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How Do Differing Voter Preregistration Policies Impact Turnout?

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ABSTRACT

I examine whether variation in voter turnout (with an emphasis on youth turnout) can be explained by policies that dictate voter preregistration guidelines across the United States. While the existing literature finds that voter preregistration policies can positively affect youth turnout, little research compares how differences in state-level preregistration requirements or restrictions shape this impact. Through regression analyses of states' voter turnout data across presidential elections, the results showcase that somewhat restrictive forms of voter preregistration policy have a significant impact on youth and overall voter turnout in the positive direction wheras the least restrictive and most restrictive forms have a negative impact.

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Chapter 1

Information

Voter preregistration is a policy that allows those under the minimum age of voting (in the case of US federal elections 18), the opportunity to fill out and submit their voter registration information before they are eligible to vote. While preregistration does not eliminate the burden of registering to vote, it allows for increased access to young people, which allows them to complete this task. In some cases, this is a time when young people are often engaged with civic education, through education (high school) or community organizations which can assist them with the process.

Through enlarging the preregistration timeframe and ensuring that it is being taken advantage of with proper implementation, preregistration has the possibility of decreasing the chance that eligible voters may miss deadlines or deal with insurmountable problems once they are eligible to vote. This application of preregistration aims to increase youth turnout, which addresses the historically lower participation rates among young voters when compared to other age groups (Circle at Tufts, 2012).

How does voter preregistration connect with turnout exactly? By implementing policies that target mechanisms enabling citizens to vote and register to vote, such as early voting, curbside voting, extended polling hours, voter preregistration, election day (same day) registration, multiple language access for registration and ballots, and more, states can impact the likelihood that a person and/or group will go to the polls (Hill, 2006). In the past 50 years, many states have implemented laws that have changed regulations surrounding their policies of voting and voter registration. These range from things like the limiting of polling locations in a

given area (Texas Secretary of State, 2023) to the expansion of early voting (Florida Legislature, 2024).

My thesis aims to examine how changes in the openness of voter preregistration policies (openness in this case being how young a state allows people to preregister to vote) across states impact their electorate by looking at the turnout before and after their implementation, with the addition of examining how these different categories of preregistration rules compare to one another.

This still leaves us with the question: why is this important? Understanding the key mechanisms and levers that most effectively encourage young people and the broader population to vote is crucial. By breaking this down, governments, activists, and community members have the ability to better understand and potentially remedy low turnout rates that are consistently observed among the youth voting demographic.

This study works on building off the foundational work of researchers who have found connections between a variety of policies including, but not limited to preregistration, education, socioeconomic statues, etc (Goldstein, et. al, 2002; Sapiro; Holbein et. al, 2015). Specifically, I will be taking a different direction in the sense that these studies have tended to examine preregistration policies as more of an umbrella-like entity (Holbein & Hillygus, 2015), whereas I am to examine the differences between state preregistration policies. To investigate this question, I've decided to divide states into categories based on their existing preregistration policy/ de-facto policy into a few categories based on the timeline which people can preregister to vote. Ordered from most open / the least restrictive policies to the least open policies, which are more restrictive based on how early they allow younger citizens to register to vote.

- 1. Preregistration beginning at 16 years of age (least restrictive)
- 2. Preregistration beginning at 17 years of age

- 3. Preregistration is allowed as long as one is 18 on/before the upcoming election date
- 4. Preregistration within only within a limited period before their 18th birthday ex. 4 months, 90 days, or something in between (most restrictive)

Alongside this information, I found the years with which each state implemented their policies. To observe the impact of these policies, youth voter turnout data (and in some cases, overall turnout data) from presidential elections preceding and following the implementation of a state's preregistration policy will be compared to showcase the overall percent point change in turnout (which will act as the dependent variable). I hypothesize that there will be a positive change with the implementation of these policies in general and a larger increase in youth voter turnout in states with less restrictive forms of preregistration. I will compare the percent point change in turnout of the varying states to better understand how these 4 forms of preregistration policy compare to one another. In addition to this, I gathered data pertaining to a variety of key factors such as socioeconomic status, education levels, access to elections, etc. to assist in controlling for the impact of a given preregistration policy.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Youth voter turnout (18-29 year olds) consistently ranks the lowest when compared with all other age groups by double-digit margins (Pomante and Schraufnagel, 2015). Considering that younger people on average experience the impacts of elections over a longer time period (when compared with those in older age groups), one might imagine that there would be a

greater participation observed from the youth demographic in elections. Yet, despite many efforts over the past few decades to engage more young voters, the problem of low youth voter turnout remains unsolved (A variety of electoral policies over the past few decades have worked to address the problem).

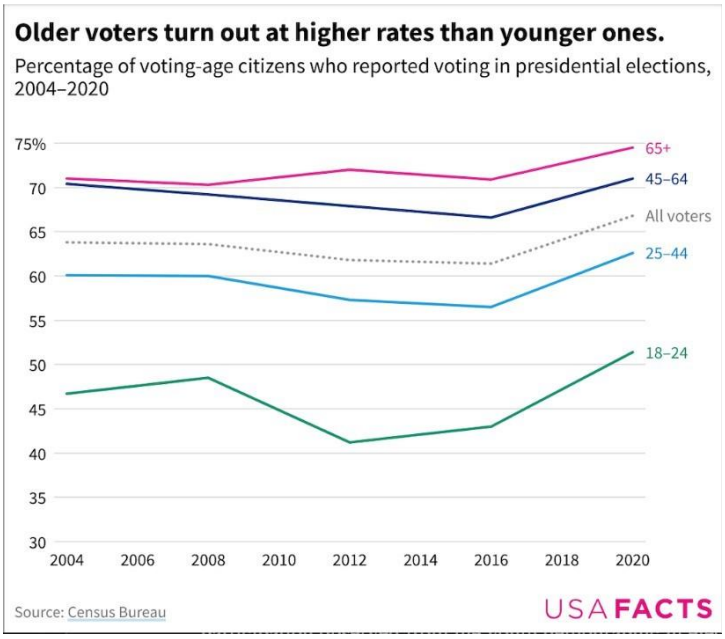

Figure 1. Turnout by Age Group

Framework

When looking for a literary base to serve as the building blocks for what would become the launch point for my research, I looked towards the key work of Anthony Downs, titled "An Economic Theory of Democracy". It was through this and consequent works that built directly off of it such as, A Theory of the Calculus of Voting (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968) that aided in thinking about the decision vote in cost/benefit terms. The formula $P(V) = pB - C + D$ captures the importance of the cost of voting (C), the benefits derived from voting (B), one's sense of duty to vote (D) and the probability that one's vote will matter to the outcome (p). Lastly, P(V), or V (depending on how one chooses to set up the formula) is the probability that a vote is cast.

