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PERSONALITIES & TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN YOUNG ADULTS, 18-24

by

Abigail Pratico

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Political Science)

The Honors College

University of Maine

May 2016

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the different political patterns that young adults have in comparison to older generations, and certain personality or attitudinal traits that may encourage traditional participation through voting or joining a political party. Previous research in this field suggests many different factors that encourage or inhibit participation. Parental influence and declining trust in government are considered to be two of the largest indicators of whether a young adult will decide to participate in politics in a traditional way. This thesis will provide an alternative explanation to why we see lower participation in politics for young adults, by exploring the attitudes of young adults when going through the decision-making process.

Analyses of the American National Election Studies and the Youth-Parent Socialization Survey was used to evaluate three different trends in young adult participation. First, the ANES is used to confirm that the act of voting or joining a political party is indeed lower for young adults compared to other generations, and that there are certain attitudes such as social trust that are declining in only those ages 18-24. Second, the ANES shows that certain attitudes such as social trust and interest in elections are declining for 18-24 year olds, while at the same time young adults are becoming less likely to vote and less likely to identify as a strong partisan. Third, the YPSS is used to evaluate the consistency of attitudes compared with the likelihood that a young adult will vote or join a political party over time. Lastly, both the ANES and the YPSS are used to see if the same patterns persist for non-traditional participation as traditional political participation. Through these analyses, we see that young adults who have low social trust and low self-confidence are consistently less likely to vote, join parties, or participate in non-traditional ways.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In the presidential election of 2008, young adults 18-24 voted at higher rates than any election since 1972 when the voting age was lowered to 18 years old (File 2014). Compared to other age cohorts, young adults attended more campaign events and were more likely to be contacted by campaigns (Keeter 2008). This was a complete turnaround from historical trends, where most campaigns would rarely spend time contacting young adults due to their extremely low turnout rates. Before the election of 2008, the youth turnout for elections was nowhere near guaranteed. In fact, young adults have consistently voted at dramatically lower rates than any other group of individuals (File 2014). Pre-2008, many politicians and political parties believed young adult lack of interest and non-participation in elections was a forgone conclusion.

As someone who grew up during the successful election campaigns of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, it seems strange to me that young adults would not participate in politics in traditional ways. One would think that the results of the Obama elections would prove to young adults that our age cohort has the ability to influence and affect the results of an election, such as they did in 2008 and 2012. Despite the results of the 2008 election, research reports that young adults are unlikely to participate because they do not believe it is important or beneficial to do so (Teixeria 1992). If young adults are aware of their potential impact in elections, the reason why they do not participate must be more complicated than apathy towards politics. Perhaps the 30-something percent of young adults who vote in the elections are those that are more optimistic, or feel confident enough in themselves that they are willing to go out and vote. In a world where young adults seem to be looking for any excuse not to participate, I am interested in profiling the type of individual that participates in defiance of the assumption that they are inactive in politics.

Therefore, my research question is as follows: what personal traits in an individual young adult (18-24) make them likely to participate in politics in a traditional way? Some personal traits persist throughout our adult years, and some of them are just phases that young adults may go through during their formative years. Because of the focus on personalities of the individuals being studied, I formed a second research question: are the personality traits one has as a young adult likely to affect political participation into adulthood, regardless of life cycle changes?

For the purpose of this thesis, traditional forms of participation will be defined simply as voting or identifying as a member of a political party. These actions were chosen because they are easy to measure, and are two actions that can have an impact on politics if enough young adults chose to participate in them. This age group of 18-24 will also be particularly interesting because it also captures many individuals' first life cycle change - the departure from home to go to college, to live on one's own, or their beginning of a first full-time job. A life cycle change can be anything that has the potential to change an individuals' outlook: moving to a new community, moving up or down of socio-economic status, or new levels of education, for example. Personality traits will be defined as they are in psychology, as "habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion" (Kassin 2003). These are internal characteristics such as confidence, efficacy, creativity, or impulsiveness, which can be molded by external factors.

In this thesis I attempt to understand which traits in young adults make them more likely to participate politically in traditional forms, namely voting and political partisanship. Two thousand and eight should have proved to many young adults that they have the power to sway election results, yet in 2012 young adult participation dropped again to more typical levels for individuals aged 18-24 (File 2014). There has been frequent research done to try and figure out

why young adults are not showing up at the polls on Election Day, but not much to determine which types of young adults continue to participate in traditional forms. While many exit polls will ask individuals about demographic information, little research has been done on personality traits among young adults that correlate with traditional political participation.

The first objective of this thesis is to understand whether there is a pattern of participation related to personality traits. In order to do this, personal traits and attitudinal trends will be compared with the rates of traditional participation. This will be useful in seeing whether there are personal traits or beliefs that correlate with an individual being more likely to register or vote. Next, because an individual is likely to go through many more life cycle changes after the age of 18-24, we will look to see whether the political party that one aligns with as a young adult will remain stable. If a young adult's decision to vote is based off minimal amounts of information about their lives, what will happen as that individual gains more information or awareness of the world around them?

This thesis will begin by laying out previous research that has attempted to explain why young adults are not participating in traditional forms of politics. Part of this will consider which avenues of participation young adults may feel more comfortable participating in, if they are avoiding voting and political parties. The literature review will also lay a foundation for normal (political and non-political) factors that go into young adult decision making, which will help understand what information young adults find important when deciding whether to vote or not. Compared to other adults, do young adults decide with high or low amounts of information? Do young adults get this information from their own research, their parents, peers, or environmental

guides? Finally, what information does a young adult look for when deciding whether to vote or join a party, or not?

To more fully answer each of the questions that the literature asks, we must first understand which types of individuals are seeking out information and guidance regarding political participation. Personal traits in a young adults' life can serve as an intermediate variable that helps to understand each of the aforementioned questions. Whether individuals have high or low levels of social trust, popularity, personal efficacy, or non-political participation can all affect whether they decide it is worth their time to seek out political information to make a registration and voting decision. The personal traits and habits in a young adults' life at the time of their first registration can possibly provide insight as to why they participate, and whether these political beliefs will persist through life cycle changes.

While some previous research has tried to evaluate which triggers make young adults participate, my research is original in two important ways. First, it does not look for influences that may encourage and sway participation (parents, school, or friends), it looks for traits that are inherent in an individual (confidence, efficacy, motivation). Second, this research will be longitudinal, as looks at the effects young adult personalities have on the future voting patterns of these individuals. Because young adults likely have a low-involvement form of decision-making, this thesis evaluates whether the party allegiance chosen at ages 18-24 will persist into adulthood.

Data on young adults' personal beliefs and activities and their rates of traditional political participation will be analyzed to determine whether there is a relationship between certain individual traits and their likelihood to register to a certain political party. Using the findings

from these potential relationships, a longitudinal study will be contrasted with the findings to see whether these political party affiliations are likely to persist in the future. This will allow the thesis to compare not only which traits make an individual more likely to participate, but also which of those traits are used to define an individual throughout multiple life cycle changes.

Many elections after the presidential election of 2008 will likely seek new ways to engage young voters, in the hopes that young adults may once again sway the results of an election. This thesis' original research will focus specifically on traits in young adults that make them more likely to participate traditionally, which could help parties in the future to target likely voters. This could mean a specific group of individuals that should be contacted to vote, or these personal traits could be encouraged while in primary and secondary education in order to create a more involved generation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Since 1971 when the voter eligibility was lowered to 18, there has been frequent research to study these “young adults” as a voting bloc. In their first election of 1972, 18-20 year olds turned out at 52 percent, and this rate has since steadily declined to the low rate it is today at 38 percent (Sakata 2007). This chapter will consider previous literature discussing voting by young adults, beginning by looking at their historical trends of traditional political participation. Because of their low voting rates, this literature review will also look at previous work that attempts to understand why young adults are not voting, and what forms of political participation they may prefer instead.

In order to determine why some young adults continue to join political parties, this chapter will also look at research of how young adults make decisions, and how these decision-making processes may be different when joining a political party or casting a vote. There are many trends in young adult voting that have been studied, including parents’ influence, peer influences, and the stability of beliefs later in life.

Political Participation of Young American Adults

Young adults have historically voted at much lower rates than any other age group, a trend that has confused and interested many political scientists, psychologists, and historians. In 2000, young adult voter participation reached an all time low of 36.1 percent, which led to even greater amounts of research on the low voting patterns of young adults. (File 2014: 2). Researchers have used many techniques to try and understand why young adults participate at

lower levels than others, whether it is because of social, economic, emotional, or habitual reasons.

Quintelier in “Differences in Political Participation Between Young and Old People” (2007) suggested three reasons as to why young adults may be less likely to vote than older generations. First, young people may have less motivation to participate because they do not have a stable residence and are therefore less tied to the results of an election. Second, young adults may prefer new forms of participation rather than traditional forms like voting and party membership because they appear to be more hip and cool. Third, young adults may be less interested in politics simply due to less trust and more negative attitudes toward politicians. Quintelier suggests these three reasons are likely side effects of the transition to adulthood, a transition that is becoming longer in duration with more young adults seeking higher education (Quintelier 2007: 167).

A lack of trust and negative views of government are frequently assumed to be the largest factor that has led to the the historically low levels of young adult participation. Teixeira in his book *The Disappearing American Voter* (1992) wrote that levels of participation were steadily declining, but young adults’ participation was showing the most rapid decline. He proposed two different ideas for why this may be: first, the costs of voting are “exceptionally high and the benefits exceptionally low” and second, the lack of voting participation in the younger generation creates a cycle of apathy because young adults feel as though they have no say in government (Teixeria 1992: 21). Because of these two factors, many young adults choose not to participate in elections.

Patterson pushes this apathy theory further, writing that older generations who were raised during wars are being replaced by younger generations who are “less politically interested and informed than any cohort of young people on record” (Patterson 2002: 21). This echoes the beliefs held by many, that young adults are not motivated because they may not understand the importance if they have not grown up during a time of harsh political disagreements (Valentino & Sears 1998).

While many believe that the apathy and lack of voting participation in young adulthood is part of being a young adult, data have also suggested that the younger generations are forming patterns of non-participation that last longer than just their young adulthood. Jennings & Neimi’s panel study in *Continuity and Change in Political Orientations: A Longitudinal Study of Two Generations* (1975) showed that as the younger generations age, they have continued to show resistance to partisanship. This study does not touch on levels of voter turnout, but argues that those who do turnout are less likely to have strong partisan ties. Because partisan ties normally mean higher levels of political participation, this could lead to speculation that younger generations may never reach the high levels of turnout that previous generations have seen.

Non-Traditional Participation in Young Adults

About 38% of young adults ages 18-24 voted in the most recent presidential election in 2012, compared to 49.5% for ages 25-44, 63.4% for ages 45-64, and 69.7% for ages 65 and older (File 2014: 2). While many are discouraged by the lack of participation in younger generations, many recent studies have found that young adults are not inactive, they just participate in non-traditional ways.

Quintelier (2007) suggested that the factors causing young adults' lack of traditional participation may be the same factors that push them to participate in non-voting ways. Due to young adults' distrust of politicians and lack of stability, young adults decide to participate in politics in different forms than older generations, such as a "cause-oriented style of politics" (Quintelier 2007: 167) Quintelier defines "cause-oriented" participation as individuals who argue for specific and "trending" political issues, but do not vote and do not advocate for any specific party. This form of cause-oriented participation may result in eventually choosing a political preference and participating in more traditional ways, but is not as simple as registering to vote the moment one turns 18. The findings presented in this article support the idea that young adults choose political parties in different ways than traditionally thought, and can still be politically active despite their lack of participation at the polls.

With increases in the use of the Internet and therefore more online discussion and organizing, it should not be much surprise that most young adults are likely to prefer other sorts of political involvement and seek out political information in other ways than older generations. Niemi and Klingler (2012) in their article "The Development of Political Attitudes and Behavior Among Young Adults" studied young adults' weakening ties to political parties and which types of participation the younger generation seemed to prefer over joining a party or casting a vote. The article first suggested that non-students are more likely to participate in politics as young adults, because college students are even more isolated from the communities that their colleges are located in. The survey also looked at trends, and saw that men are more engaged in political activities than women, and general participation declines in college from the high levels of participation witnessed in high school. Using data from the National Surveys of Political and

Civic Engagement of Young people, the study also found that college students show no significant changes in attitudes about diversity, a decline in political trust, and an increase in their perceived responsibility to society.

While most attitudes did not show large change in college-bound young adults, other researchers have tried to understand the types of participation that young adults may be more inclined to take part in. Contradicting Niemi & Klingler, some authors have found that when evaluating non-traditional ways of participation, college students actually show higher levels of political interest. Portney & O’Leary (2007) used the *Tisch College National Survey of Civic and Political Engagement of Young People* to compare the types of engagement that young adults participate in, and which ones make them more likely to vote or join a party later in life. The survey asked about many types of participation activities from small to large, including wearing a button, donating to a party, donating to an organization, signing a petition, protesting, or buying a product because of the companies values. For almost all categories, colleges students were much more likely to respond that they had engaged in these non-traditional activities. This article found that young adults prefer non-traditional ways of participation, especially if young adults do not feel tied-down to their place of residence.

Plutzer (2002) echoes the previous research in his journal article “Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood” and confirms the idea that young adults are less likely to participate in traditional ways. Plutzer warns that this pattern of non-participation is dangerous because traditional participation is necessary for young adults to form the habit of voting. The author looks at the probability that an individual will participate in their first election in order to understand whether they will continue to vote. There are some trends for

those who vote for the first time: those with higher education are more likely to vote and those who are older are much more likely to vote. Plutzer writes that one of the problems with young adult participation is that the costs of voting for the first time are heightened because of the information necessary to understand what goes into casting a vote, and many decide not to because they do not have real stakes in community politics without completing college and owning homes. If they do vote as young adults, they are much more likely to form a habit that will continue into adulthood, but many do not. In other words, if individuals vote in their first election and feel strong ties to a certain political party, that creates an “inertia” (Plutzer 2002: 41) for the citizen to settle into a habit of voting.

The findings of these articles support the idea that many young adults do not vote in elections until they are involved in their communities, and the idea that voting is a habit which is more likely to occur if they have voted previously. This could mean that young adults do not have the information necessary to make a decision, and to vote they must base it off minimal amounts of information like that heard from friends and family. Coleman argues in *The Effect of Social Conformity on Collective Voting Behavior* that young adults first make this complicated decision in simple terms by voting when “the expected benefit of voting exceeds the cost” (Coleman 2004: 78), and as they mature they begin to take collective interests into account depending on the salience of issues in a community. If individuals do not know much about their own personal needs because they are not mature and established enough, the decision to participate therefore comes from a combination of societal pressure and their perceived identity.

Young Adult Decision Making

Although many young adults may decide to participate in politics in non-traditional ways, it is still important to understand why 38% of young adults make the decision to register to vote and turnout in a presidential election despite the norm being otherwise. The process that one goes through to form an identity is often understudied for young adults because of their low rates of turnout, but many authors have tried to apply methods of psychology and marketing to understand how some individuals form beliefs despite little life experience.

Many writers claim that the thought processes that go into deciding to vote cannot be too complicated for young adults, simply because they do not care that much. Lau & Redlawsk write in *How Voters Decide: Information Processing During Election Campaigns* that voter decision making cannot be much different from other types of decisions young adults make considering “most of the time, politics is usually a minor concern” (2006: 21). The authors compiled literature to find that there are four different techniques of decision making: dispassionate decision making, confirmatory decision making, fast and frugal decision making, and intuitive decision making. Dispassionate decision making is motivated by self-interest, and seeks out information until the cost exceeds the benefit. Confirmatory decision making is motivated by the desire for cognitive consistency, where the individual is passive and perception of information is “biased in favor of early-learned predispositions” (2006: 9). Fast and frugal decision making is motivated by efficiency, and seek out just enough information to make a judgement. Intuitive decision making is motivated to make the best possible decision, where an individual seeks out information based on the perceived importance of the decision. These different strategies for

making a vote decision are based on how much information an individual decides to seek out, or whether they get their information from more passive sources.

Gentry (2010) in the article “Why Youth Vote: Identity, Inspirational Leaders, and Independence,” lays out the process a young adult likely goes through when making the decision to become active in politics. This involves a period of questioning, then taking actions to discover or confirm an identity, and then deciding the role that politics will take in one’s life. The findings presented in this article suggest that although young adults are under-sampled, they still follow a predictable route to create their political identity. This could mean that a young adult does not simply take the identity suggested to them because there is a process of questioning and affirming ones’ identity before they register. The pieces that likely go into this questioning process are an evaluation of their resources, socio-economic status, education, and general interest in politics.

Many researchers have confirmed this general idea of seeking an identity, mostly because it is simple and does not demand high levels of involvement. Winchester et al. (2014), in *Young Adults and Politics: Investigating Factors Influencing Voter Decision Making*, compared voter decision making to consumer decision making in order to understand what information and involvement is necessary to make a political choice. The findings from their face-to-face interviews suggested that most young adults depend on a low-involvement form of decision making that uses passive information seeking and perceived knowledge. Due to low-involvement decision making, young adults may be more likely to be influenced by political advertising and interpersonal communication, as compared to those who are loyal voters with a stake in their communities.

Kiousis & McDevitt (2008) added onto this literature and the idea that because of their low interest in politics, young adults are more likely to be influenced by the small amounts of political information that they interact with. In *Agenda Setting in Civic Development: Effects of Curricula and Issue Importance on Youth Voter Turnout*, the authors looked at decision making processes as they interacted with perceived issue importance, opinion strength, ideology, and voter turnout. They write that most young adults are not likely to pay attention to politics without a trigger like an election or politicized event, but once they begin focusing their opinions are crystallized towards more allegiance to a party. They form these opinions based on agenda setting in the media and the salience of ideas in their environment. We have already determined that young adults are low-involvement voters and use minimal amounts of information in order to make their decisions. This article attempts to delve deeper and explains that these low-impact voters are therefore much more malleable by those around them and the agenda they set for issue importance.

