Raising Youth Turnout: The Role of Campaigns and Political Involvement Organizations

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

This paper will explore a different side of the youth voter and the mystified year of the youth voter by examining the elections of 1992, 2004, and 2008. In investigating this issue, instead of examining the actions of the young voters during these elections, the actions of campaigns and get out the vote organizations are examined. It seems that the disappointment in young voters is not an issue for which young people hold sole responsibility. The other actors in the election, too, must do their part in courting the young voter. They must spend the time, effort, and money necessary to attract this group of voters and address the needs of this group. These entities are rarely to never examined in relation to the youth vote due to difficulties quantifying their role. The conclusions address the campaigns and organizations efforts towards young people as well as issues with the concepts behind the myth of the youth voter.

INTRODUCTION

Presidential campaigns and their corresponding elections take center stage every four years in the United States. Campaigns begin long before election night, or even the primaries, take place as candidates begin the process of raising money, courting those who have the opportunity to vote for them and personalizing their message for different groups. One such group is those young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. It seems, however, that this group has been given less attention than some other segments of the electorate.

Over the past five elections, the youth vote has become an increasingly significant topic of discussion. There consistently seems to be speculation about the youth voters coming out and being a driving force in selecting the winner of the election; that the year of the youth voter will come. Many see that the year of the youth voter is proposed over and over while the young people never seem to live up to the numbers predicted and the impact that is anticipated.[i]

Over and over again, commentators talk about the disillusioned, apathetic young person. They use the statistics, showing young voter turnout consistently lower than other age groups and steadily falling since federal elections lowered the voting at to 18 in 1972, as proof that the young person eligible to vote doesn't practice his or her civic responsibility in selecting those who govern and how this is a disappointment for the candidates and democracy. The hypothesized reasons for this lack of involvement tend to read the same way, mentioning being away from home, not knowing the process, and the system itself, with registration rules and Tuesday voting. Also usually mentioned, but with little further explanation, is that the youth feel that they are not being addressed and thus do not have the motivation to support the candidates.

This last point is what this paper will delve further into. In the lackluster record of youth voting, there are a few years that stand out as years when the youth did turn out to vote. Have the campaigns in these years put in strategies to energize the youth to support them? In a system where campaigns are evolving to allow candidates to interact more with their constituents and communicate with individual groups, as well as individuals, in a much more

personal way the campaign has a responsibility to court voters, including the youth segment. Did these campaigns have effective ways of courting young voters? With this, the candidates also have a roll in high or low youth voter turnout.

THESIS AND METHODS

This paper will try to explore a different side of the youth voter and the mystified year of the youth voter. In investigating this issue, instead of examining the actions of the young voters during these elections, the actions of campaigns will be examined. It seems that the low voter turnout among this group is not an issue for which young people hold sole responsibility. The campaigns, too, must do their part in courting the young voter. They must spend the time, effort, and money necessary to attract this group of voters. They must address the issues important to young voters as well as the needs of this group.

In addition to the official campaigns of the candidates in an election, there are a variety of other groups who are trying to energize young people and get them to the polls on Election Day. With each election year that passes more voter turnout organizations, especially those focused specifically on young people, join the mix in trying to turn young people into young voters. From Rock the Vote and Choose or Lose, to Young Democrats and College Republicans, various groups have emerged since 1992 to encourage young people to vote. These organizations are playing a large role in the process of increasing the power of the youth voting block and in trying to make the campaigns aware of what can be done to attract these young people. Are these the groups that are devoting the time, effort and resources to young voters?

To examine the actions of both the campaigns and voter turnout organizations, case studies of elections will be undertaken. The elections that will be concentrated on in this study are 1992, 2004, and 2008. These years were chosen as they represent peaks in youth voter turnout. I believe that examining these case studies will reveal that in years of high youth voter turnout, there was a focus on bringing these young people out to the polls by campaigns and voter turnout organizations. For each of these elections, accounts recorded during the election, such as newspaper articles, as well as accounts recorded after the election, such as

scholarly journals, will be examined. This will be the case to examine official campaign activity as well as voter turnout organization actions. This will allow for a variety of perspectives on the election.

Of particular importance will be the efforts of the campaigns focused on eighteen to twenty-four year olds. Some of these efforts may include visits to college campuses, registering young people, as well as efforts by the campaign to directly contact members of this group. The aim is to see if campaigns had effective strategies for connecting with young people and building a support group from this base. Also of significance will be the methods used by voter turnout organizations to attract young people. I will examine the strategies that these organizations use to register voters, keep them informed, and encourage them to vote. Which efforts were the driving forces for young people going to the polls in these years of higher turnout?

Having information about both campaigns and voter turnout elections will enable an evaluation of the strategies used by each in attracting the youth voter. After looking at the data for the individual years, it will then be possible to compare the years to one another. This comparison will help determine if the strategy used toward young voters has progressed over the election years as well as the evolution of the amount of courting done by campaigns versus voter turnout organizations.

HISTORY OF THE YOUTH VOTE

As previously mentioned, the category of "young voter" is often defined as eighteen to twenty-four year olds, but this has not always been the case. Up until 1970, the minimum voting age in federal elections was 21, with the voting age for local and state elections varying by state. Beginning during World War II, as many young men went off to fight for their country, measures were proposed that would lower the voting age to 18.[ii] In the 1960's, this idea gained more steam, as many young people becoming more politically active, especially in the form of protests to Vietnam on college campuses. In 1969 a draft was instated which put young men at risk for being sent off to war, with those between eighteen and twenty-one having no say in the government controlling their fate. "Old enough to fight, old enough to

vote," became a rallying cry for these young men and others in favor of extending suffrage to include those between eighteen and twenty-one.[iii]

In response, President Nixon signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1970. This act lowered the minimum voting age to 18 for all federal, state, and local elections. From the beginning, the constitutionality of this act was in question. Many states did not wish to lower their voting ages and maintained that Congress did not have the power to set the voting age[iv]. Shortly after being passed, Oregon, Texas, and Idaho all challenged the act in the Supreme Court case Oregon v. Mitchell. This case was ruled in favor of Oregon, with the court determining that Congress could set the voting age in federal elections, but had no authority to do so in state and local elections.[v]

With the federal age staying in place at eighteen, new problems could have risen in those states that did not wish to lower their voting age. Having different ages in place for federal elections compared to state and local elections would require states to maintain two sets of voter registration information as well as develop new procedures for elections[vi]. This becomes particularly evident when you consider a federal election year in which state officials are also being elected. In this situation, an eighteen year old would be able to cast their ballot for federal officials, but would not be able to vote for state and local officials that would traditionally be on the same ballot. This would require new procedures to be put into place to address this issue and could become complicated and costly to the states.