As we'll see, this formula helps researchers focus on one or another of these variables to under voting turnout. For example, we see in Table 1 below (number table, name it, draw out one or two).

Component	Definition	Role in the Formula	Example	Impact on Turnout	Citation
V	Net reward or utility from voting	Determines whether an individual votes (if V > 0)	A voter calculates V and votes if benefits exceed costs.	Higher V = higher likelihood of voting.	Downs, Riker & Ordeshook
P	Probability that a voter's ballot is pivotal (decisive).	Multiplies B to reflect instrumental impact	P is minimally higher in close elections	Higher P increases turnout (mostly irrelevant since P ≈ 0 in large elections)	Downs
B	Utility gained if the preferred candidate/party wins.	Represents policy or ideological benefits.	Voting for a candidate who wishes to eliminate student debt	Heightened B values lead to increased turnout (pivotal/high-stakes elections)	Downs
C	Costs of voting (barriers)	Reflects logistical/psychological burdens (subtracted from PB)	Travelling to a distant polling place or waiting in line for hours	Higher C reduces turnout for marginalized groups (ex. youth voters)	Holbein & Hillygus
D	Additional motivations (civic duty, identity expression).	Assists in explaining turnout	Voting due to a sense of party loyalty, or fear of social stigma for not voting	Higher D values (strong civic engagement) increase turnout	Riker & Ordeshook

Table 1. Voting Likelihood Variables

History/Background

Throughout the latter portion of the 20th century, voter preregistration existed in an unintended sense. Through the wording of some state's laws, those under the age of 18 sometimes had the opportunity to register before they were actually of voting age. A prime example of this would be the state of Hawaii. Hawaii based their registration cycles not on a citizen's age, but instead coupled it to election cycles (which operate in 2 year batches). Through this manner, 16 and 17-

year-olds year olds, not as an intended policy outcome, but the result of a loophole in the writing of the legislation, gained the ability to register to vote for elections in the future (McDonald, 2010). This all changed for not just the island state, but the nation as a whole in 1993. It was then that the Hawaii State government implemented legislation that aimed to rectify this loophole, as well as directly and intentionally allowed 16 and 17-year-olds to register to vote. This decision also coincided with the ratification of the National Voter Rights Act of 1993 (Motor Voter Act/ NMVA) which led to further simplifications to voter registration, an expansion of opportunities, and greater emphasis on voter protections. It can be argued that this combination set the stage for a shift in electoral policy for the rest of the nation.

In the 30 years following that landmark decision, there has been a general liberalization (expansion of access) of preregistration and other electoral policies across many states, thus expanding further access to elections. In the more recent past (the last 15 years), the focus has shifted towards a multitude of states enacting stricter election regulations (Bentele and O'Brien, 2013; King and Smith, 2015) that would appear to raise the cost of voting. These policies typically turn into partisan conflicts with Democrats generally supporting policies that reduce costs and Republicans, acting in the interests of electoral integrity, making it costlier (Hansford & Gomez, 2010). This gives a further understanding of the present landscape regarding different states electoral policies and what may motivate state legislatures to keep policies the way they are/ provide pushback against policies that may prove beneficial in increasing overall turnout.

The increases in youth turnout (or specific subsets of youth turnout) that states like Florida and Hawaii (McDonald, 2009) experienced with the implementation of preregistration have served as examples to other states regarding ways of increasing participation in elections.

Youth Voters and Important Factors

As electoral policy has changed over these past few decades, researchers continue to examine the broader factors influencing youth turnout. Despite what seems to have been a grand set of past reforms and expansion of access to electoral policies nationwide and over the decades, with things like the 24th amendment, 26th amendment, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, etc.), not much has changed in the way of outcomes for youth voters as a whole. It is only in recent years (Figure 1 - 2020) that we have seen substantial increases in youth turnout (CIRCLE at Tufts University, 2021). Even with these increases, turnout remains greatly varied across states. Despite what may potentially be a changing political trends in youth participation, data continues to show that youth voters (those between the ages of 18-29) routinely demonstrate the lowest turnout levels when compared to other age demographic groups (CIRCLE at Tufts University, 2012; Figure 1).

Research has identified a variety of factors that influence whether young people will turn out to vote. Factors such as socioeconomic status and education level (Zhu, 2021; Laurison & Rastogi, 2023) are both strongly associated with increases in voter participation and political engagement. This is particularly important to youth voters, who in many cases, are not as financially established, may still be in school, or otherwise financially dependent on others (as compared to those who are established and have heightened socioeconomic stability. This means that there could be a lack in things resources such as transportation, flexible schedules when trying to find time to vote, or even access to information relevant to voting. These are all things that, when left without access, increase the difficulty/cost (C) of voting, which may reinforce lower turnout rates when compared with citizens that are more established and/or older.

Although these factors are important in their own right, electoral policy serves as a pivotal factor in this puzzle of explaining youth turnout. Voter ID laws for example may provide

youth voters with barriers uniquely faced by this demographic. Out-of-state college students may not be aware of specific ID laws and mistakenly present a driver's license from another state, which could be seen as an invalid form of identification. Something like this could be seen as discouraging and as previous inquiries have examined, voting behavior shapes the likelihood of future voting (Plutzer, 2002). Compared to older groups that are perhaps more established within a specific community and are familiar with the laws of an area, this lack of familiarity and prior knowledge can create participatory barriers that may sway a sizable subset of potential young voters away.

Low youth turnout can be explained, in-part, by many of the aforementioned factors. Although a substantial segment of the youth demographic are students, there are many that are not. Young people often have higher levels of mobility, regardless of whether they are students. Things like school, work, and new responsibilities, play a role in the likelihood that they vote (Hill, 2020). These are all things that have the potential of interrupting one's connection to community and access to resources. This combined with things like moving to a new area for school, adjusting to having a job for the first time, living independently, etc. all play a role in making voting more difficult. Once again, these are things that people in all steps of life may experience, but there are also things that show young people may have more instability with work-life balances and weaker relationships with their communities than older age groups (Hill, 2020; Nagle 2019), making the idea of voting even harder.

To the broader 18-29 community, something that may be key is direct engagement. Mentioned in the Goldstein piece, the direct engagement that campaigns and engagement groups acted as an intervening force that increased the amount of conversations and information that young voters had access to, seeing that increased and simplified access to information assists in

lowering the cost of voting. Without interventions like this, young voters will likely continue to be uninformed and lack the engagement that gets them interested in discussions of politics.

