	** 8.281** (0.377)

Appendix Figure 2a, b. Youth and Non-Youth Treatment Marginal plots – No Interaction Plots
DV: VOTE

a. Model 1: Simple, no interaction (All respondents)



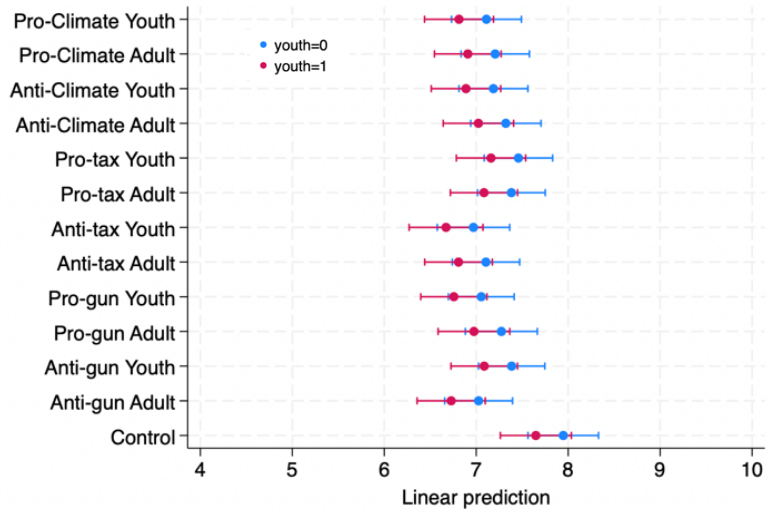
b. Model 3: Multivariate, no interaction



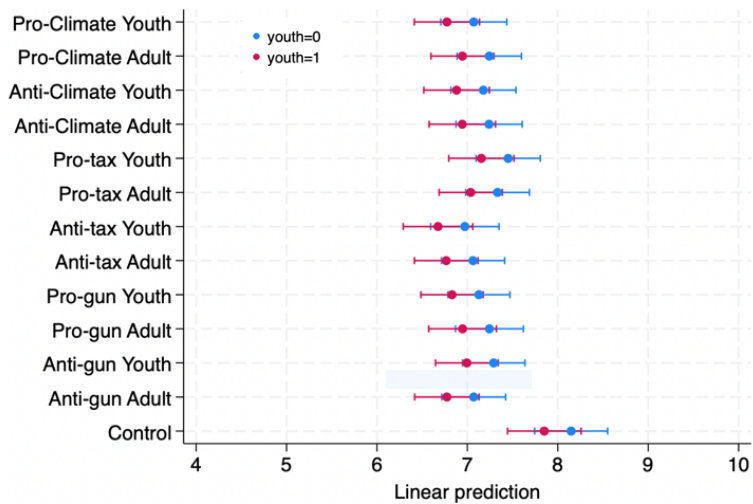
Predictive Margins, 95% Confidence Intervals, 0-10 mean scoring)

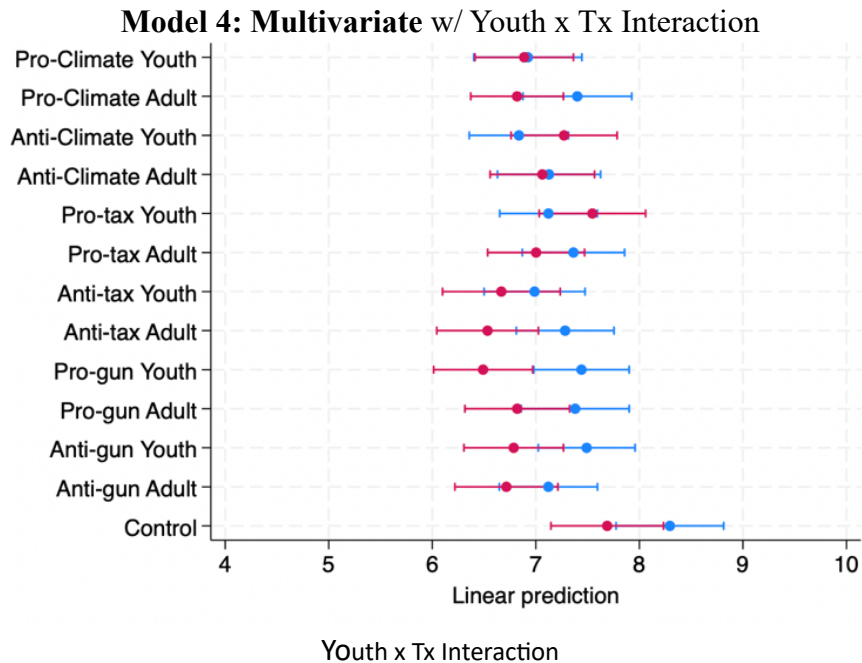
Appendix Figure 3a, b. Youth and Non-Youth Treatment - DV:
VOICES Marginal plots – No Interaction Plots

Model 1: Simple, no interaction (All respondents)



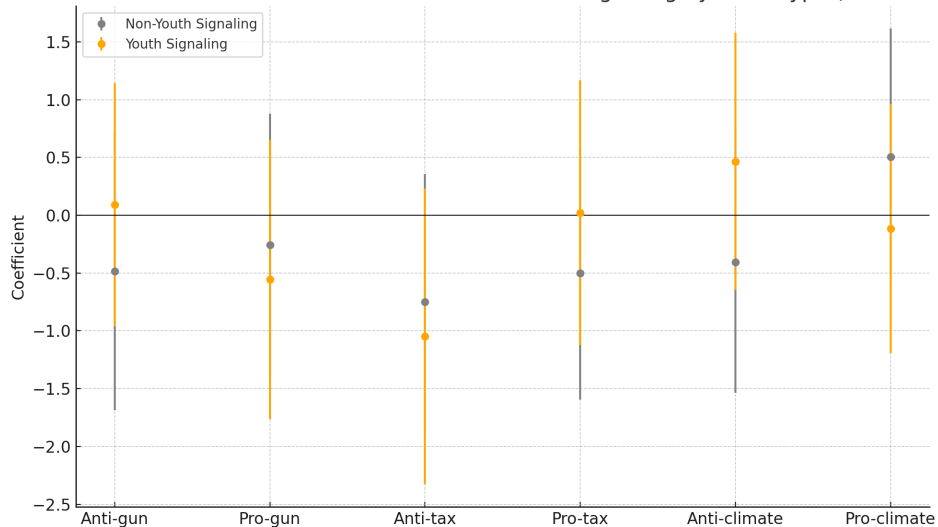
Model 3: Multivariate, no interaction





Appendix Figure 4. Youth and Non-Youth Treatment Conditions Marginal plots, youth Only with Ideology interaction

Mean Coefficients with Confidence Intervals: Youth vs Non-Youth Signaling by Issue Type (Interaction with Ideology)



Evaluating the Effect of the Youth Gun Advocacy Movement's *March for Our Lives* GOTV Campaign on Voting and Registration in the 2018 Midterm Election

1. Introduction

Historically, political participation among young Americans, 30 and under, has been the lowest of all age groups. Census data shows that youth voter turnout during presidential elections has hovered between 30% and 50% in the last 40 years, whereas older cohorts participate at levels 20-30% points higher at 50-80%, signaling a substantial voting gap (U.S. Census 2019, Holbein and Hillygus 2020). In addition to low political engagement among young Americans, this voting gap has produced stark generational inequalities in political representation, most notably in lack of institutional responsiveness to salient issues like gun violence, climate change and racial justice (Kelly 2018).

Yet, recent election cycles have disrupted this narrative. In the 2018 midterms, youth voting surged up by nearly 20% compared to the previous midterm election in 2014³, and up by more than 13% from the 2010 midterms (considered a high turnout midterm, (Clement and Mellnik 2019))⁴. Moreover, though more adults also voted youth turnout experienced a significantly higher boost than adults, a nearly 80% jump from 2014. Youth turnout increased nearly 80% from the previous midterm cycle, significantly outpacing the gains seen among older voters⁵. This upward trend continued through the 2020 general election—where youth turnout exceeded

³ From 12% in 2014 to 33% in 2018 (Gallup, 2020).

⁴ The 2010 rate was 21% (CIRCLE).

⁵ Youth turnout for 2020 has been estimated at 50% (CIRCLE)

50% for the first time—and remained stable in 2022 (Nadeem 2023; Frey, 2023)⁶. What catalyzed this dramatic shift?

A contributing factor may have been the highly visible and youth-led response to a mass shooting that occurred nine months before the historical high turnout of the 2018 midterm election. That attack at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL killed 14 students and 3 staff members and injured another 17 people. The tragedy was certainly not the first mass shooting (or even mass school-shooting) young Americans had seen in the news, nor the first to prompt a swell of activism. But it marked the first in which survivors—high school students on the verge of enfranchisement—transformed their grief into a coordinated, national movement. These survivors became the public face of *March for Our Lives* (MFOL), the youth-led gun reform organization that arose out of that emotional outpouring. They and the nascent organization was immediately thrust into the gun control policy fray with a high-profile media event—the well-attended and media-amplified eponymous outdoor protest event in Washington D.C. in March of 2018. Explicitly and vocally anti-gun they led a rapid formation of local chapters throughout the United States (Lithwick 2018; Stevens 2018). In the lead-up to the 2018 midterms, MFOL launched a 60+ city voter mobilization tour—the “Road to Change”—targeting youth registration and turnout through peer-led outreach efforts (Figure 1 and 2). This study attempts to measure what effect this movement and specifically, the Road to Change mobilization tour had on the voting and registration rates of youth who lived in the counties they visited vs. counties they didn’t with a novel quasi-experimental approach using coarsened exact matching (CEM).

⁶ However, in 2024 youth voting went down to similar levels to 2016

Figure 1. Overview of the March for Our Lives movement and 2018 Road to Change GOTV campaign - Google Trends

Media coverage of the organization and the movements of its leaders was covered extensively high after the first week after the tragedy at Parkland and continued through the end of the year.

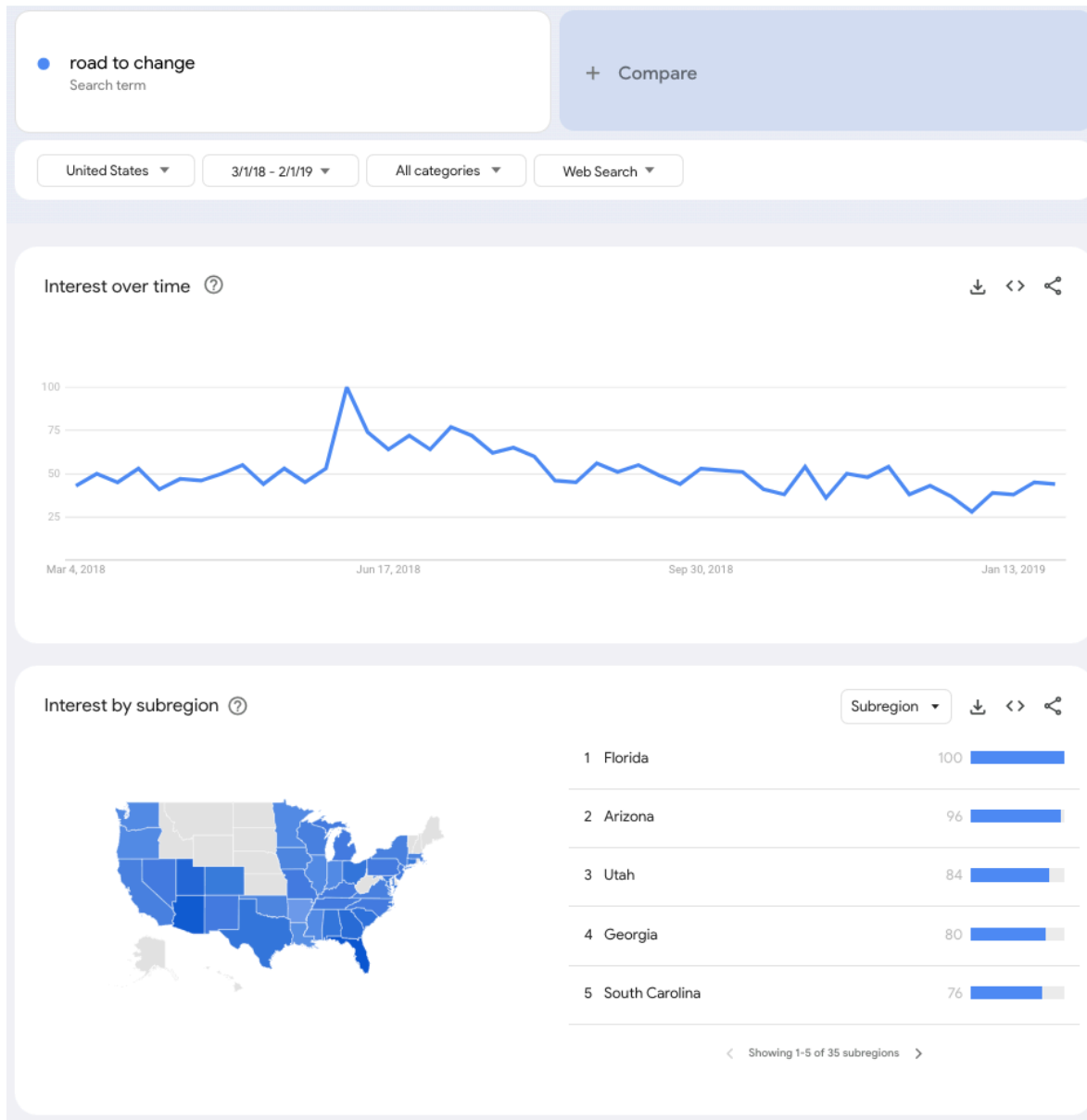
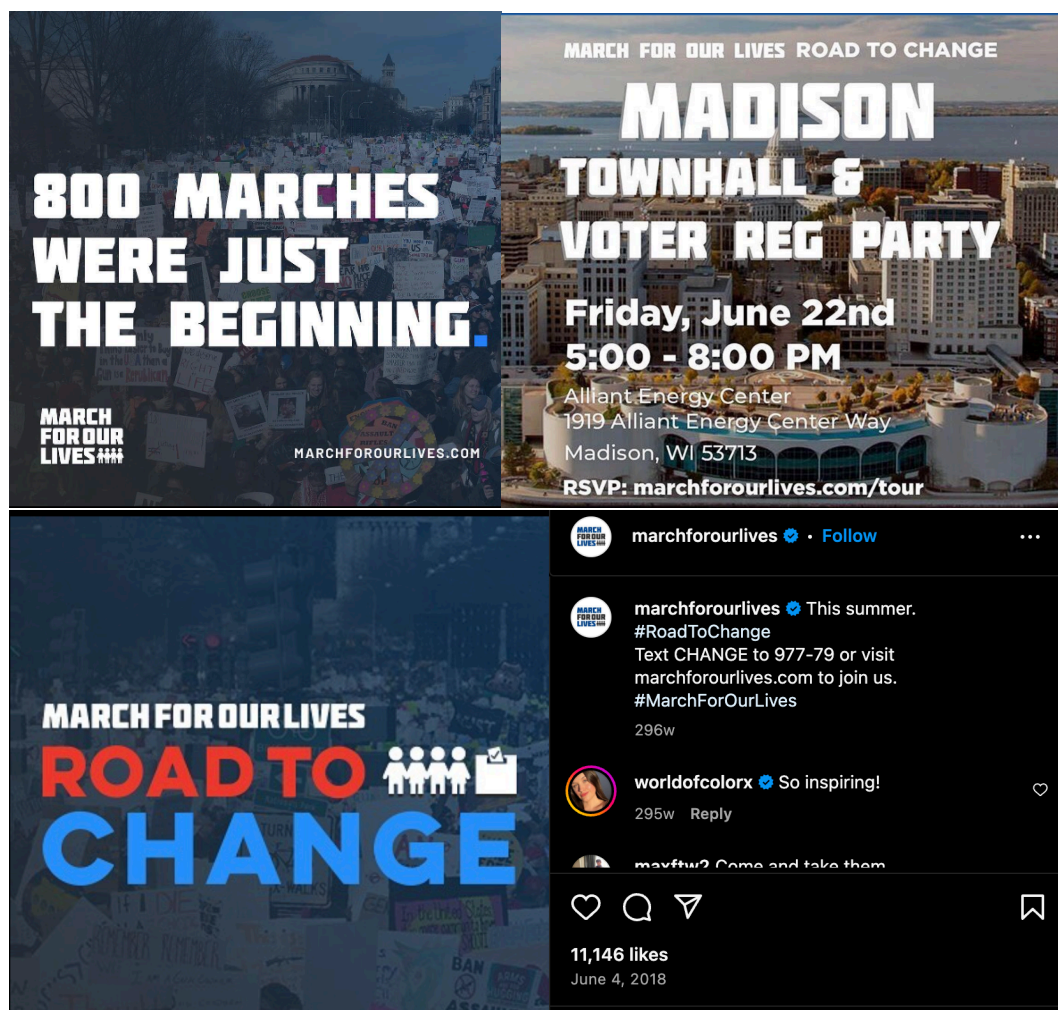


Figure 2. Instagram and Twitter images from MFOL posts during the 2018 midterms



As is widely recognized, gun violence and gun policy are highly salient issues for many Americans (Wu 2018). This salience is particularly acute for young people, who have grown up with the constant presence of mass school shootings and routine active shooter drills in their educational environments (Dermody & Hanmer-Lloyd 2004; Wasike 2017). From Columbine High School in 1999, to Virginia Tech in 2007, to Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012, these tragedies have become defining generational experiences—shaping not only public discourse but the lived realities of youth. More recent mass shootings, including those in Parkland (2018), Boulder (2021), Uvalde (2022), and Nashville (2023), have further reinforced the issue’s

visibility and urgency. Given this context, it is reasonable to expect that gun violence would politically mobilize individuals with strong attitudes on the issue—particularly those who are dissatisfied with the status quo and support gun control reforms. As Schattschneider (1960) argued, political mobilization is often driven by demand for policy change rather than satisfaction with existing conditions. In this case, it is likely that young Americans who support stricter gun laws are more activated by the salience of gun violence than those who are content with current policies.