Parents' Influence

Young adults are less likely to be interested in traditional forms of politics, and are more likely to be low-involvement voters. As mentioned, this can mean that young adults are much more easily swayed by media attention given to certain issues, or the beliefs of those around them. Much academic writing has been devoted to evaluating the most persuasive opinion in a young adults' life: their parents. Many young adults choose not to engage in politics, but for those who do engage 75% of the time they have the same partisan attachment as their parents, with only 10% switching parties from that of their parents (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008: 139). These

data would indicate that young adults simply listen to their parents when deciding which political party to join, but recent trends have also suggested that this obedience to parental partisanship is becoming less frequent (Jin Lee 2012: 686).

Lewis-Beck et al. (2008) in *The American Voter Revisited* suggest that the reason many young voters decide not to participate may be because they do not feel a strong connection to a political party the same way their parents do. The act of voting tends to strengthen a voters' partisan attachment, and if a voter has no partisan attachments they tend to not vote. When personal opinions start to contradict their political preference, individuals will either stop participating and not change their identification or change their personal opinions to match their party identification. This means that individuals who do not have strong political ties are less likely to participate and therefore less likely to create the habit of participation the older generation has. For those who have strong political ties, it is likely a small amount of young adults who have the same preference as their parents, and it is unlikely to change (Lewis-Beck 2008, 145).

Authors such as Achen in *Parental Socialization and Rational Party Identification* disagree with the conclusion that children passively accept the partisan preference on their parents, considering parents have a hard time influencing many young adults decisions on their appearances or friendships (Achen 2002: 152). Achen describes young adults not as passive, but as any decision-maker who simply uses their parents as one of the many factors to weigh in making a decision.

Other authors have argued that young adults do not copy the political partisanship of their parents but only the frequency of participation. Bhatti & Hansen (2012) wrote in their article

Leaving the Nest and the Social Act of Voting: Turnout Among First-Time Voters that young adults who live at home are more likely to vote than those who have moved out on their own, because of the influences of their parents' strong voting habits. They hypothesized that individuals who go off to college vote less because they fall under the influence of their low-voting peers, instead of high-voting parents. The findings presented in this article support the idea that individuals do not vote in places where they do not feel as connected, and young adults living at home vote more than those who move out on their own because they feel connected and because parents are more likely to vote and influence their children when they remain in the household.

Influences other than Parents

Young adults are malleable, but they still do not simply follow their parents' partisan identification, and there are many other factors that influence their political ties. These factors include friends, organizations, and the environment in which they grow up. MacFarland & Thomas (2006) studied the interaction between voluntary organizations and participation in their article *Bowling Young: How Youth Voluntary Associations Influence Adult Political Participation*. The authors suggest that voluntary associations act as sorting venues for political learning. Class background tends to affect this, as youth from higher socio-economic families are more likely to participate in voluntary associations and therefore become more active in politics later in life. If individuals are involved in political-minded groups such as debate, student government, or service groups, there are very positive effects on political participation. The

findings presented in this article support the idea that affiliations and non-political participation earlier in life do have important effects on future political participation.

The simple act of belonging to voluntary associations likely has an effect on future participation because these organizations encourage interpersonal communication where politics is likely to arise in conversation. Valentino & Sears (1998) in *Event-Driven Political Communication and the Preadult Socialization of Partisanship* looked at triggers that may force individuals to take part in political discussions, which are known to encourage political participation later in life. The authors found that salient political events can produce widespread attitude change or crystallization because a young adult will have more of an opportunity to discuss politics through interpersonal communication. This study looked at general elections and found that during an election season there were large increases in young adults' candidate evaluations and party identification. This article has important implications first because it argues that elections are not simply another way for parents to converse with their children and push political views on them. Instead, adolescents are socialized on a much broader level where conversation occurs in many places due to the high levels of attention that is given to elections.

If political discussions are where most young adults search for and discuss their potential identities, then the environment in which these political discussions occur also influences identity formation. Wolak (2009) wrote in her article *Explaining Change in Party Identification in Adolescence* that young adults acquire different political identities based on where and how they are exposed to political information. The article found generally that environments with more intense political signals are more likely to have different beliefs due to exposure of competing beliefs. On the other hand, if families, schools, or friends, share little variance in

political messages then young adults will have stable beliefs. This article is relevant because many young adults report that they do not vote because they feel no obligation to participate, and have a lack of political trust. This article argues that trust is even more important for young adults because they tend to vote and listen to whatever source they trust the most - which can be family, media, or friends.

Of course, there are influences that have an effect on every voter, regardless of age. These influences can be regional, religious, race based, or gender-driven. One of the greatest demographic trends recently has been that religious individuals are more likely to vote Republican, while those who never attend religious services were more likely to vote Democrat (Pew Research Center 2015). Since 1980, there has also been a large gender gap between party affiliation. On average, women have been much more likely to vote Democrat than men (Pew Research Center 2015). On average, older generations tend to lean more Republican, while younger generations lean Democrat (Pew Research Center 2015). In recent years, white voters have been much more likely to vote Republican, while black voters are almost entirely Democrat. Asian and Hispanic voters are less consistent, but tend to lean Democrat in the previous two elections of 2008 and 2012 (Oakford 2015). These demographic trends can predict how a young adult is likely to vote in an election, and can help understand why some environments and lifestyles may mold more involved voters.

Stability of Beliefs

Over fifty years ago, V.O. Key wrote of the “standing decision” (Key & Munger 1959: 286) to join a political party, one that is unlikely to change despite life and identity changes that

would normally associate with another party. If individuals do not have a firm party preference, when they encounter contrary information they are likely to re-evaluate their political identification. On the other hand, if individuals do feel strong ties to a political party, the amount of political information encountered is not likely to change their beliefs due to motivated reasoning (Wolak 2009: 579). If young adults are making their political party identifications based off minimal information, it could mean that young adults are more likely to switch from one political party to another while they search for their identity.

Killian (2007) wrote in *Moments of Doubt and Reassessment: An Examination of Why Individuals Switch Political Parties* that it is statistically unlikely for an individual to switch party allegiance entirely, and instead they will opt to lessen or strengthen pre-existing attachments. The study used the Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study to see that about 32% of respondents switch parties between two waves, which is small enough for it to still be considered one of the most stable social identities. Most partisans decided rather than switching completely from one party to another, they would opt for an independent stance, or decide to disassociate from parties altogether.

Although political identity is still pretty stable for young adults, it is much more unstable than that of older generations. Jennings & Niemi (1981) found that parents' partisanship fluctuated far less than their offspring in their article *Generations and Politics: A Panel Study of Young Adults and their Parents*. In their survey they found that roughly 40% of young adults changed their basic response between surveys. This was most often from an independent position to a political party, while only 9% actually moved from one political party to another. This means that young voters' opinions are not as firmly based as adults, and their identifications evolve as

they grow up and come into contact with new and different environments. Many young adults also chose political parties before they have contact with a wider environment, and experience “issue constraint” (Jennings & Niemi 1981: 61) where an individual holds many conflicting views at a time.

Further research has gone on to understand the decisions that individuals make when they end up holding many conflicting views that disagree with their identity. Campbell et al. (1960) in *The Impact and Development of Party Identification* found that many individuals chose political preferences in young adulthood and tend to remain in the same political party despite life cycle changes. The study found that partisan preferences remain very stable between elections as an individual ages. This stability is not characterized by a fixation on one party, they found, but a persistent adherence to one party and a “resistance to contrary influence” (Campbell et al. 1993: 231) which results in a lack of partisan re-evaluation. The findings presented in this article support the idea that partisan identity is a very stable identity which is unlikely to change in the face of contrary information.

Some authors have disagreed that partisan identity is stable, considering the many life changes individuals go through after turning 18. Abramowitz (1983) in *Social Determinism, Rationality, and Partisanship among College Students* found in a study of college campuses that there was a high rate of defection from political parties if they attended a college with a different partisan leaning. Leaving home therefore encourages individuals to re-evaluate their loyalty in the face of a new environment, and the individual may choose a different party identification if confronted with inconsistent information. This article supports the idea that children do not

exactly mimic their parents political preference, but are also responsive to many other political preferences surrounding them while they search for an identity.

There are many researched reasons as to why young adults may not vote: lack of trust, life cycle changes, lack of connection to a community, or higher amounts of interest in non-traditional forms of participation. It seems as though young adults are faced with a mountain of reasons to not vote, so what about the 36 percent of young adults who decide to show up at the polls on Election Day? Achen wrote, “when the voters expect that a party will favor them in the future, they will be said to ‘identify’ with that party” (Achen 2002: 153), but ignores that most young adults are uncertain of what their futures hold. Young adults tend to use a low-involvement decision making technique when deciding whether to vote (Winchester et al. 2014), but not much research has been done on what few signals and personal traits guide the decision-making process for young adults. There are certain triggers that will make a young adult more likely to vote: high levels of political discussion, a feeling of connection to the community, exposure to media, or involvement in voluntary organizations. In order to better understand why some young adults participate in traditional forms, it is important to understand what personal traits lead to these pathways to participation.

This thesis attempts to understand which personal traits encourage some young adults to participate traditionally in politics despite the trend not to. Traditional forms of participation can be as small as joining a political party, or as involved as working for a campaign or organization. Focusing on young adults ages 18-24 means understanding the decision making process that happens when young adults are first eligible to vote. If young adults weigh their parents’ and

peers' social influences, and are unsure of what their communities and socio-economic statuses will be in the future, it is important to see whether personality interferes in making a political affiliation decision that seems increasingly permanent. Much of the existing research has focused on why individuals decide to participate or not, but many studies do not ask which political parties they joined and why. In other words, I am interested in what triggers make an individual feel as though they need to commit to a certain party, and the long-term trends of political involvement that result from this feeling.

While previous research has determined which environments make young adults more likely to vote, there has been a gap in research on a major mediating factor between environment and voting - the traits of the young adult. An individual's personality, world outlook, confidence, or any other number of traits could be a determining factor of whether they decide to vote. Despite the possibility the personal traits can be a major determinant of participation, most research cited above surveys young adults at one point in time and does not follow-up to see whether personal traits result in longstanding political participation. My use of longitudinal studies will be helpful in determining whether certain personality traits of an individual as a young adult results in a desire and habit to participate in traditional politics such as voting and joining a political party.

Chapter 3: Methods and Results

This thesis looks at the relationship between attitudes of individuals 18-24 years of age, and their likelihood to participate in traditional forms of political participation such as voting and joining a political party. Data will be taken from the American National Election Studies (ANES), which will look at attitudinal questions and voting patterns between 1952 and 2012 - the duration of the ANES. This shows general population attitudes and patterns, such as the rate of young adult voting and their partisanship. While the ANES does ask some attitudinal questions of their respondents, the Youth-Parent Socialization Study (YPSS) will be used to understand the attitudes and personalities of young adults and their persistence into adulthood. The YPSS will be used to understand how political beliefs of individuals relate to their personalities, and how they change throughout various points in life. This YPSS will study responses from individuals in 1965, 1973, 1982, and 1997, beginning by surveying high school seniors and continuing into adulthood to see whether voting and partisan attitudes persist at ages 26, 35, and 50. The YPSS will also use the attitudinal questions answered in the first wave of the survey, to see if attitudes and behaviors in the later waves continued to be affected by certain personality traits.

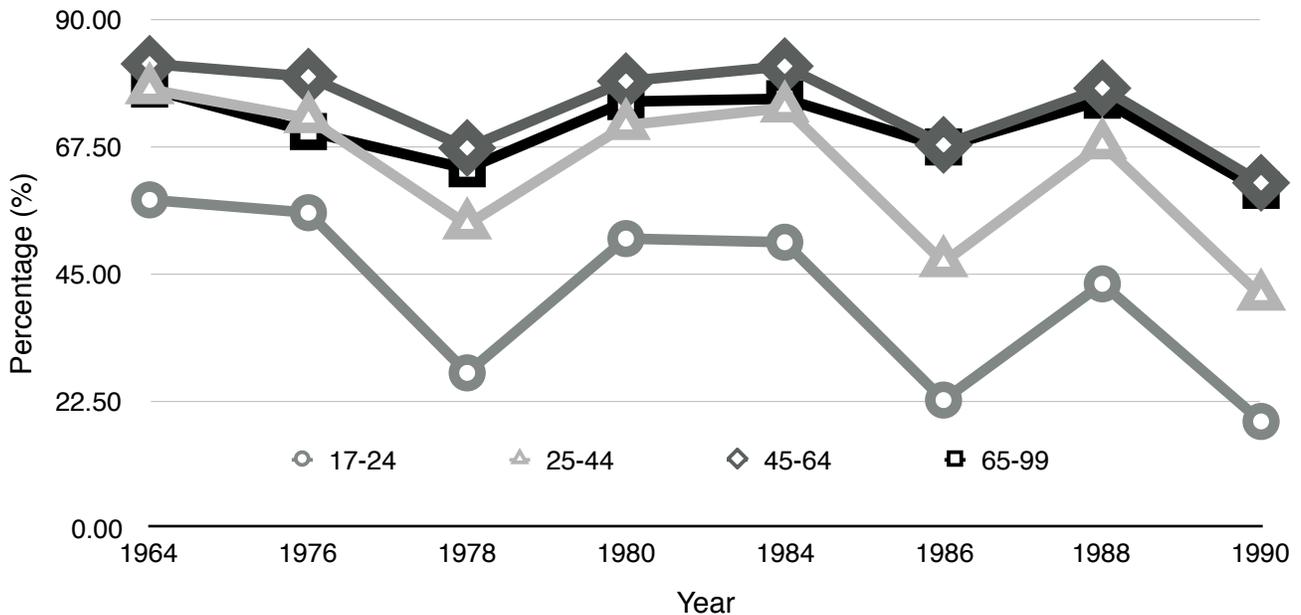
The first objective in this thesis was to confirm that most young adults do not participate in traditional forms of politics such as voting and joining a political party. The likelihood of traditional participation was correlated with attitudinal and personality questions asked by both the ANES and the YPSS. This was done with a separate analysis of both studies, which indicate that young adults' participation has less to do with political attitudes, and more to do with

personality and attitudinal traits of those aged 18-24. The Youth-Parent Socialization Study will be used to see whether personality traits at age 18-24 continue to determine voting behaviors and partisanship into adulthood, despite major life cycle changes.

There will be four sections to compare attitudes and traditional participation over time, and compared to other generations. First, young adults ages 18-24 will be compared to other generations using the ANES, to evaluate the differences in voting behavior and attitudes over time. Second, young adults ages 18-24 will be compared among each other using the ANES, to determine whether there is a difference between the attitudes of voters and non-voters. Third, young adults will be compared to themselves over time using the YPSS, which will evaluate whether attitudes and their relationship to partisanship are a consistent trait into adulthood and through various life cycle changes. Lastly, non-traditional forms of participation will be compared for young adults compared to older generations, to see if their lack of traditional participation is being replaced with a more non-traditional relationship with politics.

Data I: 18-24 Compared to Other Generations

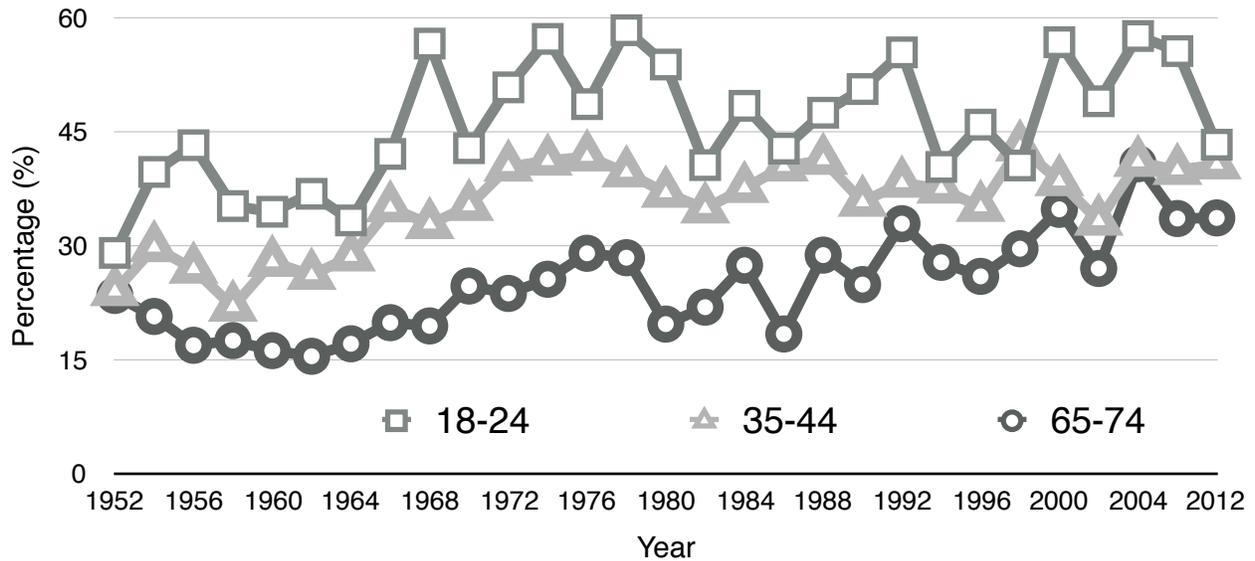
Figure 1: VCF9151 Voting in Elections



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

The ANES data in Figure 1 on voting history show that young adults are consistently less likely to vote in elections than are older generations. Young adults had similar trends to older generations in terms of some elections being more popular than others, indicating that popular elections have the ability to draw out additional voters in all age groups. In general, 18-24 year olds were less likely to turnout than older generations, no matter how much national attention the election received. The data confirm previous literature such as research done by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014), which reports that young adults are less likely to participate in traditional politics though voting or joining a political party.