Varied Impact of Preregistration

Scholars generally agree that preregistration policies either increase voter turnout or have no negative impact (Brians & Groffman, 2001; Holbein & Hillygus, 2015). However, there is disagreement about the extent of their effectiveness. While some researchers argue that preregistration has little to no impact, others report significant increases in youth voter turnout ranging from 2% to 13% (Holbein & Hillygus, 2015). These variations in outcomes appear to be influenced by how preregistration interacts with civic education and exposure to voting processes. For instance, states that combine preregistration with robust civic education programs tend to see greater improvements in youth turnout compared to those that implement preregistration without additional engagement efforts. This variation in the overall increase of turnout as a result of preregistration policies leads to the question of why? Some scholars believe that preregistration alone doesn't make as much impact if not properly paired with other campaigns and policies (McDonald, 2009). Actions like face-to-face outreach and engaging with youth on specific issues regarding elections, as well as early and repeated interactions with the concept of elections seems to be important factors in increasing interest and participation from youth when it comes to an election (Mitchelson, 2003). This aspect of engagement and repetition fills the gaps that preregistration alone cannot handle. The opportunity to be continuously engaged in a manner that aids you in gathering pertinent information, whether by means of your education or in-person engagement, coupled with the opportunity to be easily able to vote (preregistration) lower the cost to voting.

One area of the existing literature that seems to have a dearth of information would be the comparisons between the various forms of preregistration that exist. The differences in how states administer their preregistration policies has the potential to be key in understanding the variance in the impact of preregistration policies across states. For example, some states actively intertwine preregistration into high school civics programs, which actively gets students registered and teaches the importance of voting. Meanwhile, other states might allow it, but don't pair it with outreach or education, which may limit the potential impact of these policies.

Concluding Thoughts:

Existing literature places a focus on the importance of variables such as education and upbringing alongside preregistration policy, in addition to viewing preregistration as more of a monolithic policy, rather than examining the differing forms of preregistration separately. With the understanding that increasing opportunities to get involved at a younger age and build habits and interest with the political system will play a large role in driving young people's electoral behavior, future research should to focus more directly on the effectiveness of these different forms of outreach on younger individuals (16-18). Voter preregistration being one way that seemingly is very direct, both in the fact that you directly engage with the electoral system of your given area, and in the way that this often has potential to lead to further engagements (being campaigned, educated, etc.). To better understand youth voter turnout and enact policy that has a positive impact, a deeper understanding of these topics must be reached. This is pivotal because our democracy is better when we have a greater share of the population voting, from the legitimacy of our elections (Sonam Tongbay, 2015) to equity (Tova Wang, 2024), increased voter turnout plays a large role.

Chapter 3

Theory

How do potential voters decide whether to vote, let alone whom to cast their ballot for? To understand the thought processes behind this decision, it is essential to consider that voting-eligible citizens often act as rational individuals—meaning they make decisions based on what they perceive will yield the greatest benefit to themselves (Downs, 1957). In many cases, in the minds of these rational actors, the act of voting is not worth it unless certain conditions have been met. Some of these conditions could include: the likelihood that voting for a candidate will aid in achieving a preferred electoral outcome, the potential for a candidate's victory to bring about substantive and meaningful changes in their lives, or the ease of accessing information and physically making it to the polls (Downs, 1957; Palfrey & Rosenthal, 1983; Cost of Voting Index, 2024).

Electoral rules and regulations are a large determining factor when it comes to formulating theses perceived costs of voting (Downs, 1957). These costs include factors such as: voter registration laws, deadlines, poll hours, voting inconveniences, identification laws, absentee voting policies, etc. (Pomante II, 2024). It can also include social and psychological factors such as perceived difficulty of navigating the voting process, confusion about voting requirements, societal pressure to participate, and more. The cost of voting framework leads us to believe that when barriers are high, the likelihood that an individual votes goes down because the effort is not worth the potential benefit(s). Inversely, less restrictive policies such as extended polling hours or simplified registration processes can aid in reducing (perceived) costs and make voting more accessible and appealing to individuals (Riker & Ordeshook, 1968).

It is from this theoretical foundation that preregistration laws can be viewed as a policy tool that is able to decrease the logistical costs of voting by allowing young voters to register before they reach voting age. The less restrictive the law, the more they reduce participatory barriers, specifically for youth that may face challenges such as moving around frequently, adjusting to new work/education schedules,

unfamiliarity with the voting/registration process in a state. It is my thought process that a reduction in cost will lead to higher turnout, especially those groups that have historically low turnout.

Concepts and Ideas

Base information readers should remember when examining the 4 distinct categories of preregistration that exist in the United States are as follows, below.

- The state allows preregistration beginning at 16 years old
- The state allows preregistration beginning at 17 years old

- The state does not set a specific age but allows preregistration if the individual will turn 18 by the next election
- The state allows preregistration only within a specified time period, typically between 4 months and 90 days before turning 18

Something of note, would be the idea of a "voting cost" and how it plays into the "why" section of this chapter, but to further explain it, the idea of voting having a cost helps to indicate the difficulty of voting in a given state. The higher the cost, the more difficult/ more barriers exist to voting in a state.

Additional Factors Influencing Turnout / Confounding Factors

Looking into factors that will be important in shaping turnout, voting accessibility is easily one of the most important. Having more options and opportunities is one of the ways that a state lowers its cost of voting. Things like having early voting options or sending all eligible voters mail-in ballots assist in that effort. The overall education and socioeconomic status of a state plays into this seeing that heightened levels of wealth and education correlate to higher rates of voting, with those that have access to more resources being able to more easily bear the same costs of voting that a person of low socioeconomic status might not be able to (Hansen & Tyner, 2018). Lastly, electoral competitiveness is an important factor. A state like Michigan that is often considered to be a swing state may drive more voters who feel that their vote may actually make a difference to go out and vote. On the other hand, a

state like Alabama which is not as competitive could lead to young voters feeling as though their vote will make no difference.

Factors that will be excluded

Some factors that will not be included in this analysis include the overall impact of social media. Although this has been seen to be an ever more popular form of campaigning and information sharing, measurement and methods for gathering this data, coupled with the fact that some states have banned different social media platforms, complicates things further.

Additionally, ballot measures, an electoral procedure that citizens are able to make a direct impact on policy, will not be included. This is due to the fact that not all states utilize these measures, and amongst those that do, ballot measures function differently across states.