As a result of these anticipated issues, a Constitutional Amendment was proposed shortly after the Voting Rights Act of 1970 was ruled unconstitutional. One year later in 1971 the 26th Amendment to the Constitution was enacted, establishing the constitutionality of setting the minimum voting age to eighteen in all federal, state, and local elections. The amendment consisted of two lines of text:

> **Section 1.** The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

> **Section 2.** The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The Senate had proposed the amendment with a vote of 94-0 on March 10th and the House voted 401-19 in favor on March 23rd. [vii] The amendment then became the quickest to be passed into law, with three fourths of states ratifying but July 1st. With this, the Presidential election of 1972 was the first in which those between eighteen and twenty- one had the vote[viii].

USING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Voting Statistics

In their first election with the right to vote, those between eighteen to twenty-one years of age came out to vote and contributed to a turnout rate for eighteen to twenty-four year olds of 52.1%. Even with this high number, young voters had a lower turnout rate than those thirty and over, who had a rate of 69.5%.[ix] In this election, George McGovern was counting on young voters to lead him to victory over the incumbent Richard Nixon. Young voters were not enough to propel McGovern to victory, and thus, from the beginning youth voters were considered a disappointment to a candidate that was depending on them. With this, the cycle of neglect began. From this point on, the turnout of young voters consistently fell until it reached 39.9% in 1988.[x]

This trend broke four years later with the election of 1992. The youth vote experienced a great leap, rising to 48.6%, the second highest figure for youth turnout, trailing only 1972. Working against the youth vote, not only did the turnout in the youth segment rise, but the overall voter turnout rose to 70.5%. While the youth turnout increased more than overall turnout, the corresponding upswing in each limited the effect that the increase in youth turnout had on the elections. It is interesting to note that when examining a graph comparing voters age eighteen to twenty-four years old and twenty-five plus in the period since 1972, while eighteen through twenty-four year olds are consistently lower than twenty-five plus voters, they show very similar paths. The lines seem to move together for the most part with decreases in both young and over twenty-five occurring during the same years and increases following the same pattern. The actual amount of the changes vary between the younger and

older group, but this may signify factors in the actual election determining voting interest across all age groups.[xi]

Despite the positive increase in 1992, in 1996 the downward trend resumed with the youth vote plummeting to 35.6%. This is the low point for the youth vote and made the turnout increase in 1992 seem like a onetime incident and not an actual turn around in the downward trend of youth voting[xii]. Turnout rose slightly in 2000 to 36.1% and then significantly in 2004 to 46.7%. With this leap in turnout, 2008 was the year to determine whether 2004 was another blip as 1992 had been or if this may be the start to an upward trend. In 2008, the turnout rose again to 48.5%.[xiii] Whether this movement will continue is yet to be seen, but this upward momentum during three consecutive election cycles is a positive sign for the youth vote and may be the start of the trend that can change the conception of youth voters in the eyes of the media and campaigns.

Cause for Concern

The fact that young people seem to consistently turn out at lower rates than expected and at lower rates than other age groups is a cause for concern. In a democratic society, having as many people as possible voting is very important. The system is based on the representation of the people, and voting is the citizen's way to choose that representation. If young people choose not to vote, their interests may not be addressed by those in office, as elected officials will be more responsive to those that helped them get elected. This means that democracy is not working to its full potential for the whole population.[xiv]

Also very important is the fact that voting is an act that is very habitual; those who have voted in the past are much more likely to vote in the future.[xv] Because of this, it is important for young people to vote and get involved in the process early so that they will continue participating into the future. This is essential for the continuation of the system and faith in the institutions.[xvi] In addition, the Millennial Generation, those born between 1979 and 2000, are the young voters of today and will eventual have 90 million voters and make up approximately 40% of the electorate. This is a generation that will be a driving force in politics for many years to come and it is important for them to be involved in the process from an early age.[xvii]

Reasons for Not Voting

If it is so important for young people to vote, why is it that so many choose not to? Several reasons for not voting pertain not only to young people, but citizens in general. There are some aspects of the United States electoral process that are seen to discourage some in the population from voting. The first is the registration process. Citizens are not automatically registered to vote, the initiative must be taken by the citizen to register, and register on time, in order to cast a ballot in elections. In many other nations, the government is responsible for registering its citizens to vote. In addition, our elections take place on Tuesdays, which tends to discourage voting among lower classes of people who are not able to take off work in order to vote.[xviii]

Other reasons not to vote are more associated with young people. For one, when you register to vote, you need to register at your permanent address and then need to vote in a certain district of the town or city in which you registered. Doing this can be a problem for some young people, as they are away from home at college or move around more and are not as established in their location as older people.[xix] Because of this, many young people have to use absentee ballots. These ballots take more effort on the part of the voter, as there can be many steps to obtain a ballot, which then must be filled out and mailed back by a certain date in order to be counted. Having this more complicated process can discourage some from filling out a ballot at all.[xx]

In addition, many young people have not yet felt the full impact that government plays in daily life. They do not see how their everyday activities are affected by government and how elected officials have control over many aspects of life for all citizens. Part of this is that today's youth is accustomed to instant gratification. Everything today happens so quickly and processes and results are immediate. Democratic government does not operate in this fashion. It is designed specifically to be a slow process and the results of the process can take many years to be felt. This leads young people to believe that who is elected is of little importance to them, and thus makes voting less likely.[xxi]