Figure 2: VCF0305 Answering “Independent, Apolitical, or Leaning”

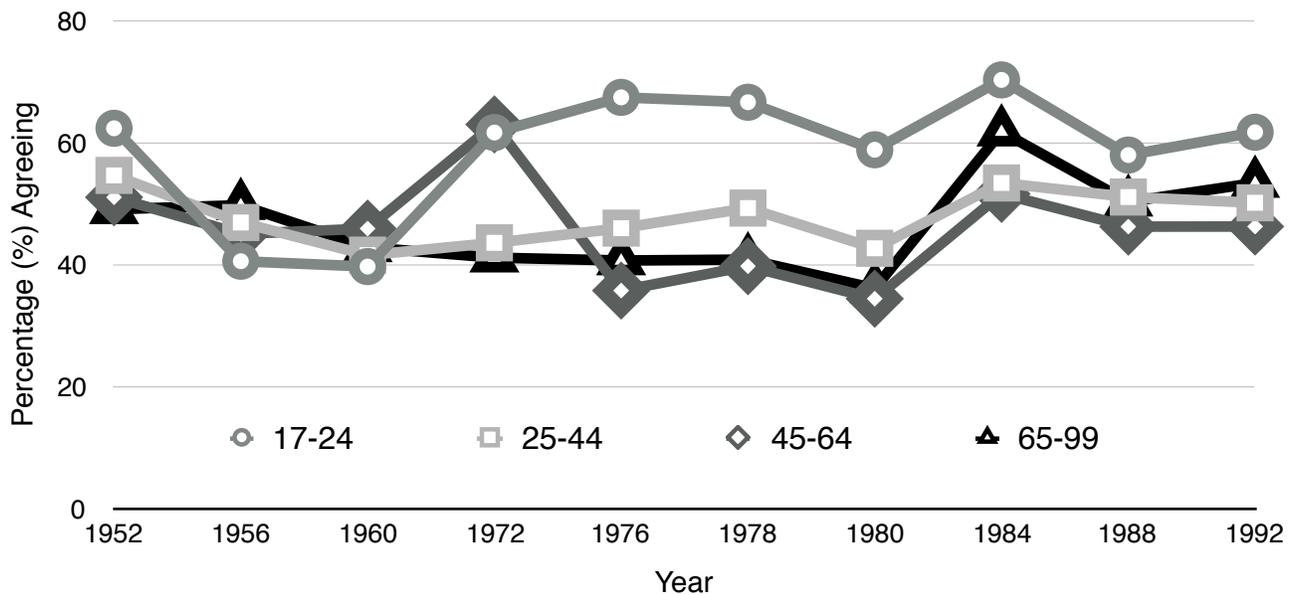


Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

The ANES data shown in Figure 2 compare age groups who answered that they were independent, apolitical, or leaning independent. Compared to other age groups, young adults 18-24 were more likely to report being independent or apolitical than any other generation. This indicates that they are the least likely to have joined a political party, and would support previous research done by Jennings & Neimi (1975) that young adults are becoming more resistant to partisanship than any other generation.

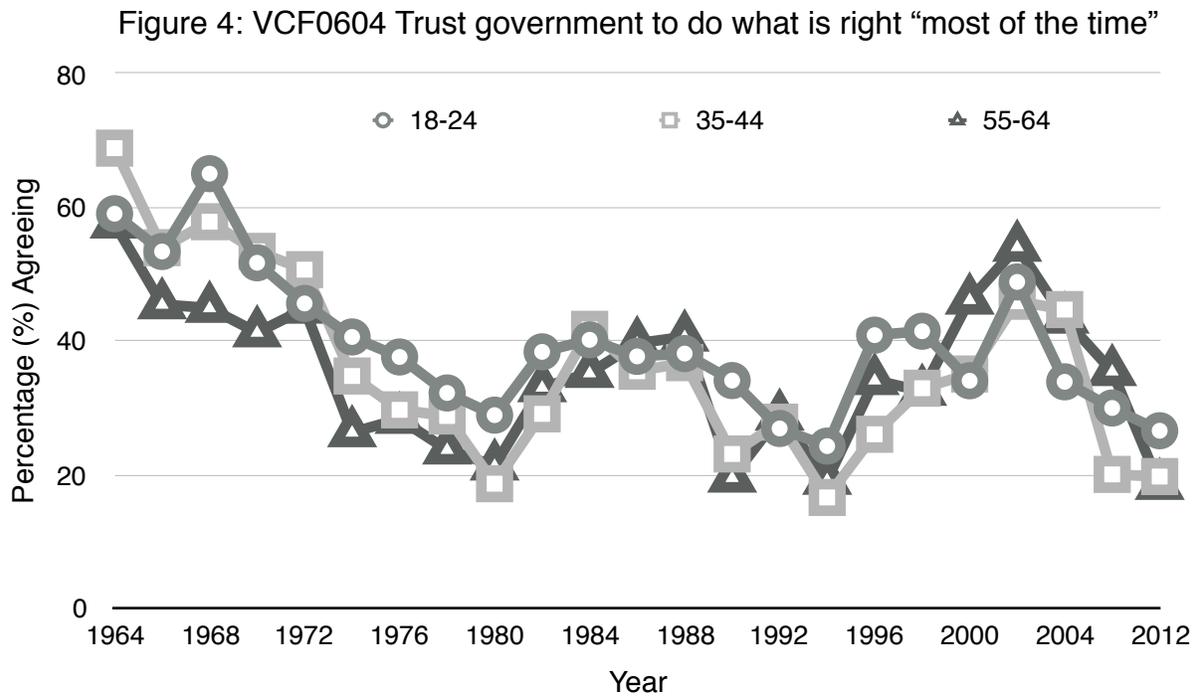
This young adult lack of attachment to political parties may indicate why they are consistently less likely to vote than older generations (Figure 1), as young adults may not support any specific candidate and therefore do not have the motivation to register and vote in an election. This supports the research done by Quintelier (2007), which reports that individuals without a strong attachment to a political party are less likely to vote.

Figure 3: VCF0616 “Those who don’t care about election outcome should not vote”



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Figure 3 also indicates an attitudinal shift between the generations. Young adults lack of party identification (Figure 2) would likely mean that 18-24 year olds do not feel as though they have much of a stake in an election. If they are not rooting for a specific party or candidate, there is probably not much motivation to register to vote and get themselves to the polls (Quintelier 2007). When asked whether individuals should still vote in an election even if they do not care about the outcome, 18-24 year olds were more likely than any other generation to agree. In other words, young adults believe that they should not vote in an election if they do not care about the outcome. This provides another layer of explanation as to why young adults are not voting. Many young adults do not belong to a specific party and therefore will not care much about the results of an election, and Figure 3 indicates that because they do not care they will likely not vote.

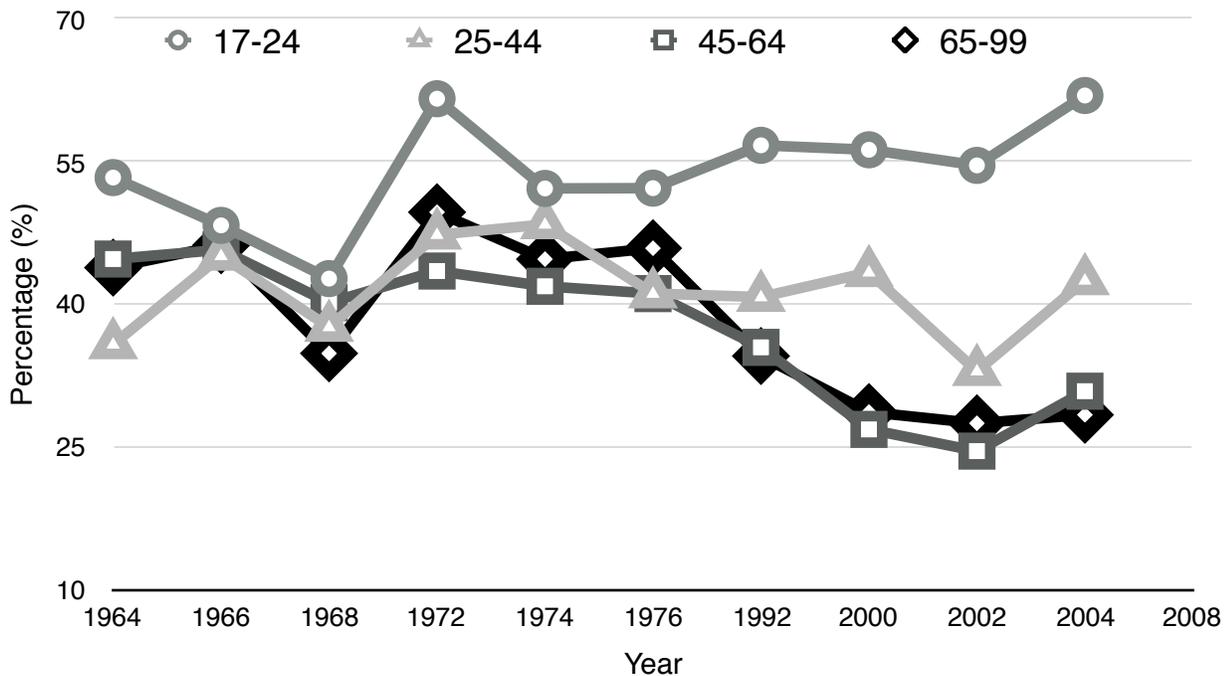


Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Figure 3 would indicate that the lack of participation for young adults has a lot to do with simply not caring about an election. Popular literature such as Niemi and Klingler (2012) would argue that the most important factor that has led to the fall in young adult participation is that young adults do not trust the government. Figure 4 does not support these claims, as 18-24 year olds answer that they “trust the government to do what is right most of the time” similarly, if not more, than other generations. The reason young adults may have comparable answers to older generations is due to their lack of experience with government. Those aged 18-24 have not voted in many - if any - elections, have not had much experience talking with or writing to politicians, have not seen many bills through Congress, and likely do not have fully formed opinions on whether they trust government or not. This is compared to older generations, who likely have better reasoned opinions for why they may or may not trust government to do what is right.

Compared to previous research, 18-24 year olds show surprising amounts of trust in government in Figure 4. Other attitudinal questions that were asked about government showed comparative results to those shown in Figure 4. This would indicate first that the explanation for why young adults do not participate is much more complicated than trust issues with politicians and the government. Second, Figure 4 may begin to prove that young adults' lack of voting has less to do with their beliefs about government, and more to do with personality and attitudinal traits. If it is not this lack of trust in government that is preventing young adults from voting, there must be other attitudes that make young adults less likely to participate traditionally in politics.

Figure 5: VCF 0620 Social Trust: “People Look Out for Themselves”



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Young adults’ beliefs begin to pull away from older generations when evaluating personality and attitudinal beliefs that do not necessarily relate to government. While there is no significant difference between generations with political trust, there is a noticeable difference between young adults and older generations when asked about social trust. Instead of asking about specific beliefs related to government, the ANES asked respondents whether they trusted people in general. When asked about this social trust, 18-24 year olds were more likely than any other age group to answer that “people look out for themselves,” as shown in Figure 5. These results are interesting for many different reasons. First, while young adults were generally positive towards government, they showed a consistently more negative outlook on the world in general than respondents in older generations. Second, it is strange that 18-24 year olds’ negative

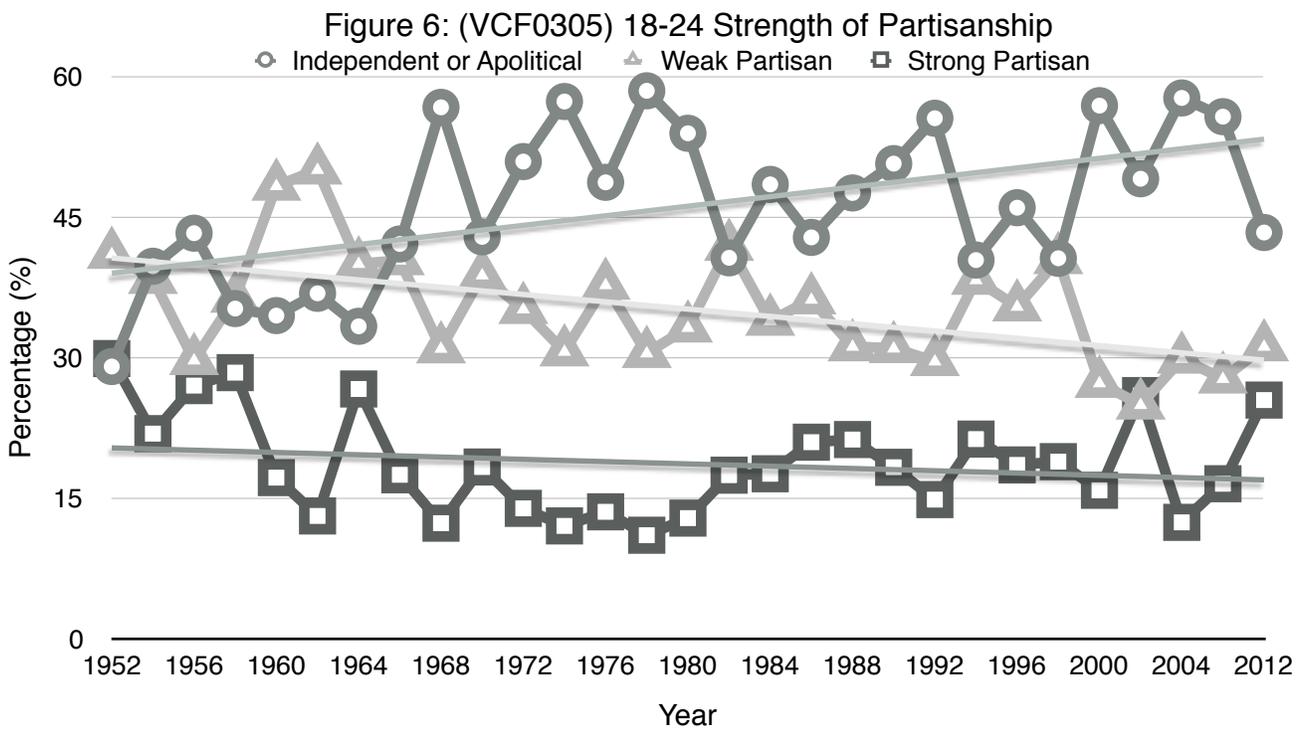
world outlook does not seem to affect their outlook on whether government is trustworthy or can do what is right.

Lau & Redlawsk (2006) wrote that politics is a minor concern for young adults, and young adults do not likely have a deep understanding of whether they trust government or not. Instead, as Figure 5 would corroborate, 18-24 year olds would use a decision making process based on something they know more about: whether people in general are trustworthy.

These trends comparing 18-24 year olds to older generations will become increasingly important as this thesis begins to compare young adults who vote to those who do not. In order to better understand why young adults may not vote, it is first important to lay the groundwork for where they stand compared to older generations. Using the ANES data we can determine a few things about young adults: they are less likely to vote, more likely to be independent, and more likely to carry a generalized and negative world outlook that does not necessarily relate to their views on government. These trends appear to be exclusively young adult trends, so there must be factors that affect young adults' likelihood to vote that do not necessarily have the same effect on older generations. In order to determine this, next we must look at the differences between the young adults who decide to vote and those who do not.

Data II: 18-24 Compared to Each Other

After having determined what trends are different for young adults than older generations, next ANES data will be used to compare 18-24 year olds amongst each other to determine what may be affecting the voting and party identification trends found in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Compared to older generations, young adults are significantly less likely to vote and significantly less likely to identify with either of the major parties.

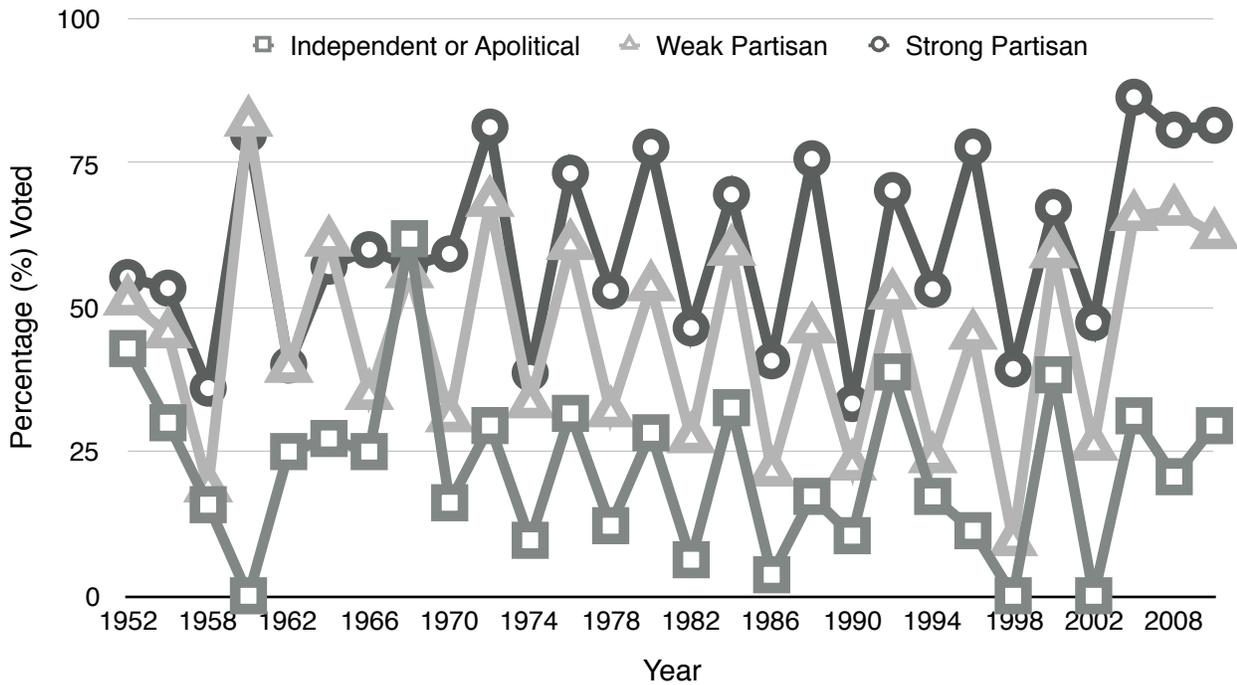


Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Figure 6 shows the strength of young adults 18-24 political partisanship, regardless of which political party they identified with in the survey. Consistently, 18-24 year olds are more likely to report being independent or apolitical, rather than having a party affiliation. The category of independent or apolitical includes individuals who do not feel attached to a certain political party but continue to participate in politics, and those who do not participate at all. For

those who do report have a partisan attachment, young adults are unlikely to report that attachment as strong. When evaluating overall trends between 1952 and 2012, 18-24 year olds are becoming more likely to be apolitical or independent, less likely to be a weak partisan, and the percentage of the young adult population reporting as strong partisans remains consistent over time.