This linkage between gun control issue attitudes and voter turnout among young people in 2018 should be strengthened by exposure to activism in general, and *youth driven* activism especially. As noted, the saliency of gun violence influences youth and adults in political affairs alike, yet for youth, most of whom have not yet fully crystallized in their partisanship attachments, the saliency of gun violence provides an opening for the issue to influence their political decision-making (Ansolabehere and Puy 2015; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008; Campbell et al. 1960; Sears and Brown 2013).

This framework also builds on the catalyst model of political socialization (Sears & Valentino 1997), which holds that early, formative political experiences can shape long-term participation patterns. For today's youth, gun violence represents a generationally salient issue—one that can activate political agency, particularly when coupled with mobilization from trusted, peer-based sources. Youth driven activism efforts such as the *March for Our Lives* movement have focused on youth becoming aware of their political agency to participate electorally, some for the first time. And because youth have less experience and more barriers to participate (Fisher 2012; Holbein and Hillygus 2020), activism efforts may produce a more potent effect. Gun violence

and gun control issues, I argue, was the catalyst issue ready for utilization to tap into saliency and activate mobilization in 2018 and that MFOL was able to do so.

Thus, this study asks: *What effect did the March for Our Lives – Road to Change GOTV campaign have on registration and voting during the 2018 election in the areas the campaign visited, particularly among young voters?*

To answer this question, I employ a quasi-experimental design using Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) and leverages the comprehensive validated dataset Congressional Election Study (CES) dataset from 2014 and 2018. The analysis finds that counties visited by the MFOL campaign experienced significantly higher voter registration and turnout rates than counties not visited—especially among matched respondents under 30. The results show a 5.63 percentage point increase in voting overall in visited counties and an 8.6 percentage point increase among youth, with odds ratios indicating a 35% increase in youth turnout likelihood. These findings suggest that this peer-led, issue-salient advocacy movement may been a highly effective tool for activating youth political participation during the 2018 U.S. midterms.

A note on timing: This study compares county-level data from the 2014 and 2018 midterm elections. Because the 2016 presidential election and the rise of Donald Trump introduced a major political shock, some of the observed increase in voter turnout during the 2018 midterms may also reflect broader mobilization effects associated with Trump’s presidency. While this analysis focuses on the potential effect of the *March for Our Lives* campaign, future research will aim to isolate these overlapping influences through the construction of a synthetic control group that matches counties across multiple time periods and additional political attributes.

2. Literature Review

Youth Political Behavior and Socialization: A Brief Overview

Young Americans have historically exhibited the lowest levels of voter turnout among all age groups (Andolina 2024; File 2012.; Holbein and Hillygus 2020). A large body of research attributes this to the underdevelopment of political identities, lower levels of political trust, and structural barriers that make participation less habitual and more costly for youth (Campbell et al. 1960; Highton and Wolfinger 2001). However, political socialization literature suggests that formative civic experiences during young adulthood can have lasting effects, shaping political identity, participation habits, and trust in institutions (Sears & Valentino 1997; Putnam 2000; Highton & Kam 2011).

The literature on political incorporation emphasizes the outsized impact that early mobilization can have on voting behavior, particularly among first-time or episodic voters (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995). For youth, exposure to emotionally resonant political stimuli—especially when paired with accessible entry points like issue advocacy—can lead to long-term civic habit formation (Hobbs 2018; Holbein and Hillygus 2020).

Issue Salience: Gun Violence as a Generational Catalyst

Gun violence has emerged as a uniquely generational issue for young Americans. From Columbine (1999) to Sandy Hook (2012) to Parkland (2018), mass shootings have not only shaped national policy debates but also the lived realities of youth who have grown up with lockdown drills and constant exposure to school violence (Wasike 2017; Wu 2018). These events create strong emotional resonance and help define what Schattschneider (1960) calls “conflict displacement”—wherein previously disengaged groups enter political life due to misalignment with the status quo.

Empirical research shows that young people are among the strongest supporters of gun control measures (Newman and Hartman 2019, Della Volpe 2021), and youth-centered movements like *March for Our Lives* have demonstrated an ability to translate issue salience into political action (Stevens 2018; Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017). These movements frame political participation not as institutional duty, but as personal and moral obligation, often rooted in lived trauma.

March for Our Lives and the “Road to Change” Campaign

March for Our Lives (MFOL) emerged directly from the trauma of the 2018 Parkland shooting. Unlike previous mass shootings, Parkland survivors were old enough to speak for themselves, organize, and lead. Their efforts coalesced into a national movement that emphasized peer-led activism, youth voter registration, and policy reform.

The literature on protest movements and youth-led organizing notes that campaigns like MFOL play a dual role: they provide expressive outlets for discontent and also instrumental pathways to political incorporation (Brady et al. 1995; Della Volpe 2021). Earl et al. (2017) describe these campaigns as “hybrid movements” that blur the lines between social protest and electoral mobilization—especially effective when they resonate with a generation shaped by shared trauma and policy neglect.

Face-to-Face Mobilization and GOTV

The broader literature on voter mobilization emphasizes that in-person, face-to-face contact remains the most effective method of increasing turnout (Gerber and Green 2000). Field experiments consistently find that live conversations, particularly those involving social norms and personalized appeals, significantly outperform mailers, texts, or social media nudges in terms of voter activation.

MFOL’s 2018 “Road to Change” tour visited over 60 cities across the U.S., combining traditional organizing strategies (rallies, canvassing, voter registration drives) with online amplification and emotionally resonant storytelling. The campaign blended visibility and proximity: youth activists went directly to schools, community centers, and neighborhoods to speak with peers face-to-face (Jensen 2023; Stevens 2018). This model represented a significant departure from conventional top-down mobilization strategies and offers a powerful case study in youth-led GOTV (Rice & Moffett 2021; Soler-i-Martí 2015).

3. Theory and Hypotheses

Although prior work has documented the power of get-out-the-vote (GOTV) efforts and the role of issue salience in youth political behavior, few studies have empirically tested the electoral effects of youth-led, in-person mobilization. Gerber and Green’s (2000) foundational work demonstrated the efficacy of canvassing broadly, but it did not account for peer-based or issue-driven variation in effectiveness. Nor do most voter mobilization studies evaluate the distinctiveness of youth constituencies as both messengers and targets. This project draws on those insights by examining whether *March for Our Lives*’ hybrid model—youth-led, issue-salient, and both digitally and physically present—led to measurable gains in participation. Specifically, it evaluates whether counties visited by the “Road to Change” tour experienced statistically significant increases in youth registration and turnout, offering evidence that youth-to-youth, face-to-face engagement can meaningfully influence civic behavior.

Theoretically, this project draws from three intersecting literatures: political socialization, issue salience, and peer-based mobilization. Youth, as a group with weaker partisan attachments and lower institutional trust, may be particularly responsive to personal outreach—especially when the messenger is another young person. While traditional GOTV campaigns tend to generalize

their outreach, March for Our Lives combined peer-driven messaging with emotionally salient content and direct community engagement—conditions especially conducive to activation among youth populations (Kioussis and McDevitt 2008; Della Volpe 2021). Grounded in political socialization theory, this approach recognizes early adulthood as a critical moment for shaping long-term civic identity (Campbell et al. 1960; Sears & Valentino 1997). For today’s young people, gun violence is a generationally defining issue, experienced not abstractly but through lockdown drills, media coverage, and lived trauma. A catalytic moment like the Parkland shooting can thus become a “crystallization moment,” transforming concern into action.

MFOL’s approach also leveraged the power of peer signaling and issue framing. Research shows that people are more likely to engage when the stakes feel personally urgent and when the status quo threatens their values (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008; Schattschneider 1960). For youth who feel directly affected by gun violence—and disillusioned by government inaction—political engagement becomes both emotionally and morally compelling. By positioning youth as both the audience and the advocates, MFOL activists became “trusted intermediaries,” engaging their peers in spaces where traditional political actors might lack credibility (Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017). This was especially powerful among first-time voters, whose partisan cues are often underdeveloped and for whom the act of voting itself can be a hurdle (Holbein and Hillygus 2020). Framing participation as a meaningful act of personal and moral responsibility, rather than institutional obligation, helped translate emotional urgency into measurable action.

Hypotheses

From this theoretical foundation, I derive four testable hypotheses:

- **H1a:** Individuals residing in counties visited by the MFOL “Road to Change” campaign will exhibit **greater increases in voter registration** between 2014 and 2018 than individuals in matched unvisited counties.
- **H1b:** Individuals in treated counties will exhibit **greater increases in voter turnout** from 2014 to 2018 than their matched counterparts.
- **H2a:** Among individuals under age 30, those in MFOL-visited counties will show **larger gains in registration** between 2014 and 2018 compared to similarly aged individuals in unvisited counties.
- **H2b:** Among individuals under age 30, those in MFOL-visited counties will show **larger increases in turnout** than their matched peers in control counties.

These hypotheses allow for the evaluation of both overall treatment effects (H1a, H1b) and youth-specific effects (H2a, H2b), operationalized through a matched quasi-experimental design using the CES validated voting dataset. They also reflect both overall treatment effects and youth-specific differences.

4. Research Design and Methods

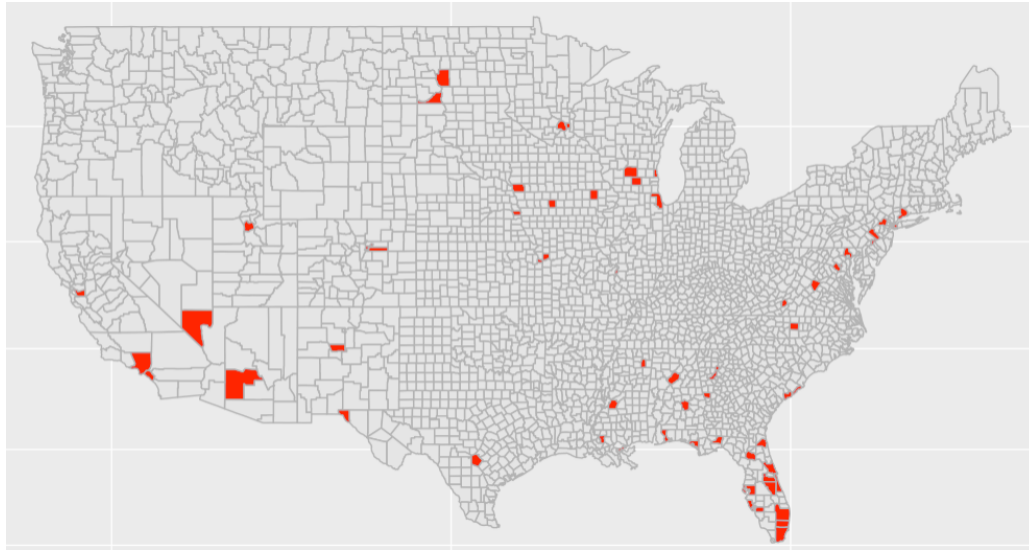
Empirical and Identification Strategy

To estimate the causal effect of the *March for Our Lives* (MFOL) 2018 “Road to Change” GOTV campaign on political participation, this study employs a quasi-experimental design using Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) and data from the 2014 and 2018 Cooperative Election Studies (CES). The 2014 CES data serves as a pre-treatment benchmark to assess change over time, enabling a difference-in-differences logic that strengthens causal inference, even though the matched sample itself is drawn solely from 2018 data. By combining CEM with a difference-

in-differences approach across time, the design aims to isolate the effect of MFOL campaign exposure from broader political shifts, such as reactions to the Trump administration, though as mentioned earlier in the paper in consideration of timing, additional work may need to be done to casually isolate any boosts in response to Trump election in 2016.

Treatment is identified as residing in a county visited by the MFOL campaign in 2018, using their published tour schedule and corresponding FIPS codes (Figure 3 and list form Appendix). I then implemented Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) with 1:1 Mahalanobis distance matching to balance covariates across treated and control units on an individual level. Matching variables included: age, education, gender, race, ideology, party ID, household income, internet access, news interest, and gun policy attitudes. The Appendix has a complete listing of factors. CEM is well-suited for this analysis because it balances treatment and control groups by coarsening covariates into substantively meaningful strata, thereby pruning unmatched observations and minimizing imbalance (Iacus, King, and Porro 2012). Compared to propensity score matching, CEM provides better covariate balance and greater transparency in weighting decisions, which is especially important when analyzing non-randomized treatments like geographic exposure to a political campaign.

Figure 3. Map of MFOL County visits



Data Sources and Treatment Assignment

The analysis uses CES datasets from 2014 (pre-treatment) and 2018 (post-treatment) midterm election years. The treatment is defined as residency in a county visited by the MFOL campaign tour in 2018, matched using county FIPS codes and a verified list of tour stops.

Estimation and Modeling

Post-matching, logistic regression models are used to estimate both average treatment effects (ATE) and subgroup-specific effects. Models include:

- **Baseline models** of treatment effects on registration and turnout
- **Age-interacted models** to isolate youth-specific treatment effects
- **Moderated models** testing variation by race and education

The final matched sample includes 15,088 respondents, evenly split between treatment (MFOL-visited counties) and control (non-visited counties). Matching was conducted using Mahalanobis

1:1 distance across a broad set of demographic and attitudinal covariates. Essentially individual respondents were match along key covariates that predict political participation and exhibit pro-balance along gun control attitudes in order to create a treatment pool of likely attendees or for possible spillover effects from media coverage of if they knew someone who went or discussed the event. Covariate balance diagnostics indicate high-quality matches, with all standardized mean differences approaching zero and variance ratios close to one (see Appendix for Density plots along key factor variables).

