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Beyond the Ballot: Evaluating the Impact of Priming Effects on Public Support for Lowering the Voting Age in American Elections

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Abstract

Six cities in the United States currently allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. In Takoma Park, Maryland, the first city to implement this reform, these youth vote at a rate higher than any other age group. Yet, support for instituting these reforms in California is still low. This study uses an experimental design to investigate how priming individuals with successful initiatives on lowering the voting age to 16 could impact public support for lowering the voting age in California and aims to understand which factors most affect individuals' levels of support for lowering the voting age. Utilizing an online survey, a nonrandom sample of 197 California residents were divided and randomly assigned into treatment and control groups, with the former receiving specific information on the high voter turnout rates of 16- and 17-year-olds in Takoma Park. Contrary to my hypotheses, the findings indicate no statistically significant difference in support for lowering the voting age between the treatment and control groups. This study concludes that education level, gender, household size, and party affiliation are the largest factors in such support. This study finds that simple exposure to positive turnout data may not be sufficient to sway public opinion on lowering the voting age, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing public support for lowering the voting age.

Introduction, Context, and Significance

In 2022, in Culver City, California, voters rejected ballot initiative Measure VY, also known as Vote 16, which would have allowed 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. This initiative, championed by young activists from the local high school, encountered resistance from those who questioned the political maturity of teenagers and believed that lowering the voting age would lead to an increase in left-leaning policies.¹ The measure failed by only 16 votes.² Matt Lesenyie, Assistant Political Science Professor at California State University, Long Beach, said, “To see a result that is so razor thin, just makes me think that somebody has to be sitting at home regretting that they didn't vote in that election. That they literally would have made a difference.”³

The debate over lowering the voting age has attracted attention across the globe, with proponents arguing that it is a necessary step toward inclusivity through empowering young voices. Lowering the voting age could lead to increased youth participation in local politics, affect which candidates get elected, and result in policies that better align with the interests of younger voters. Lowering the voting age could also set a precedent for lifelong voter participation, which would improve overall voter turnout in US elections.⁴ California also often sets trends for the rest of the country. A successful initiative in California could influence discussions around the voting age, potentially leading to cities in other states instituting similar changes.⁵

¹ Sheets, “California City Decides If 16-Year-Olds Should Be Allowed to Vote - Los Angeles Times.”

² “Culver City, California, Measure VY, Voting Age Measure (November 2022) - Ballotpedia.”

³ CBS News, “It’s Official: LA County Election Results Certified by Registrar’s Office.”

⁴ Heys et al., “Should California Lower the Voting Age to 17?: A Review of the Research Evidence, California’s Historical Context, and Predicted Turnout Rates for 17-Year-Olds.”

⁵ Schrag, *California, with a New Preface: America’s High-Stakes Experiment*.

Critics, however, have expressed reservations, categorizing their objections into four primary concerns: the perceived lack of political awareness among 16- and 17-year-olds, their perceived immaturity and impulsiveness, a tendency toward apathy regarding voting, and the potential for undue influence from peers, parents, teachers, or celebrities.⁶

When it comes to lowering the voting age in California, Culver City's razor-thin margin of failure is not new. In 2020, in San Francisco, a similar measure failed by falling short of the 50% vote threshold by only 0.8 percentage points.⁷

However, there have been successes. In 2013, Takoma Park, Maryland, made history by becoming the first city to lower the voting age to 16 in local elections. Since being enfranchised, 16- and 17-year-olds turnout at higher rates than any other age group.⁸ After Takoma Park, six cities in the U.S. began to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in municipal elections.⁹ In 2016, Berkeley voters approved a measure that would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections. Oakland did the same in 2020. However, even after passing, both measures have stagnated and haven't been implemented in an election as of yet.¹⁰

The issue's continued defeat at the ballot box and the slow pace of implementation in other California cities suggests there remains significant public opposition to lowering the voting age. My project seeks to improve our understanding of public attitudes toward policies that lower the voting age. What factors affect public support for lowering the voting age in California?