Figure 7: (VCF 0305) Voting 18-24 Year Olds



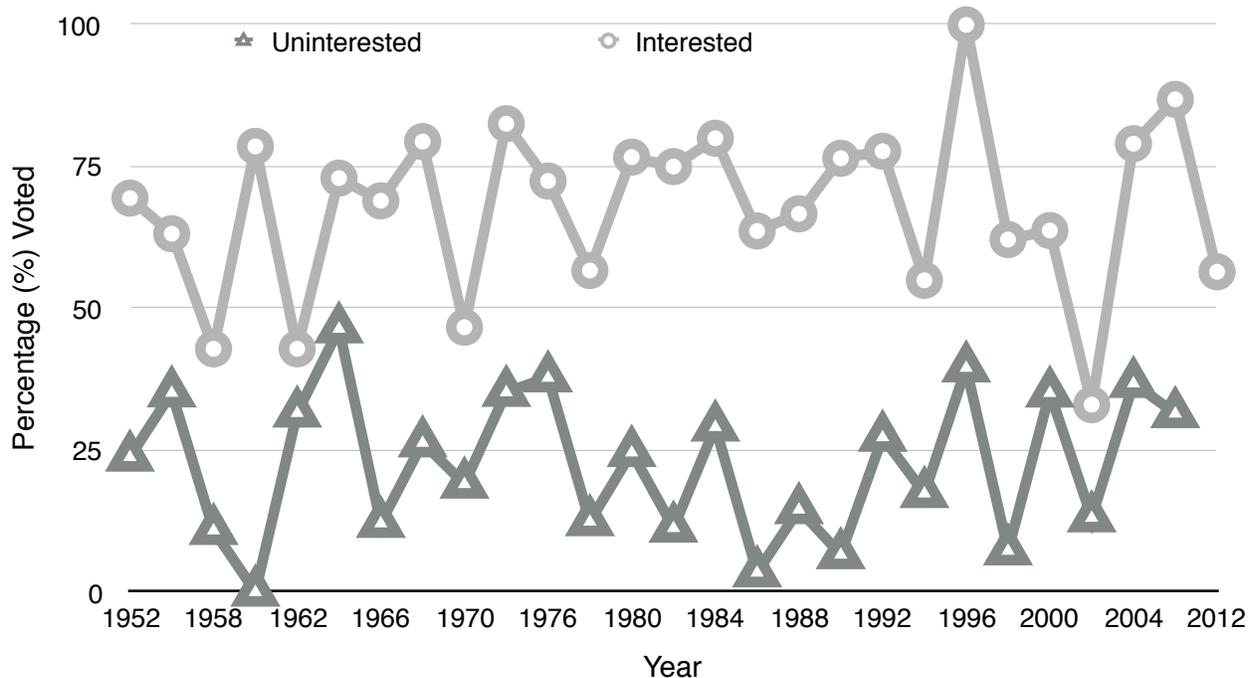
Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Quintelier (2007) reported that young adults who do not feel strong ties to a political party are less likely to vote. With Figure 6 reporting that the majority of young adults do not identify as strong partisans, this could explain why 18-24 year olds are less likely to vote than any other generation. Figure 7 takes only 18-24 year olds who voted in their elections, and there is a consistent trend that individuals with strong partisan ties are more likely to vote than those

with weak ties or an independent stance. This means that independent or apolitical 18-24 year olds, who make up the majority of young adults, are the least likely to vote in any given election.

The data are consistent with previous research: as partisan ties increase, the likelihood to participate increases (Pew Research Center 2014). Figure 7 shows that this trend is true for 18-24 year olds as well. As young adult partisanship goes up, their likelihood of voting goes up as well. When taking into account the increasing amount of young adults that choose to remain independent or apolitical, this may mean an increase in inactive young adults who do not participate in any form of traditional political activity.

Figure 8: (VCF 0310) 18-24 Year Olds Interest in Elections

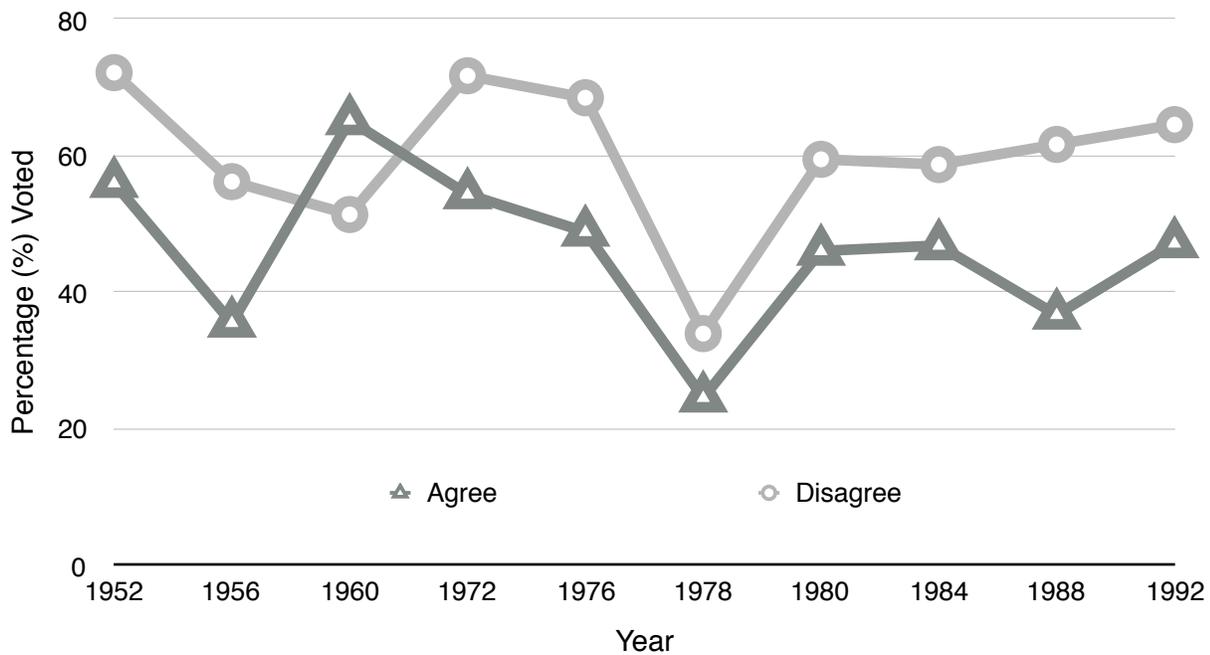


Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

After looking at some of the attitudinal questions that were asked throughout the ANES, there appears to be some explanation for the lower amounts of participation in 18-24 year olds. Figure 8 shows a connection between interest in elections and an individual's likelihood to vote. It is no surprise that 18-24 year olds who are most interested in elections are the most likely to vote in them, and the 18-24 year olds who are the least interested in elections are the least likely to vote in them.

This is consistent with the previous data presented, as young adults who have strong ties to political parties are likely more invested in the results of an election than those who have weak or independent relationships to political parties.

Figure 9: (VCF 0616) Those who don't care about an election outcome shouldn't vote



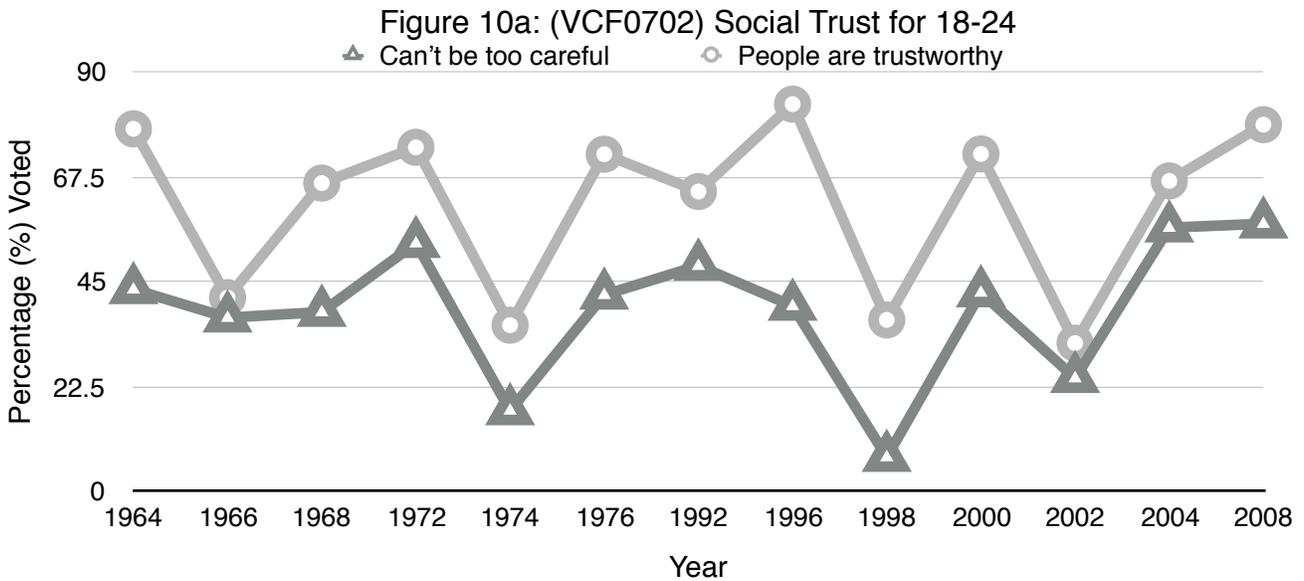
Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Figure 9 provides a possible explanation for why this lack of interest and lack of voting are related and occurring. When asked whether individuals who don't care about an election should stop voting, 18-24 year olds consistently agreed compared to older generations who were given the same statement (Figure 3), also making them the only age group that were consistently more likely to agree than disagree. When looking at only 18-24 year olds and only those who voted, respondents who agreed "those who don't care about an election outcome shouldn't vote" were consistently less likely to vote in elections. Combined with an increasing rate of disinterest in elections (Figure 8), this may mean more young adults choosing not to vote simply because they do not care who wins.

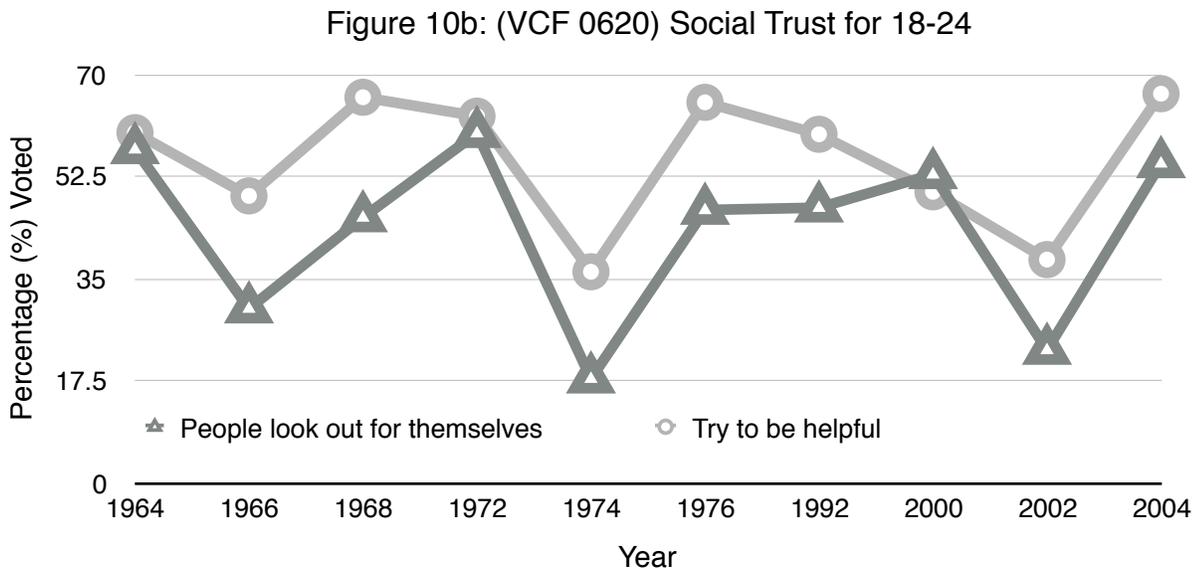
This confirms the trend of apathetic voters' lack of traditional participation that was reported in previous literature (Teixeria 1992). If an increasing amount of individuals do not care

bout the results of an election, there is less motivation for young adults to go through the apparently time-consuming process of registering and voting in their first election.

Attitudinal questions asked by the ANES may provide reasons for why individuals do not care about the election, or why they do not feel they have a stake in the results as Coleman (2004) and Plutzer (2002) have previously reported. While the ANES does not ask many questions about respondents' personality traits, there are some attitudinal questions that should help understand why young adults are making the decision not to vote in elections. As shown in Figure 5, young adults are consistently less likely to trust citizens and the world around them. Looking at these social trust questions and comparing these attitudes for 18-24 who participate and those who do not may provide some explanation to whether social trust and general attitudes have any implication in politics for young adults.



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.



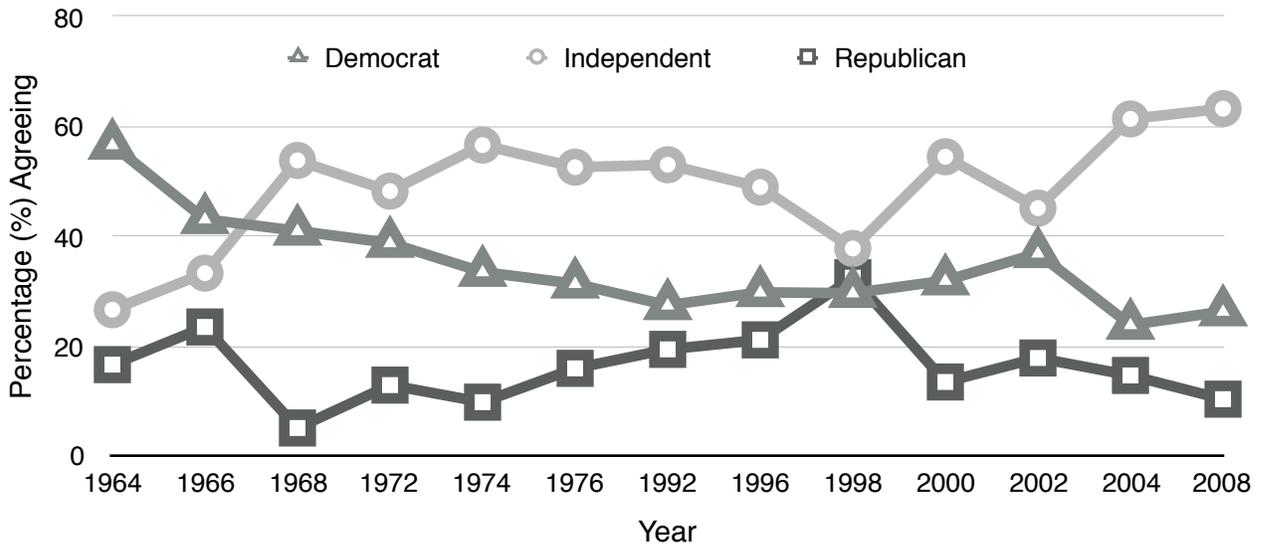
Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

When taking social trust questions that were given in the ANES and correlating it with the likelihood that an 18-24 year old votes in an election, there appears to be a relationship between a lack of trust and a lack of voting. Figure 10a and Figure 10b show two different social trust questions asked of 18-24 year olds. Figure 10a shows a question where young adults were

asked whether people were trustworthy. The 18-24 year olds who believed people were untrustworthy and answered “can’t be too careful” were less likely to vote in almost all elections, some with significant differences between groups. Figure 10b shows a question where young adults were asked whether people were selfish. The 18-24 year olds who believed people were selfish and answered “people look out for themselves” were also less likely to vote in almost every election.

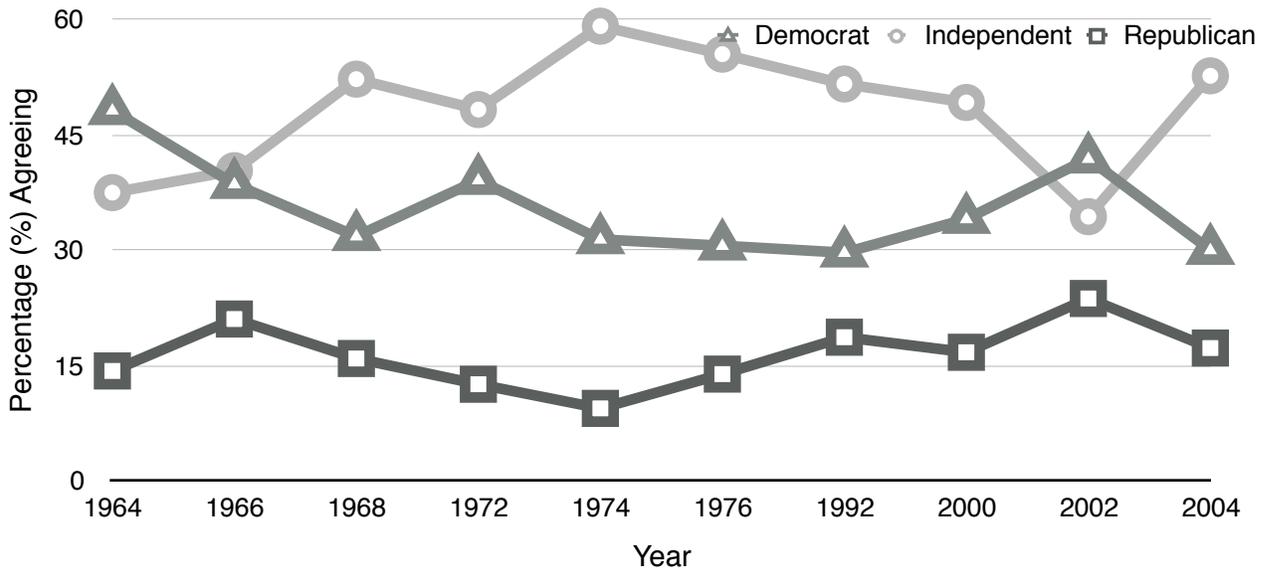
These figures support the idea that voting is related to a young adult’s personality traits and general attitudinal beliefs. Young adults who have a more pessimistic view of the world around them are significantly less likely to vote in elections, even though they are not necessarily pessimistic about the government and politics (Figure 4). Figure 10a and Figure 10b also support the idea that 18-24 year olds voting in their first elections may be under-informed about government and political parties, and instead will use a low-involvement decision-making process that can be largely affected by their personalities and generalized outlook on the world.