Also, many young people are extremely cynical about elected officials. Many Americans are cynical, but young people seem to be so more than average. It may be seen why young

people are so cynical, especially those coming of age around 2008, by looking at political events that have occurred in their short lifetime. One of the first presidents these people would remember would be Bill Clinton. They were exposed to his affair, its investigation and one of only two presidents that has ever been impeached. Next, these young people viewed the election of George W. Bush. This election had varying aspects as far as encouraging voting. On one side, we saw how close votes can be in a state with Florida's ballots and turnout being challenged up to the Supreme Court and ultimately determining the winner of the election. On the other side, Bush won the election without obtaining the popular vote, leads to questioning of the system and whether the popular vote matters. Still more, they have experienced living through an unpopular war, where many of the reasons stated for why we were entering turned out to be false, such as weapons of mass destruction. Yet another aspect was viewing the government's response to Hurricane Katrina and how poorly FIMA handled the crisis. These factors all lead to cynicism among today's young people.[xxii]

Lastly, and the issue that this paper will be focusing on, is the lack of attention given to this group by campaigns and candidates. Many young people feel that candidate do not pay attention to the issues that are important to them. They feel that campaigns for the most part ignore them. In fact, many campaigns do not contact this segment of the electorate, as they do not have a voting history and thus do not know where their allegiances lie, while if candidates did in fact contact them, they may be able to gain their support. Campaigns and young people are caught in a vicious cycle of neglect. Campaigns do not pay adequate attention to young people and thus many do not choose to vote. Since young people did not vote, elected officials are unresponsive to the needs of young people and young people feel that they are neglected by the political system, again, discouraging them from voting in the future. As they have not voted, campaigns do not contact them in the future and target them and the cycle begins again.[xxiii]

CONCEPTIONS OF YOUNG VOTERS

Because of the turnout of young voters has decreased consistently since the first year that the voting age was lowered to 18 (until recently) and because of many of the reasons that may prevent young people from voting, this group has often been categorized as apathetic. Many

in elected office view young people as not caring about politics and voting. This has been perpetuated by the cycle of neglect present between politicians and young people. In many cases, young people are actually very political; they just express their beliefs and support the issues they care about in different ways. While they are less likely to vote, they are more likely to volunteer for an organization, fundraise, or organize activism for a cause they believe in.[xxiv]

Even when young voters make strides in turnout, the group is still scene as a disappointment. For example, despite increasing turnout by 11% from 2000 to 2004[xxv], shortly after the election, it was reported that the youth vote was a "bust." This article published by the Associated Press cited the statistic that the youth vote comprised the same percentage of the total vote as it had in 2000. This measure evaluates youth voters on a factor that they cannot control; the turnout of other groups.[xxvi] This is again represented after the election of 2008. Despite being the group in which President Obama received the largest margin of victory, the youth turnout for Obama was minimized, as it was determined that he still would have had victory without their votes. It seems that the view of this group as a disappointment will be hard to kick.

What seems most prevalent in these conceptions of young voter and their turnout rates is that the voters are the disappointment to the candidates. Never in looking at these young people is it examined whether the candidates made sufficient strides to attract the group. It is always assumed that the young people should be turning out to vote no matter what the circumstances. The candidates wouldn't choose to ignore another segment of the population for fear that they would not come out to support their campaigns by voting, yet when it comes to young voters, they are expected to turnout without being significantly addressed by the candidates. When turnout rates are lower than old age groups, the blame is placed completely on the young people, with very little attention paid to whether the candidates held up there end in making this group feel that they are needed and that their concerns are of importance to those running for office.

EVOLUTION OF CAMPAIGNING

Addressing young voters, and other groups for that matter, individually has become increasingly important in today's campaigning. The way candidates go about campaigning has changed greatly since the founding of the nation. Campaigns used to focus around the political party, with the candidate having a smaller role. The primary system was not in place, and thus, candidates were not selected by the people, but by the parties instead. With the growth in influence of the popular primary allowing the people to choose the nominees, the campaign became longer and more focused on the candidate.[xxvii]

In addition, new technologies allowed candidates to campaign more actively. Candidates were able to travel to many more places and interact with many more people. Going on the campaign trail now became a common part of the election and the personality of the candidate was essential. In addition, radio and television allowed candidates to reach a mass audience with their messages. More people could now be exposed to the candidate and have access to information about the candidate more directly[xxviii]. With this, the candidate was increasingly the center of the campaign.

Now, new campaign techniques are evolving that are making a campaign more focused on the voter. Like a marketing campaign for a consumer product, candidates are targeting different groups with different messages and tailoring their campaigns to many groups. Today's populace is used to being actively marketed to and candidates need to have a personal connection with the electorate. Again, technology has played a role in this evolution. In becoming candidate centered, television allowed people to see candidates and receive information more easily. With new technologies, such as internet networking sites, there is an element of interaction in the campaign. Not only can we receive information, we can comment on it and the average person can take a much more active role. With this, engaging every portion of the electorate is essential. The campaign will continue to become more and more focused on the voter and this makes connecting with all voters progressively more vital.[xxix] This could be an opportunity to break the cycle of neglect between candidates and young people.

HAVE CAMPAIGNS DONE THEIR PART? CASE STUDIES OF PAST ELECTIONS

As has been mentioned, when looking at the literature related to the youth vote, voter turnout is what is emphasized. Why is it that the role of the campaigns is rarely to never mentioned? The simple answer is that the responsiveness of the campaign to young people is much harder to quantify than determining how many young people voted. In examining turnout numbers, there are statistics, exit polls and winners, but in determining attentiveness, you have to determine what young people want, what was targeted at young people and what was not. This can be difficult as well, as the campaign usually does not outline this and many actions taken by campaigns are addressed towards multiple groups. Because of this, for the purpose of these case studies, I have chosen four aspects of the campaigns to focus on and determine how young people were addressed.

The first aspect to be looked at is policies. This was chosen as an important aspect of choosing a politician is that they share similar beliefs and that they will work to enact policies that are important to you and the nation. It can be seen that polices that effect senior citizens, such as Medicare, are addressed by politicians, and in a similar way, issues that are important to young people should be addressed. The issues that are important may change over the years, but it will be examined whether or not and how they were addressed.

The get-out-the-vote tactics of the campaigns will also be examined. Here the major concepts of campaigning are addressed. It had been determined that if people register, they are more likely to vote. It has also been determined that person-to-person contact is a key. Being contacted by a campaign and being asked or being reminded to vote by a campaign or a friend increases the likelihood of a person voting. Did campaigns reach out to young people in this way?