This study seeks to examine how specific information about the actual voting behavior and civic engagement of 16- and 17-year-olds affects public opinion. By conducting an online

⁶ Oosterhoff, Wray-Lake, and Hart, "Reconsidering the Minimum Voting Age in the United States."

⁷ "San Francisco, California, Proposition G, Local Election Voting Age Charter Amendment (November 2020) - Ballotpedia."

⁸ Vote16USA. "Lowering the Voting Age for Local Elections in Takoma Park and Hyattsville, MD."

⁹ National Youth Rights Association. Voting Age Status Report, 2023.

¹⁰ "Berkeley and Oakland Passed Measures to Let 16- and 17-Year-Olds Participate in School Board Elections. So Why Can't They Vote yet? | KQED."

survey experiment, I examine whether awareness of young voters' higher turnout rates and active participation in local elections can sway public sentiment toward endorsing voting-age legislation in California. By analyzing the impact of targeted information on public perception, this study aims to provide insights into strategies for increasing support for lowering the voting age. Additionally, it will explore potential implications for policy-making and civic engagement initiatives aimed at young voters. This study aims to deepen our understanding of public attitudes toward lowering the voting age in California, investigating the disparities in campaign outcomes across various municipalities. I also briefly analyze some factors that have led to the successful adoption of lower voting age initiatives in some cities, while similar efforts have not prevailed elsewhere.

Literature Review

Studies have cited several reasons for why people choose to vote. For example, people with higher socioeconomic status, level of education, perceived stake in governance, and older individuals are likely to have a higher propensity to vote.¹¹ Notably, young people are the least likely to cast a ballot in elections, pointing to the need to foster early voting habits.¹² Proponents of lowering the voting age to 16 offer the idea as a potential solution, arguing that 16- and 17-year-olds are more likely to vote than 18-year-olds because they are in a more stable phase of their lives, often still embedded within their community and school networks, which foster a higher level of engagement.¹³ Unlike 18-year-olds, who are often navigating significant life changes such as moving, starting new jobs, or attending college, 16- and 17-year-olds' relatively

¹¹ Brady, Verba, and Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation."

¹² Zeglovits and Aichholzer, "Are People More Inclined to Vote at 16 Than at 18? Evidence for the First-Time Voting Boost Among 16- to 25-Year-Olds in Austria."

¹³ Tim Male (former Takoma Park, Maryland City Council member) in discussion with the author, February 2024.

stable circumstances make it easier to participate.^{12,13} This stability, combined with their high turnout rates observed in examples from Austria, Scotland, and Takoma Park, suggests that lowering the voting age could significantly enhance the representation of younger perspectives in the political process.¹²

Institutional rules can also significantly influence voter turnout, acting as a determinant separate from individual motivations. The regulatory framework of the voting process, such as voter ID laws, registration deadlines, or permanent felon disenfranchisement, can all influence the overall voter turnout and affect which groups of people will be more likely to vote¹⁴. Research shows that the presence of these types of laws can cause disproportionately lower turnout among younger voters and African Americans¹⁵. Conversely, states that have adopted more accessible voting practices, such as all vote-by-mail systems, consistently have higher voter turnout. Therefore, examining institutional factors, as well as personal factors, is crucial for understanding voter turnout in elections, especially among young voters.

The possibility of reducing the voting age in a particular city is contingent upon state legislation, as each state holds the power to set the criteria for voting in its state and local elections. In Maryland, cities can reduce the voting age for municipal elections with just a charter amendment approved by the city councils. This process is the same in five other states, including California. However, this contrasts with the more complex processes required in many other states.¹⁶

In nine states, city councils can pass charter amendments to lower the voting age in local elections, however, the law is less clear, and constitutional challenges are very likely to occur. In

¹⁴ Wayne, Stephen J. *Is This Any Way to Run a Democratic Election?*

¹⁵ Uggen, Shannon, and Manza. "State-Level Estimates of Felon Disenfranchisement in the United States, 2010."

¹⁶ Vote16USA. "White Paper on Lowering the Voting Age: Young Voices at the Ballot Box."