Figure 11a: (VCF0702) Social Trust “you can’t be too careful with people”



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Figure 11b: (VCF0620) Social Trust “people only look out for themselves”



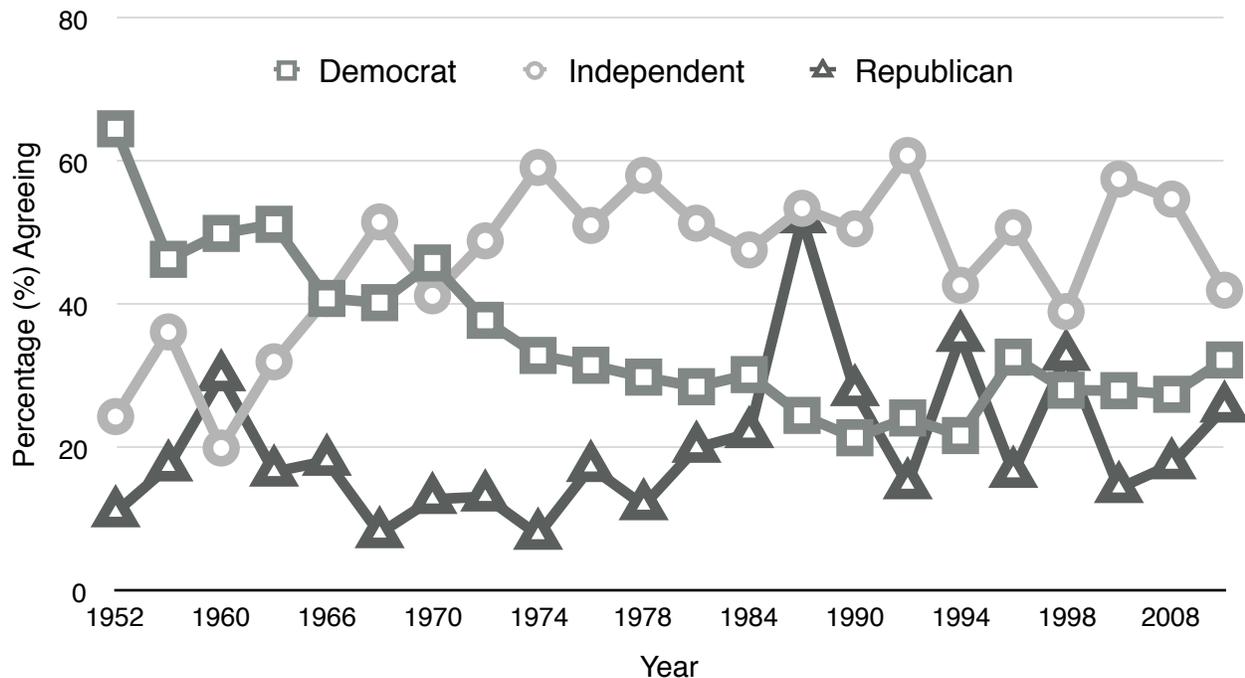
Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

If young adults with low social trust are skeptical of voting in elections, it would follow that they are just as skeptical of joining a political party if they have a pessimistic world view.

Given the same social trust questions as before (Figure 10), individuals with low levels of social trust were less likely to affiliate as Democrat or Republican. Figure 11a shows when young adults were asked whether people could be trusted, and respondents who answered “you can’t be too careful with people” were consistently more likely to affiliate as independent. When asked whether people are selfish, 18-24 year olds who answered “people only look out for themselves” were also consistently more likely to report being independent.

This would first indicate that those with low levels of social trust who are less likely to vote are also less likely to join any particular political party. Consequently, those with low social trust and a negative outlook of people around them therefore make up a sect of young adults who are more consistently withdrawn from politics, at least in terms of consistent refusal to vote and join either of the two major political parties.

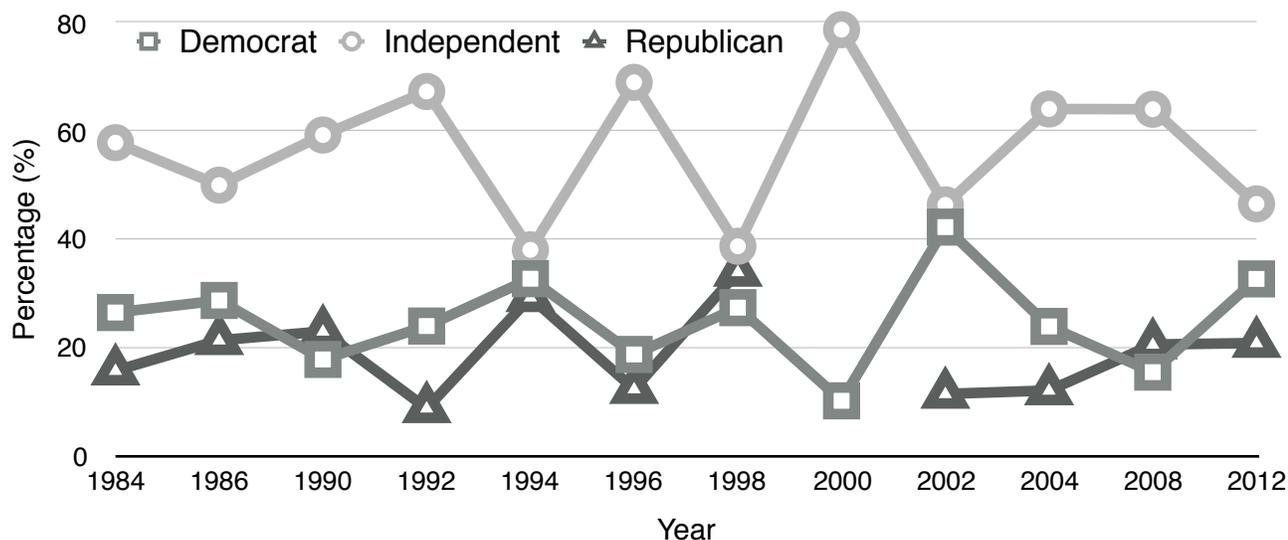
Figure 12: (VCF0614) Politics and government are too complicated



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

The ANES data may also indicate that young adults with low self-confidence and minimal knowledge about government and politics may also be less likely to join a political party. Figure 12 shows that young adults who believe that government and politics are too complicated are much more likely to report being independent. This would make sense, if young adults are confused by politics they may not feel confident enough to align with a party on issues they may not fully understand. Believing politics and government are too complicated may be another implication of young adults tendency towards a negative world outlook, as well as a lack of motivation to solve any questions they have about politics and government.

Figure 13: (VCF0733) Discuss politics “none” or “never”



Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Another question from the ANES that may indicate a lack of confidence and a lack of caring about politics is shown in Figure 13. Young adults were much less likely to identify with a political party if they did not discuss politics at all with their friends or family. This can be related with the lack of knowledge about politics, but could also indicate that young adults who do not feel comfortable discussing politics are more likely to withdraw from either political party.

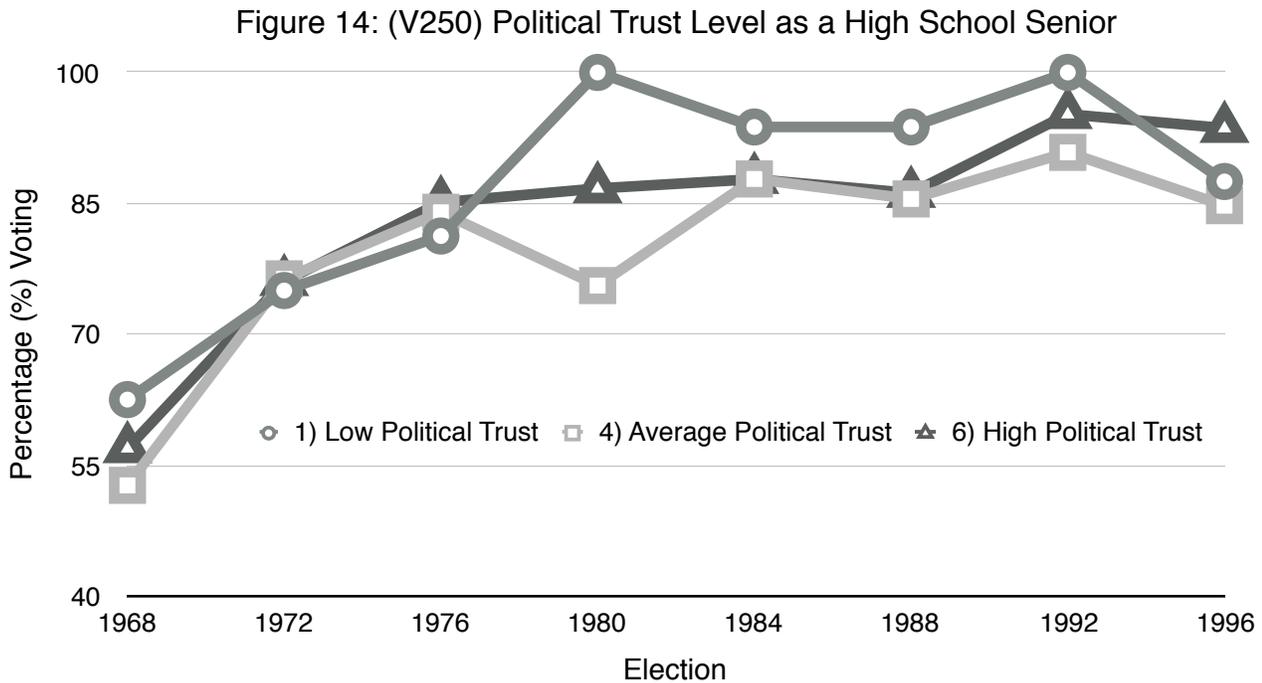
Figure 14 would support the research done by Lewis-Beck (2008) who reported that individuals were more likely to join the same political parties as their families and friends. If young adults are not discussing politics with those around them, it would make sense they are more likely to adopt an independent stance because their opinion has not been pushed towards Democratic or Republican by those around them.

The ANES data have shown long-standing trends of differences between 18-24 who turnout to vote and join political parties, and those who do not. From Data II, results have shown that young adults are becoming increasingly more likely to identify as independent, and those identifying “independent or apolitical” are the least likely to vote in elections. From the few attitudinal questions that were asked during the ANES, there is a relationship between low levels of social trust and low levels of traditional participation via voting or the joining of a political party.

Other questions asked during the ANES such as believing government is too complicated and levels of discussion with friends and family would indicate that a pessimistic world outlook is just the beginning of personality traits that may affect a young adults’ likelihood to participate traditionally in politics.

Data III: Young Adults Compared to Themselves Over Time

The Youth-Parent Socialization Survey asks far more personal questions, as the purpose of the study is to follow voting and partisanship through various life cycles. The YPSS allows the evaluation of major life cycle changes: graduating high school, graduating college or finding a full-time job, marriage, and many other potential changes an individual may face between the ages of 18 and 50. To see the relationship between attitudes, personalities, and voting, personality and attitudinal questions asked in Wave I of the survey when the respondents are seniors in high school are correlated with voting patterns in future waves.



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

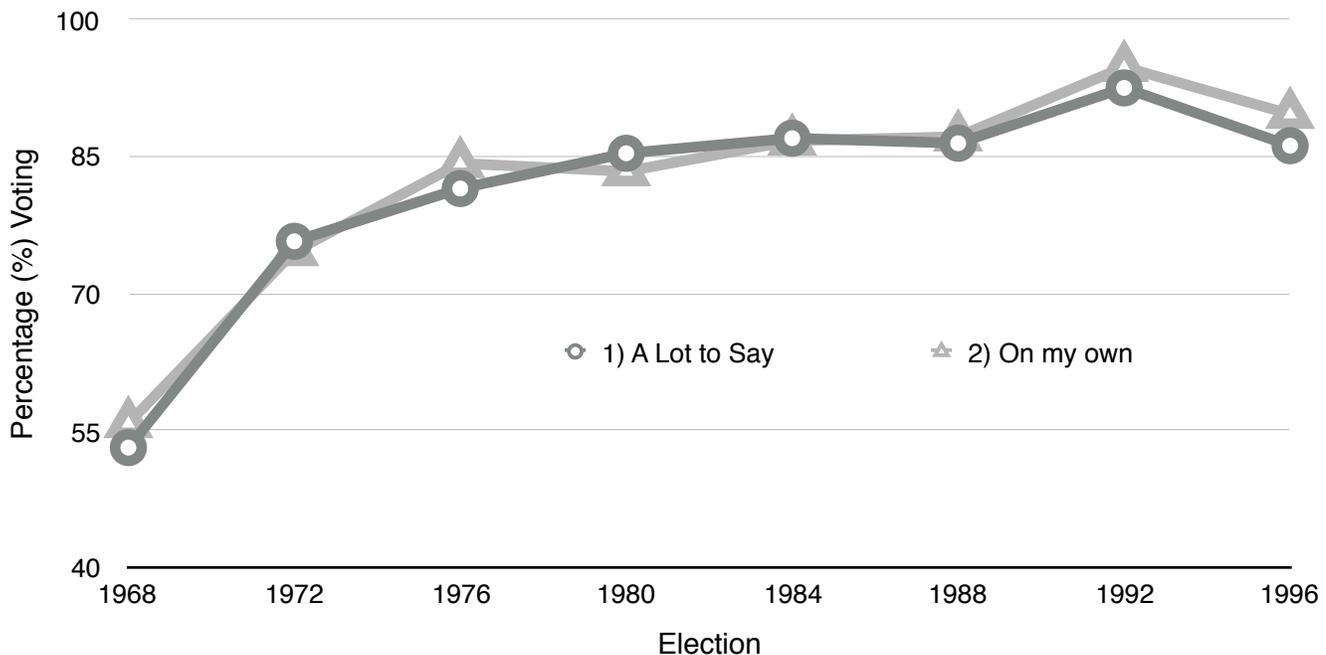
Wolf (2009) wrote that one of the biggest factors why young adults do not participate in elections is because they have low levels of political trust, and this creates a pattern of non-voting into adulthood. The results of the YPSS would suggest this is not true, and in fact confirm

the same findings from the ANES (Figure 4) that political trust is not a major determinant of the likelihood someone will vote in an election. Figure 14 shows that the amount of political trust as a young adult in high school does not necessarily affect future voting levels. Using three options from the survey given high school seniors, those who answered they had “low political trust” voted more in national elections than those who reported having average or high political trust.

Figure 14 can have different reasons for not supporting common literature that high levels of political trust equal high levels of political participation. The likely reason may be that high school seniors do not have much experience with government in politics, making their levels of trust in government hardly a persistent opinion. This would mean that the level of political trust when you are younger is either not a stable attitude, or it does not have any effect on whether an individual decides to vote or not in an election.

If political trust is not a consistent and strong determinant of an individual's likelihood to vote, there must be other beliefs or personality traits that drive an individual to register and vote in an election.

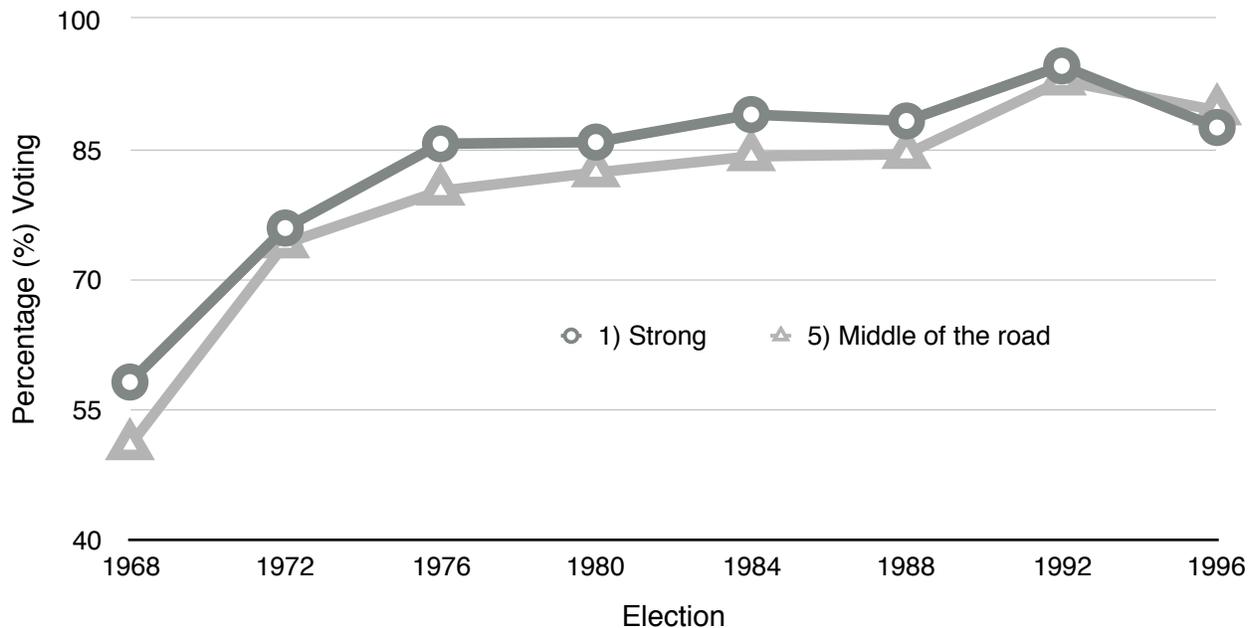
Figure 15: (V123) Does your family have a lot to say about your life, or are you pretty much on your own?