Tables 1a and b. Summary Statistics of Matched Sample

Variable	Category	Control	Treated
Control	0	7544	0
Treatment Group	1	0	7544
Regist. Status - No	0	2398	2064
Regist. Status - Yes	1	5146	5480
Voter Turnout – No	0	3185	2760
Voter Turnout - Yes	1	4359	4784
Age Cohort	30+	6198	6195
Age Cohort	18-29	1346	1349
Party ID Leaner	Democrat	4542	4542
Party ID Leaner	Independent	2333	2333
Party ID Leaner	Not Sure	54	54
Party ID Leaner	Republican	615	615

	Control	Treatment
Original	10,3194	11,701
Matched	7,544	7,544
Unmatched	95,650 (full pool that included 2014)	4,157

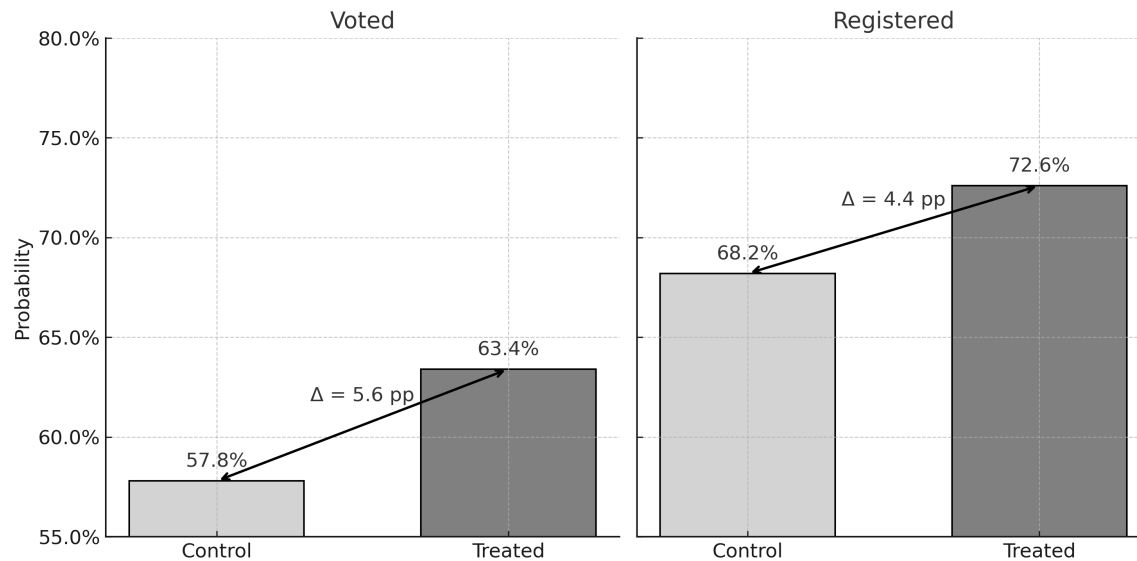
Although the initial data pool included both 2014 and 2018 CES respondents, matching was performed exclusively on 2018 cases to maintain consistency in covariate measurement and treatment timing. The 2014 data is used descriptively as a pre-treatment baseline for contextualizing change over time but is not included in the matched control group used for treatment effect estimation. Logistic regression is employed in this analysis because the dependent variables are binary.

5. Findings and Results

Respondents in MFOL-visited counties were *1.24 times more likely* to be registered to vote in 2018 than those in control counties. This difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and represents a *4.43 percentage point increase* in predicted probability of registration. Similarly, the campaign had a positive and statistically significant effect on turnout. Individuals in treated counties were *1.26 times more likely to vote*, translating to a *5.63 percentage point increase* over matched controls ($p < 0.001$) (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. Predicted probability of having voted by treatment group.

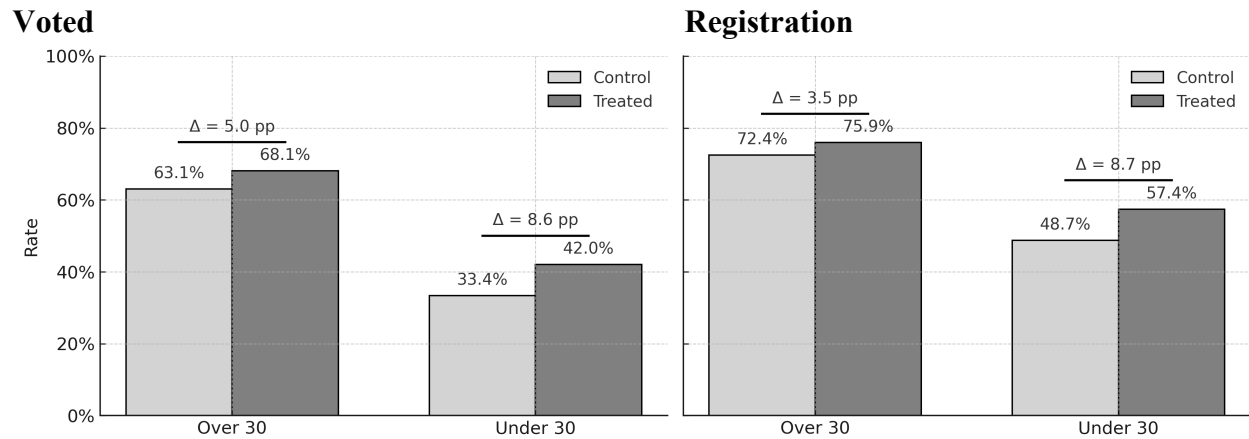
The treated group shows a 4.4 pp higher likelihood of being registered and 5.6 pp of voting, compared to the control group.



Youth-Specific Treatment Effects

The effects were especially pronounced among respondents under 30 (Figure 4). Treated youth were 8.6 percentage points more likely to vote than their youth counterparts in control counties. Compared to the adult group (age 30+), who saw a 5.0 percentage point increase, this yields a difference-in-difference of 3.6 points, indicating a stronger mobilizing effect of MFOL among younger voters.

Figure 4. Voter Turnout and Registration by Age Group and Treatment



The effect is stronger for those under 30 with an *Average Treatment Effect of 1.35* of being under 30 or a *9% increase in the odds of the event happening in youth compared to adults 30 and above*. And the strongest effects are seen among the youngest respondents peaking at 20 years old (though the larger confidence intervals acknowledge the sparseness of this sample) (Figure 5 and 6a and 6b).

Figure 5. Average Treatment Effect (Voting) by Age, Marginal Odds Ratios

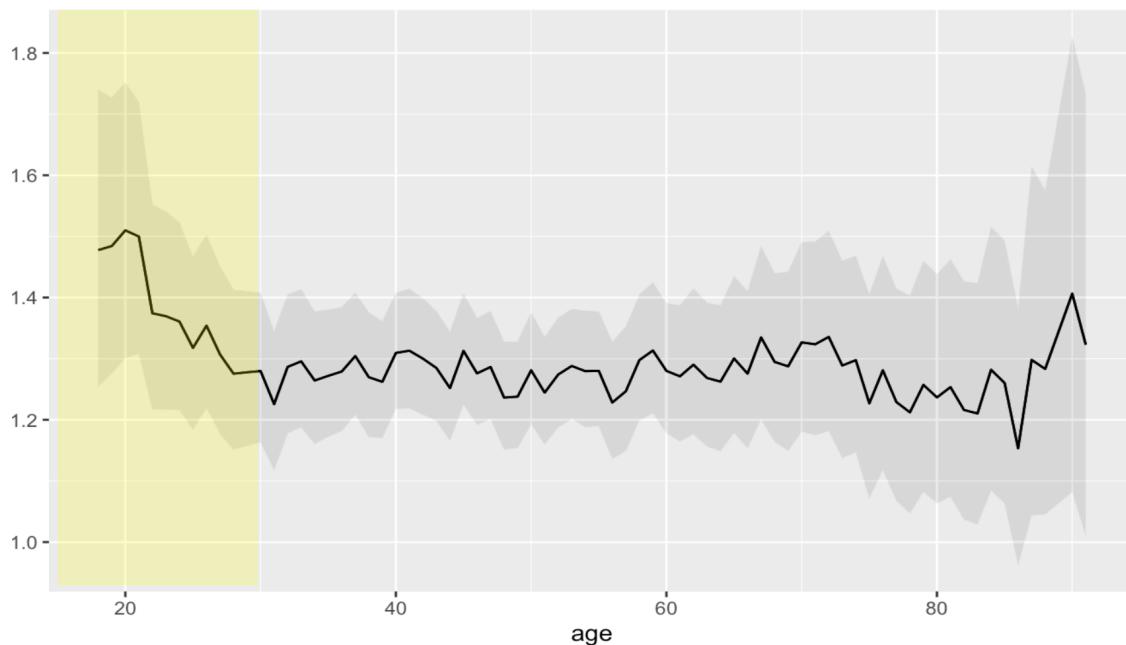
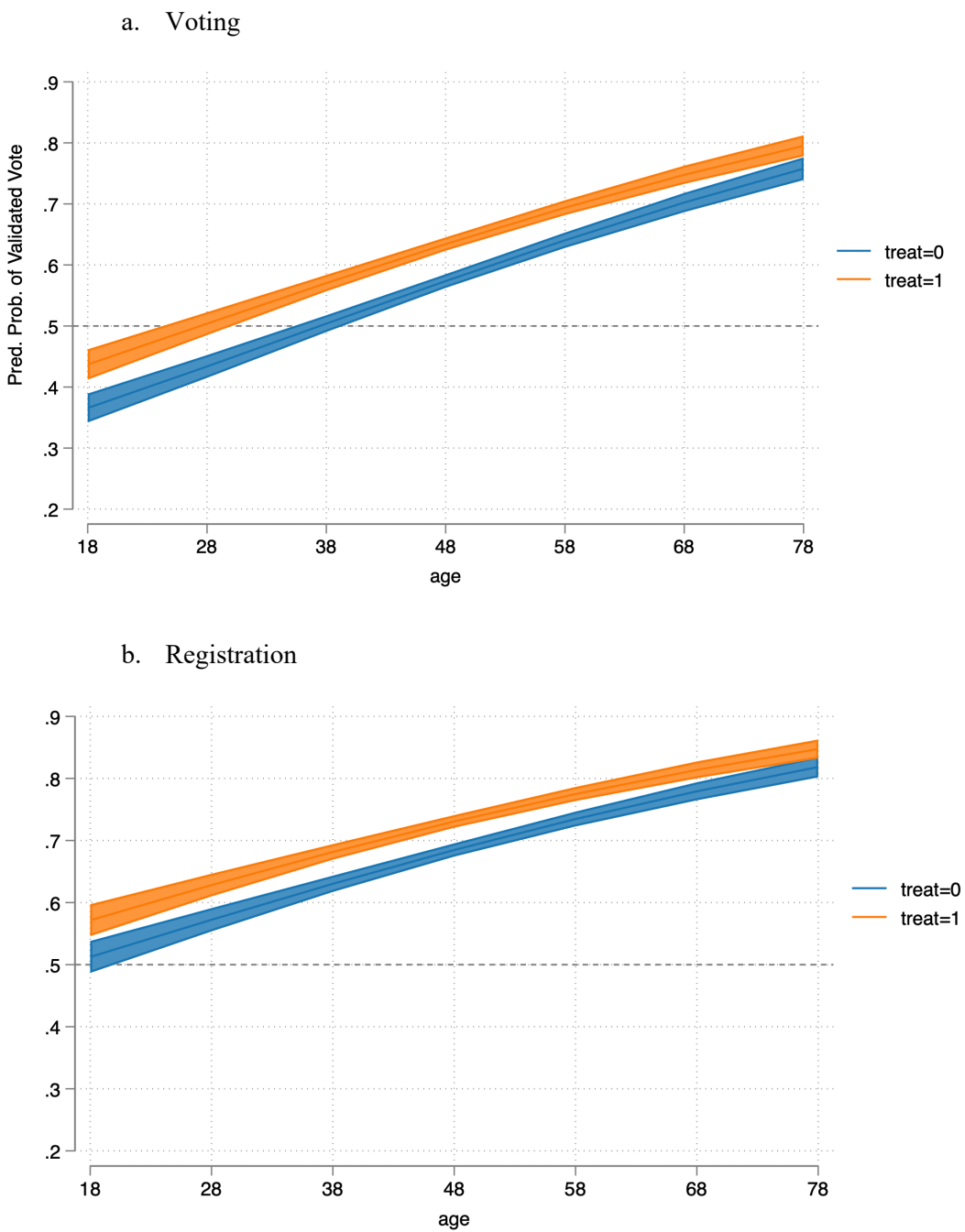


Figure 6. Marginal Effects; Predicted Probability, over Age with Treatment x Youth interaction



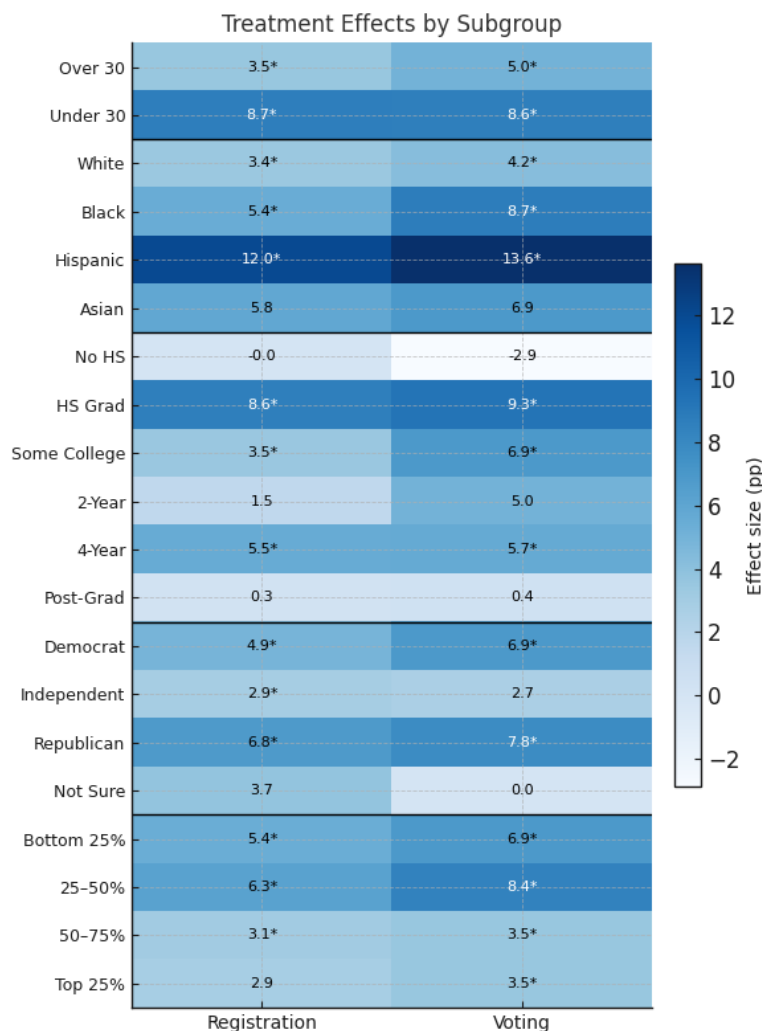
Subgroup Effects

Hispanic-identifying respondents showed the largest treatment effects across racial categories.

This may be partially due to MFOL's strong campaign presence in Florida—a state with a large

Hispanic youth population and high media visibility. Respondents with a high school diploma (but no college degree) experienced significantly greater turnout gains in treated counties. This supports the theory that MFOL’s peer-based outreach strategy resonated with younger potential voters who had not yet finished the education or non-college-attending voters, often underserved by elite-driven or institutionally mediated campaigns (Figure 7). Women were also significantly more likely to show an effect than male identifies (See Appendix for all specific subgroup plots).

Figure 7. Probability of Voting by subgroup (excluding gender)



To assess the robustness of these findings, a stricter model incorporating *state fixed effects* was estimated. This reduced the sample size slightly but yielded similar or slightly higher treatment effects (OR = 1.28 for turnout). In addition, logistic regression models using the unmatched data confirmed the direction and magnitude of effects, though with more variance (see Appendix for outputs).

Summary of Results

- MFOL exposure significantly increased both registration and turnout.
- The effects were strongest among youth, Hispanic respondents, and non-college-educated individuals.
- Findings were consistent across model specifications and robust to alternate controls.

These results provide strong empirical support for the central hypotheses of this study and suggest that peer-led, issue-salient mobilization efforts can meaningfully increase political participation.