Hypotheses

H1: Preregistration policies increase youth voter turnout by way of reducing logistical barriers and the cost of voting, making youth voter participation more attainable.

H1.1: Preregistration policies positively influence overall voter turnout by aiding in the fostering of a culture of civic engagement through early interactions with citizens who will carry these habits with them in the future.

H2: The greatest positive difference in youth voter turnout will be noted in states that adopt the least restrictive forms of voter preregistration, seeing that these policies reduce barriers by encouraging early engagement and lowering barriers for young voters during a pivotal period of life.

H2.1: The greatest positive difference in overall voter turnout will be observed in states that adopt the least restrictive forms of voter preregistration because these states will benefit from broader accessibility and engagement of diverse groups.

Chapter 4

Research Design

Design

To test my aforementioned hypotheses, I conducted 2 sets of linear regressions in Rstudio: the first set is made up of 4 regressions comparing youth voter turnout with preregistration law types 1, 2, and 4 and the second set that compares a state's overall change in turnout with preregistration laws. These tests serve the purpose of identifying potential relationships of significance between changes in youth voter turnout/ changes in overall voter turnout and different types of preregistration laws when compared with the national standard set created with Law Type 3 - (Also known as the National Voter Registration Act). Within each set of regressions, there are 4 models that will control for different control variables in addition to the main explanatory variables. The unit of analysis for this will be state-level change in youth voter turnout.

Dependent Variables

My main dependent variable that will be observed is the **change in youth voter turnout** between consecutive presidential elections. To visualize this, we subtract the post-intervention turnout percentage of a given state from the pre-intervention percentage of the same state to see the percentage point change (%Δ). This is a limited variable that has the potential to be anywhere from 0% to 100%. Much of this data originates from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University (CIRCLE), with some data coming from state election result databases. Something to note is that many states do not have data that is specific to youth voter turnout (either not publicly available, or it is not collected). Due to this,

there are data entries where it was not feasible to get the percentage change in youth voter turnout. As a consequence of this, I searched for more widely available data and included a second dependent variable as one more measure to note trends regarding turnout.

The second dependent variable is overall turnout change. This will provide additional insight into the impact of the different forms of preregistration policy on the electorate as a whole once a given preregistration law changes.

Independent Variables

Regarding my independent variables, the first and what readers can consider to be the explanatory variable, is the **type of law** a state has implemented (with regard to their set form of preregistration). The way that this variable is represented in this project is done through categorizing the forms of voter preregistration into four categories. This breakdown came from an existing list from Democracy Maps that separates all 50 states into 4 categories of

preregistration type that are as follows (in order of categories that are the least restrictive to most restrictive):

Law type 1 being comprised of states with preregistration laws that permit the registration of citizens as young as 16 years old. This is a widely used form of preregistration law, seeing that it is used by 20 states and the territory of Washington, D.C., currently, it is tied for being the most commonly employed form of registration law within the nation.

Law type 2 comprises states that allow citizens to register to vote beginning at age 17. This is a lesser employed category of preregistration, with only 4 states making use of laws that fit this category.

Next, we have law type 3. This **breaks from the other law types** as an independent variable, for the fact that this analysis will be examining it as the reference. This law type allows young people to register to vote as long as they meet the minimum age requirement for voting in

the following election. There are 21 states whose policies fall into this preregistration category. An interesting aspect of Type 3 laws is that it is essentially the "default" form of preregistration due to the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (also known as the Motor Voter Act) (Department of Justice, 1993). Although it is the "default form", there are states that either had pre-existing regulations (prior to the Motor Votor Act) or created regulations that moved them away from this national standard and into another law type. If a state legislature has not passed its own preregistration policy, it is then that they follow the regulations set by this federal legislation. This category is unique because it does not specify a minimum age requirement; instead, it allows individuals to register if they will turn 18 on or before the date of an upcoming election (which typically up to ~ 6 or 7 months before a potential voter turns 18).

Lastly, we have law type 4, which only 5 states utilize. This type of law is categorized by the fact that it is more restrictive in comparison to the standards set by the Motor Voter Act. To provide an example of this, we can look to the state of Texas. Here, the minimum voter registration age is 17 years and 10 months of age, providing a shorter time period for preregistration to take place for young citizens.

To close out on law types as a variable, here is an explanation of how they were coded. Within the linear regressions, they were coded as a single ordinal variable with the values of 1, 2, 3, and 4 having the same number as their respective law type. Higher values indicate more restrictive policies being in place. Law type 3 is not included because it will be used as the reference category.

Moving on to the control variables, the first is **electoral competitiveness**. In order to measure this, I used the absolute difference in the percentage of vote share between the winner of a presidential election and the candidate who gained the 2nd highest amount of votes in the post intervention election (ex. Republican presidential candidate won 48% of the vote in a state vs. A

democratic candidate's 44%: 48-44 = 4% as the difference in vote share in the given presidential election that year), meaning that the lower the value, the greater the level of competitiveness. This variable was chosen as a metric to control for electoral competitiveness because previous work has shown how competitiveness can impact voters decisions to vote in an election, depending on whether they feel their vote has a chance at changing the outcome (Vowles et al., 2017). I chose to include this based on the fact that similar studies examining policy impact on voter turnout made use of similar markers of competitiveness (Garnett and Miller; 2020).

The next independent variable that I measured for was the percentage of college educated adults in a state during the year between the pre- and post-intervention presidential elections. This helps in serving as a metric for a state's level of **education.** The data seen with this variable was gathered through records held by the annual educational attainment database, Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED). This variable was coded as a percentage of the adult population of a state (ex. 29% of adults have graduated from college = 29%).

To assist in measuring how class plays a role in this picture, I gathered data on median income levels from FRED and Statista depending on the year (the year between the pre- and

post-intervention presidential election). These values are all adjusted to 2023 dollars for sake of uniformity and comparison. This variable was coded as a continuous variable, where the median income was placed directly into a state's data.

Finally, there are 3 more independent variables that I took account of, but will group together since they are similar. Whether a state allows for **early voting**, **automatic voter registratio**n, and **same day voter registration.** The inclusion of these variables aides in highlighting the change in turnout attributed to other policies that lower the cost of voting for individuals through either the expansion of access or the restriction. These variables are all coded on a binary, with 0 equating to the fact that a state did/does not (at the time of the post

intervention election) make use of a policy. Whereas a 1 represents that a state did/does (at the time of the post intervention election) make use of the given policy.