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Other literature would suggest that if it is not political trust that pushes an individual to participate, it is parental influence. Bhatti & Hansen (2012) reported that young adults' who are close with their parents tend to vote more, because of their parents' strong voting habits to influence them. Despite this previous research, Figure 15 suggests that the level of involvement in one's family is not a determinant of future voting patterns. When high school seniors were asked about their family, both those who answered that their parents had "a lot to say" about their lives and those that said they are "on their own" have similar voting patterns into adulthood. This does not corroborate previous literature, where we would likely see more voting in the future for individuals who had more involved parents.

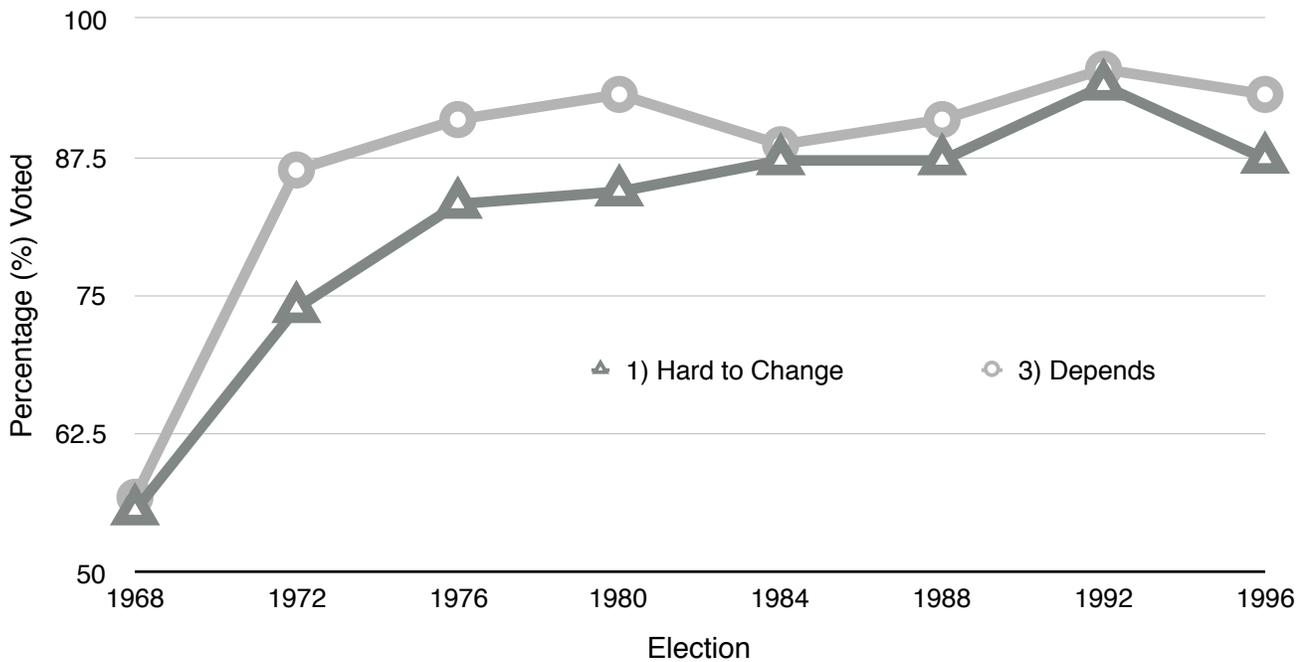
Figure 16: (V151) Do you have strong opinions?



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Once the Youth-Parent Socialization Study begins to look at the personalities of the respondents, we start to see slight trends in whether people are more likely to vote. Figure 16 shows when asked about the strength of their opinions - not related to politics - high school seniors who reported having strong opinions were more likely to vote in 1968, the first election they were eligible to. It makes sense that those with stronger opinions would want to have more of a say in government than those who were more neutral and chose the “middle of the road” option when originally surveyed, but there is not quite a drastic difference between the age groups which may suggest that opinions are not a large factor when deciding whether to vote or not. Those who had strong opinions in high school voted at slightly higher rates through the 30 years of elections the YPSS covered, although not at drastically higher rates as one would expect.

Figure 17: (V152) Is your mind hard to change?



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

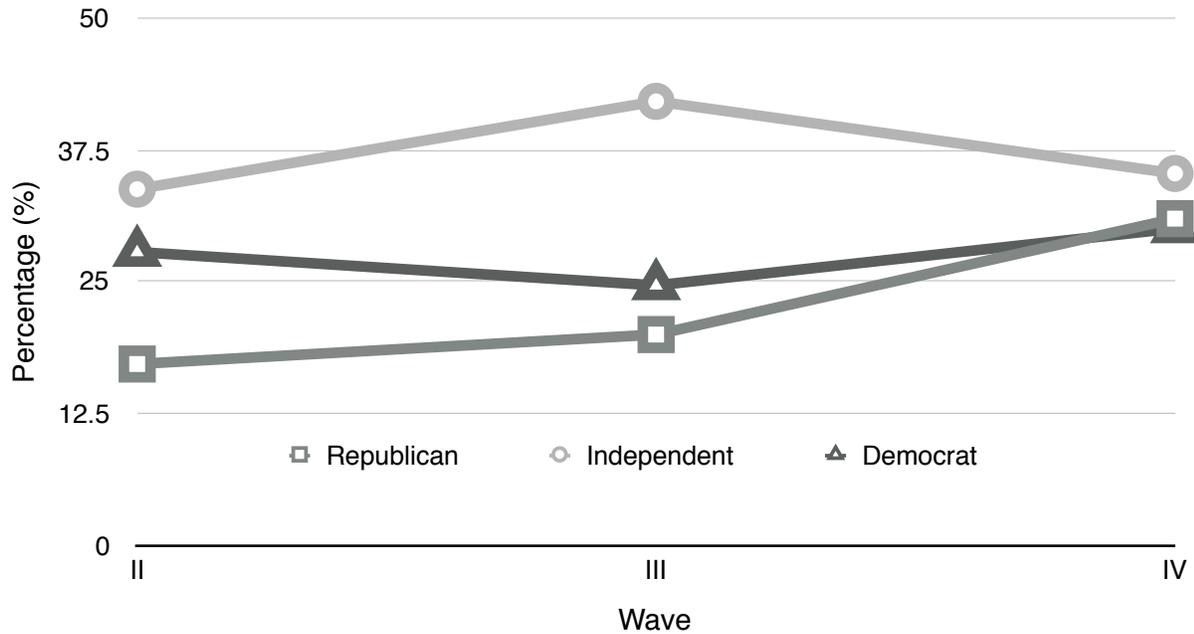
Along with whether individuals have strong opinions, we also see more frequent voting for individuals who are more open-minded. Figure 17 shows that when asked whether their minds were hard to change, high school seniors who answered “hard to change” voted less in every election they were asked about, compared to those who answered “depends.” This difference is most apparent in the earlier elections of the survey, until the voting rates become more similar.

The similarity of voting in Figure 16 and 17 may suggest that an individual's opinions do not largely affect their decision to vote as a young adult and beyond. If high schoolers began voting because they had strong opinions related to a party position or candidate, one would expect drastically higher voting records for both individuals with strong opinions and individuals whose minds are hard to change. These figures may support Winchester et al. (2014) who

reported that young adults have a low-involvement form of decision making when deciding to vote, and therefore do not seek out political information to form opinions. If the decision to vote is not based on having strong political opinions, young adults must use passive cues when deciding whether to vote in elections.

We could also find some support for Killian's (2007) research in Figure 16 and 17, who reported that individuals who are faced with information inconsistent to their party beliefs will disassociate from politics all together. If those with strong opinions or who's minds are hard to change vote at similar levels to those with weak opinions whose minds are easier to change, it may be because the "strong opinion" individuals withdrew from politics to avoid switching parties after gaining new information.

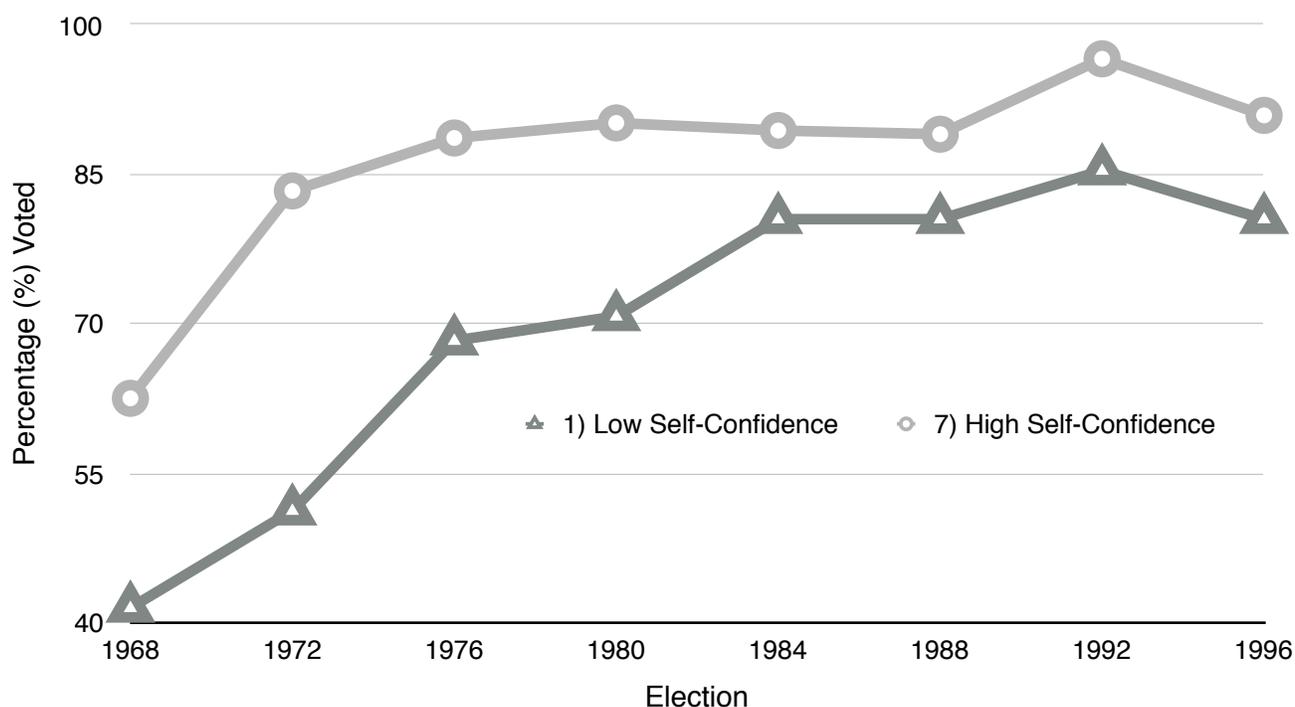
Figure 18: (V151) “Strong Opinions” in High School



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Figure 18 would support the idea that respondents who reported that their minds were hard to change likely withdrew from politics and therefore voted at lower levels than high school seniors who answered “depends.” When comparing those who answered that they had strong opinions in high school and their party identification in future waves of the YPSS, we just see individuals strengthening their partisan alignment - indicated by both Democrat and Republican levels rising while Independent is lowered. This likely means that individuals are not switching from Republican to Democrat or vice versa, simply strengthening pre-existing partisan attitudes. The large percentage of “strong opinion” respondent’s who report being independent may also provide some proof for Killian’s (2007) theory that those with strong opinions disassociate from parties if faced with inconsistent information.

Figure 19: (V248) Self-Confidence Index



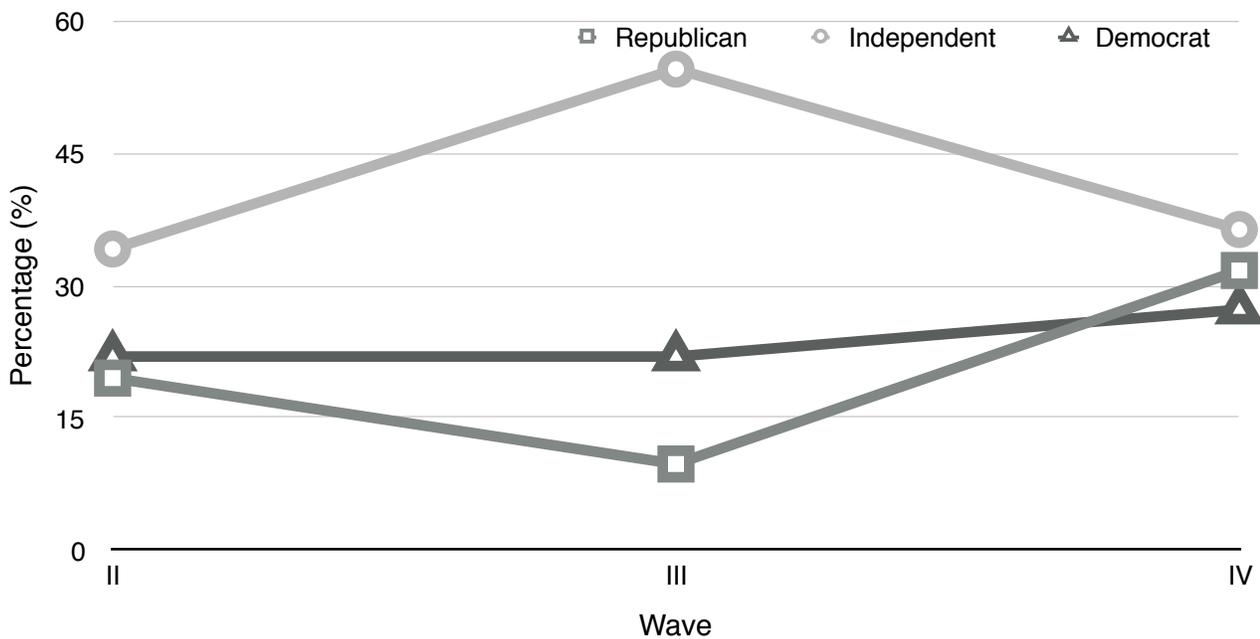
Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Perhaps the greatest attitudinal indicator of whether an individual votes in future elections is their self-confidence in high school. Figure 19 shows that when asked to rate their self-confidence during the YPSS, those who had answered “high self-confidence” as seniors in high school were consistently and dramatically more likely to vote in future elections, even into 1996. The difference is largest during the first couple elections as an eligible voter, where those who reported having low self-confidence were much less likely to vote.

This trend is likely because those with higher self-confidence are more confident that they will be able to successfully vote in their first election. As young adults voting in their first election there are many costs, and those with higher self-confidence are much more likely to think that they can easily face the costs in order to receive the benefits of voting. This is an

important trait in determining future voting patterns, especially when considering previous research. Plutzer (2002) wrote that voting in the first election is important because it creates the habit of voting, and whether one votes in the previous election is the greatest determinant of whether they will vote in future elections. If those have are low self-confidence in high school do not vote in their first elections, this explains why this pattern persists so prominently into adulthood.

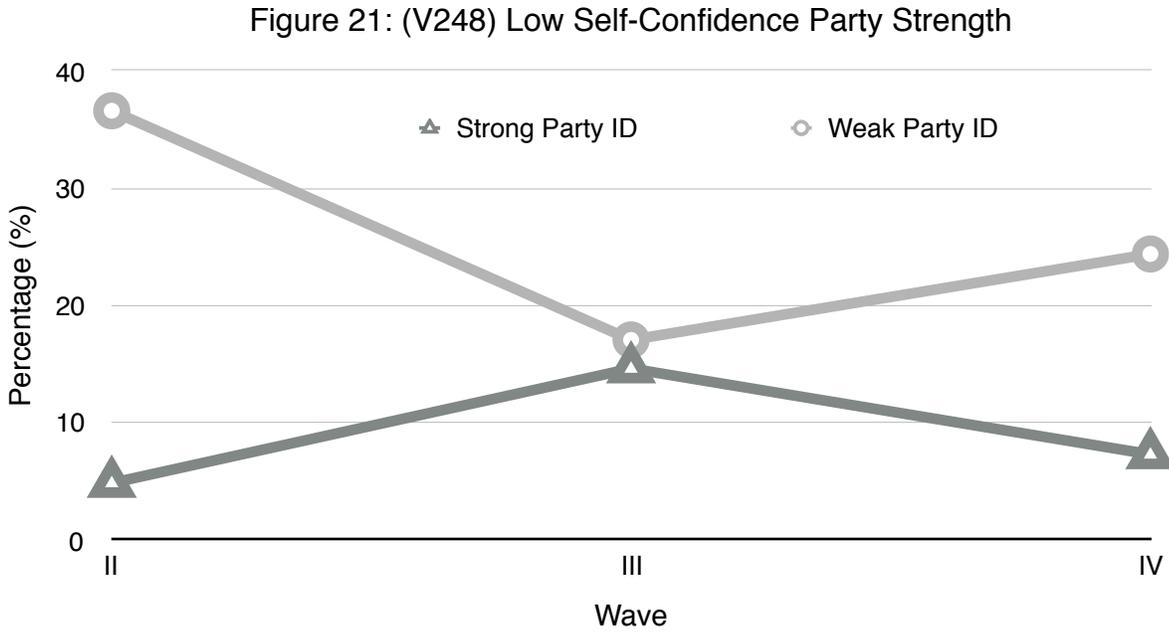
Figure 20: (V248) Respondents with “Low” Self-Confidence



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

A similar pattern appears in Figure 20 for those with low-self confidence and their strength of partisanship. Those who answered that they had low self-confidence in the first wave of the YPSS were much less likely to show a strong party identification in the later surveys given out as they aged. If young adults with low self-confidence are not sure they can register and vote,

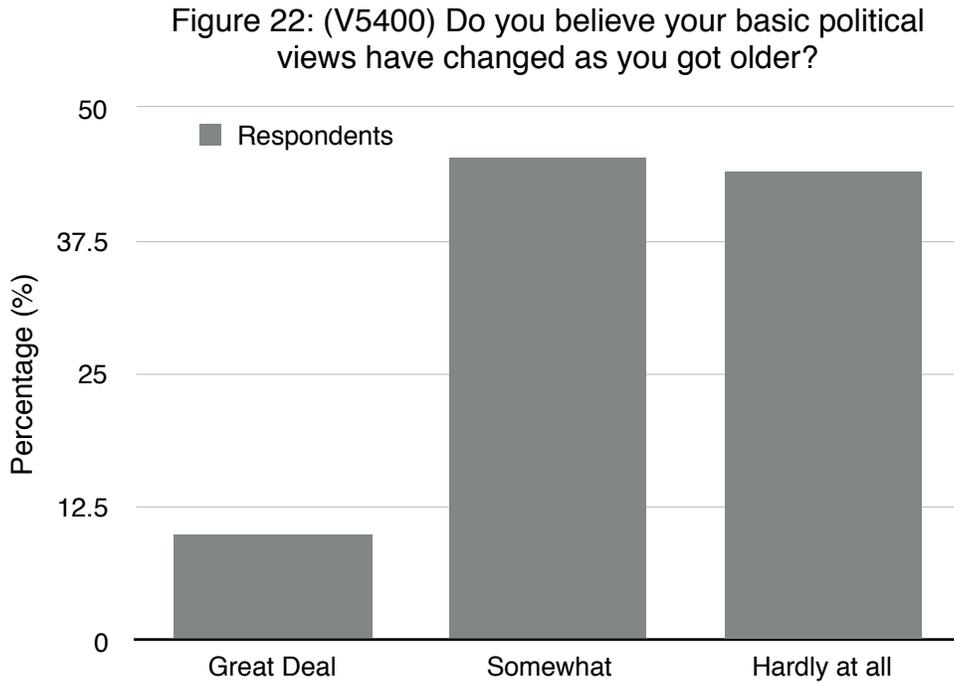
it would follow that they would likely not be able to confidently identify with a certain political party.