29 states, a state law is required to allow cities to lower the voting age, and a state constitutional amendment is required in the remaining six states.¹⁶

The California Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, but do not explicitly forbid those under 18 from voting¹⁶. California endows its charter cities with extensive home rule authority. While elections are not directly mentioned, municipalities have the power to “make and enforce all ordinances and regulations in respect to municipal affairs”¹⁷, and case law has supported the view that elections fall under municipal affairs, meaning that California’s charter cities can lower their local voting ages through city charter amendments.¹⁶

Recent polling indicates that public opinion on lowering the voting age varies across party lines. A 2019 Hill-HarrisX survey poll revealed that 75 percent of registered voters were against permitting 17-year-olds to participate in national elections, with opposition rising to 84 percent for allowing 16-year-olds to vote. Furthermore, the poll indicated that Republicans were more likely to oppose lowering the voting age compared to Democrats.¹⁸ Another poll found that among 18-to-29-year-olds, Democrats were more likely to support lowering the voting age to 16, while Republicans were more likely to support raising the voting age to 21.¹⁹ Consistent with previous results, the Vote 16 Research Network found that Democrats were more likely to support lowering the voting age compared to Republicans. Democratic support for lowering the voting age to 16 stands at 49% for local elections, 47% for state elections, and 43% for federal elections. In contrast, Republican support for this change is markedly lower, at 21%, 19%, and 18%, respectively.²⁰

¹⁷ California Constitution, article XI, section 5a

¹⁸ The Hill, “Poll: Americans overwhelmingly reject lowering voting age to 16.”

¹⁹ The Institute of Politics at Harvard University. “45th Edition – Spring 2023.”

²⁰ Hanmer and Novey, “Americans Are Open to Lowering the Voting Age.”

The Vote 16 Research Network found that using different research questions could affect public opinion toward lowering the voting age. By presenting subjects with testimonials of apparent 16-year-old voters, who had spent time researching the election and candidates through multiple sources and engaged in careful consideration of their choices, support for lowering the voting age in local elections increased by 12.7% from the baseline.²⁰ These findings suggest that public opinion on lowering the voting age may be influenced by the way information is presented to individuals. Providing examples of responsible and informed young voters could potentially sway more people toward supporting this policy change.

However, a gap in researchers' understanding still remains in the literature. To date, no experimental research has assessed whether presenting individuals with turnout data for 16- and 17-year-olds can positively influence attitudes toward lowering the voting age. This could reveal whether increased awareness of 16- and 17-year-olds' high political engagement leads to broader acceptance of their inclusion in the electoral process. This research could provide valuable insights into strategies for advocating for lower voting ages, by highlighting the potential impact of priming individuals with positive examples of youth political engagement.

Theory, Causal Mechanism, & Hypotheses

My research question was studied using an online survey experiment. My conceptual hypothesis was that *individuals informed about higher voter turnout rates among 16- and 17-year-olds are more likely to support reforms to lower the voting age compared to those who are not provided with this information*. My independent variable will be if an individual has been primed about 16- and 17-year-old turnout rates. The dependent variable is the subjects' support for lowering the voting age. For this experiment, I utilized voter turnout data from the 2020

elections in Takoma Park, Maryland. The study aimed to assess differences in support for lowering the voting age between individuals exposed to the turnout data and those who are not.

Political socialization theory posits that political behaviors and attitudes are shaped through exposure to information and engagement within an individual's social circles. Building on this theory, the causal mechanism of this study is that by providing examples of successful implementation of lowering the voting age, this could normalize the concept for individuals who were previously unaware or skeptical, leading to a change in their perception about the maturity and engagement of young people, leading to an increase in support of lowering the voting age. By giving subjects awareness of high youth political engagement, this could challenge preconceived notions about their political immaturity, apathy, or inexperience, thereby increasing support for lowering the voting age²¹. Using this research design, the following operational hypotheses are tested:

H1:

Individuals primed with information about the high 2020 election turnout rates among 16- and 17-year-olds in Takoma Park, Maryland, will show greater support for lowering the voting age than those who have not been exposed to this information.

H2:

Treatment group Democrats will show greater support for lowering the voting age than control group Democrats.