6. Discussion

The findings presented in this study demonstrate that the *March for Our Lives* (MFOL) "Road to Change" campaign increased both voter registration and turnout in counties where its events occurred. This mobilization was not merely statistical noise. Among youth, especially those under 30, the campaign produced turnout gains well beyond what was observed in the general population. Moreover, the strongest gains occurred in subpopulations—such as Hispanic youth and individuals with only a high school diploma (some of those are not attending college but

some have not yet graduated - they are the youngest respondents)—who are often excluded from conventional mobilization efforts.

The articles' core hypotheses—H1a and H1b (registration and turnout effects), and H2a and H2b (youth-specific amplification)—are all supported by the findings. The campaign's youth-driven, peer-to-peer structure appears to have had a unique effect on political activation, confirming that the source and framing of a mobilization message matters as much as its content. These findings are particularly striking given the broader context of historically low youth turnout prior to 2018 – this is especially true in midterm elections (Measuring the midterm turnout gap - Washington Post Interactive).

From a theoretical perspective, this study aligns with political socialization theory and supports the framework of the impact of formative experiences during early adulthood. The salience of gun violence, coupled with the Parkland survivors' relevance and authenticity, created a moment of emotional and political resonance that many young people could not ignore. MFOL succeeded in transforming this resonance into action—modeling civic engagement in a way that was visible and emotionally compelling.

The evidence also supports arguments from the persuasion and mobilization literatures.

Consistent with Lupia and McCubbins (1998) and Gerber and Green (2000), the campaign's interpersonal, identity-congruent outreach made its messages more credible and more likely to be acted upon. Unlike traditional GOTV campaigns, which often rely on abstract appeals or elite-driven narratives, MFOL offered a grounded, community-centered, and peer-led model of engagement. This appears to have especially benefited low-propensity and first-time voters who may be less receptive to formal institutional messaging.

By examining not only aggregate treatment effects but also subgroup variation, this also shines a light on the heterogeneity of political responsiveness. The particularly strong effects among high school-educated respondents suggest that MFOL successfully reached segments of the youth electorate that are often missed by mobilization efforts. The campaign's on-the-ground tour, local town halls, and relational approach likely contributed to this broader reach.

7. Conclusion

This study offers strong empirical evidence that youth-led, peer-based political mobilization can significantly increase voter engagement. The *March for Our Lives* “Road to Change” campaign—organized by students, aimed at students, and borne out of a viscerally salient issue—produced meaningful increases in both voter registration and turnout, especially among young, Hispanic, and less formally educated Americans.

By using a matched observational design and leveraging pre-treatment 2014 data, this study isolates the impact of MFOL against the backdrop of national political trends. The results affirm that the campaign's unique structure—peer-to-peer, emotionally resonant, and visibly youth-driven—helped reshape the civic landscape for a generation often portrayed as politically disengaged.

More broadly, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship arguing that who delivers political messages matters as much as what those messages say. MFOL did not rely on institutional authority or elite credibility—it mobilized through shared experience and collective voice. In doing so, it not only raised turnout but also modeled a new way of practicing democratic engagement. As political scientists, organizers, and educators seek strategies to address democratic disengagement, especially among youth, the lessons of MFOL are both

timely and vital. This study shows that young people are not apathetic—they are waiting to be invited, and they are most compelled when that invitation comes from each other.

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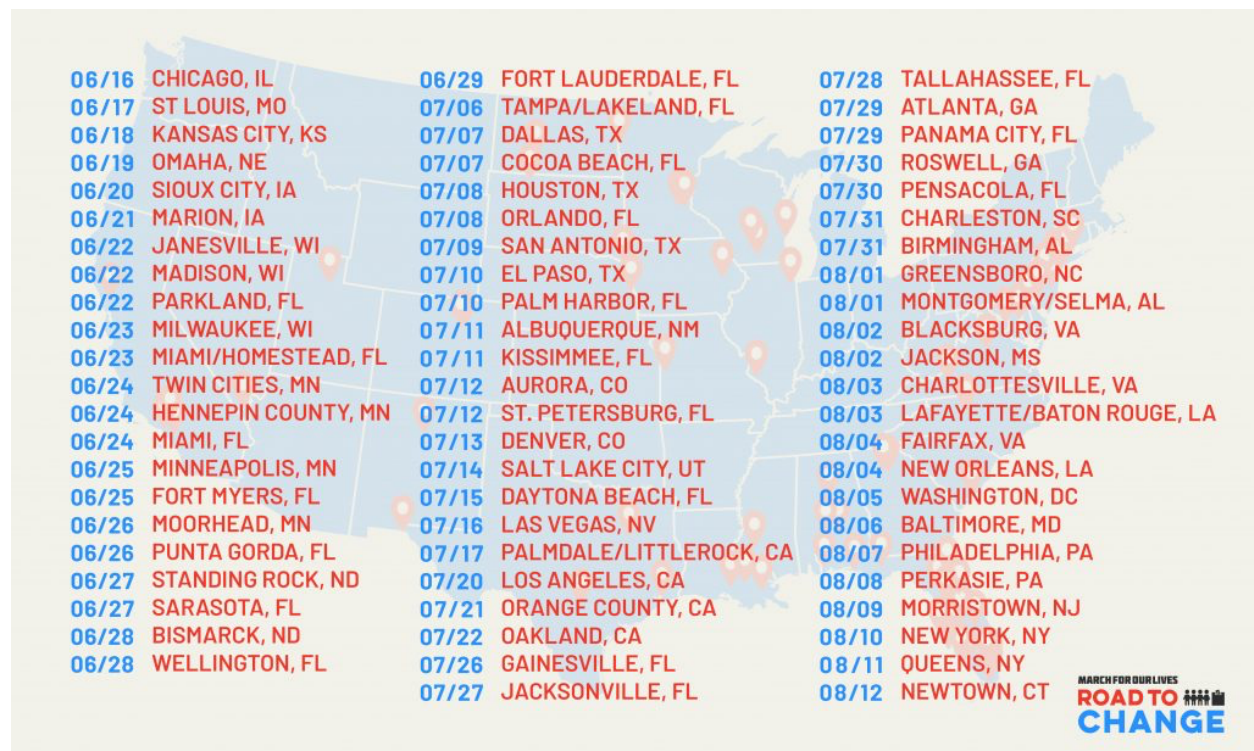
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Appendix

Appendix Figure 1. Materials from Road To Change Campaign

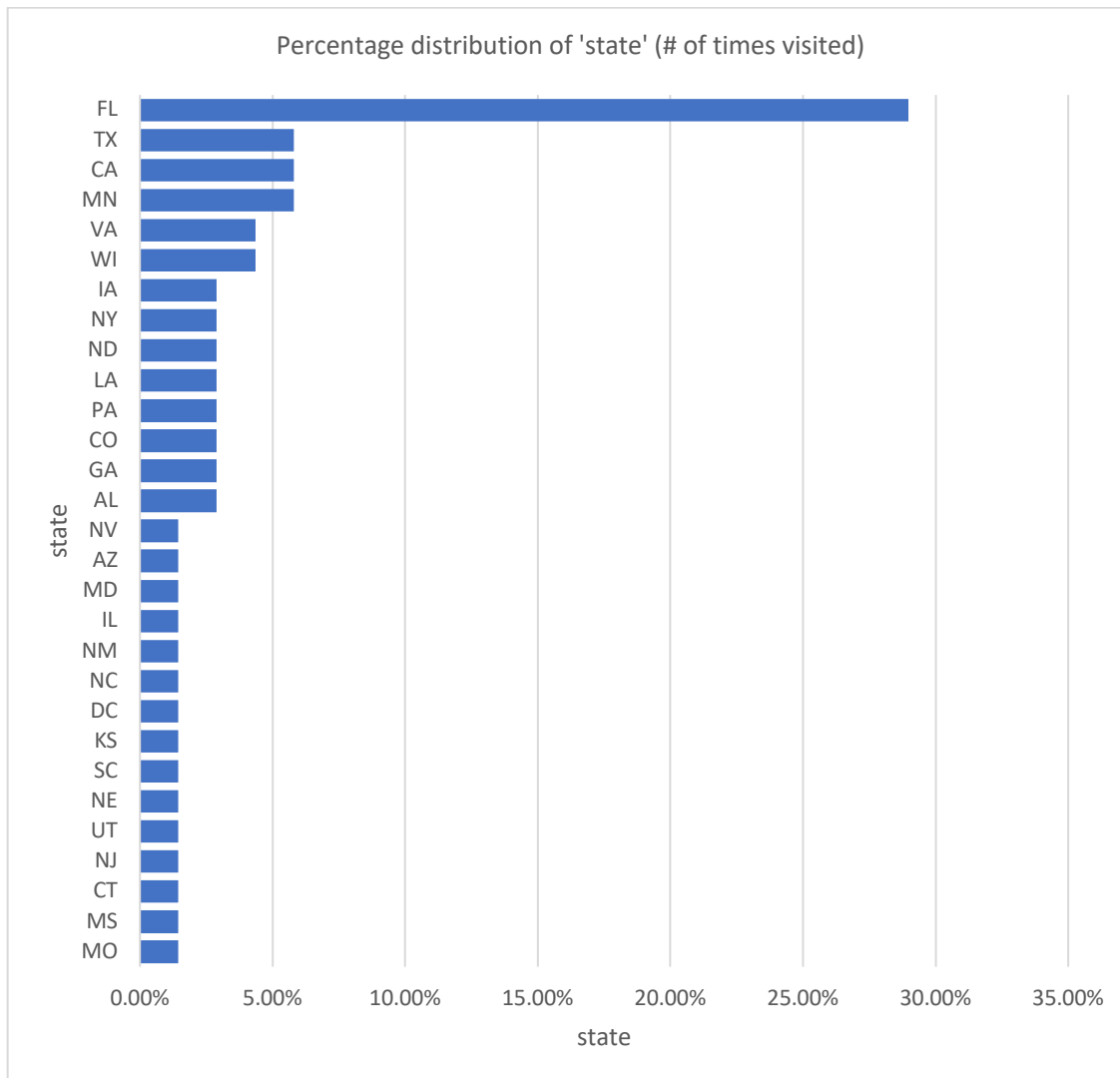


Appendix Table 1. TOUR DATES and FIPS County lists

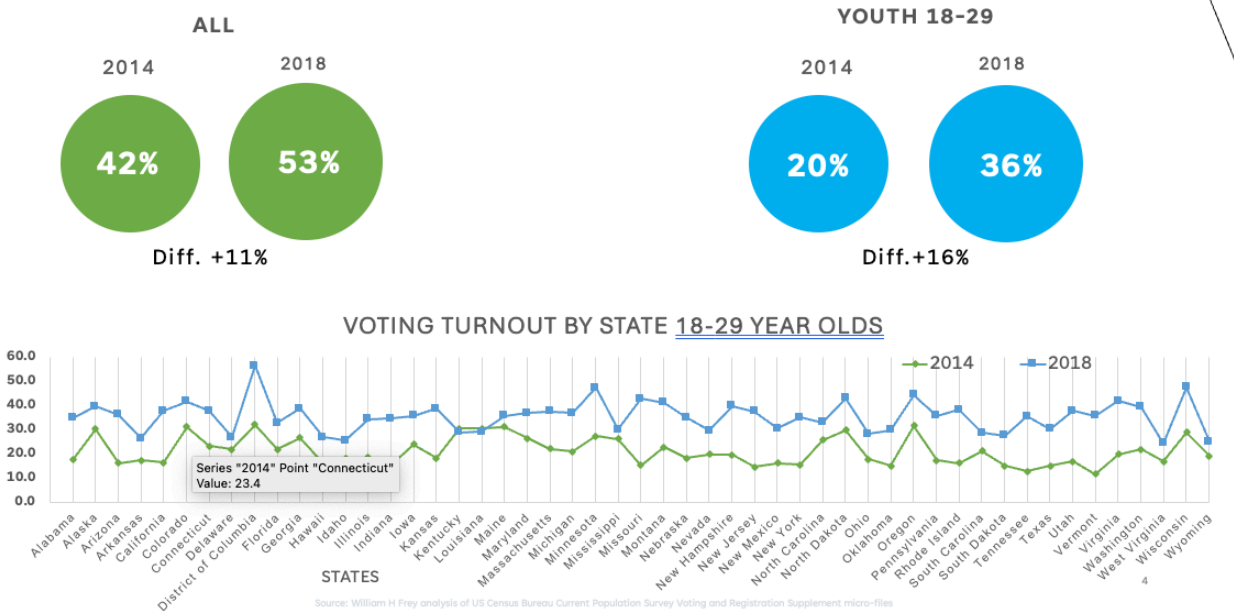
18 Summer Tour Dates	Name of Area Visited	FIPS/CNTY	Visited in the Fall	Fall Dates
16-Jun	CHICAGO, IL	17031		
17-Jun	STLOUIS, MO	29510		
18-Jun	KANSAS CITY, KS	20209		
19-Jun	OMAHA, NE	31055		
20-Jun	SIOUX CITY, IA	19193		
21-Jun	MARION, IA	19113		
22-Jun	JANESVILLE, WI	55105		
22-Jun	MADISON, WI	55025		
22-Jun	PARKLAND, FL	12011	X	6-Nov
23-Jun	MILWAUKEE, WI	55079		
23-Jun	MIAMI/HOMESTEAD, FL	12086		
24-Jun	TWIN CITIES, MN	27123		
24-Jun	HENNEPIN COUNTY, MN	27053		
24-Jun	MIAMI, FL	12086	X	27-Oct
25-Jun	MINNEAPOLIS, MN	27123	X	26-Oct
25-Jun	FORT MEYERS, FL	28081		
26-Jun	MOORHEAD, MN	29047		
26-Jun	PUNTA GORDA, FL	12015		
27-Jun	STANDING ROCK, ND	38085		
27-Jun	SARASOTA, FL	12115	X	30-Oct
28-Jun	BISMARCK, ND	38015		
28-Jun	WELLINGTON, FL	12099		
29-Jun	FORT LAUDERDALE, FL	12011		
6-Jul	TAMPA/LAKELAND, FL	12057		
7-Jul	DALLAS, TX	19049	X	2-Nov
7-Jul	COCOA BEACH, FL	12009		
8-Jul	HOUSTON, TX	13145	X	1-Nov
8-Jul	ORLANDO, FL	12095	X	31-Oct
9-Jul	SAN ANTONIO, TX	48029		
10-Jul	EL PASO, TX	48141		
10-Jul	PALM HARBOR, FL	12103		
11-Jul	ALBUQUERQUE, NM	35001		
11-Jul	KISSIMMEE, FL	12097		
12-Jul	AURORA, CO	8005		
12-Jul	S.T.PETERSBURG, FL	12103		
13-Jul	DENVER, CO	8031		
14-Jul	SALT LAKE CITY, UT	49035		
15-Jul	DAYTONA BEACH, FL	12127		

16-Jul	LAS VEGAS, NV	32003		
17-Jul	PALMDALE/LITTLEROCK, CA	6037		
20-Jul	LOS ANGELES, CA	6037		
21-Jul	ORANGE COUNTY, CA	6059	X	4-Nov
22-Jul	OAKLAND, CA	6001		
26-Jul	GAINESVILLE, FL	12001	X	5-Nov
27-Jul	JACKSONVILLE, FL	12031	X	4-Nov
28-Jul	TALLAHASSEE, FL	12073	X	5-Nov
29-Jul	ATLANTA, GA	13121	X	28-Oct
29-Jul	PANAMA CITY, FL	12005		
30-Jul	ROSWELL, GA	13121	X	28-Oct
30-Jul	PENSACOLA, FL	12033		
31-Jul	CHARLESTON, SC	45019		
31-Jul	BIRMINGHAM, AL	1073		
1-Aug	GREENSBORO, NC	37081	X	29-Oct
1-Aug	MONTGOMERY/SELMA, AL	1101		
2-Aug	BLACKSBURG, VA	51121		
2-Aug	JACKSON, MS	28049		
3-Aug	CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA	51003		
3-Aug	LAFAYETTE/BATON ROUGE, LA	22033		
4-Aug	FAIRFAX, VA	51059		
4-Aug	NEW ORLEANS, LA	22071		
5-Aug	WASHINGTON, DC	11001		
6-Aug	BALTIMORE, MD	24005		
7-Aug	PHILADELPHIA, PA	42101		
8-Aug	PERKASIE, PA	42017		
9-Aug	MORRISTOWN, NJ	34027		
10-Aug	NEW YORK, NY	36047		
11-Aug	QUEENS, NY	36081		
12-Aug	NEWTOWN, CT	9001		
	TEMPE, AZ	4013	X	3-Nov