The use of new ways of connecting with the electorate will also be examined. These methods, such as technology, are often associated with young people, and with this, there use can be very beneficial in connecting with this group. It is understood that anything "new" does not stay new for long, so in each election different methods will be examined to see how the innovative method of the time was handled by the candidates.

Lastly, image is another important aspect of campaigning for office. Image can connect or distance a candidate from a group of people, whether or not this image is a reality. Campaigns work hard on constructing the public image of how they want to be seen. How your constituents view you has a lot to do with whether they will vote for you. With this, it will be examined whether the image of the candidates was appealing to young voters.

1992: Bill Clinton vs. George H.W. Bush
The election of 1992 pitted incumbent Republican President George H.W. Bush up against Democrat and Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. In addition Ross Perot, an Independent was a major player for much of the race. Coming into the election, Bush was expected to take another victory and remain president for another 4 years.

Policies

A few policies stood out in 1992 as being particularly important to young people. Homelessness, AIDS, healthcare, and the economy were all important issues to young people during this election. One issue that was particularly emphasized by young people was environmental protection. This is an issue where neither Bush nor Clinton had a strong track record. Leading up to the election, Bush had spent much of his time trying to achieve short term job security, while sacrificing long term environmental issues. He supported opening protected wetlands to development as well as drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska and allowing strip mining in national forests[xxx].

As Governor of Arkansas, Clinton could not boast of environmental achievements; Arkansas ranked last in environmental protection and enforcement. He had been accused of appointing industry representatives from top polluters to the board that is supposed to monitor such actions and in much of the White River region of the state, streams had become polluted by waste runoff from animal farms[xxxi].

While neither candidate can claim a good track record for the environment, where the two candidates differ is in how they took on these issues in campaigning. Bush took to further attacks on environmental policy in his campaigning. In the Pacific Northwest, Bush promised to do everything in his power to remove restrictions on cutting down untouched forests in the

area and even went as far as saying that the Endangered Species Act was "a sword aimed at the jobs, families and communities of entire regions like the Northwest."[xxxii] This was a complete turnaround from his 1988 campaign, where he had pledged to protect the environment.

Clinton took the opposite stance and in campaigning has emphasized environmental action. Much of the campaigns environmental discussion was left to vice Presidential candidate Al Gore, a leading environmentalist in Congress and author of a book of global resource problems at the time and later on global warming. The Clinton/Gore campaign promised to raise fuel efficiency standards, support tax breaks for businesses upgrading to more environmentally friendly equipment, development of solar energy, and encouragement of recycling by applying a refundable tax on recyclable containers. He tried to emphasize that environmental protection and economic growth are not opposites and that both can be achieved[xxxiii].

Get Out the Vote

While some effort was made by the democrats to get out the vote by visiting a variety of college campuses around the county, most of the campaign to register and remind young people to vote was taken on by outside sources. Rock the vote and MTV's Choose or Lose combined forces to try and bring the candidates, registration, and voting to the young people. Rock the Vote is a non-profit that was established in 1990 by the music industry that uses music, pop culture, and technology to attract young people to voting and give them a voice[xxxiv]. MTV was established in 1981 and in 1992 was still a twenty-four hour music video station. For the 1992 election, MTV decided to devote about one fifth of its time to the Presidential Election and news[xxxv].

While both Rock the Vote and MTV were in their political infancies in 1992, by working together, these groups were able to register 10,000 young adults during the New Hampshire primary alone as well as many more young people during the election by offering registration at various concerts, including some free concerts put on by the two groups. In addition, they were able to portray a message that voting was hip by running public service announcement

where artists such as Aerosmith encouraged young people to vote. They brought continuous coverage of the campaigns to this group, where otherwise many may not have watched any news of the campaign[xxxvi]. In the 1992 election alone, Rock the Vote is credited with registering 350 thousand young people and having influenced up to 2 million newly registered youth[xxxvii]. Both of these organizations played a major role in getting young people to the polls and each continues to work to promote the vote to young people.

Connecting

For the campaign of 1992, the "new" way of connecting with the electorate was to appear on television, including shows not specifically focused on news. These programs allowed a looser format for the candidates, where they would have more time dedicated to them and would be able to talk more freely with less pressing questions[xxxviii]. Also, these programs have a wide audience and a growing importance in delivering information, allowing the candidates to reach the everyman.

This tactic was fully embraced by the Clinton campaign and he thrived in this informal format allowing him to speak to the average person. He made a variety of appearances on network television programs included a spot broadcast on NBC called "America Speaks" targeted at interacting with undecided voters, "CBS This Morning", and "Today". In addition, Clinton had appearances with David Frost, Larry King, and Arsenio Hall, where Clinton made a splash, as he appeared in dark sunglasses playing the saxophone[xxxix]. Of particular importance for young voters was Clinton's appearance on MTV, where he had a town hall discussion with 18 to 24 year olds. The MTV program, entitled "Choose or Lose: Facing the Future with Bill Clinton," was an hour and a half long special where Clinton fielded questions ranging from his first rock and roll experience to more serious matters of deficit reduction and AIDS[xl]. Clinton said he hoped to "demystify" politics by focusing on the young people. While the group he spoke to was mostly college students already registered and planning to vote, having this forum on MTV exposed other youth to the topics discussed and showed that Clinton was making an effort with young people[xli].

George H.W. Bush did not utilize this medium nearly as well as Clinton. While he made appearances on television and had traditional media coverage, he did not take advantage of the shows that would allow him to reach a broader audience. Not only did he not use this medium, he criticized his competitors for their tactics saying, "I think in a campaign year, you've got to draw the line somewhere. And I am not going to be out there kind of being a teeny-bopper at 68. I just can't do it," and "**I just have a certain respect for the office that I don't want to turn it into a call-in-show place.**"[xlii] **Later, Bush agreed to appear, but still could not use his appearance to its full potential.**

Image

Image was in many ways connected to the other aspects we have already discussed. While the candidates try hard to promote the image they wish to portray, often times their actions create an image for them. For the Bush camp, the goal was to create an image of strength in international affairs and also portray him as an everyman. While images of Bush with his foreign policy advisors denouncing Saddam Hussein while standing in front of the flag, or at the Illinois state fair wearing a ball cap would seem to portray the correct image, they in fact missed the mark[xliii]. Even at the Illinois State Fair, arriving on Air Force One and having an entourage of secret service does not give off the image of the everyday person[xliv]. Also, by 1992, foreign policy was no longer the biggest concern of Americans, whose attention had shifted towards the economy and the recession, limiting the effectiveness of this image[xlv]. Another blow to Bush's image of being an everyman occurred at the National Grocers Association convention, where supermarket technology was on display. He seemed to show amazement at a common supermarket scanner, something middle class Americans had been experiencing in their grocery stores for as long as 15 years[xlvi]. You can also add his other actions, such as not appearing on "teenybopper" or call-in shows until late in the game, leaving Bush looking out of touch with the times and old.