When examining this research design, I want to highlight some important things, first and foremost being the data I've collected. If you look at the data that I have aggregated in the Excel sheet below (Table 1 – Values for all Variables) you will see all the values for the independent and dependent variables that used. Additionally, you can see that there are some data missing in either (and in some cases both) category(/ies) of youth pre-intervention turnout or youth post-intervention turnout. This is due to the fact that depending on the year an election took place, a state may not have had data available to the public or have collected it at all. It is only in the past 15 years that some states have made efforts to record their election turnout by age group. This issue results in a limitation for the amount of entries that I can have for any analyses involving changes in youth turnout. Additionally, some preregistration policy types are more popular than others. Allowing young people to preregister at 17 is only an option in 5 states. When compared to states that allow you to preregister as long as you turn 18 by the election (21 in total), we see that there is a discrepancy in just how much data you can compare.

I believe the impact of this investigation lies in the fact that it may not provide a full picture of what is truly happening. Perhaps in the future, when more data is collected, and more states make said data available, more reliable investigations will be possible.

Column1	Intervention Year	Law Type	PreInt	PostInt	YPreInt	YPostInt	TurnoutDiff	YTurnoutDiff	Comp	Education Level (% of college grads)	Income	EV	AVR	SDR
AL (Alabama)		3	66.80%	63.00%	40.00%	46.70%	-3.80%	6.70%	25.50%	28.00%	$57,000.00	0	0	0
AK (Alaska)	2004	4	66.00%	66.03%	58.00%	49.00%	0.00%	-9.00%	21.50%	29.00%	$56,418.00	1	0	0
AZ (Arizona		3	74.17%	79.90%	33.00%	50.90%	4.67%	17.90%	0.30%	33.00%	$62,283.00	1	0	0
AR (Arkansas)		3	64.65%	66.92%	31.00%	34.60%	2.27%	3.60%	26.90%	25.00%	$49,781.00	1	0	0
CA (California)	2016	1	75.27%	80.67%	37.00%	54.00%	5.40%	17.00%	29.30%	37.00%	$70,489.00	1	1	1
CO (Colorado)	2013	1	71.17%	74.39%	43.00%	52.00%	3.22%	9.00%	4.90%	35.00%	$60,940.00	1	1	1
CT (Connecticut)		3	77.00%	71.50%	43.00%	54.10%	-5.50%	11.10%	13.70%	42.00%	$72,812.00	1	1	1
DE (Delaware)	2023	1	68.75%	65.74%	52.10%		-3.01%		14.70%	37.00%	$80,750.00	1	1	0
DC	2009	1	62.30%	57.50%			-4.80%		83.60%	50.00%	$53,141.00	1	1	1
FL (Florida)	1994	1	83.00%	67.00%			-16.00%		1.90%	24.00%	$29,294.00	0	0	0
FL (Florida) #2	2007	1	75.20%	75.00%		53.00%	-0.20%		2.80%	29.00%	$45,676.00	1	0	0
GA (Georgia)		4	59.80%	68.20%	37.00%	50.60%	8.40%	13.60%	0.20%	34.00%	$55,821.00	1	1	0
HI (Hawaii)	1977	1	74.50%	67.60%			-6.90%		1.90%	20.00%	$45,674.00	0	0	0
HI (Hawaii) #2	1993	1	65.70%	51.80%			-13.90%		11.40%	23.00%	$42,260.00	0	0	0
ID (Idaho)		3	75.87%	81.16%	38.00%	48.30%	10.30%	10.30%	30.70%	31.00%	$58,728.00	1	0	1
IL (Illinois)	2023	1	72.90%	70.42%	45.60%		-2.48%		10.90%	38.00%	$78,020.00	1	1	1
IN (Indiana)		3	57.90%	61.50%	35.00%	41.60%	6.60%	6.60%	16.00%	25.00%	$58,892.00	1	0	0
IA (Iowa)	2007	2	75.90%	72.60%	58.00%	57.55%	-3.30%	-0.45%	0.70%	24.00%	$48,126.00	1	0	1
KS (Kansas)		3	67.40%	65.60%	31.00%	45.40%	-1.80%	14.40%	14.60%	35.00%	$63,900.00	1	0	0
KY (Kentucky)		3	59.60%	64.80%	41.00%	55.70%	5.20%	14.70%	25.90%	51.00%	$54,555.00	1	0	0
LA (Louisiana)	2018	1	60.60%	64.20%	42.00%	41.90%	3.60%	-0.10%	18.60%	27.00%	$50,000.00	1	0	0
ME (Maine)	2019	1	72.90%	75.80%	55.00%	60.90%	2.80%	5.90%	2.90%	34.00%	$58,663.00	1	1	1
MD (Maryland)	2006	2	63.10%	67.80%			4.70%		13.00%	35.00%	$63,668.00	0	0	0
MD (Maryland) #2	2010	1	67.80%	67.30%			-0.50%		25.40%	37.00%	$64,201.00	1	0	0
MA (Massachusetts)	2016	1	71.00%	71.31%	47.00%	52.00%	0.30%	5.00%	27.20%	47.00%	$99,800.00	1	1	0
MI (Michigan)	2024	1	73.90%	79.90%			6.00%		1.40%	33.00%	$76,960	1	1	1
MN (Minnesota)	2023	1	79.96%	76.35%	65.10%		-3.61%		4.20%	40.00%	$45,533.00	1	1	1
MS (Mississippi)		3	60.40%	60.20%			-0.20%		16.50%	38.00%	$49,450.00	0	0	0
MO (Missouri)	2003	4	61.20%	65.10%			3.90%		3.30%	28.00%	$73,590.00	1	0	0
MT (Montana)		3	64.30%	72.80%	41.00%	56.10%	8.50%	15.10%	16.40%	35.00%	$66,670.00	1	0	1
NE (Nebraska)		3	64.00%	69.50%	41.00%	50.20%	5.50%	9.20%	19.00%	33.00%	$78,110.00	1	0	0
NV (Nevada)	2018	2	76.70%	77.26%	39.00%	53.10%	0.56%	14.10%	2.40%	28.00%	$100,200.00	1	1	1
NH (New Hampshire)		3	72.50%	74.90%			2.40%		0.30%	40.00%	$94,020.00	0	0	1
NJ (New Jersey)	2015	2	66.40%	68.10%		45.00%	1.70%		17.70%	39.00%	$84,000.00	1	1	0
NM (New Mexico)		3	62.36%	68.67%	31.00%	38.50%	6.31%	7.50%	8.30%	30.00%	$55,810.00	1	1	1
NY (New York)	2017	1	57.30%	61.10%	37.00%	45.20%	3.80%	8.20%	22.30%	40.00%	$81,840.00	0	0	0
NC (North Carolina)	2010	1	66.10%	65.40%	55.00%	45.00%	-0.70%	-10.00%	0.30%	27.00%	$43,830.00	1	0	0
NC (North Carolina)	2016	1	65.20%	72.80%	45.00%	55.10%	7.60%	10.10%	1.30%	35.00%	$61,690.00	1	0	1
ND* (North Dakota)	1951	1	61.00%	73.00%					8.80%			1	-1	1
OH (Ohio)		3	64.20%	67.00%	44.00%	49.00%	2.80%	5.00%	8.00%	31.00%	$71,240.00	1	0	0
OK (Oklahoma)	2019	4	68.11%	55.30%	30.00%	34.00%	-12.81%	4.00%	33.10%	27.00%	$64,800.00	1	0	0
OR (Oregon)	2007	1	72.60%	68.30%	54.80%	59.00%	-4.30%	4.20%	4.10%	28.00%	$50,236.00	0	0	0
PA (Pennsylvania)	1993	3	54.30%	48.90%			-5.40%		2.30%		$32,066.00	1	0	0
RI (Rhode Island)	2013	1	60.80%	59.70%		38.00%	-1.10%		20.80%	34.00%	$58,633.00	1	1	0
SC (South Carolina)		3	57.30%	65.90%	35.00%	44.80%	8.60%	9.80%	11.70%	32.00%	$66,400.00	1	0	0
SD (South Dakota)		3	60.00%	66.40%	31.00%	31.90%	6.40%	0.90%	26.20%	28.00%	$68,730.00	1	0	0
TN (Tennessee)		3	51.80%	59.70%	29.00%	43.10%	7.90%	14.10%	23.20%	31.00%	$64,800.00	1	0	0
TX (Texas)	1991	4	44.34%	47.64%			3.30%		3.50%		$28,228.00	1	0	1
UT (Utah)	2018	1	82.00%	90.09%	24.00%		8.09%		20.50%	37.00%	$94,680.00	1	0	1
VT (Vermont)		3	64.80%	7220.00%	37.00%	49.50%	7.40%	12.50%	26.40%	42.00%	$80,990.00	1	1	1
VA (Virginia)	2021	1	72.80%	70.48%	56.40%		-2.32%		5.80%	42.00%	$86,550.00	1	1	1
WA (Washington)	2019	1	78.76%	84.14%	58.00%	58.30%	5.38%	0.30%	16.10%	38.00%	$94,510.00	0	1	1
WV (West Virginia)	2016	2	57.40%	63.25%	33.00%	39.80%	5.85%	6.80%	26.80%	23.00%	$58,460.00	1	1	0
WI (Wisconsin)		3	69.50%	75.30%			5.40%		0.60%	32.00%	$72,390.00	1	0	1
WY (Wyoming)		3	60.20%	65.30%			5.10%		43.30%	28.00%	$72,290.00	1	0	1