Appendix Table 2. Frequency lists



Appendix Figure 2. Voting turnout comparison

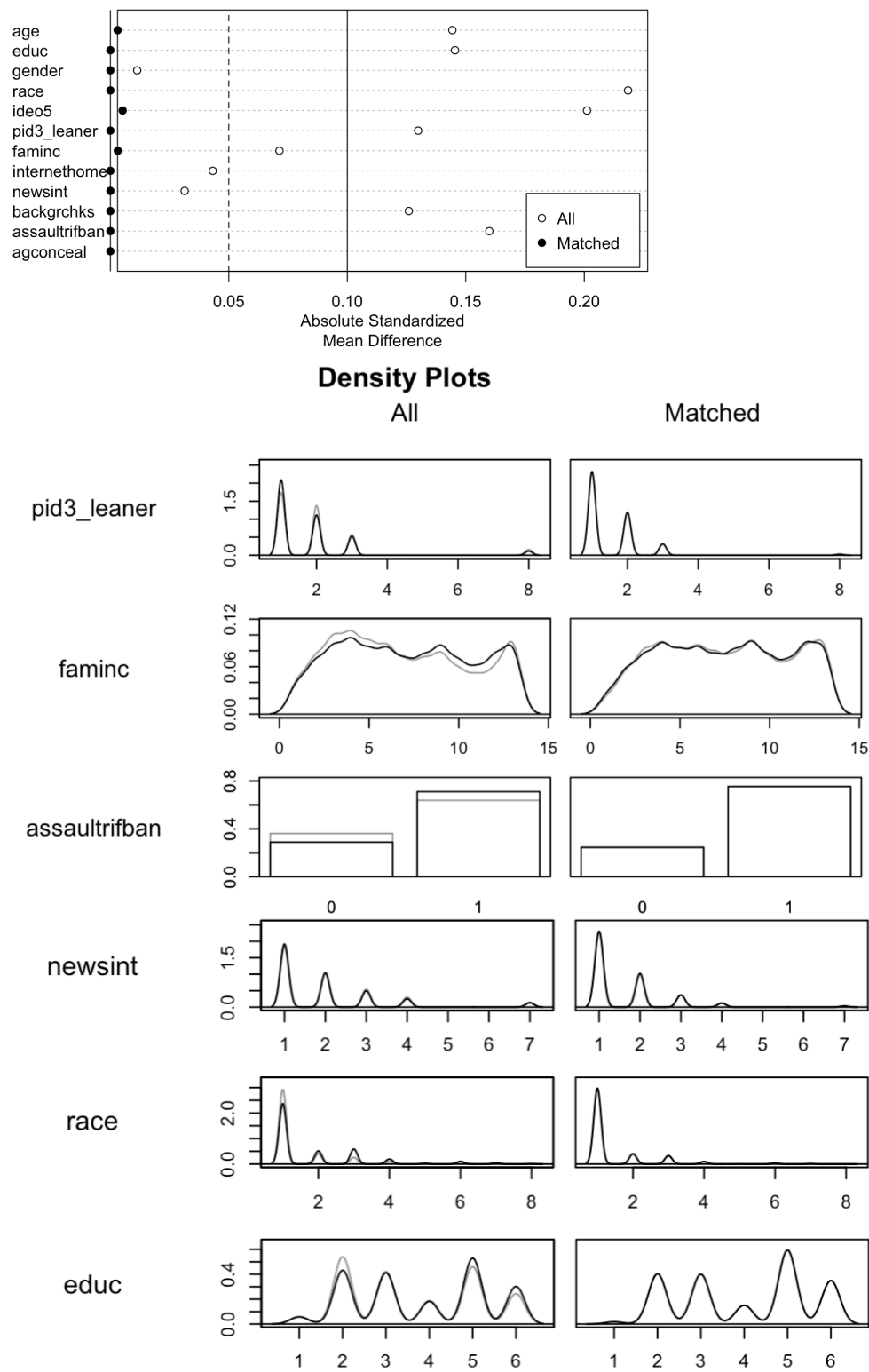


Appendix Table 3. Matching Variables and Sample Construction

Matching was performed using CEM and Mahalanobis distance across the following covariates:

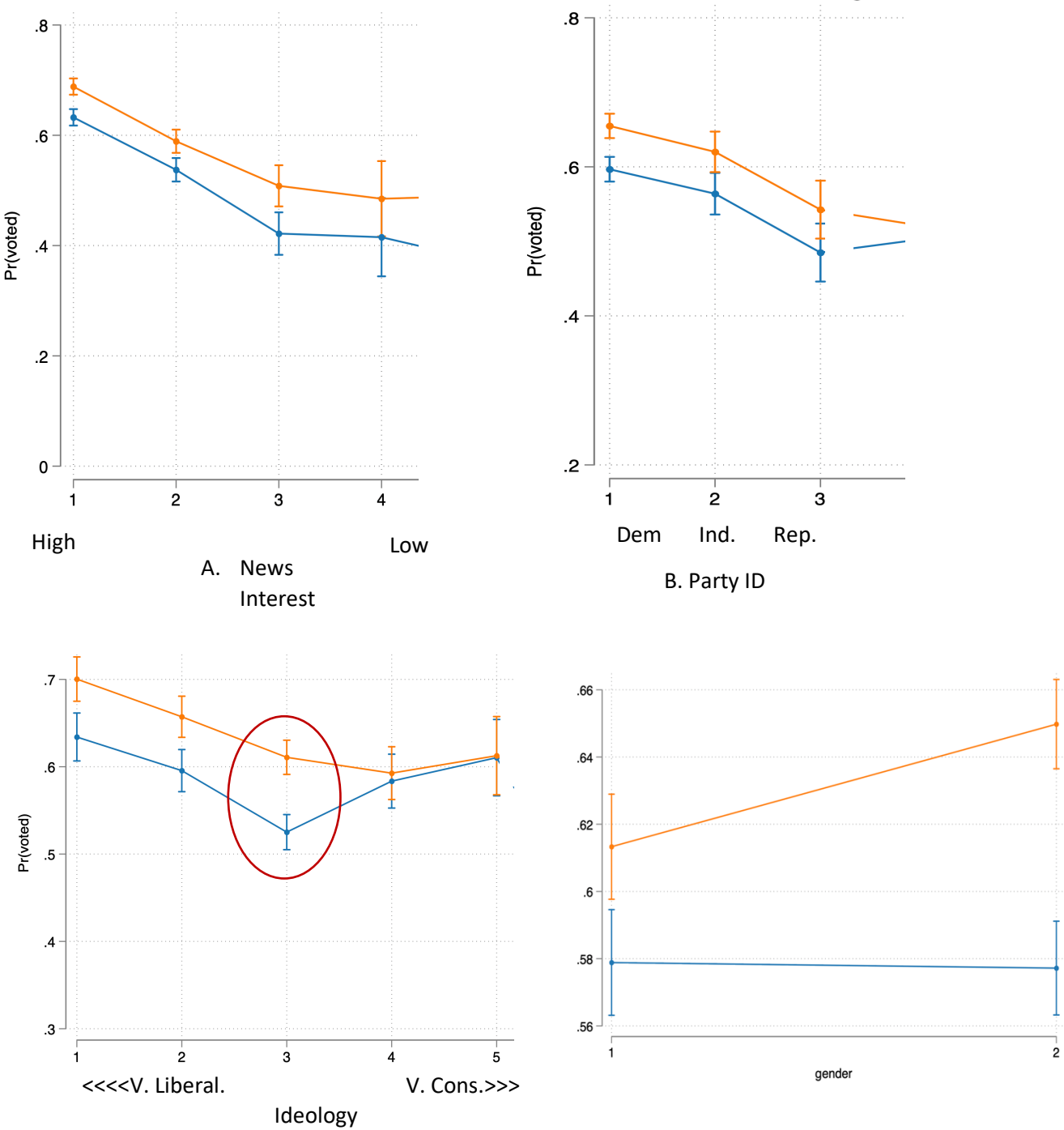
- Age (continuous and binned)
- Education level
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Ideology (5-point scale)
- Partisan identity (3-point)
- Household income (binned)
- Citizenship status
- Internet access at home
- News consumption/political interest
- Gun policy attitudes: background checks, assault weapon bans, and concealed carry

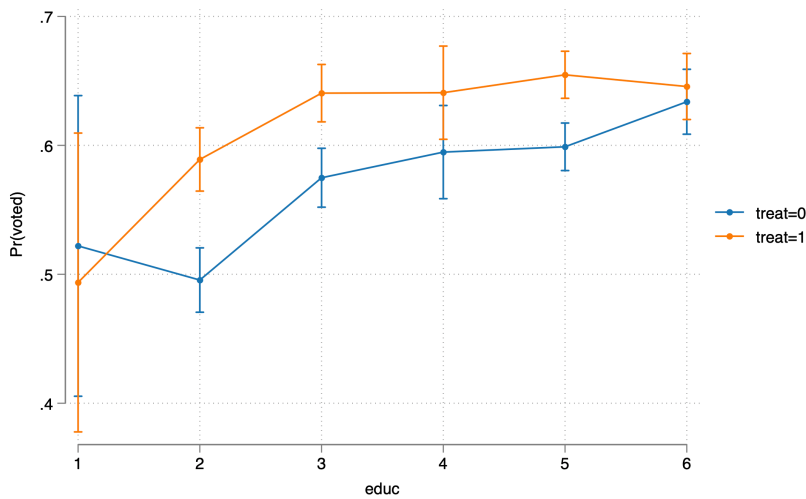
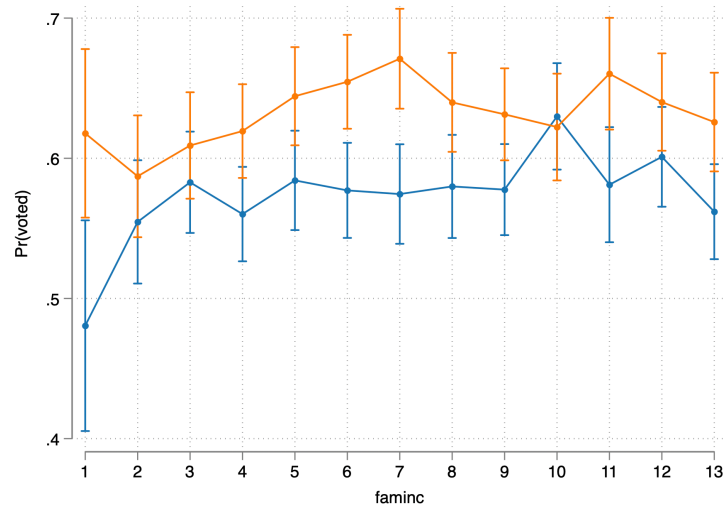
Appendix Figure 3. CEM Covariate Balance Plots and Density Plots



Appendix Figure 4. Regression results by Covariates

Marginal effects on the predicted probability of having voted





Appendix Table 4. Log odds of Voting and Registration Models

Category	Subgroup	OR_Reg	p_Reg	AME_Reg	OR_Vote	p_Vote	AME_Vote
Treatment	All	1.24	<0.001	+4.4	1.27	<0.001	+5.6
Age	Over 30	1.20	<0.001	+3.5	1.25	<0.001	+5.0
Age	Under 30	1.42	<0.001	+8.7	1.44	<0.001	+8.6
Race	White	1.19	<0.001	+3.4	1.20	<0.001	+4.2
Race	Black	1.27	0.024	+5.4	1.42	<0.001	+8.7
Race	Hispanic	1.12	<0.001	+6.8	1.09	0.005	+8.6
Party ID	Democrat	1.22	<0.001	+4.0	1.24	<0.001	+4.8
Party ID	Independent	0.99	0.932	+0.1	1.02	0.739	+0.5
Party ID	Republican	1.00	0.994	+0.0	1.02	0.748	+0.4
Party ID	Not Sure	0.38	0.115	-1.2	2.15	0.224	+1.0

Changing Patterns of Partisanship Among American Youth

1. Introduction

Young Americans have long been underrepresented in the electorate. Despite comprising a substantial share of the voting-age population, individuals under 30 consistently turn out at lower rates than older adults (US Census 2020). While youth turnout surged in 2018 and again in 2020 and 2022 (CIRCLE 2023)—prompting speculation about a politically awakened generation (Bump 2023; Della Volpe 2022). The most recent cycles have shown greater volatility including 2024 where youth voting dropped, though only by 3% (CIRCLE 2025). This pattern raises deeper questions not just about whether young people vote but why and under what conditions they choose to engage.

A leading explanation for youth disengagement is the phenomenon of weak partisanship. Young people are more likely to identify as independents or leaners than older cohorts, express lower levels of partisan strength, and voice skepticism toward the two-party system (Dalton 2010; Wray-Lake, Arruda, and Hopkins 2019). Classical models of political socialization suggest that partisan identity tends to crystallize in early adulthood and provides a long-term anchor for political behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; D. O. Sears and Valentino 1997). However, for contemporary youth, this anchoring appears weaker and more conditional. Many come of age politically not through party affiliation but through highly salient policy issues—often moral, urgent, and identity-defining—such as gun violence, war, or climate change (Andolina 2024).

In this article I examine how partisanship is evolving among American youth, and what alternative channels may be driving political participation. Using national survey data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the Cooperative Election Study (CES), I assess

both long-term patterns of party identification and strength, and recent trends in emotional polarization and issue-based engagement. I focus on two interrelated questions: (1) how partisan identity and attachment among youth compare to older adults and to prior youth cohorts, and (2) whether strong attitudes on a salient issue—specifically gun policy—are associated with higher rates of voting, particularly for young people with weak partisan ties.

This research study explores these two key pathways into political engagement. The first reflects a more traditional model: some youth still adopt partisan identities, and for those with strong attachments, these affiliations can serve as cognitive shortcuts and behavioral motivators (Abramowitz 2018a; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; Wray-Lake, Arruda, and Hopkins 2019). But partisan strength is consistently weaker among youth than older cohorts—especially among young Democrats—and this gap appears to be both persistent and structural (Della Volpe 2022; Sears and Funk 1991). The second pathway involves issue-based mobilization. Youth may be activated by direct, personal stakes in urgent policy problems. For instance, gun violence has become a generationally defining concern—experienced not just through headlines but through lockdown drills, community trauma, and peer-led activism (Stevens 2018; Wasike 2017). In these cases, political action may stem less from partisan loyalty and more from moral clarity or emotional urgency. Scholars have shown that when issues are experienced as immediate and identity-relevant, they can function as powerful entry points into civic life—particularly for those without strong partisan ties (Marcus et al. 2007; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady 2012; van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008).

Classic political socialization theory holds that political identity—particularly partisanship—tends to crystallize during early adulthood and then remains relatively stable over the life course

(Campbell et al. 1960; Highton and Wolfinger 2001). But today's youth are coming of age in a political environment that complicates this process. Lower trust in institutions, increased affective polarization, and growing skepticism toward the two-party system are all reshaping how, when, and even whether partisan attachments form (Dalton 2010; Wray-Lake, Arruda, and Hopkins 2019). For many young people, politics is not inherited through families or institutions—it's encountered through personal experience, often in the form of salient and emotionally charged policy issues like gun violence or climate change (Carmines and Stimson 1980; Jensen 2023).

This study's analysis illustrates this with a striking and persistent generational gap in partisan strength. Youth are not only more likely to identify as independents or leaners; they are also significantly less likely than older adults to report strong partisan attachment. This is especially pronounced among young Democrats, whose levels of partisan strength have remained consistently lower than those of young Republicans—an asymmetry that holds across both datasets. While Democratic identification remains more common among youth overall, this alignment appears softer and less deeply rooted than among their Republican counterparts.

Affective measures further illuminate this pattern. Using ANES "feeling thermometers," I find that emotional evaluations of the opposing party have grown colder over time among youth, especially those who identify with a party.