Clinton also took pains to craft his image and how he wished to be perceived. Clinton wished to create a "Presidential" feeling as well as still connect with the everyman. To create the image of being Presidential, Clinton took on large scale speeches addressing topics important to the nation, such as the economy and the environment. In addition, he had to unify the

Democratic Party at the DNC and portray the party as stable and trustworthy[xlvii]. To emphasize being an "ordinary guy" Clinton focused on his humble beginnings and met with a wide variety of people, including a bus tour across the nation, the MTV town hall meeting, and the Arsenio Hall Show. While not all aspects of Clinton's image were good, such as accusations of infidelity and other character issues, Clinton's campaign was able to minimize the negatives and portray Clinton as an average guy, in touch with many groups, and hip.

Analysis

In looking at the election of 1992, it is clear to see that the Clinton campaign excelled over the Bush campaign in paying attention to the young voter. Clinton addressed the issues that young people wanted to be handled, he went on a bus tour of the country, including many college campuses to talk to young people, he communicated through popular media, such as MTV and Arsenio Hall, and he created an image for himself that was attractive to the youth voter. In doing this, his efforts paid off as young voters made up 22% of the electorate, compared to 20% in 1988. In addition, 44% of this group voted for Clinton, while only 34% voted for Bush and 22% for Perot. This is a turnaround from the 1988 election, where Bush had held the youth vote. This election would seem to suggest that when a candidate pays attention to young voters, they do in fact come out and vote.

2004: George W. Bush vs. John Kerry
In 2004, Republican incumbent George W. Bush went up against Democratic Senator from Massachusetts, John Kerry. Circumstances surrounding this election added extra importance to the contest. First, in the 2000 election, results had been highly contested and Bush ended up winning after the Supreme Court halted a recount in Florida, despite not receiving the overall popular vote for the country. 2000 had showed how close an election could be and the importance of voting. In addition, there were a number of pressing issues at the time of the election, which left which candidate would come out on top up in the air.

Policies

The election of 2004 was a year of very large issues taking center stage during the election. The most pressing issues for the electorate were the War on Terror and the War in Iraq.

During this election, the cost of a college education also became a key domestic policy issue. All of these issues were very relevant to young people. In the wars that were being waged, it was young people who were doing the fighting, with half of the casualties being soldiers under the age of twenty-four and 75% of the casualties under the age of 30[xlviii].

On this issue, Bush stood by the country's entrance into the war. Bush declared that the world agreed that Saddam Hussein was a threat, but did nothing when Hussein refused to comply. He emphasized that he choose to protect America, even when other nations would not act[xlix]. He also stressed that terrorists cannot be negotiated with and must be brought to justice for the security of the nation. He did not specify any time frame for the remaindered of the war as security could not be put on a time frame. He did, however, believe that having four more years in office would make the United States a safer place[l].

Kerry, on the other hand, hoped to build a stable Iraq with the help of other nations. He contested that America was in a better position when it is respected around the world, instead of just feared. He wanted the United States, Iraq and other nations, specifically those in the UN Security Council, all invested in stabilizing the nation. This would help nations come together in support for peace. He acknowledges that the US must stay the course in Iraq, as the country cannot be left a failed state, open to terrorist influence, and creating instability in the region[li].

The cost of a college education was also important to young people, as the price of education was increasing faster than inflation. In addition, education debt had increased by 66% between 1997 and 2002. Less than one third of young Americans were obtaining college degrees and less than one fifth of African Americans were gaining a degree[lii]. College degrees were also becoming increasingly important, as college graduated would earn on average $900,000 dollars more over the course of their careers[liii].

In this framework, Kerry proposed a system to try and keep down the rising costs of tuition. He claimed that while tuition of increasing at a very fast rate, aid was not increasing accordingly. He wanted to try and slow these increases in tuition. In addition, he favored implementing a tax credit that would give as much as $4,000 to a student each year to help

offset the costs of education. The tax credit would be made available in advance of filing taxes so that it could actually be used in paying the tuition instead of having to pay the full tuition and receive the rebate after that fact. He also had the Compact with the next Generation, where he hoped to help pay for college in return for national service.

Bush focused on a program called Jobs for the 21st Century. He wanted to help high school students get extra help in reading and math and bring in teachers from the private sector part time to further education in these subjects. In addition, he proposed expanding the Pell Grant program, a grant program where students who cannot afford college tuitions can get grants to help offset the costs. He proposed raising the limit on how much a student could receive in a Pell Grant by approximately $1,000.

With policy issues, another aspect of the 2004 election to mention was a primary season debate in which eight Democratic hopefuls participated in. The debate, entitled America Rocks the Vote, was put on by CNN and Rock the Vote and aired on CNN. This debated was targeted specifically at young people. This forum made young people feel like the candidates were paying more attention to them and that they mattered to the candidates.[liv]

<u>Get Out the Vote</u>

The importance of getting out the vote was emphasized in 2004 after the very close election of 2000. Some states were won by very slim margins in the 2000 election, such as Florida which was won by 537 votes and New Mexico by 366 votes[lv]. The 2000 election was ultimately won by George W. Bush, despite opponent Al Gore receiving the plurality of the popular vote. This brought controversy about the election process, but made people, and campaigns, keenly aware that a few votes really can make a difference. In addition, studies had come out that believed that swing voters, which candidates are always trying to win over, do not actually swing between the parties, but swing between voting and not voting[lvi]. This makes getting as many people out to vote as possible increasingly important.