H3:

Treatment group Republicans will show less support for lowering the voting age than control group Republicans.

²¹ Patrick Paschall (former Hyattsville, Maryland City Council member) in discussion with the author, March 2024.

For the second and third hypotheses, my casual mechanism is that both Democrats and Republicans will be self-interested rational actors. Democrats in the treatment group, knowing that young people are more likely to vote for Democrats and now aware that they turn out in high numbers, would be more likely to support lowering the voting age to take advantage of this. However, Republicans, also knowing that young people lean liberal, and now knowing they turn out in high numbers, will be less likely to support lowering the voting age.

Methods

Following the research design of Gerber et al., (2020)²² and Currin-Percival (2010)²³, this project employed a post-test-only experimental design with a treatment and control group. The experiment was conducted through an online Qualtrics survey, which ran from Feb. 30 to Mar. 2, 2024. Subjects were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and only included subjects who stated that they currently live in California. Since MTurk participants are not representative of the general California population, the external validity of this experimental design is low. However, by randomly assigning subjects between the two groups, this experiment maximizes internal validity.

Using MTurk users as experimental subjects is not uncommon in academic research but makes generalizing this experiment to California adults difficult. MTurk users are more likely to be liberal, Caucasian, male, and younger than the general population, and as such, the results presented in this paper should be interpreted with caution.²⁴

²² Gerber, Green, and Shachar, "Voting May Be Habit-Forming: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment."

²³ Currin-Percival, "Regular Readers Expect More Polling Details."

²⁴ Huff, Connor, and Dustin Tingley. "'Who Are These People?' Evaluating the Demographic Characteristics and Political Preferences of MTurk Survey Respondents."

A total of 197 subjects participated in the experiment and were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Both subjects in the control group (n= 97) and treatment group (n= 99) were asked to complete a public policy survey and were not aware there were two versions of the survey.

All subjects were asked about their level of support for lowering the voting age in local elections. However, subjects in the treatment group received additional information on the high voter turnout rates of 16- and 17-year-olds. The treatment group question read:

For years, a number of municipalities in the U.S. have allowed 16 and 17-year-olds to vote for mayor and city council in local elections. In one city in Maryland in 2020, 16 and 17-year-olds voted at a rate 15.3% higher than the total population. Do you support or oppose granting 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in local city elections in California?

Then, all subjects were asked to state their support for lowering the voting age to 16 in school board, state, and federal elections. Subjects were asked to express their support or opposition using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Oppose” (= 1) to “Strongly Support” (= 5). They were also asked if they believed if 16-year-olds had enough maturity or political awareness to make informed voting decisions, if they believed that 16- and 17-year-olds would vote if enfranchised, and if they believed that 16- and 17-year-olds would be unduly influenced by their parents, teachers, or peers, preventing them from making independent voting decisions. Questions about political maturity, knowledge and awareness, and likelihood to be influenced were coded on a 4-point scale.

For maturity, answers ranged from “Definitely not mature enough” (= 1) to “Definitely mature enough” (= 4). Political knowledge and awareness response options were “Definitely not enough knowledge and awareness” (= 1) to “Definitely enough knowledge and awareness” (= 4). Likelihood to be unduly influenced response options ranged from “Not at all unduly influenced” (= 1) to “Extremely unduly influenced” (= 4).

Findings

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Control Group</i> <i>N=97</i>	<i>Treatment Group</i> <i>N=99</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>N=197</i>
Age 18-24 (%)	3	1	2
Age 25-34 (%)	76	68	72
Age 35-44 (%)	11	13	12
Age 45-54 (%)	7	16	11
Age 55+ (%)	2	2	2
Female (%)	36	33	35
Income (median)	4	4	4
White (%)	91	95	91
Democrat (%)	68	67	67
Republican (%)	23	24	24
Independent (%)	9	9	9
Voted in 2022 (%)	77	77	77

To determine the effect of each demographic factor on individuals’ support for lowering the voting age and perception of 16- and 17-year-old voters, the responses were initially analyzed using Welch’s two-sample t-tests. Although random assignment was used in this experiment, it is worthwhile to note that distribution of the subjects’ demographics in treatment groups, especially among age, is slightly unbalanced. The subject pool skewed younger, with

72% of the survey participants aged 25-34. Table 1 shows the random assignment of subject characteristics across experimental groups.