Table 2. All Variable Values

Chapter 5
Results

Before getting into the analyses, I would like to revisit the expectations that I had for my hypotheses. First, it was my expectation that the implementation of preregistration policies will lead to an increase in both youth and overall voter turnout. Additionally, I expected to see a greater increase in youth and overall voter turnout in states that had the least restrictive policies regarding preregistration

To begin, I think that it is important that we understand what turnout numbers looked like across the states based on their law type, both before (T-1, where T is the implementation of a preregistration law) and after implementation (T+1). The range of information in the years recorded ranges from 1976 to 2024. To provide some data on this, we can look at **figures 3 – 6**. It is here that we can see a given state and its corresponding information. The term "Year" refers to the year in which a specific policy change was made that led to a shift in the preregistration laws of a state. In the rare case of states that have made multiple changes, I noted, in the tables by showcasing the states' information, "#2" to signify that it was the second change.

State	Year	Law Type	T-1 Turnout	T + 1 Turnout	Youth T-1	Youth T+1	ΔTurnout	ΔYouth Turnout
CA (California)	2016	1	75.27%	80.67%	37.00%	54.00%	5.40%	17.00%
CO (Colorado)	2013	1	71.17%	74.39%	43.00%	52.00%	3.22%	9.00%
DE (Delaware)	2023	1	68.75%	65.74%	52.10%		-3.01%	
DC	2009	1	62.30%	57.50%			-4.80%	
FL (Florida)	1994	1	83.00%	67.00%			-16.00%	
FL (Florida) #2	2007	1	75.20%	75.00%		53.00%	-0.20%	
HI (Hawaii)	1977	1	74.50%	67.60%			-6.90%	
HI (Hawaii) #2	1993	1	65.70%	51.80%			-13.90%	
IL (Illinois)	2023	1	72.90%	70.42%	45.60%		-2.48%	
LA (Louisiana)	2018	1	60.60%	64.20%	42.00%	41.90%	3.60%	-0.10%
ME (Maine)	2019	1	72.90%	75.80%	55.00%	60.90%	2.80%	5.90%
MD (Maryland) #2	2010	1	67.80%	67.30%			-0.50%	
MA (Massachusetts)	2016	1	71.00%	71.31%	47.00%	52.00%	0.30%	5.00%
MI (Michigan)	2024	1	73.90%	79.90%			6.00%	
MN (Minnesota)	2023	1	79.96%	76.35%	65.10%		-3.61%	
NY (New York)	2017	1	57.30%	61.10%	37.00%	45.20%	3.80%	8.20%
NC (North Carolina)	2010	1	66.10%	65.40%	55.00%	45.00%	-0.70%	-10.00%
NC (North Carolina)	2016	1	65.20%	72.80%	45.00%	55.10%	7.60%	10.10%
ND* (North Dakota)	1951	1	61.00%	73.00%				
OR (Oregon)	2007	1	72.60%	68.30%	54.80%	59.00%	-4.30%	4.20%
RI (Rhode Island)	2013	1	60.80%	59.70%		38.00%	-1.10%	
UT (Utah)	2018	1	82.00%	90.09%	24.00%		8.09%	
VA (Virginia)	2021	1	72.80%	70.48%	56.40%		-2.32%	
WA (Washington)	2019	1	78.76%	84.14%	58.00%	58.30%	5.38%	0.30%