Finally, I analyze CES data from 2014 through 2022 to test whether support for gun control policies, like an Assault Rifle Ban, is predictive of voting behavior, particularly among younger respondents. The findings indicate that youth who support gun control policies are significantly more likely to vote than their peers with opposing views. Notably, this relationship has

strengthened over time in the period we examined which was against the backdrop of high youth voting. This may point to issue salience as a possible compensatory mechanism for weak partisan motivation. While not causal, the consistent association across three election cycles supports the claim that urgent, identity-relevant policy issues can activate political engagement among youth who otherwise lack strong partisan anchors (Campbell et al. 1960; Jensen 2023; Krosnick 1990)

Together, these findings complicate the dominant narrative that today's young voters are simply disengaged or disaffected. Rather, they point to a political generation whose identities are increasingly shaped by salient issues and emotional commitments, rather than traditional party loyalties. While partisan identification remains an important lens, it may no longer be the only—or even the primary—organizing framework through which youth experience and act on political life. For many young people, gun violence represents not just a political issue, but a proximate and unresolved threat—an example of what Schattschneider (1960) termed “conflict expansion,” where perceived policy failure catalyzes broader participation among those who feel most at risk.

2. Literature Review

Foundational theories of political behavior assert that partisan identity is among the most enduring and predictive elements of political life. Through processes of political socialization—particularly during adolescence and early adulthood—partisan attachments typically “crystallize” and then remain relatively stable over the life course (Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1964; Highton and Kam 2011) These early-formed identities shape political perceptions, information processing, and voting behavior well into adulthood (Crowder-Meyer, Gadarian, and Trounstein 2019)

However, recent scholarship suggests that the nature and timing of partisan development may be shifting, particularly among younger generations. Scholars find that contemporary youth are less likely to identify strongly with either major party, more likely to describe themselves as independents or leaners, and more inclined to express skepticism toward the legitimacy of the two-party system (Andolina 2024; Dalton 2010; Wray-Lake, Arruda, and Hopkins 2019). This detachment is often interpreted as evidence of political disengagement, but other accounts argue it reflects a transformation in the formation of political identity—one that prioritizes flexibility, issue responsiveness, and social authenticity (Hobbs 2018; Holbein and Hillygus 2020).

These generational shifts are unfolding against a backdrop of declining trust in institutions, polarization, and rising political cynicism (Citrin and Stoker 2018; Peyton 2020; Putnam 2001)s. These forces are influencing not just when partisan identities form, but how what they mean and their strength for younger Americans.

Partisan Strength and Identity Stability

Beyond direction of affiliation, the strength of partisan identity plays a critical role in shaping political behavior. Research shows that individuals who identify as strong partisans are more likely to vote, participate in political discussions, and maintain stable preferences across time (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004; Leighley 2010; Mason 2018). In contrast, weak partisans and independents tend to exhibit more volatility and lower participation rates, especially in non-presidential elections (Bartels 2000; Holbein and Hillygus 2020).

Theoretically, partisan strength operates as a psychological anchor—it provides consistency, shapes affective responses to political stimuli, and guides behavioral cues even in low-information environments (Campbell et al. 1960; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). However,

emerging research indicates that strong partisan attachments may be declining among youth, and that identification may be more contingent, episodic, or affectively driven (Abramowitz 2018a; Della Volpe 2022; Green and Platzman 2022).

This shift opens space for other motivational frameworks—such as issue-based or identity-based engagement—to compensate for the relative weakness of partisan anchors, especially among young or newly mobilized voters (Ansolabehere and Puy 2016).

Youth Participation and the Structure of Political Engagement

Finally, recent work challenges the assumption that youth are disengaged or apathetic. While turnout rates remain lower among young voters, scholars increasingly argue that youth are politically active through nontraditional means—such as protest, social media activism, and issue-based organizing (Bandura and Cherry 2021; Baumgartner 2007; Boulianne 2015; Flegenheimer 2020). These behaviors may not be captured by standard measures of political participation, but they reflect a broader transformation in civic life.

Youth engagement today is often relational, expressive, and mediated by digital networks (Andolina 2024; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). Rather than acting out of partisan loyalty, many young people are motivated by personal relevance, emotional proximity to issues, and a desire to express moral or social identity. As a result, political participation may increasingly be structured around affective and identity-driven incentives, rather than purely partisan ones.

Issue Salience and Alternative Paths to Engagement

In response to these changes, scholars have begun to examine the conditions under which political participation can be activated by factors other than partisan identity. One of the most widely discussed alternatives is issue salience. Political psychologists have shown that

emotionally resonant or morally charged issues can prompt engagement even among the politically unaligned (Ansolabehere and Puy 2018; Brader 2005; Marcus et al. 2007).

Among youth, several policy domains—gun violence, climate change, racial justice, and reproductive rights—have emerged as particularly salient (Della Volpe 2022; Delli Carpini 2000). These issues, that tap into emotional threat like gun violence, can act as effective mobilizers for individuals who may otherwise be alienated from partisan politics (Erisen 2018; Holbein and Hillygus 2020). For instance, school shootings have generated high levels of support for gun reform among young Americans, and social movements have demonstrated the power of peer-led, emotionally proximate activism (Fisher 2012; Jensen 2023).

Affective Polarization and Social Sorting

While many young people report weak or conditional partisan identities, this does not necessarily mean they lack partisan feeling. Affective polarization—the tendency to view one’s own party positively and the opposing party with hostility—has risen sharply in the United States over the past several decades (Abramowitz 2018b; Druckman and Levendusky 2019; Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012). While originally conceptualized as an elite phenomenon, recent work finds that affective polarization is now pervasive among mass publics and may be driven more by identity and social sorting than ideological differences (Mason 2018). When partisanship is experienced as a social identity—reinforced by in-group/out-group dynamics—it may generate turnout and other forms of participation even among individuals with limited policy knowledge or partisan history (Ansolabehere and Puy 2016; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015).

Some have argued that this form of “expressive politics” may be more resonant among youth than traditional partisan cues (Dalton 2016; Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015; Vaccari et al.

2015). When political issues are framed in terms of identity or moral clarity, they may function as political entry points—catalyzing participation, especially among those who lack strong party ties. Schattschneider’s (1960) theory of conflict expansion suggests that political participation is more likely when individuals perceive existing policy arrangements as threatening to their interests. For youth who support gun control, the current legislative stalemate—or perceived regression—may heighten the sense of urgency and personal stake, spurring electoral engagement. By contrast, youth who oppose such measures may experience the status quo as aligned with their views, thus facing less motivation to act. This asymmetry in perceived threat helps explain why some young people are mobilized by policy debates while others remain politically dormant.

3. Theory and Hypotheses

With this scholarship in mind, this study raises important questions about the form and function of partisanship among youth. Are young people disengaging from traditional partisan identities altogether? Or are they building political commitments through alternative routes—especially via salient policy issues like gun violence? For some, issue engagement may precede or even substitute for partisan attachment as a basis for political action. Others may still adopt party identities, but in a different affective or expressive register, grounded more in opposition and identity signaling than in ideological consistency.

Youth at a Political Crossroads: Partisan Identity or Issue Engagement?

Path 1: Traditional Partisan Identity

One pathway reflects the traditional model of engagement: youth acquire and internalize partisan identities that in turn shape their political behavior. While this process may be less automatic

today than in previous generations, some young people—particularly those exposed to consistent partisan cues—still follow this route. Political science research has long shown that strong partisan identifiers are more likely to vote, and that partisan strength functions as a cognitive shortcut and motivational cue (Boudreau 2009; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2004).

However, youth are less likely to report strong partisanship than older cohorts. This aligns with developmental and sociopolitical explanations that as individuals age, their identities stabilize, and political attachments—like partisanship—tend to solidify (Highton and Kam 2011; Sears and Valentino 1997).

Path 2: Issue-Based Mobilization

This study tests an alternative pathway to mobilization that involves salient policy issues.

Engagement is being activated not by partisan loyalty, but by emotional proximity to policy problems—such as gun violence, racial justice, or climate change. Gun violence, in particular, is a uniquely generational issue. Today’s young Americans have lived through mass shootings, active shooter drills, and youth-led protest movements. Building on political psychology and participation research, this model assumes that salient policy issues—especially those experienced as personal or urgent—can catalyze political engagement in the absence of strong partisan identity (Verba and Nie 1987; Zaller 1992). As Schattschneider (1960) argued, policy conflict becomes politically activating when the status quo is experienced as a threat. For young people who support stricter gun laws, the persistent lack of federal action may represent precisely such a threat, turning issue alignment into a motivating force for participation (Erisen 2018; Jensen 2023).

The concept that youth can be mobilized through policy attitudes—especially in the absence of strong partisan identity—builds on scholarship that shows that moral salience and personal relevance increase the likelihood of political action (Ansolabehere and Puy 2015; Highton and Kam 2011; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). If partisan identity is weak or delayed among youth, issue-based engagement may serve as a compensatory or alternative route into the electorate.

Hypotheses

Here, I test the following hypotheses:

- *H1: Young people are less likely than older adults to report strong partisan identification.*
- *H2: Young people are less likely than older adults to report strong partisan attachments.*
- *H3: Affective polarization levels will be stronger for adults than youth*
- *H4: Among youth, those who express strong support for gun control are more likely to vote than those with weaker or opposing views.*
- *H4a: The relationship between gun control attitudes and turnout is stronger among youth than among older adults.*

These hypotheses examine how young people engage politically—through partisanship, through identity, through issues, or in some cases, not at all. They also offer a framework for understanding whether traditional partisan models still apply to the youngest segment of the electorate, or whether new mechanisms may be driving participation in an era of political flux.

4. Research Design and Methods

This study draws on two complementary datasets—the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the Cooperative Election Study (CES)—to examine patterns of partisanship,

affective polarization, and issue-based engagement among American youth. While the ANES provides a long historical lens from 1952 through 2020, CES offers a broader sample size and annual, validated turnout data from 2006 to 2022. Together, these sources allow for both longitudinal description and inferential testing.

Descriptive Analysis: Partisanship and Polarization Over Time

The first stage of the analysis is descriptive, tracking changes in political identity across cohorts and time. I use ANES and CES to examine three key dimensions of partisan attachment: (1) party identification, (2) partisan strength, and (3) affective polarization. Respondents are categorized by age group, with youth defined as individuals aged 18 to 29 and non-youth as those aged 30 and above.

For party identification, I track the share of respondents identifying as Democrat, Republican, or Independent in each year, comparing across age cohorts and over time. To assess partisan strength, I use each dataset's respective four-point scale measuring intensity of identification—from weak to strong. For affective polarization, I analyze ANES “feeling thermometer” scores toward the in-party and out-party, calculating the gap between them as a proxy for emotional attachment and partisan hostility. All descriptive analyses are weighted using post-stratification weights to ensure representativeness.

These analyses offer a foundational view of how young people's partisan attachments differ from older adults and how those differences have evolved historically. They also help situate contemporary youth partisanship within broader institutional and ideological shifts.

Inferential Analysis: Testing the Role of Issue-Based Mobilization

The second analytic stage explores whether issue salience—specifically, attitudes about gun policy—predicts political participation, particularly for youth. Using CES survey waves from 2014, 2018, and 2022, I estimate logistic regression models where the dependent variable is validated voting in midterm elections. The primary independent variable of interest is support for an assault weapons ban; a policy item consistently included in CES across cycles.

To assess age-based heterogeneity, I include interaction terms between age and gun control attitudes. Additional controls include education, income, ideology, gender, race/ethnicity, political interest, and party identification. The models are weighted using CES survey weights and reported using odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals.

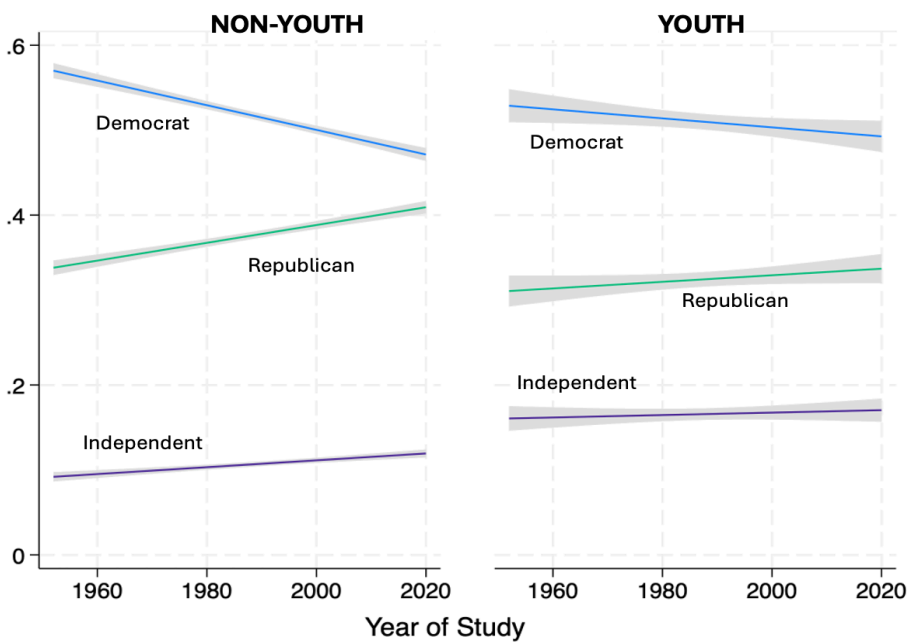
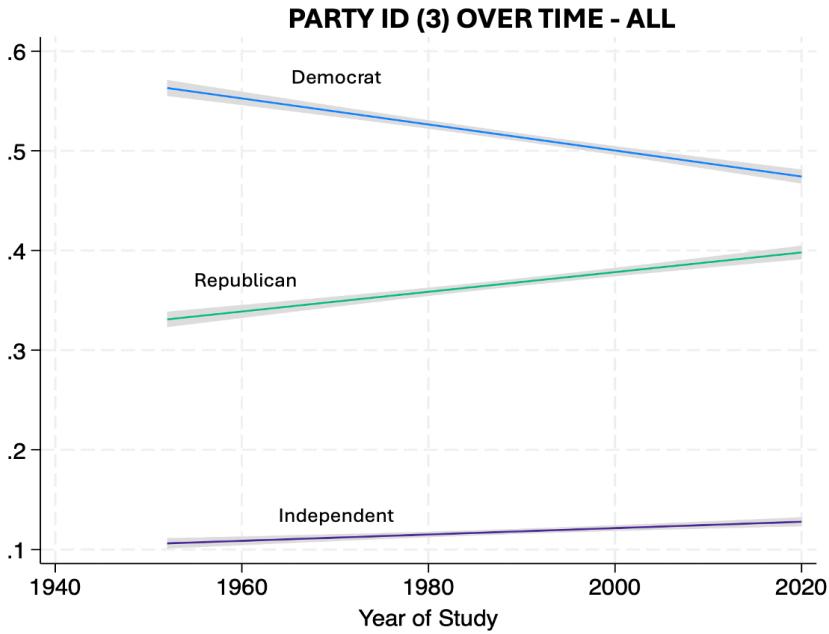
This stage tests whether issue-based mobilization operates independently of partisanship—and whether its influence is stronger among youth, who tend to report lower levels of partisan strength.