Table 2 shows the difference of mean support levels for lowering the voting age across experimental groups by election type, as well as perceptions of 16- and 17-year-olds' political maturity, awareness, and likelihood to be manipulated or influenced. The table also includes p-values indicating levels of statistical significance for each category.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Control Group</i> <i>N=97</i>	<i>Treatment Group</i> <i>N=99</i>	<i>Total</i> <i>N=197</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>5-Point Scale Questions</i>				
Support Lowering Age, Local Elections	3.28	3.14	3.21	0.391
Support Lowering Age, School Board Elections	3.56	3.37	3.46	0.216
Support Lowering Age, State Elections	3.35	3.34	3.34	0.947
Support Lowering Age, Federal Elections	3.41	3.33	3.37	0.656
Likelihood to Cast a Ballot	3.40	3.36	3.38	0.982
<i>4-Point Scale Questions</i>				
Maturity	3.79	3.01	3.40	0.036
Political Knowledge and Awareness	3.02	2.93	2.97	0.356
Unduly Influenced	2.59	2.62	2.60	0.819

The results show that there is no discernible difference in the treatment group's subjects' support levels for lowering the voting age in any election scenario compared to the control group. There is a slight decrease in levels of support among treatment group members compared to control group members, but these results do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Therefore, I did not find support for my first hypothesis. These results show that when individuals are presented with high-turnout data from 16- and 17-year-olds in local elections, it does not have a significant impact on their support for lowering the voting age.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Control Democrats N=72</i>	<i>Treatment Democrats N=70</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Control Republicans N=30</i>	<i>Treatment Republicans N=25</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>5-Point Scale Questions</i>						
Support Lowering Age, Local Elections	3.27	3.18	0.954	3.32	2.89	0.177
Support Lowering Age, School Board Elections	3.55	3.39	0.409	3.6	3.33	0.336
Support Lowering Age, State Elections	3.55	3.41	0.469	3.13	3.33	0.497
Support Lowering Age, Federal Elections	3.58	3.02	0.002	4.04	3.8	0.528
Likelihood to Cast a Ballot	3.44	3.4	0.752	3.12	3.3	0.489
<i>4-Point Scale Questions</i>						
Maturity	3.13	3.03	0.527	2.8	3	0.379
Political Knowledge and Awareness	3.08	2.93	0.252	2.84	2.96	0.603
Unduly Influenced	2.51	2.6	0.445	2.8	2.67	0.454

My second and third hypotheses were tested by comparing the effect of including the treatment between Democrats and Republicans. When broken down by party affiliation, there is no statistically significant difference between the treatment and control group Democrats and Republicans, as shown in Table 3. Except in the case of federal elections, there is no statistically significant difference in levels of support for lowering the voting age in any election type when comparing the results of control and treatment groups for either political party. As expected, when Republicans are provided with the information that 16- and 17-year-olds vote at high rates, they are less likely to support lowering the voting age. However, this same result occurs with Democrats. When provided with the treatment, Democrats also become less likely to support lowering the voting age, but these results do not meet the level of statistical significance. However, when provided with the treatment information on high teen voting rates, Democrats become less likely to support lowering the voting age in federal elections (p value = 0.002). Therefore, the data remains inconclusive since the overall data did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, and I did not find support for my second or third hypotheses.

Since these results show that providing information on high 16- and 17-year-old voting rates does not impact levels of support for lowering the voting age, further analysis must be done to determine which factors are the most likely to influence support.

To determine the potential factors influencing support levels, additional variables such as age education level, gender, household size, income, voting status, and party affiliation, I conducted an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression on the control group results, to test the relationship between explanatory variables and the dependent variable, while controlling for the effects of the other explanatory variables.