Table 3. Law Type 1 States variable values

State	Year	Law Type	T-1 Turnout	T + 1 Turnout	Youth T-1	Youth T+1	ΔTurnout	ΔYouth Turnout
IA (Iowa)	2007	2	75.90%	72.60%	58.00%	57.55%	-3.30%	-0.45%
MD (Maryland)	2006	2	63.10%	67.80%			4.70%	
NV (Nevada)	2018	2	76.70%	77.26%	39.00%	53.10%	0.56%	14.10%
NJ (New Jersey)	2015	2	66.40%	68.10%		45.00%	1.70%	
WV (West Virginia)	2016	2	57.40%	63.25%	33.00%	39.80%	5.85%	6.80%

Table 4. Law Type 2 States variable values

State	Year	Law Type	T-1 Turnout	T + 1 Turnout	Youth T-1	Youth T+1	ΔTurnout	ΔYouth Turnout
AL (Alabama)		3	66.80%	63.00%	40.00%	46.70%	-3.80%	6.70%
AZ (Arizona		3	74.17%	79.90%	33.00%	50.90%	4.67%	17.90%
AR (Arkansas)		3	64.65%	66.92%	31.00%	34.60%	2.27%	3.60%
CT (Connecticut)		3	77.00%	71.50%	43.00%	54.10%	-5.50%	11.10%
ID (Idaho)		3	75.87%	81.16%	38.00%	48.30%	10.30%	10.30%
IN (Indiana)		3	57.90%	61.50%	35.00%	41.60%	6.60%	6.60%
KS (Kansas)		3	67.40%	65.60%	31.00%	45.40%	-1.80%	14.40%
KY (Kentucky)		3	59.60%	64.80%	41.00%	55.70%	5.20%	14.70%
MS (Mississippi)		3	60.40%	60.20%			-0.20%	
MT (Montana)		3	64.30%	72.80%	41.00%	56.10%	8.50%	15.10%
NE (Nebraska)		3	64.00%	69.50%	41.00%	50.20%	5.50%	9.20%
NH (New Hampshire)		3	72.50%	74.90%			2.40%	
NM (New Mexico)		3	62.36%	68.67%	31.00%	38.50%	6.31%	7.50%
OH (Ohio)		3	64.20%	67.00%	44.00%	49.00%	2.80%	5.00%
PA (Pennsylvania)	1993	3	54.30%	48.90%			-5.40%	
SC (South Carolina)		3	57.30%	65.90%	35.00%	44.80%	8.60%	9.80%
SD (South Dakota)		3	60.00%	66.40%	31.00%	31.90%	6.40%	0.90%
TN (Tennessee)		3	51.80%	59.70%	29.00%	43.10%	7.90%	14.10%
VT (Vermont)		3	64.80%	7220.00%	37.00%	49.50%	7.40%	12.50%
WI (Wisconsin)		3	69.50%	75.30%			5.40%	
WY (Wyoming)		3	60.20%	65.30%			5.10%	

Table 5. Law Type 3 States variable values

State	Year	Law Type	T-1 Turnout	T + 1 Turnout	Youth T-1	Youth T+1	ΔTurnout	ΔYouth Turnout
AK (Alaska)	2004	4	66.00%	66.03%	58.00%	49.00%	0.00%	-9.00%
GA (Georgia)		4	59.80%	68.20%	37.00%	50.60%	8.40%	13.60%
MO (Missouri)	2003	4	61.20%	65.10%			3.90%	
OK (Oklahoma)	2019	4	68.11%	55.30%	30.00%	34.00%	-12.81%	4.00%
TX (Texas)	1991	4	44.34%	47.64%			3.30%	

Table 6. Law Type 4 States

The two sets of regressions are comprised of 4 that had change in youth voter turnout as the dependent variable and 4 more where change in overall turnout is the dependent variable and independent variables changed based on the hope of controlling for links to factors that may increase voter turnout that have the potential to be influential factors relating to preregistration reform. Within those groups of 4: the first regression is univariate and only accounts for a

change in voter preregistration law type, the next regression adds in education, median income, and competitiveness as control variables, the third regression controls for whether a state has automatic voter registration, early voting, and same day voter registration, the final regression controls for all the aforementioned variables (education, median income, competitiveness, automatic voter registration, early voting, and same day voter registration). Negative values indicate that there is a smaller increase / a decrease in turnout, while positive values indicate larger increases.

Regressions

Youth Models

As previously mentioned, not all the states are represented within these youth voter turnout centered regression models due to the fact that some states do not have available data for their youth voter turnout in past elections. With relation to law type 3, revealing what the results yielded, regarding the four regressions as a whole, law type 1 came out to show statistical significance in all models. But more importantly, it was consistently leading to a negative impact to the tune of 5% to -7%. The univariate model yielded the least significance, but still led to a sizable decrease in turnout of an estimated 5%. Law types 2 and 4 yielded little to no significance regardless of the model used.

Beyond that, education had a significant role that led to increases in turnout of 0.42% - 0.48%. Apart from that, no factors seemed to indicate any significant impact. I would like to point out the adjusted R^2 values that highlight how much variance the models I've used are able to reliably account for. Between all 4 models in this section, the accounted for between 7.3% and

23.5%. This means that these models are able to account for at most 1/4th of the variance shown in these models.

Youth Turnout Difference	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Law Type 1	-5.003	-6.303	-6.5	-6.68
Law Type 2	-3.146	-6.74E-03	-5.73	-1.54
Law Type 4	-7.096	-5.323	-7.24	-5.55
Education		0.482		0.42
Income		3.85E-05		2.06E-05
Competitiveness		-7.97E-02		-0.06
Early Voting			0.43	0.484
Automatic Voter Registration			4.18	1.72
Same Day Registration			1.56	1.15

Table 7. Youth Regression Data

Statistical Significance Key	Column1
Color	Value
	1
	0.1
	0.05
	0.01
	0.001

Table 7.1. Statistical Significance Key

*Cells in Table 6 and 7 that correspond with a highlighted color showcase the level of significance as determined by p-values in Rstudio.

Model	Residual Std. Error	DF (Residual)	Obs. Deleted	Multiple R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-statistic (DF)	Model p-value
1	6.454	28	22	0.1631	0.07338	1.818 (3, 28)	0.1667
2	5.865	25	22	0.3828	0.2347	2.585 (6, 25)	0.04355
3	6.305	25	22	0.2869	0.1158	1.677 (6, 25)	0.1683
4	6.129	22	22	0.4069	0.1643	1.677 (9, 22)	0.1548

Table 7.2 Youth Regression Model Coefficients

Overall Turnout Models

The regressions in this section are set up in the same manner as those in the aforementioned "*Youth Model*s" section. The only difference would be that the dependent variable is now percent point change in overall voter turnout. Reiterating the reasoning behind this choice, this dependent variable was added as another way to observe the differences in the change in turnout, seeing that some states do not have and/or make their youth turnout data available, this is another metric to observe trends within voter turnout on another relevant scale.