The Bush campaign started campaigning to young people 8 months earlier in 2004 compared to 2000. Their main registration push was Reggie the Rig, a bus which went from campus to campus in order to register college students to vote. In addition, the campaign had the help of

the National Students for Bush Organization, which had gained the support of 40,000 young people as volunteers by April in the campaign[lvii]. The republicans tried to register as many young people as possible in hopes that they could be the difference in the event of another close election.

Kerry and the democratic campaign also sought to register and bring out young people on Election Day. Kerry took a week long campus tour where he registered young people and talked about his Compact with the Next Generation. He also appeared on an MTV Choose or Lose special targeted at young people and ran ads focused on this demographic during Saturday Night Live and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. He also had help from a variety of privately funded 527 groups, such as the Young Democrats, the Young Voters Alliance, and the Stonewall Democrats, who all worked to get out the vote for the Democratic Party[lviii].

Far dwarfing the efforts of the parties in the 2004 election were independent voter participation organizations. During this election period, the six largest organizations spent $40 million in trying to attract young people to the polls[lix]. These organizations, the New Voters Project, Declare Yourself, Hip Hop Summit Action Network, MTV Choose or Lose, Rock the Vote, and World Wrestling Entertainment's Smackdown Your Vote!, all played a role in registering and engaging large numbers of young people in the process and encouraging them to come out on Election Day. For example, Rock the Vote and Declare Yourself each made it easier to register by having online registration forms. According to Rock the Vote, 2 million forms were downloaded from their website. In addition, many more were registered at concerts and wrestling events. The New Voters Project devoted 250 full time staff and 1,500 volunteers to registering young people and getting them to the polls. They registered 349,000 people to vote in Colorado, Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington. This accounted for one fifth of all young people eligible to vote in these 6 states. In addition, the group made 539,000 calls and home visits in the days leading up to the election to remind people to vote[lx]. Also, these groups used technology to stay in contact, track, and communicate with those people that they had registered in hopes of keeping them involved and mobilizing them for the cause.

Get out the vote organization such as these benefited from a more organized approach to the campaign in 2004. They coordinated with one another with the help of Spitfire Strategies, a consulting firm in Washington, DC. With this help they were able to present a united front and communicate a shared message for candidates and the media, young voters are important. They focused on using data, polls, and analysis from reputable sources, such as CIRCLE, the Pew Research Center, and Harvard's Institute of Politics. Their efforts increased coverage of the youth vote in the media in 2004 by 80% over 2000. In addition, the media had a much more positive message about young voters as compared to 2000[lxi].

In addition, more research was being put into the youth vote during this election. One in particular was a randomized field experiment entitled *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout,* which examined the effort of traditional canvassing on young people. The study found that a phone call placed to a registered young person increases their chance of voting by 5%. In addition, if a young person was engaged face-to-face, their probability of voting increased by 8.5%. And it wasn't only the young people who were affected by these efforts. Other adults in the same household also voted at a higher rate than those in household of the control group[lxii].

Connecting

In the election of 2004, the new way of connecting with the electorate was through the internet. The web was first used in campaigns in the mid nineties, but only in very basic ways. Increased internet usage, however, made using the internet as a campaigning tool a more viable option. In addition, more people were getting political information online. In 1997, 4% of people said they received political information online. By 2004, 29% of people were looking for political information on the web. When the population is narrowed to young people, the numbers are even more significant, with 28% of young people receiving most of their information on the campaigns on the internet[lxiii]. The internet gained political importance as Howard Dean had used it as a tool to gain support in the primary season, especially through blogging with his supporters.

Each of the campaigns used the internet in very similar ways. Websites often provided basic information about the candidates, their views, provide news updates, and some basic features. Each of the candidates also had sections that provided for their constituents to help them. For Bush, people could download a list of people in their area who they could visit to campaign for Bush. They could do this on their own time, instead of having to participate in the canvassing events of the campaign[lxiv]. Kerry had supporters create their own websites that supported his campaign and had a feature to allow people to find local campaign events. Another feature, and one of the primary uses for the internet campaign, was as a fundraising tool. This could be said to be the main focus of the Kerry internet campaign. In addition, advertisements already made for print and television could be placed on the web for very little money. Candidate could also place their banners on sites that they believe would attract their constituents. Another important aspect of the online campaign was the blog. This allowed for some limited interaction between the candidates and those visiting the sites as many people could post their thoughts[lxv].

Again, the websites of get out the vote organization had additional features to attract young people. These sites sought to create a sustainable structure to keep young people involved in civic actions. To do this, they had more interaction than the campaign sites had. They kept in closer contact with interested parties by sending email updates of pertinent information and new press releases. They also had registration forms available for download and more links to other sources of campaign information. They were much more interconnected with one another and the campaigns through links than the campaigns were connected to other sites. They provided photos and message boards for people to interact with one another. One site in particular, IndyVoter, was one of the first social networking sites for politics, where people could connect with other with the same views and even create voting guides to share with others on the site. The biggest thing for these organizations websites was that they were able to mobilize a large number of people[lxvi]. Where campaigns were asking individual people to help them, these sites were bringing large amounts of people together.

For John Kerry, the primary goal was to come off as Presidential. Especially in debated and large speeches, Kerry wanted to sound authoritative to create this image. Bush was able to attack this image by highlighting Kerry's past indecision and characterizing him as a flip flopper. Additionally, Kerry wanted to connect with the average person. One way he tried to create this image was to go on a goose hunting trip. This backfired however, as Kerry had to borrow his clothing and hunting gear from the owner of the farm where they hunted[lxvii]. This made the trip come off as a stunt; something that Kerry would not normally do. This disconnect from the average person was also emphasized in a commercial by the Bush campaign showing Kerry windsurfing. With this, Kerry came off as wealthy and highbrow, disconnecting him from many people.

In this election cycle, George W. Bush wanted to emphasize his leadership skills, especially those he had displayed in relation to the War on Terrorism and the War in Iraq. He was able to use the ongoing wars as a major way of showing his leadership and his commitment to the safety of the nation. In addition, based on the missteps of the Kerry campaign in portraying their candidate as an average guy, Bush was able to capitalize by portraying himself as more connected with this group of people. While Kerry tried to portray Bush as halting progress in science, Bush was able to connect with the religious right with his views and gain a very large base of support[lxviii]. With this, Bush was able to better control his image and use it to his advantage, and was able to discredit Kerry in many aspects of his image.