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Of young adults with low self-confidence who are able to join a political party, Figure 21 shows that they are much less likely to have a strong party identification. Those with low-self confidence who affiliate with a certain political party are much more likely to have a weak attachment, which probably explains why those with low self-confidence are less likely to vote. If respondents do not have a strong attachment to a party, they are less likely to have a stake in the election, and therefore less likely to vote in the election.

If party identification and the likelihood of voting is determined by personality traits such as confidence, social trust, and strength of opinions, it is even more important to understand whether the partisan leaning chosen as a young adult persists into adulthood.

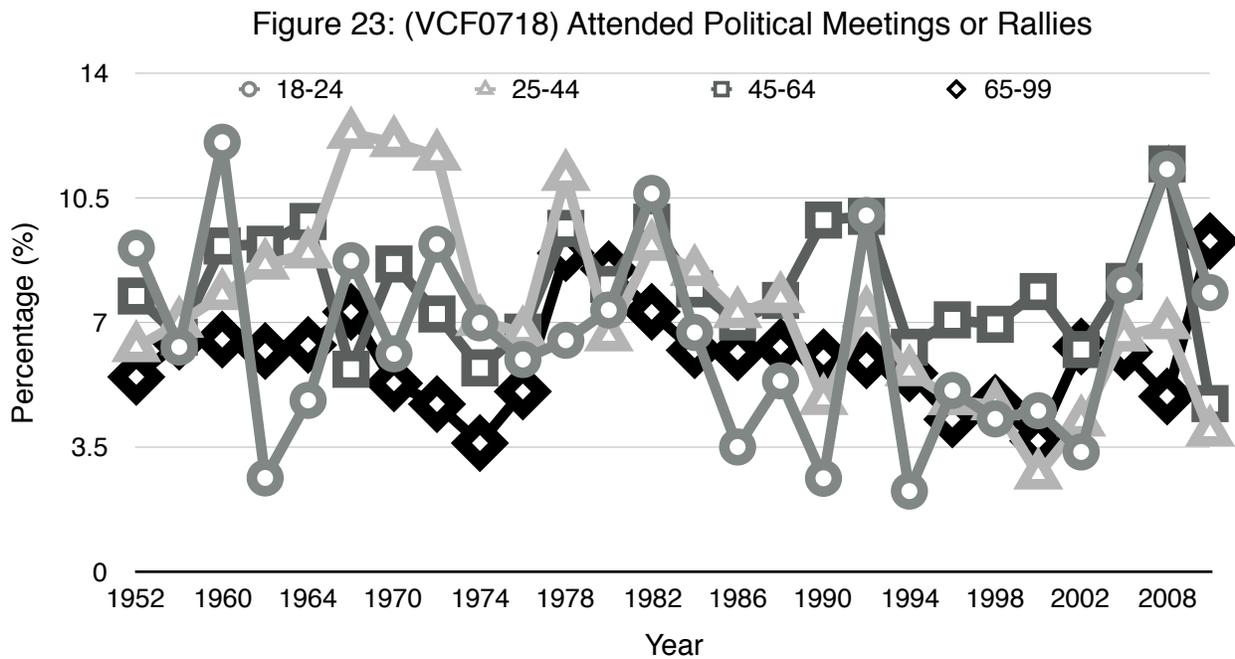


Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Figure 22 shows a question asked during Wave IV of the YPSS: whether the respondent feels that their political views have changed over the course of the waves. Supporting literature (Campbell et al. 1960), a very small percentage of those surveyed answered that their views changed “a great deal.” This likely means that respondents rarely switched parties completely from Republican to Democrat, and instead strengthened or weakened their pre-existing opinions that were formed as young adults.

Data IV: Non-Traditional Participation

Previous literature has reported that although young adults do not participate frequently in traditional politics such as voting or joining a political party, non-traditional forms of participation are gaining popularity for young adults more than other generations (Niemi and Klingler 2012). These explanations claim that the recent and rapid decline in traditional participation is accompanied by a steep rise in non-traditional politics such as online discussion and informal meetings.

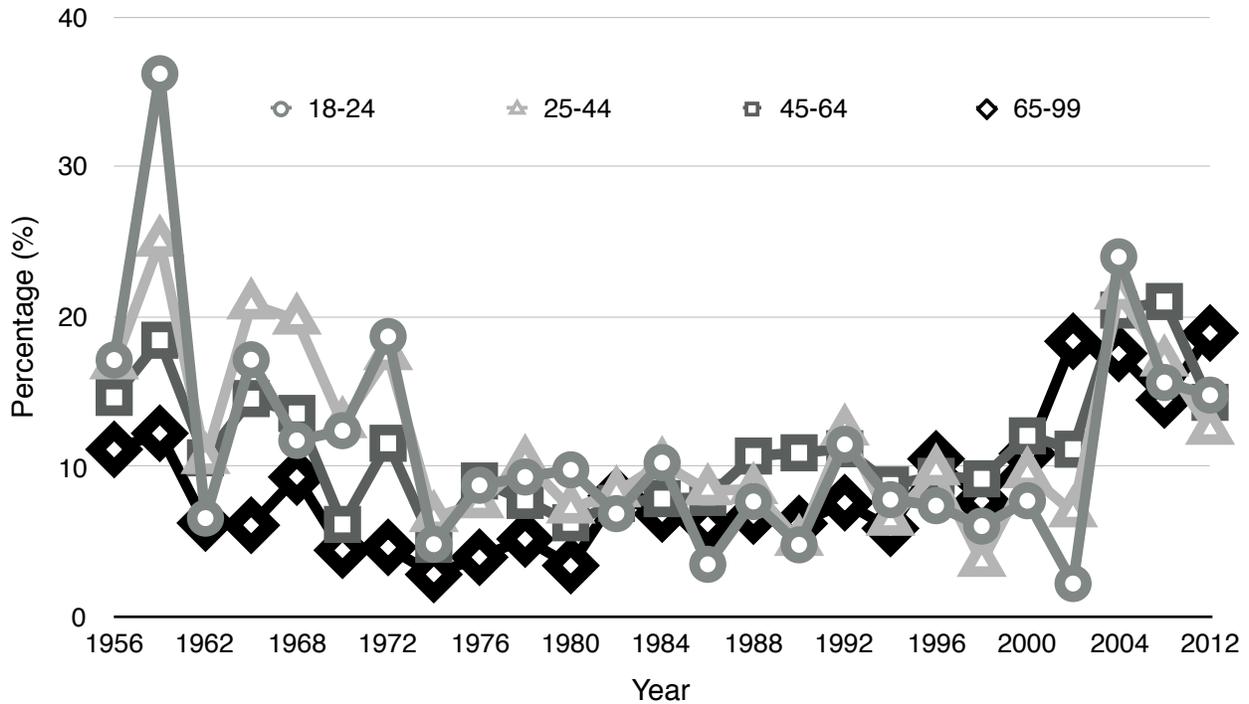


Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

The ANES data in Figure 23 depicts no perceptible rise over time for 18-24 year olds non-traditional political participation in the form of attending political meetings or rallies. Compared to older generations, young adults were no more or less likely to attend a meeting or rally, and the likelihood of attending such gatherings fluctuated frequently for all generations.

This would suggest that the theory reported by Niemi and Klingler (2012) that traditional participation is being replaced with non-traditional participation is not necessarily true, at least in terms of political gatherings for young adults ages 18-24.

Figure 24: (VCF0720) Displayed Candidate Button or Sticker During Campaign



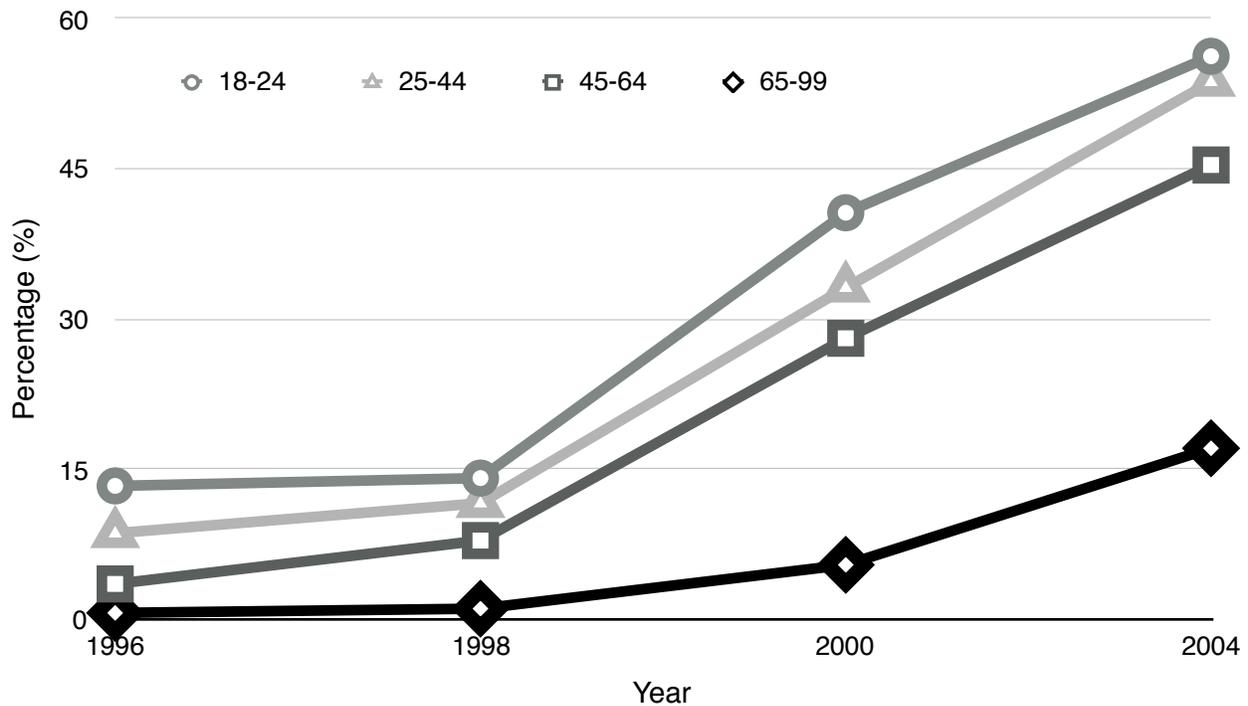
Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Figure 24 looks at an even more informal form of traditional participation, wearing a candidate button or sticker during an election season. Once again, young adults 18-24 were no more or less likely to participate in this non-traditional form of politics, and consistently wore buttons or stickers at similar levels than other generations. If young adults are still interested in politics but do not have the motivation to go out and vote, one would think that wearing a button or sticker would be the easiest and impermanent way to express that, but 18-24 are not participating in this way.

The interesting piece about both Figure 23 and 24 is not necessarily that young adults are not participating at higher levels in these non-traditional forms, but that there is no large difference between generations. With young adults much less likely to vote and join a political party, it would follow that young adults would be unlikely to attend a campaign rally or wear a political sticker - considering said rallies and stickers usually encourage voting or supporting a party. Despite their low voting rates and low partisanship compared to other age cohorts, young adults continue to attend campaign meetings and wear tickets at comparable levels to other generations. This may suggest that there is a portion of the young adult population who do not vote or join parties, but continue to support candidates or issues, which could indicate that these respondents could begin voting eventually. On the other hand, this can mean that older generations who vote are not interested in these informal ways to participate, while many young adults who vote are.

When considering whether the ANES supports previous literature, Figure 23 and 23 may suggest that young adults are more interested in non-traditional participation than older generations, despite their comparable levels when responding to whether they attend meetings or wear campaign stickers and buttons.

Figure 25: (VCF0745) Read Election Information on the Internet

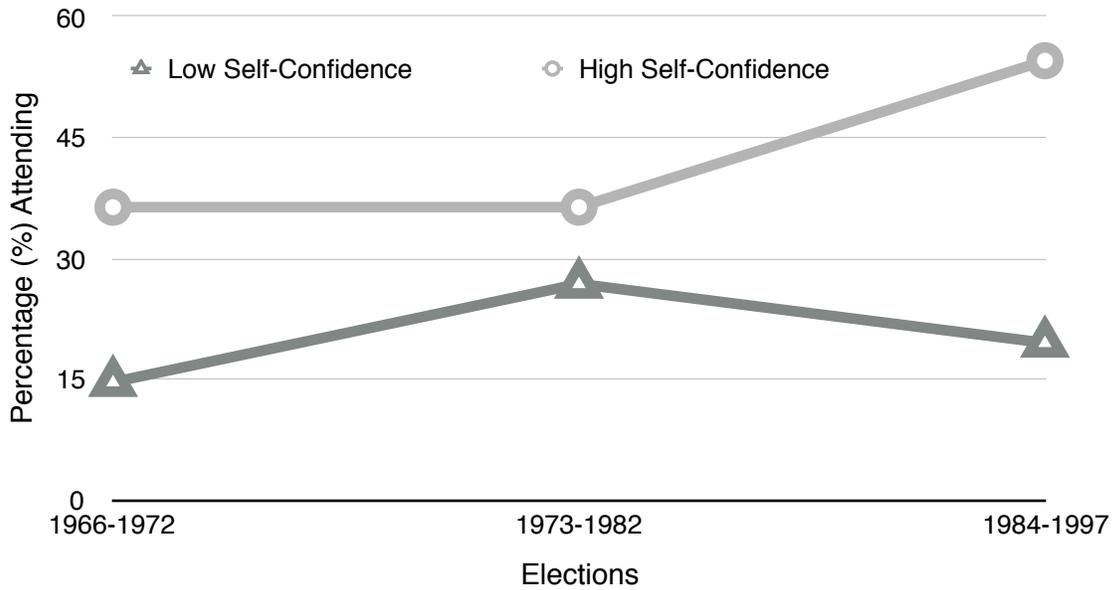


Source: The American National Election Studies (www.electionstudies.org) TIME SERIES CUMULATIVE DATA FILE [dataset]. Stanford University and the University of Michigan [producers and distributors], 2015.

Other research has suggested that young adults tendency towards non-traditional participation is almost entirely occurring online. With the rise of the Internet, the ANES began asking Internet-related questions in 1996 but have not asked the question since 2004; Figure 25 shows that young adults 18-24 were more likely than any other generation to read election information on the Internet, though their levels are comparable to middle-aged generations. These data are also important when taking into account young adults low voting and party levels. Figure 25 suggests that although young adults do not participate in politics in a traditional way, they still continue to read election information online. This suggests that 18-24 year olds are not completely withdrawn from politics, and still seek out information related to elections as often - if not more - than other generations.