<i>term</i>	<i>estimate</i>	<i>std. error</i>	<i>statistic</i>	<i>p-value</i>
(Intercept)	1.41	0.87	1.61	0.11
Age	0.06	0.17	0.37	0.71
Education	0.14	0.09	1.55	0.13
GenderFemale	-0.5	0.27	-1.86	0.07
PeopleInHousehold	0.18	0.13	1.36	0.18
Income	-0.01	0.08	-0.1	0.92
VotedIn2022	0.04	0.14	0.31	0.75
Party Affiliation	0.26	0.22	1.19	0.24

The results, shown in Table 4, indicate that the factors that most influenced support for lowering the voting age in local elections were education levels, gender, household size, and party affiliation. Higher education levels are moderately correlated with increased support, albeit with little statistical significance (p value = 0.13). Men tend to support lowering the voting age more than women (p value = 0.07). Additionally, individuals from larger households were more inclined to support voting age reduction (p value = 0.18), and Democrats were more likely to support lowering the voting age than Republicans, although this was not statistically significant (p value = 0.24).

Further analysis of control group levels of support shows that 52.3% of Democrats supported lowering the voting age compared to 47.8% of Republicans. When independent subjects that leaned toward a particular party were included, those levels jumped to 54.1% and 52%, respectively.

Table 5 indicates that men found 16- and 17-year-olds more politically mature and knowledgeable, but also found them to be more likely to be unduly influenced by their parents, teachers, or peers. Men also supported lowering the voting age more than women in every election type, except for federal elections (p value = 0.214). Subjects younger than 35 were more likely to find 16- and 17-year-olds to be less politically mature than subjects older than 35 (p value = 0.102) and were more likely to support lowering the voting age in school board elections (p value = 0.119). However, given that the younger age group outnumbered the older by nearly four to one, these results should be interpreted with caution.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Male</i> <i>N=62</i>	<i>Female</i> <i>N=35</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Age (<35)</i> <i>N=78</i>	<i>Age (>35)</i> <i>N=20</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>5-Point Scale Questions</i>						
Support Lowering Age, Local Elections	3.42	3.03	0.112	3.27	3.3	0.916
Support Lowering Age, School Board Elections	3.66	3.4	0.295	3.64	2.36	0.119
Support Lowering Age, State Elections	3.48	3.1	0.177	3.33	3.33	1
Support Lowering Age, Federal Elections	3.57	3.91	0.214	3.64	4.05	0.259
Likelihood to Cast a Ballot	3.47	3.17	0.163	3.4	3.25	0.501
<i>4-Point Scale Questions</i>						
Maturity	3.13	2.88	0.234	2.97	3.3	0.102
Political Knowledge and Awareness	3.15	2.8	0.067	3	3.1	0.598
Unduly Influenced	2.68	2.43	0.093	2.56	2.65	0.663

Discussion

These results show that providing information to individuals about the existing high voting rates of 16- and 17-year-olds does not positively impact support for lowering the voting age. In fact, it may cause a slight dip in support, but these results are not entirely statistically

significant. This suggests that there may be other factors at play influencing attitudes toward lowering the voting age, and further research is needed to explore these other explanatory variables. Additionally, the sample size of younger participants in this study may have skewed the results, and further studies should try to utilize a more representative sample of California residents, since these results are not generalizable to the overall population.

Contrary to my hypotheses that when provided with the treatment, Democrats would become more likely to support lowering the voting age, and Republicans would become less likely, the results show that providing the treatment is correlated with a slight decrease in support, regardless of party affiliation.

It is also possible that the treatment was not strong enough to cause a significant difference in levels of support. The treatment information was only included in one question and was only two sentences long. Future studies should use a stronger priming effect, such as having treatment group subjects watch a news broadcast of 16- and 17-year-olds casting their ballots at the polls, alongside high turnout figures.

Further research also needs to identify the most important factors that affect public support for lowering the voting age. The results of this indicate that the knowledge of high turnout rates among 16- and 17-year-olds does not significantly impact Californian residents' support levels. Instead, this study finds that education, household size, and party affiliation emerge are the most significant factors. Additional research should be conducted on municipalities where these reforms are already in place, to determine their determinants of support and to understand if these explanatory influences could affect public support in California as well.