Analysis

In looking at the case of the Presidential election of 2004, a winner of the youth vote doesn't jump out as it had in 1992. It was John Kerry who actually received the majority of the youth vote, with a 54% to 44% margin. He was considered the youth favorite, even though from the case study this may not be evident. Almost immediately after Bush was announced as the winner, reports began to surface saying that they young people did not come out, as people assumed that if young people came out, Kerry would have won. Also, these reports stated that the youth made up more or less the same percentage of the total vote as they had in 2000.

It turns out that young people did come out to vote. An additional 4.6 million more young people under the age of 30 voted in 2004 as compared to 2000, and the percentage of young people that voted was 51.6%, compared to 42.3% in 2000[lxix]. In fact, the youth sector was the only age group that Kerry won. The reports did get it right however, that the youth made up the same percentage of the vote as the past election. This is because people of all age groups came out in bigger numbers for an election that had important issues.

In this election, it seems that a variety of factors came together to boost the youth vote, but they weren't so much related to a specific candidate. This seems to be the year of the get out the vote organization. They had better funding, there were more groups, they were coordinated with one another, and they talked to a very large number of young people. They also used the new technologies to their advantage, creating a network of young people, where they could track and communicate with the young people they registered and keep them involved. They achieved in make the youth voice more heard in the media and by candidates and new research help showed the importance of reaching out to the youth voter.

2008: Barack Obama vs. John McCain
The election of 2008 pitted Democratic Senator from Illinois Barack Obama against Republican Senator from Arizona John McCain. This was the first election since 1952 in which there was no incumbent President or Vice President running for office. In addition George W. Bush had very low approval ratings leading up to the election and this election would mean a new group in the White House with either winner.

Policies

While at the beginning of the 2008 election cycle many issues, such as global warming, healthcare, and college affordability, may have stood out, in September the economy took center stage and was the real defining issue of the election. The recession came and President Bush began to take steps to organize a bailout for those companies too big to fail. The reactions of the candidates in this time were very influential to the election.

With the bailout being discussed in Congress and the plan being unpopular with voters, John McCain decided to take time off of his campaign to go be part of the Senate discussion of the

legislation. His efforts to "fix" the legislation seemed illegitimate, as he was only one Senator coming in late on a bill that already had many parts worked on by both Democrats and Republicans. It also did not help his case that the bill was rejected by Republicans in its first version. More than anything, the economy was not McCain's strong point and he did not seem confident enough in ensuring that he was the person to help handle these issues[lxx].

Obama, while also not who you would think of as a perfect choice to fix a crashed economy, remained composed during these times. He came across in debates and speeches as knowledgeable and composed, helping to calm people's fears about the recession where McCain had failed to do so[lxxi]. This composure went a long way in establishing Obama's Presidential appearance.

Get Out the Vote

With the knowledge gained from the 2004 election and studies, get out the vote efforts were a big part of the campaigns in the 2008 election cycle. In many ways, the extensive get out the vote efforts taken on by independent organizations during the 2004 election were now being tackled by the campaigns, as there was limited funding for these organizations and they had raised awareness of the young voters during the previous election.

The get out the vote organization did not disappear however. They had to work smarter, as they only had about one fourth of the funding they had enjoyed in the 2004 election. Despite this, Rock the Vote had over 1.75 million young people use its online tools to register to vote, and registered 40,000 more people through its other outreach programs. They had a tool which allowed people to embed a voter registration tool in any website, allowing people to encourage others to register. They also held pledge to vote rallies on their bus tour, where 137,000 young people pledged to go to the polls on Election Day. They reminded young people to vote by sending out text messages and calling in the final days leading up to the election. Many other get out the vote organizations, such as the New Voters Project, Hip Hop Caucus, and the Bus Federation all put in significant resources to register young voters and to remind and encourage them to go to the polls when it mattered[lxxii].

While each of the campaigns hired youth outreach coordinators and made efforts at using technology to mobilize young people to vote, its became apparent as the election went on that Obama's youth campaign attracted for attention and was better funded. Obama recruited an entire staff focused on youth outreach and "mobilizing, training, and developing volunteers to register, educate, and turn out young voters."[lxxiii] Obama had paid youth organizers in 18 states and in addition to the National Youth Vote Director also added a National Voter Registration Director. McCain on the other hand, only had one full time staff member dedicated to youth outreach and come election time, the difference was apparent. Only 13% of young people reported being contacted by the McCain campaign, while 25% of young people said they were contacted by the Obama camp. This was the largest disparity between the campaigns for any age group in the election[lxxiv]. More can be seen about how Obama garnered such support in his efforts to use New Media.

Connecting

New Media was new technology in this election cycle. While the internet was also the new technology in the 2004 election, its roll and its scope was expanded in the 2008 election. Just as get out the vote organizations took the internet to the next step in the 2004 election, the campaigns were now taking on the same kind of web activity and expanding the internet's role in the campaign. In addition, use of the internet as a political tool had grown further from the 2004 numbers. Whereas 28% of young people got most of the political information on the web in 2004, this number grew to 58% by 2008[lxxv]. This offered an opportunity to connect with young people more easily using this format.

The Obama campaign is regarded as the top notch internet campaign in 2008. To start, he had an entire team of 95 paid employees devoted to the creation of his site, my.barackobama.com. This team was headed by one of the founders of Facebook, Chris Hughes. In addition, he had experts in a variety of online media as team members, including an owner of an online fundraising company, a YouTube expert, a text message advisor, and a blog designer[lxxvi]. These team members created a website Obama supports could get traditional campaign information, such as the candidate's positions on issues and biography, but also additional features, such as being able to view his speeches and advertisements. Visitors could also find

information on registering to vote as well as donating money to the campaign. Obama was able to raise $500 million in online donations, which is 12 times higher than John Kerry was able to do in 2004 when his main online focus was raising funds. During his campaign, 6.5 million people donated an average of $80 to his cause[lxxvii]. Another tool the Obama campaign took advantage of was YouTube, which allowed them to post ads and speeches online for free. YouTube had an estimated 60 million users at the time[lxxviii]. One speech that Obama posted, where he addressed the issues with his former reverend, received 3 million views within 24 hours and 6.7 million views overall. This is compared to 4 million that saw the speech online[lxxix].