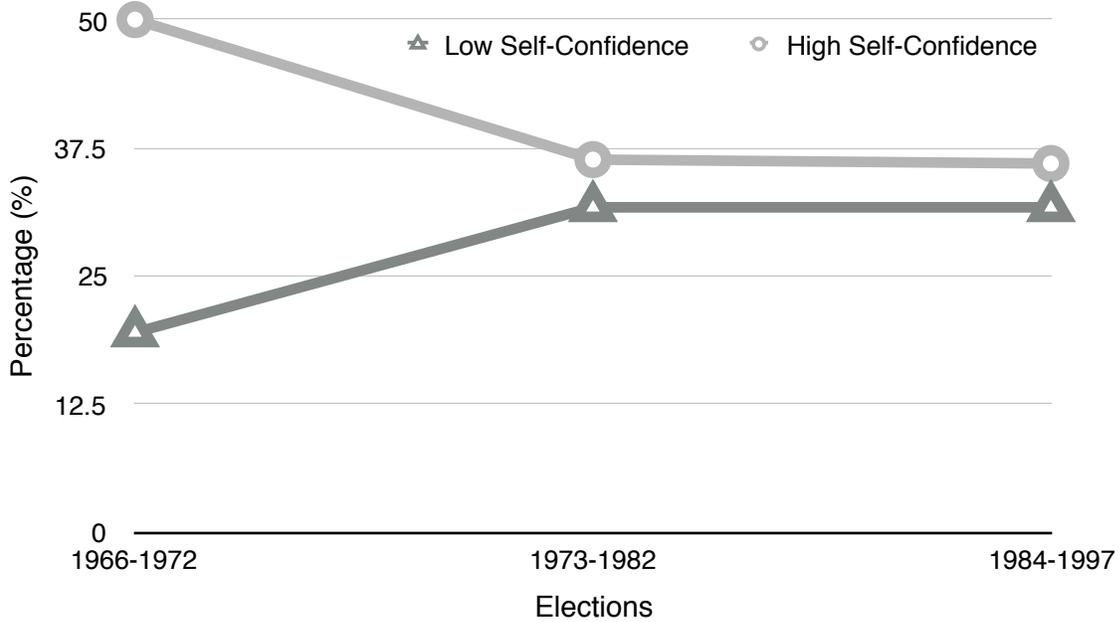
This may indicate different trends for young adults. First, the high rate of reading election information online could simply be a side effect of young adults being on the Internet frequently, as social media makes political information hard to avoid entirely. On the other hand, Figure 25 could be indicative that young adults are not seeing anything online that would motivate them to participate in a traditional manner. If almost 60% of 18-24 year olds are reading political information but continue not to vote, this would mean that the election information they are reading does not encourage them to vote or join a political party. The reading of political information paired with a persistent refusal to vote or join a political party could be yet another indicator of an attitudinal interference for young adults. Perhaps young adults who have low social trust and a negative world outlook are paying attention to the information which supports this negative view. This would support decision-making research done by Wolak (2009) which reports that young adults seek out information that supports their pre-existing beliefs. If the majority of young adults have a negative world outlook, believe politics are too complicated, or have low social trust, this may be the only election information they retain on the Internet so their non-participation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Figure 26: (V5855) Attending Political Rallies



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Figure 27: (V5859) Wore A Button or Sticker

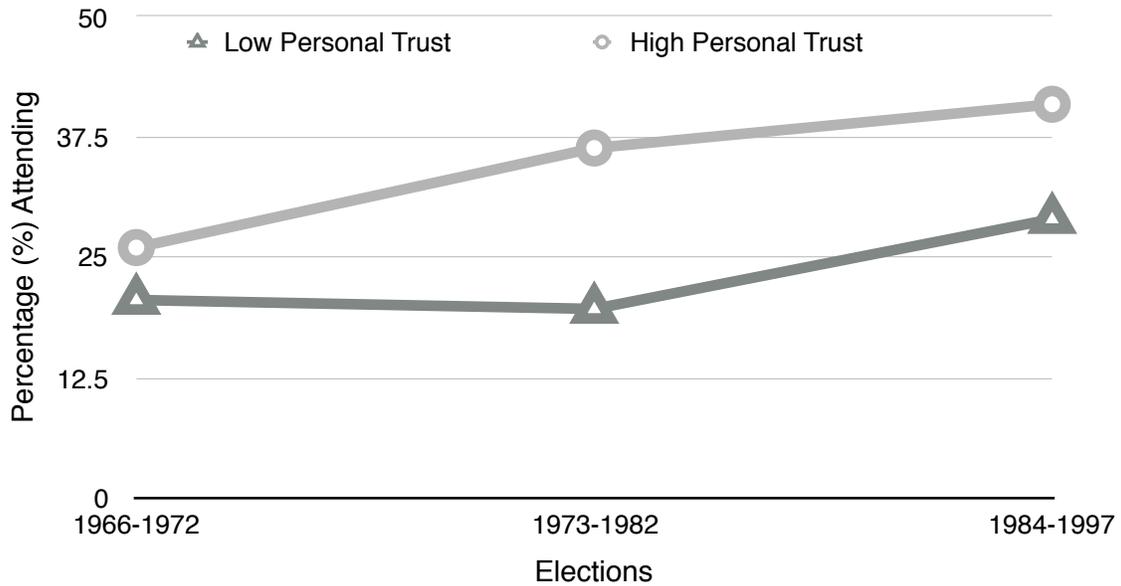


Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

The YPSS data continues to show that certain personality traits act as a mediating factor between a young adults likelihood to participate in a non-traditional way, as well as traditional. Figure 26 shows that individuals who reported having low self-confidence in high school were much less likely to attend a political rally than those with high levels of self-confidence. This would likely be because getting information about a rally and getting themselves there to attend it requires some level of confidence and comfortableness with new environments. For something that requires almost no effort, it is a bit more surprising to see a relationship between wearing a sticker and self confidence. Figure 27 shows that individuals with low self-confidence in high school were less likely to wear a campaign button or sticker during an election season, and those with high self-confidence were more likely to participate in this non-traditional political participation. The difference between these groups and whether they wore a sticker is most apparent during the first elections as eligible voters. This likely means that individuals with low self-confidence may not feel comfortable outwardly supporting a candidate or party by wearing a sticker, while those with high self-confidence are willing to publicly share their opinions.

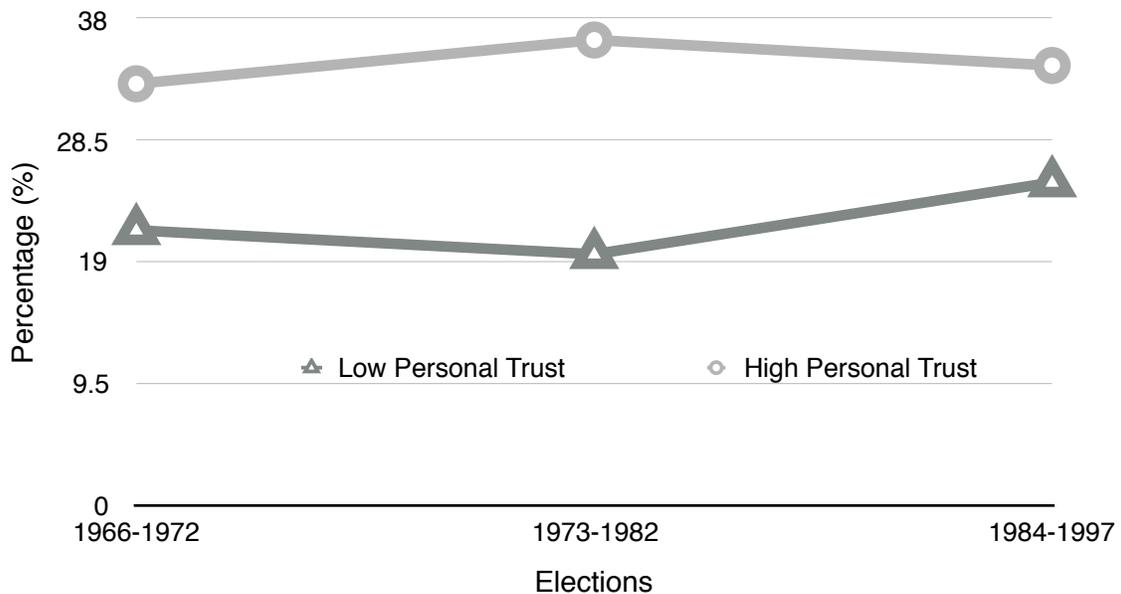
Figure 26 and 27 would indicate that attitudinal traits do not only affect traditional forms of political participation, but non-traditional as well. These figures also suggest that the personality trait of self-confidence is an important trait that persists into adulthood. Respondents who had low self-confidence as a senior in high school in 1965 continued to be unlikely to attend a rally or wear a sticker as far as the election of 1996.

Figure 28: (V5855) Attending Political Rallies



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

(V5859) Wore A Button or Sticker



Source: Jennings, M. Kent, Gregory B. Markus, Richard G. Niemi, and Laura Stoker. Youth-Parent Socialization Panel Study, 1965-1997: Four Waves Combined. ICPSR04037-v1. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2005-11-04.

Personal trust, another indicator of whether young adults were likely to vote or join a political party, also appears to be an indicator for non-traditional participation. Figure 28 shows that individuals who had low levels of personal trust in high school were less likely attend a political rally than those who reported having high levels of personal trust. Figure 29 shows a similar trend, respondents who had low personal trust as a high school senior were less likely to wear a button or sticker supporting a party or candidate. If personal trust does indeed affect political trust, the same factors that were responsible for the lack of voting and partisanship may also be the reason why young adults do not attend rallies or wear campaign stickers. If 18-24 year olds do not trust politicians the same way they do not trust others around them, then they are probably not likely to attend a rally or wear paraphernalia supporting candidates or parties.

According to the ANES, young adults do seem to show more interest in non-traditional participation than what one would expect based of their traditional participation patterns. Although 18-24 participate non-traditionally at comparable levels to older generations, non-traditional participation is perhaps the only form of activity where young adults are involved at similar rates as older age cohorts. The YPSS data is similarly important because it shows that the same personality traits affect non-traditional participation as they do for traditional participation, far into adulthood.

The data from the American National Election Studies confirmed multiple trends reported in previous literature. There is no doubt that young adults are continually the least involved sect of voters compared to older generations, and an increasing amount of young adults do not associate with either political party. Compared to older generations, young adults are more likely to report being independent or apolitical. The young adults who do decide to associate with a political party rarely have a strong attachment to said party, and instead are likely to answer that they are a “weak” or “leaning” partisan. This makes those aged 18-24 less likely to participate in traditional politics than any other group of voters. The reasons for this have varied in previous literature, but there are trends in non-participating young adults that would suggest personality and attitudinal factors play a large role in the decision to participate traditionally in politics.

Young adults do not have much real-world experience. By the age of 18, most young adults have still not moved out of their parents homes, have only been exposed to ideas and people in the place they grew up in, and have no idea what their future will truly hold. Without young adults knowing their future socio-economic status, social class, or where they will live, it seems unlikely that a young adult will be able to confidently cast a vote or join a political party. This is an interesting dilemma for political parties, who are attempting to sway young voters to their side by appealing to certain issues that young adults likely to not have strong opinions on so far because of this lack of life experience. Because those aged 18-24 do not know what their future will hold or the experience to make an educated vote decision, their decision-making process must be low-involvement.

Previous authors have assumed that this lack of life experience would result in young adults mimicking the voting patterns and partisanship of their parents and peers, in lieu of their

own (Lewis-Beck 2008). The results found here agree with the foundation of this argument, which is that young adults do not have much experience to make a decision, and therefore substitute something else. Social trust is likely substituted during the first decision to vote, as a placeholder until young adults are able to determine whether they trust the government and politicians. Since young adults likely do not have much experience with government officials, they instead decide whether candidates and parties can be trusted by using their general social trust.

Both the ANES and the YPSS supported the conclusion that trust in government has barely any effect on whether an individual is likely to cast a vote. Instead, a young adults' social trust and identity play a large role in their decisions when it comes to politics. Those who did not trust those around them are much less likely to vote in an election or join any political party, suggesting that a negative world view deters young adults from participating. This makes sense, as a negative world outlook would permeate all aspects of a young adults life including politics. Whether young adults mean to or not, if they do not trust those around them, they likely are not going to trust politicians either.

Self-confidence had a sizable effect on participation as well, young adults with low self-confidence were significantly less likely to participate by joining a party or voting in an election. This makes sense when considering the many costs that go into deciding to vote for the first time as a young adult. In order to vote, a young adult must figure out how to register, decide which political party to join, and get themselves to the polls to vote. Previous literature has reported that all of these things are much easier when you have friends or family encouraging you to do so (Kiousis & McDevitt 2008). If you have friends that are all registering to vote, or family that is

discussing which party to side with, the decision to participate in politics is a simple one in order to fit in with those around you. If young adults have low self-confidence, they likely would not feel comfortable discussing politics with individuals and would not have strong and steadfast opinions about parties or candidates. Therefore, the costs of voting are likely heightened for those with low self-confidence. Since those with stronger opinions and partisanship are more likely to vote (Quintelier 2007), unconfident young adults are unlikely to have these strong ties and feel determined to have their voice heard in an election.

The Youth Parent Socialization Survey supported the view that social trust and self-confidence and their effect on participation remains persistent into adulthood. Regardless of whether an individual goes through life cycle changes or their personality evolves, an individual's decision to participate or not as a senior in high school seems to be a nearly permanent decision. For those who are not confident or not trustworthy in high school, the trends of non-participation or non-partisanship remained well into adulthood. This is most likely because, like other activities, voting is a habit (Plutzer 2008), and if 18-24 year olds are not voting they are not forming a habit. If a young adult does not vote in their first election, it becomes increasingly hard to motivate themselves to vote in future elections, and this is especially true if they do not belong to a political party that is encouraging participation.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The data from the American National Election Studies and the Youth Parent Socialization Study confirm that vote choice in young adults may have little to do with issues, and more to do with young adults' personalities and attitudes when they are making decisions. While certain issues and candidates may encourage young adults to get involved in politics, their personalities and outlook appear to be a mediating factor in determining whether issues or candidates are effective in motivating 18-24 year olds to vote in their first elections. Young adults are becoming consistently less likely to participate in elections as the years go on with the exception of the election of 2008, which may indicate a general attitudinal trend in children and young adults today. If self-confidence and social trust are large indicators of whether individuals will vote, the lack of voting may mean a decline in confidence and trust on a national level.

A potential increase in negative world views by those aged 18-24 could be assisted by many factors that are affecting young adults specifically. The rise of the Internet and social media, and increasingly polarized news stations could be one large factor (Mitchell et al. 2014). The Internet can both help or hinder political discussions for young adults. For individuals with low self-confidence who are not sure about their stance on politics, they may see the constant arguing and negative articles on social media and simply withdraw from politics all together. The 24 hour news cycle may contribute to this as well, as young adults' world views may become even more negative after watching news outlets where parties and candidates are almost always putting each other down and arguing. This constant exposure to political information that is often negative would explain why young adults are more likely than any other generation to believe

that politics are too complicated, and to report that they do not care about the results of an election.

Another factor that may exacerbate the trend in young adults not participating would be the increasing length of the time one considers themselves a “young adult.” As mentioned earlier, young adults may not feel comfortable joining a political party or voting in an election until they have a better idea of their social and economic class in the future. This means most young adults are not strong partisans until they have issues that they can confidently pick a side on. With exceedingly high amounts of children going onto higher education such as college and grad school, young adults are taking longer to become educated, acquire jobs, and become financially independent from their parents (Cohen 2010). If individuals are 24 and still on their parents insurance, just finishing up higher education, and have not even begun to search for a career, even the highest age this thesis looked at may rarely consider themselves an “adult.” As adulthood is becoming farther away for 18-24 year olds, it would make sense that young adults have record low voting rates. In earlier decades, an a young adult may finish high school and immediately begin a career, move out on their own, and be married within the ages of 18-24, which could explain why young adults tended to vote at higher rates historically than they do now (Arnett 2001). Because young adults today rarely know what their future will hold, it would make sense that they would wait to vote or join a political party until they are more settled.

The analyses of this study have demonstrated that these personality traits and attitudinal trends have implications on young adults and their political participation. As social media and television are unavoidable in today’s society, and an increasing number of individuals need to go onto higher education in order to qualify for jobs (Bidwell 2014), these trends do not appear to

be going away anytime soon. These nationwide trends affecting young adults are potentially hazardous for democracy, as increasing numbers of young adults may never form the habit of participation that is necessary to become a consistent and confident voter. If this habit of voting is not formed by the time 18-24 year olds reach adulthood, they may not bother to go through the costs of registering and turning out to vote. This likely means that generations today will never have the historically high rates of participation that older generations have.

Elections like the Barack Obama election of 2008 and 2012 had the ability to turn out large numbers of young adult voters who were thought to be permanently inactive from politics. These elections may prove that a positive campaign can have an effect on the negative young adult. The Obama campaigns convinced 18-24 year olds that their vote matters, used social media to their benefit, and resulted in record high participation rates for young adults. In 2008, young adults were more likely to be contacted by campaigns than older generations, which is a significant reversal of how campaigns were run in the past where candidates would assume the young adults would not vote in elections (Keeter 2008). Even more surprising, young adults were more likely to campaign on behalf of Barack Obama or attend a campaign event (Keeter 2008).

These recent elections may show a new trend forming in young adults: a push for more informal types of campaigning and informal participation, such as the new popularized idea of “grassroots” campaigning. If young adults are skeptical of the government and those around them, the new way to reach young voters may be through informal channels that young adults may be more open-minded towards. If 18-24 year olds ignore television news and are not interested in political debates or elections, reaching out to them by using young adults who are interested and encouraging them to participate may be the most effective way of increasing

young adult traditional participation. Even if young adults still do not want to vote in an election or join a political party, the wearing of a bumper sticker or the support of a candidate by a peer can encourage others to participate who generally would not.

A potential rise in non-traditional participation may become popular for young adults who are not ready to make permanent decisions while in a temporary life cycle, but it is still important that campaigns and politicians do not settle for non-traditional participation. Wearing a button or talking to a friend about a candidate is a positive political action, but it does not necessarily mean anything if it does not encourage people to go have their voices heard in government. In the American political system, the primary way for an individual's opinion to matter is by voting in an election or being put into a political party's platform. If a large amount of young adults decide not to participate but still continue to share their opinions, those ideas may be seen in party platforms, regardless of whether young adults are voting in elections. The unfortunate truth is that parties will likely not change their platforms unless they are losing potential voters, which means young adults must vote in order for their opinions to matter.

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Author's Bio

Abigail Pratico was born in Portland, Maine on March 25, 1994. Raised in Falmouth, Maine, she graduated from Falmouth High School in 2012. After an interesting year in Boston, Abigail transferred to the University of Maine in the Fall of 2013, declaring a major in political science and a minor in psychology. Abigail is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, has served as President of her sorority, as well as Vice President of the University of Maine Mock Trial Team, and has spent most summers working for political campaigns or interning for state government through the Margaret Chase Smith Government Internship Program. Upon graduation, Abigail plans to spend a year traveling before beginning law school in the Fall of 2017.