In recent years, there has been a concern about the quality of data collected in Amazon Mechanical Turk experiments. There have been decreases in the validity, reliability, and replicability of Mechanical Turk's data quality^{25,26}, which could potentially impact the findings of this study. For instance, some notable discrepancies occurred. Subjects in the treatment group found 16- and 17-year-old voters to be less political mature than those in the control group (p value = 0.036). Additionally, Democrats in the treatment group were much less likely to support lowering the voting age in federal elections compared to their control group counterparts (Table 3, p value = 0.002).

At the start of the survey, subjects were asked to complete a variety of demographic questions. Of the 197 respondents, when asked what county they currently reside in, 100 gave "USA", "America", or "The United States", as their response. 18 answered "California", and 24 gave a response that was not a county in California, such as "San Jose" or another city. This suggests that respondents may have misunderstood the question or provided inaccurate information, which could impact the validity of future question responses.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the impact of presenting voter turnout data among 16- and 17-year-olds on public support for lowering the voting age in California, with a focus on how such support might vary across different election types and subjects' party affiliation.

My research questions were as follows: First, does exposure to high youth voter turnout data influence overall public support for lowering the voting age? Second, what factors most affect support for lowering the voting age? And third, does party affiliation serve as a strong

²⁵ Chmielewski and Kucker, "An MTurk Crisis? Shifts in Data Quality and the Impact on Study Results."

²⁶ Webb, M. A., & Tangney, J. P., 2022.

interaction term, influencing the extent to which priming individuals with youth voter turnout data affect such support.

The analysis, based on a survey conducted among 197 California adult residents, revealed that priming individuals with high 16- and 17-year-old voter turnout data does not significantly affect support for lowering the voting age. This lack of significant difference in support between the control and treatment groups was consistent across political affiliations and all election types, except in the context of federal elections. However, it was noted that participants younger than 35 years in this pilot study perceived 16- and 17-year-olds as less politically mature compared to older participants, and they were slightly more inclined to support lowering the voting age in school board elections. However, these findings should still be interpreted with caution due to the overrepresentation of younger individuals in the sample, which could skew perceptions and reported levels of support.

This pilot study discovered that support for lowering the voting age in local elections is influenced by factors such as education level, gender, household size, and party affiliation. I observed a tendency for individuals with higher education levels and household size to show more support, and for men to support lowering the voting age more than women, except for in federal elections. These results lay the foundation for future exploration into the dynamics of public attitudes toward 16- and 17-year-old voting rights.

Further research with a more diverse, and representative, age range of subjects is needed to confirm these initial findings, to better determine if age plays a significant role toward support for lowering the voting age. Future studies should consider aiming for a more representative sample of California adults.

This study's findings contribute to the broad discourse on youth enfranchisement and suggests that simply providing high turnout data among 16- and 17-year-olds is insufficient to significantly shift public opinion toward lowering the voting age. This emphasizes the complexity of public attitudes toward lowering the voting age, and more research must be conducted to determine which factors and what information individuals need to have before supporting such a policy change, including perceptions of youth political maturity and capability, and exploring the impact of educational initiatives focused on a more favorable view of youth enfranchisement. Additionally, investigating public support within municipalities where youth voting rights have already been implemented could yield valuable insights, providing empirical evidence to guide future research and policy considerations.

In addition to examining the factors that affect public support for lowering the voting age, more research should be conducted on the pathways to lower the voting age itself. It is notable that in every US city where 16- and 17-year-olds are currently allowed to vote in local elections, this enfranchisement was facilitated directly through city council decisions. In California, such reforms have historically required ballot approval. Given that ballot measures require a greater consensus of public support to be enacted, this presents significant challenges for future efforts of these reforms. This suggests that in order to lower the voting age, advocates must rely more on city government in order to pass these initiatives instead of on ballot measures.¹⁵ This could potentially lead to quicker implementation of reforms, compared to the more challenging approval process in California, which requires voters to approve a city charter amendment.¹⁶

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