Most importantly, Obama's web campaign allowed supports to connect with one another through discussion boards on his site as well as through social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and many more. These websites had very large following, for example, Facebook had 69 million registered users. In addition, Twitter was a site that had attracted many activists and political junkies. This site created spin off website, politweets, to combine all the political tweets that occurred and could be looked at by candidate. On Facebook alone, Obama was "friended" by 3.2 million people and on all the other networking sites combined he had 5 million followers. Inherent in this type of site is a sense of community, where people are connecting with one another[lxxx]. This community allowed for Obama to grow a giant grassroots organization of young people to help his campaign. He was able stayed connected with these followers through email and text messages. The campaign sent out over 1 billion emails with over 7,000 messages to its followers, where they could do anything from asking from campaign contributions, to having them encourage others to vote, to making announcements about the campaign[lxxxi]. This was also the case for text messages, as the campaign first announced who Obama's running mate would be to anyone who texted VP to a designated number. About 1 million people participated in the text messaging program. This allowed the campaign to build up a large database of supporters email addresses and cell phone numbers, which they could then use to send targeted messages to specific areas, especially those where they felt they needed extra support. In the final 4 days of the campaign, Obama's grassroots organization made 3 million calls to remind people to come out and vote[lxxxii].

While the McCain campaign had many similar features on its website and also had profiles on social networking sites, he was not able to utilize them as effectively as Obama had. He also did not have the extra communication provided by text messages and the grassroots organization that had formed around the Obama campaign.

Image

The McCain campaign had a hard time defining a consistent image for itself during the elections cycle. He tried to create too many images for himself, the heroic fighter to stay in the race in the primaries, the leader compared to Obama's celebrity, and the fighter against old Republican ways. He was never able to define a clear, precise image for himself, which left room open for Obama to define his image for him. Despite many differences between McCain and Bush, the Obama campaign was able to portray a vote for McCain as being a vote for a continuation of Bush's policies[lxxxiii]. Additionally, the actions of McCain made him come off as old. For example, he admitted that he was computer illiterate and that email an everyday tool for him[lxxxiv]. With these technologies become such a part of everyday life for many Americans, this made McCain seem old fashioned and out of touch.

Obama was able to define an image for himself. He was the candidate of hope and change; the new guy in town to change business as usual. In addition, when the recession hit, he was able to remain composed and presented himself as "competent, knowledgeable, and trustworthy."[lxxxv] The attempts made by the McCain campaign to characterize Obama as "palling around with terrorists" missed their mark, as the economy took center stage. He was also the youth compared to McCain's age. He was tech savvy, having multiple phones and a blackberry, he had two young children, and he was into sports[lxxxvi]. He was able to present himself as a competent leader while at the same time being an everyday guy.

Analysis

It is clear in looking at the election of 2008 that Barack Obama was the candidate of the youth. Especially in his internet campaign and its use to mobilize young people to get to the polls and encourage everyone they know to do the same, Obama surpassed the efforts of John McCain. He also was able to create the image that he wanted to portray, an image that was so

attractive to the youth in this election cycle. The youth not only came out for Obama, they came out big. 66% of young people voted for Obama compared to 32% for McCain, a very large margin of victory for Obama in this age group. These young people were Obama's most supportive constituency. The youth turnout in this election was the highest in any election since 1972, and even made up a bigger portion of the electorate than those over 65. This again shows that when the youth are engaged, they will come out to vote.

CONCLUSION

In looking at these 3 elections, it can be seen that efforts were put forward to attract the young voters to the polls. Each of these elections can be characterized by efforts made to attract young voters. 1992 is usually considered the anomaly year for the youth vote, but when it is examined, Clinton put in a great deal of effort to attract these young voters. 2004 is the year of the voter participation organization. This year was the peak of these get out the vote organizations, as they received a large amount of funding and attracted their goal for youth voters. In 2008, much of the funding for these organizations was lost with the recession hitting the nation. Despite this, Barack Obama, as a fund raising powerhouse, was able to pick up where they left off. He was able to take on many of the activities that the get out the vote organizations had taken on in the past. The effort put in during these campaigns was a factor in the peaks seen in youth voting.

Even with the extra effort put in to get young people to the polls, criticism has come in all of these years. As previously mentioned, 1992 is considered an anomaly that couldn't last. In 2004, the candidate of the youth, John Kerry, lost despite winning the youth vote, which led many to attribute his loss to not enough young people coming out to vote. For 2008, even with youth voters being the group where Obama had the highest percentage of support, the youth vote was discounted, as Obama would have still won without as much support from the group. In all these elections, youth participation was still lower than participation by other groups, even though the gap was closed somewhat.

Based on this, when it comes to the myth of the youth voter, the problem seems to be in the actual myth. The myth states that the youth will come out in such force that they will propel a

candidate to victory. One problem with this myth is that it is very hard to motivate only young voters. This group often cares about the same issues as other age groups and all age groups are attracted by similar characteristics in candidates. Because of this, when candidates attract the youth vote, they tend to attract other voters too. In addition, an aspect that tends to raise turnout in general is having important, pressing issues as part of the election. When this is the case, both young people and older people come out to vote at a higher rate. This means that the youth vote and the overall over peak during the same years, making the peaks in the youth vote less impactful, as the youth still make up a similar percentage of the electorate. A third problem with this myth is the idea that one group is going to propel a candidate to victory. Elections are not won by a single group; elections are won when a candidate can get support from all groups. No individual group will propel a candidate alone, and thus, the youth can never truly accomplish the year of the youth voter.

The myth of the youth voter seems to be destined to stay just that, a myth. The blame for lower youth turnout doesn't lie only with the youth and it doesn't lie only with the campaigns. It can be seen that the youth will come out at a higher rate when they are addressed by campaigns, but even in these times, their turnout has been consistently lower than the electorate as a whole. It seems that the situation is improving, with growth in two consecutive elections and the gap between youth voters and other groups closing slightly. If this trend continues, it is possible for the youth to catch up at some point in the future.

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