5. Findings

Party Identification Over Time

Across both datasets, a durable generational gap in party identification persists. ANES data, spanning from 1952 to 2020, show that youth (ages 18–29) have consistently leaned more Democratic than non-youth (30+), though that advantage has narrowed over time. Republican identification has risen more sharply among older adults than youth, while the proportion of young independents has grown steadily since the 1990s. These trends suggest that younger cohorts are increasingly reluctant to adopt either major party label (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Party Identification Over Time, ANES (1952–2020) by Age

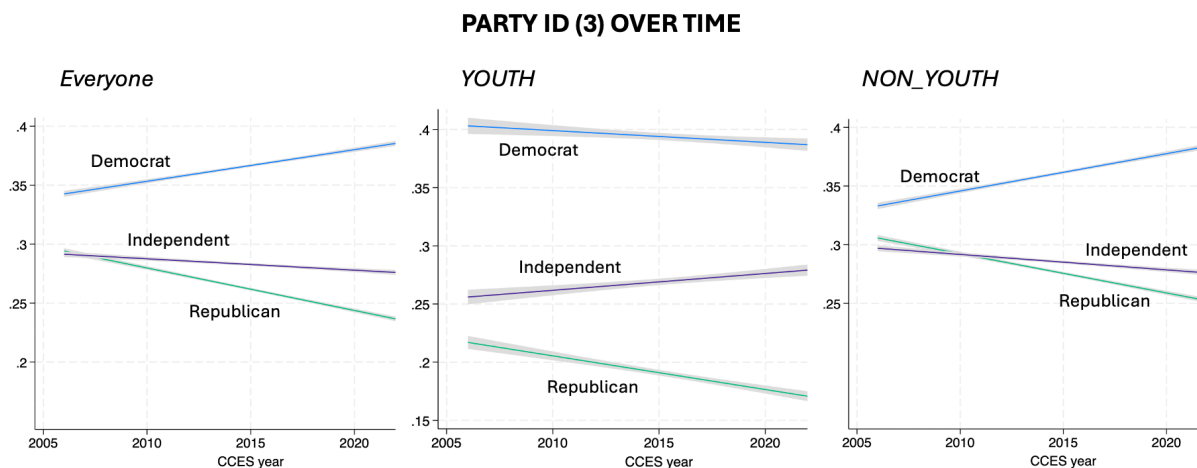


CES data (2006–2022) broadly reinforce these patterns, though with subtle differences. Youth in CES remain more likely than older adults to identify as Democrats and less likely to identify as Republicans. However, unlike the long-term erosion in Democratic ID observed in ANES, CES shows relative stability—and even slight gains—for youth Democratic identification since 2016. Meanwhile, Republican ID among youth declines steadily, diverging from the more balanced

adult partisan split. Independent identification is again more prevalent among youth but shows a flatter trajectory than in ANES (*Figure 2*).

Together, the datasets suggest that while younger voters lean Democratic overall, they increasingly resist formal partisan affiliation. Youth are more likely than older adults to identify as independents, particularly in the ANES time series, and less likely to adopt the Republican label. The stability in youth Democratic ID in CES contrasts with its decrease in ANES, demonstrating the importance of measurement timing and political context.

Figure 2: Party ID over time – CES, by Youth



Partisan Strength Over Time

Beyond party label, partisan strength offers a window into how deeply individuals identify with a political party. Both ANES and CES consistently show that youth express weaker partisan attachment than non-youth. Across waves, younger Americans are overrepresented in the “leaner” and “weak partisan” categories and underrepresented among strong partisans (*Figure 3*).

In the ANES data, Republican youth show increasing partisan strength beginning in the 1980s, narrowing the gap between them and older Republicans. Democratic youth, by contrast, report

consistently low levels of partisan strength over time, showing little change even as political polarization increases. Independents—regardless of age—report the weakest attachments.

CES data align with this picture. Since 2006, partisan strength among Republican youth remains relatively stable and high, while Democratic youth show only modest increases post-2016 (*Figure 4: Partisan Strength by Age and Party – CES*). Youth across all party groups exhibit lower intensity than non-youth. The consistency of this pattern across datasets suggests a structural generational feature, not a momentary deviation.

Figure 3. Partisan Strength Over Time by Age and Party, ANES (1952–2020)

1- 4 Scale: 1 Independent or Apolitical – 4 Strong Partisan

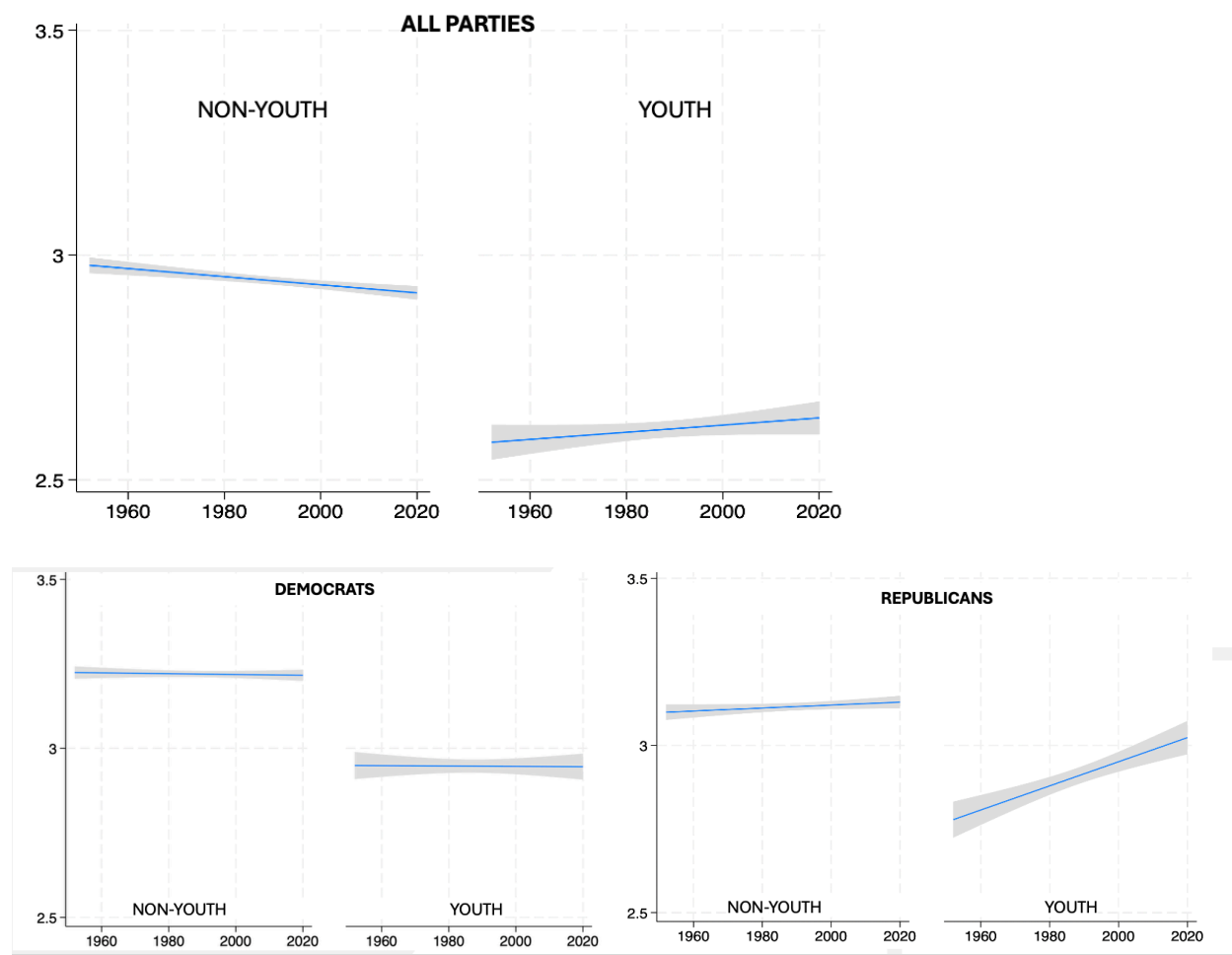
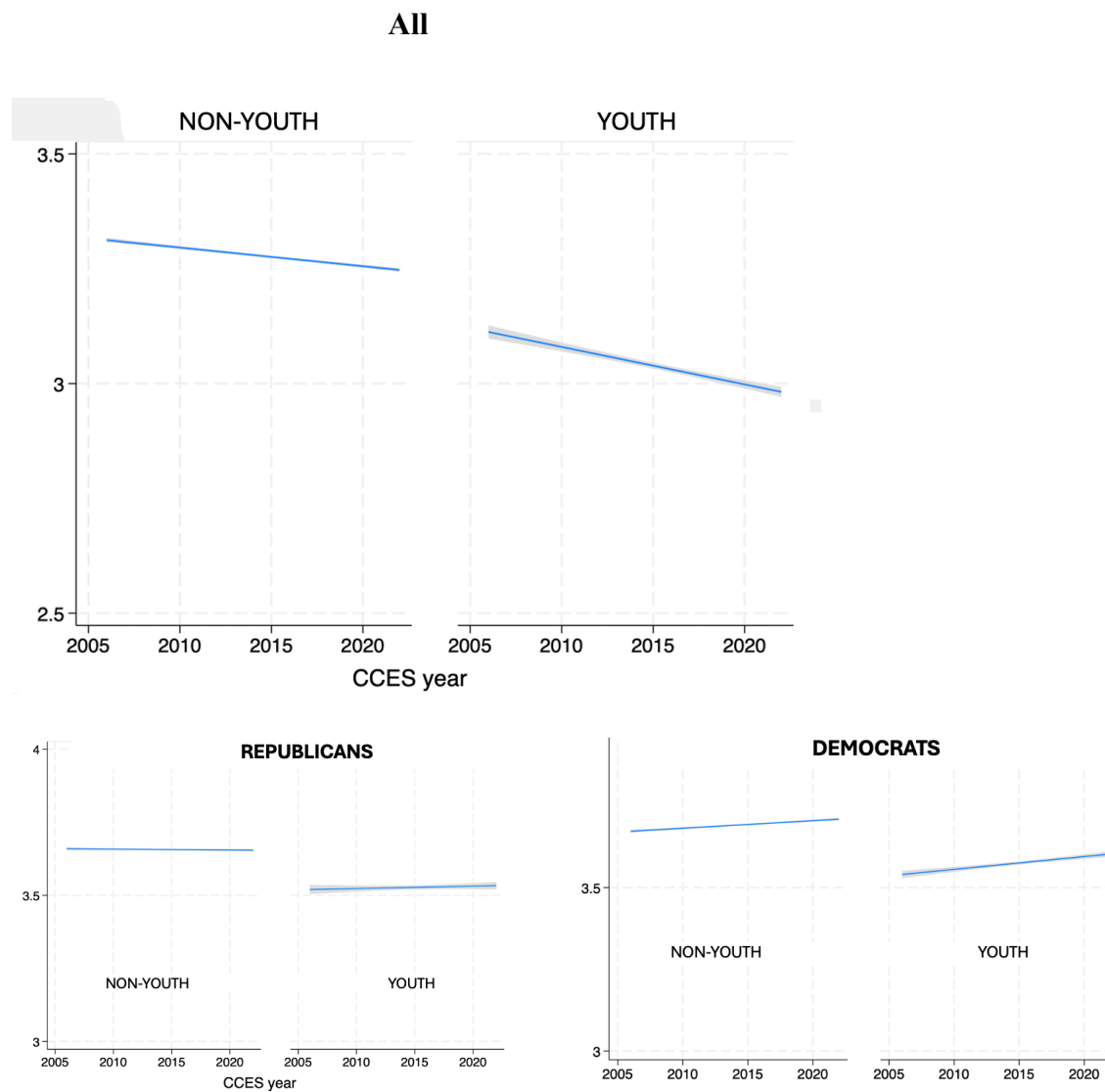


Figure 4. Partisan Strength Over Time by Age and Party, CES (2006–2022)

1- 4 Scale: 1 Independent or Apolitical – 4 Strong Partisan



Affective Polarization

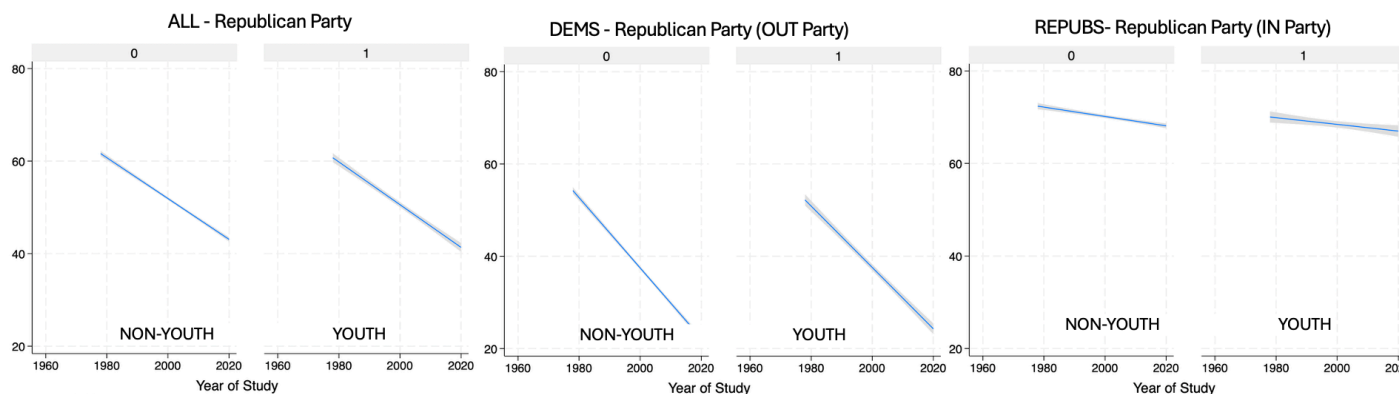
To examine the emotional dimension of partisanship, we turn to ANES feeling thermometer data, which capture respondents' warmth toward political parties on a 0–100 scale. These

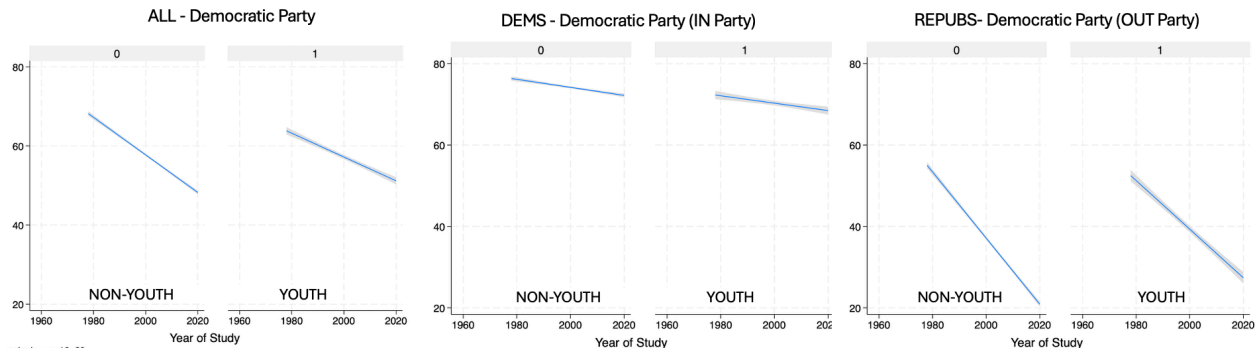
evaluations are particularly telling when used to assess the out-party—how Democrats feel about Republicans, and vice versa.

Democratic youth express sharply declining warmth toward the Republican Party over time, with scores falling below 20 by 2020. This downward trend is steeper than among older Democrats. A parallel pattern appears among Republican youth rating Democrats: their thermometer scores also drop significantly, surpassing the rate of decline among non-youth Republicans (*Figure 5*).

These results suggest that youth may be less anchored in party identification, but more affectively polarized than older voters. Their emotional evaluations of the opposing party are consistently more negative, pointing to a generational intensification of partisan hostility even amid weaker partisan identity. This finding does not support H3 that older partisan adults have stronger levels of affective polarization.

Figure 5. Feeling Thermometers (0–99) Toward Out-Party, by Age and Partisan ID – ANES





Issue Salience and Youth Turnout

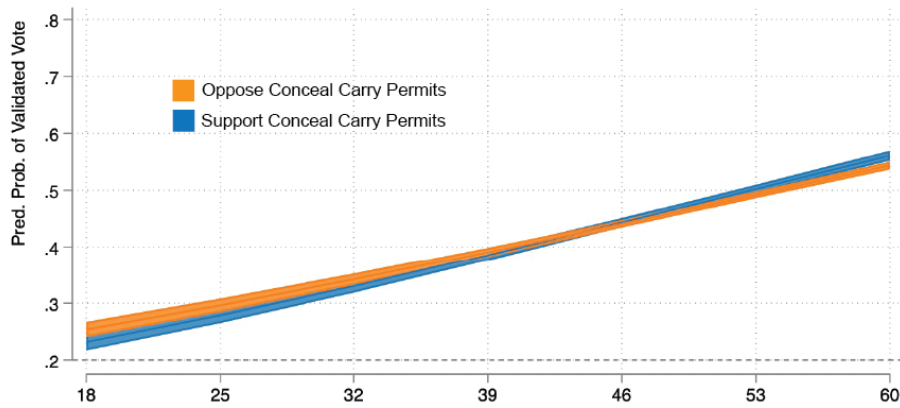
The final set of analyses shifts from identity to behavior, testing whether policy attitudes—particularly support for gun control—are associated with higher turnout among youth. Using validated vote data from the CES midterm waves (2014, 2018, 2022), logistic regression models show that support for an assault weapons ban is positively associated with turnout, especially among younger respondents.