Looking at these models, there were a few more instances of statistical significance than found in the youth turnout model (as seen in Table 8 below). Similar to the youth turnout models, law type 1 showed significance consistently (with every overall turnout model). The impact on turnout ranged from –3.8% to –4.93%, showcasing a consistent negative impact on turnout. Which leads us to the idea that introduction of law type 1 leads to lower levels of youth turnout.

In addition to this, there was significance relating to early voting demonstrated in models 3 and 4. The values range from 4.4% – 4.8%, representing a sizably large difference when it comes to this lone factor. Separate from that, the only other factors that led to significant impacts in turnout were education, with a value of 0.06 (Figure 7's model 2) and median income (Figure 7's model 4). When looking at some of the adjusted R^2 values with the overall turnout models, we see that the fit of these different models at best accounts for 23% of the variance demonstrated. Although, something interesting occurred with these adjusted R^2 values. When comparing models with their counterparts in the different sections, the models with the highest adjusted R^2 values were not the same. In the case of the youth turnout models, Model 2 presented a value that accounts for 23% of the variance found, whereas model 2 in the overall percentage point change showcased a value accounting for 17%. In the case of the overall

models, Model 4 presented an adjusted R^2 value that indicates 23% of variance in the model was found through the factors utilized in this analysis.

Overall Turnout Difference	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Law Type 1	-4.338	-4.93E+00	-3.8733	-3.803
Law Type 2	-1.843	-2.718	-1.4277	-1.654
Law Type 4	3.187	-3.793	-3.3667	-4.012
Education		5.90E-02		6.70E-02
Income		1.09E-04		1.02E-04
Competitiveness		-1.78E-02		-3.00E-02
Early Voring			4.3857	4.81
Automatic Voter Registration			-0.4576	-1.84
Same Day Registration			2.3262	8.70E-01

Table 8. Overall Regression Data

Statistical Significance Key	Column1
Color	Value
	1
	0.1
	0.05
	0.01
	0.001

Table 8.1. Statistical Significance Key

Overall Models	Residual Std. Error	DF (Residual)	Obs. Deleted	Multiple R^2	Adjusted R^2	F-statistic (DF)	Model p-value
Model 1	5.603	50	0	0.1188	0.0659	2.246 (3, 50)	0.09436
Model 2	5.315	44	3	0.2734	0.1743	2.759 (6, 44)	0.02305
Model 3	5.304	47	0	0.2577	0.1629	2.719 (6, 47)	0.0238
Model 4	5.116	41	3	0.3725	0.2348	2.705 (9, 41)	0.01433

Table 8.2. Overall Regression Model Coefficients

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Discussion

Youth voters within the United States have long been known to have some of the lowest rates of voter participation (Pomante et. al, 2015). This inquiry aimed to further investigate this topic by better understanding how voter preregistration policies and their varying levels of restrictiveness make an impact on youth voter turnout, as well as overall turnout within the broader electorate. Through this research, my goal was to better understand how these policies influence voters behavior and examine trends that could prove useful in policy creation.

My initial hypotheses were that the implementation of preregistration policies would make noticeable and positive differences in youth and overall turnout, and that the greatest positive differences would be observed in states that have adopted the least restrictive forms of voter preregistration. The data proved my first hypothesis incorrect. Generally, there was a negative with the exception of the reference category, which was law type 3. This is further corroborated by the fact that regardless of model, each form of preregistration law lead to consistent levels of decreases regarding the change in youth and overall turnout within states.

My second hypothesis that the less restrictive a law is would lead to a greater positive change regarding the observed change in turnout was incorrect. Surprisingly, states with less restrictive preregistration laws often experienced greater decreases in youth turnout. For example, states allowing preregistration starting at age 16 (Law Type 1) frequently saw declines in youth engagement. This finding challenges the assumption that early access to registration automatically fosters political participation. But this is not to say that more restrictive is always

best practice, either. The few states that have the most restrictive laws that lie within category 4 also led to general decreases in youth and overall turnout.

Law Type 3, which was proliferated across a swathe of states as a result of the National Voter Registration Act, while not delved into beyond being a reference for the analysis, had the strongest correlation and consistently led to positive results (which can still be seen based on the negative results from every other law type). In the future, I think that there is a need to further investigate this policy and what makes it work so well.

The theory of this inquiry is heavily based around ideas of the cost and calculation of voting. Based on how younger citizens tend to vote in higher percentages within states that utilize this process, better understanding how the changes of this policy aid in lowering the cost of voting, apart from increasing the range of time which young people can register, could lead to better versions/different policies that will lower barriers for youth voters and get them to the polls, which will in turn, assist in fostering lifelong voting patterns that will increase voter turnout in future years (Plutzer, 2002).

I believe that the most significant finding from this project is that according to the data, less restrictive preregistration laws generally led to negative changes in youth turnout. This result challenges already existing assumptions about preregistration policy. I would have thought that, similar to the findings of researchers like Eric Plutzer, providing young people more opportunity to engage politically from a younger age would foster some sense of connection to the political process.

Looking back on how I formed this hypothesis, I reflected on my upbringing and recognized how it was atypical. From the age of 15, I had been actively participating in voter registration drives, helping people understand the process of voting, and sharing election related information. In addition to that, I was particularly excited to vote when I turned 18. These

experiences likely influenced my prediction more than I initially realized. Through my early engagement and involvement with civics and politics, I developed a higher than normal level of engagement. After analyzing the results of this project, I now have a clearer understanding of why my hypothesis was incorrect.

The potential for the thought of voting to fall to the wayside with the multitude of other things happening at such a formative and transitional point in a person's life is quite high. If you register to vote potentially 2 years in advance of the time when you're first eligible to do so, who knows if you'll stay as passionate as when you first registered. On the contrary, states where you can register to vote as long as you turn 18 by the upcoming election leave young citizens typically in what is a campaign season. A time when there is information galore and a sense of power in being able to assist in making a decision that can potentially impact your community, state, and or nation. This is all to say that the impact of preregistration may lie in the timing that it happens.

Based on these findings, I believe that future research should explore there is a threshold to the time when preregistration might begin to lose its impact on increasing youth participation (if it does at all). Through an inquiry such as that, there is a possibility of gathering information that could yield results for policy recommendations that could limit the possibility of wasteful spending of resources on efforts that yield little positive, or in some cases negative results.

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