In 2014, youth who supported stricter gun laws voted at slightly higher rates than their peers who opposed them. This turnout gap widened in 2018, (amid heightened salience of gun violence following the Parkland school mass shooting). By 2022, the gap persisted: youth with pro-gun-control views were significantly more likely to cast a validated vote than those without such views (*Figure 6*).

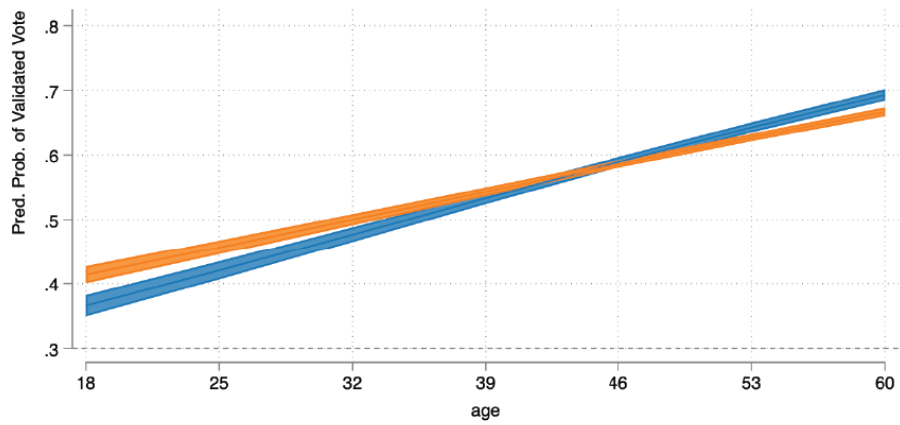
Crucially, these patterns hold even after controlling for partisanship, ideology, political interest, and education (see Appendix Table A1). This provides support for the hypothesis that policy alignment on salient issues may operate independently of partisan strength in motivating youth political behavior.

Figure 6. Validated Midterm Vote by Support for Assault Weapons Ban and Age, CES (2014, 2018, 2022)

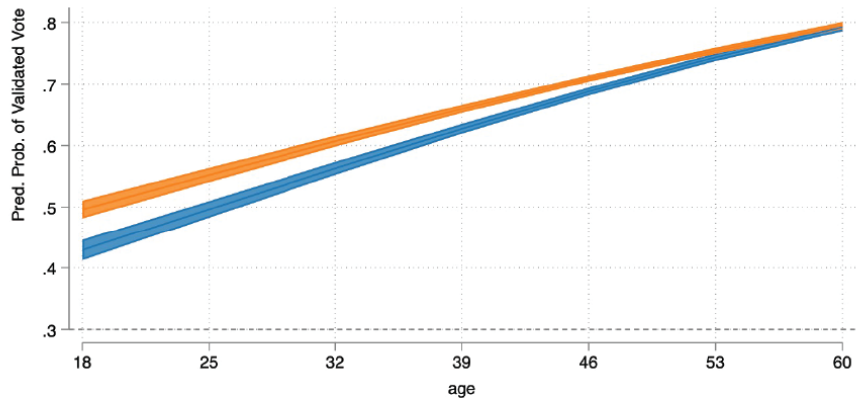
2014 Midterm Validated Vote over Age (CES)



2018 Midterm Validated Vote over Age (CES)



2022 Midterm Validated Vote over Age (CES)



Summary of Findings

Across both identity and participation measures, the data reveal a generationally distinct political profile among youth: more likely to lean Democratic, less likely to strongly identify with either party, more affectively polarized, and increasingly responsive to salient issue cues. Democratic advantage among youth remains, but it is softened by weak partisan strength and rising independence. At the same time, emotional hostility toward the opposing party—especially among youth—points to the growing role of affect in anchoring political identity. Finally, support for gun control policies can be confirmed as a consistent predictor of youth turnout across three electoral cycles, suggesting that policy salience can serve as a meaningful pathway to engagement even in the absence of strong partisan ties. Overall, the shows strong support for all hypotheses, except for H3 which posited that effective polarization levels would be higher among non-youth.

6. Discussion

Taken together, these findings offer a clearer view of how young Americans relate to parties—not just in terms of where they place themselves on the partisan map, but how strongly they connect to those affiliations, how they evaluate the other side, and what motivates them to show up and vote. Across both the long arc of ANES data and the more recent CES cycles, a consistent picture emerges younger Americans remain more likely than older adults to identify as Democrats or Independents and less likely to identify as Republicans. However, these affiliations are softer than they appear on the surface. Youth are also less likely to report strong partisan identification, particularly among Democrats, and more likely to fall into leaner or weak categories. This generational gap in partisan strength is not just a recent phenomenon—it holds across datasets and across time.

The differences by party are especially important. While youth Democrats outnumber youth Republicans, Republican youth consistently report stronger attachment to their party than their Democratic counterparts. This has been true over multiple decades and persists in more recent CES data. That asymmetry matters, especially when considering how partisan identity functions as a cue and motivator for political behavior (Boudreau 2009; Dancey and Sheagley 2013). A Democratic lean without much strength behind it may not carry the same behavioral implications as a smaller but more intense Republican identification.

At the same time, the feeling thermometer data complicate this picture. Despite having weaker attachments to their own party, youth partisans express increasingly negative views of the opposing party. This is clearest among Democratic youth, who show a sharp and consistent drop in their ratings of Republicans over time. But the pattern holds among Republican youth as well. In both directions, young partisans rate the other side more negatively than older partisans do—suggesting that affective polarization is not only present among youth, but in some cases more intense. The disconnect between weak partisan identification and strong negative feelings toward the other party suggests that youth partisanship may be more expressive than rooted—driven less by loyalty to a party than by rejection of the alternative.

Finally, the analysis of turnout and issue salience reveals an alternative pathway into political participation. Across three midterm election cycles, youth who support stricter gun laws are consistently more likely to vote than those who do not. This relationship holds even after accounting for partisanship, ideology, and other standard predictors of turnout. While we cannot infer causality, the pattern suggests that gun control serves as a mobilizing issue—especially for youth who perceive it as an urgent, unresolved threat. In the current policy landscape, where federal action on gun reform remains stalled or moving in the opposite direction, pro-control

youth may experience a heightened sense of loss or threat. By contrast, youth who oppose gun control may view the policy status quo as aligned with their preferences and thus lack the same incentive to act. In Schattschneider's terms, the conflict is not equally activating; it expands participation among those who feel the stakes most acutely.

What these findings show is that youth partisanship is not just weak; it's uneven. It operates differently depending on the dimension being measured—strength, affect, behavior—and often varies by party. Many young people are clearly politicized, just not always through traditional channels. They may be less likely to identify strongly with a party, but more likely to act when an issue hits close to home. And they may not feel strongly about their own party, but they increasingly know what they don't like about the other.

7. Conclusion

This chapter examined the changing patterns of partisanship among American youth, drawing on national survey data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the Cooperative Election Study (CES). Using a combination of descriptive trends and inferential models, the analysis traced how young people identify with political parties, how strongly they hold those identities, how they feel about the opposing party, and what role issue attitudes—especially toward gun violence—play in motivating political participation.

The findings underscore that youth are not disengaged, but they are differently engaged. Across both ANES and CES, young people are more likely than older adults to identify as independents or leaners and less likely to report strong partisan attachment—particularly among Democrats. Yet this weaker institutional affiliation does not translate into neutrality. In fact, younger partisans often express deeper affective polarization than their older counterparts, suggesting that

partisanship may be operating less as a stable institutional loyalty and more as an expressive or identity-based stance.

In the final section, we tested one possible pathway for participation in the absence of strong partisanship: issue-based motivation (Fisher 2012; Krosnick 1990). Across three midterm election cycles, youth who support stricter gun laws were more likely to vote than their peers who did not. This relationship holds even when accounting for partisan ID, ideology, and political interest.

Youth may not always adopt strong partisan labels—but when they do engage, they often do so through channels that are emotionally resonant and grounded in lived experience. Understanding these evolving dynamics is essential for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers who seek to engage the next generation of voters not just as partisans, but as full political actors.

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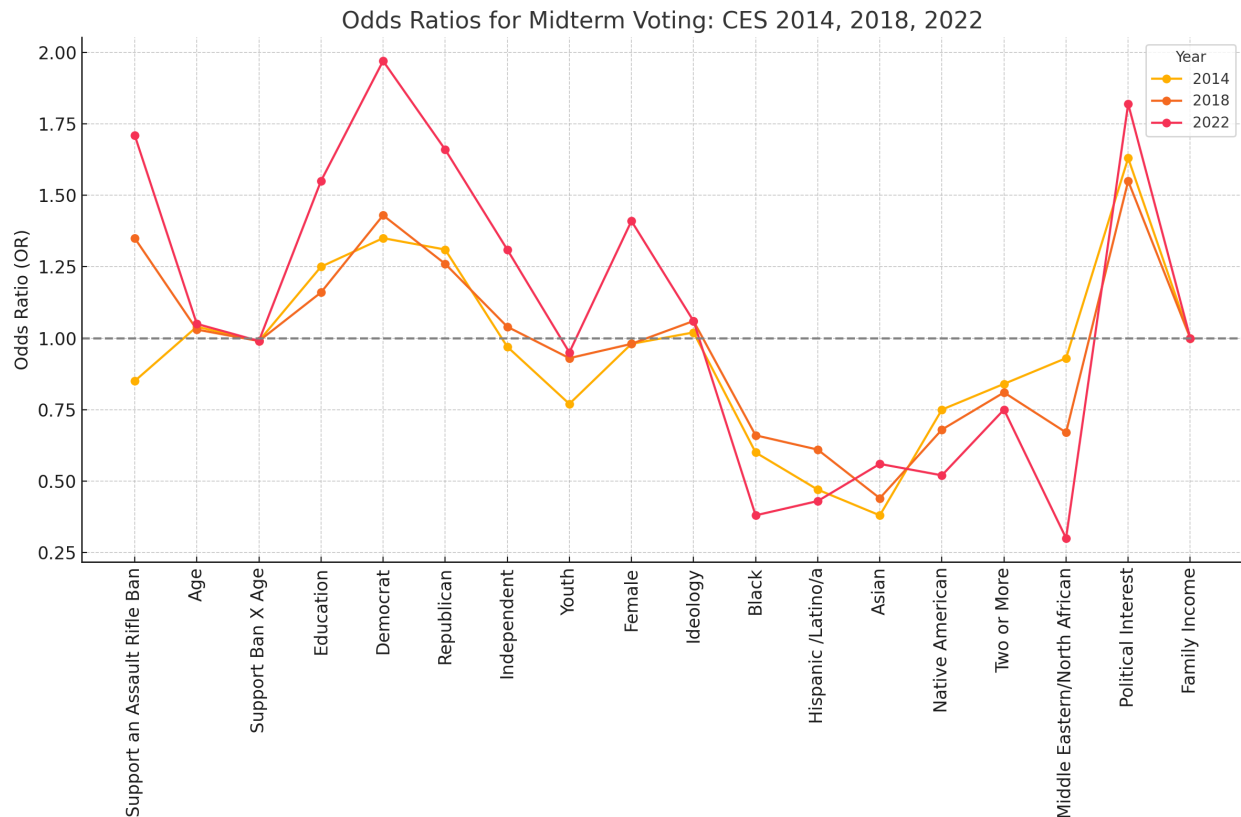
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Appendix:

Appendix Figure 1. Logistic Regression Predicting Validated Vote by Gun Control Attitudes (Full Model Output)

Odds Ratios for Midterm Voting: CES 2014, 2018, 2022



Appendix Table 1. Support for Assault Weapons Ban and Probability of Voting
Midterm Elections: CES 2014, 2018 & 2022

Interaction Model 2 Shown: Baseline is a moderate White adult of 55, making about \$100,000, with political interest expressed as some of the time and having some college.

Logistical Regression - Odds Ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals

Midterm Voting	2014		2018		2022	
	OR	95% conf. interval	OR	95% conf. interval	OR	95% conf. interval
<i>Support an Assault Rifle Ban</i>	0.85**	1.01-0.36	1.35**	1.19-1.52	1.71**	1.48-1.98
<i>Age</i>	1.04***	1.03-1.04	1.03***	1.03-1.04	1.05***	1.05-1.06
<i>Support an Assault Rifle Ban X Age</i>	0.99***	0.99-1.00	0.99***	0.99-1.00	0.99***	0.98-1.00
<i>Education</i>	1.25***	1.23-1.27	1.16***	1.14-1.17	1.55***	1.53-1.58

Democrat	1.35***	1.24-1.47	1.43***	1.32-1.56	1.97***	1.79-2.17
Republican	1.31***	1.20-1.43	1.26***	1.16-1.38	1.66***	1.50-1.83
Independent	0.97	0.89-1.05	1.04	0.87-1.13	1.31***	1.19-1.45
Youth	0.77	0.71-0.83	0.93***	0.87-0.99	0.95	0.87-1.21
Female	0.98	0.94-1.02	0.98	0.94-1.02	1.41	1.35-1.48
Ideology	1.02**	1.00-1.05	1.06***	1.04-1.08	1.06***	1.03-1.08
Race (White is reference group)						
Black	0.60**	0.56-0.64	0.66***	0.62-0.71	0.38**	0.35-0.40
Hispanic /Latino/a	0.47***	0.43-0.51	0.61***	0.57-0.66	0.43***	0.40-0.47
Asian	0.38***	0.33-0.45	0.44***	0.39-0.50	0.56***	0.49-0.64
Native American	0.75***	0.56-0.93	0.68**	0.55-0.85	0.52***	0.42-0.66
Two or More	0.84***	0.73-0.97	0.81	0.73-0.97	0.75***	0.65-0.85
Middle Eastern/ North African	0.93	0.53-1.62	0.67	0.44-1.01	0.30***	0.20-0.47
Political Interest	1.63**	1.59-1.67	1.55**	1.51-1.58	1.82***	1.77-1.86
Family Income	1.00***	1.00-0.99	1.00***	1.00-1.00	1.00***	1.00-1.00

p<0.05; *p<0.01

Appendix Table 2. Support for Gun Control Policies and Midterm Voting– 2014-2018

Model 1 and Model 2 Standalone variables and gun issues interacted with age.

Logistical regression, Odds Ratios

	<i>Dependent Variable: Validated Vote</i>			
	2014 Model 1	2014 Model 2	2018 Model 1	2018 Model 2
Youth (under 30)	-0.27*** (0.03)	-0.34*** (0.01)	-0.30*** (0.02)	-0.28*** (0.02)
Support for Assault Rifle Ban	-0.06 *** (0.02)		-0.07*** (0.01)	
Against Conceal Carry Permits		-0.02*** (0.01)		-0.06*** (0.01)
Assault Rifle Ban x Age			0.18*** (0.03)	
Conceal Carry Permit x Age				0.14*** (0.03)
Political Interest	-0.03 (0.5)		-0.28*** (0.004)	-0.28*** (0.004)
Party ID (Baseline Republican)			-0.084*** (0.005)	-0.083*** (0.004)
Ideology (Baseline (Conservative)			0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)

Income				
Education			0.062*** (0.003)	0.062*** (0.003)
Constant	4.73*** (0.009)	4.70*** (0.008)	5.127*** (0.23)	5.16*** (0.22)
Observations	49,070	47,718	47,577	47,601
R ²	0.013	0.011	0.13	0.13
Adjusted R ²	0.013	0.011	0.13	0.13
Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01				

Appendix Figure 2. CES Party ID over time: Everyone – CI PLOT

