Voting at UMaine: An Empirical Study of Student Turnout Trends and Motivations

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ABSTRACT

Thomas et al. (2016) estimates that around 10 million currently enrolled college students did not vote in the 2016 presidential election. Unfortunately, this statistic is representative of a national downward trend in youth voter turnout rates where those in the youngest (and largest) voter age bracket are turning out at the lowest rate compared to any other bracket. Previous research on this phenomenon has focused on procedural and institutional barriers like registration, residency requirements, and voter ID laws to describe what physically stands between a prospective young voter and the ballot box. This research looks to study that issue from the perspective of attitudinal barriers as they play out among University of Maine (UMaine) students to produce data which will be both directly helpful to our community but also the larger body of research by answering this question: how does a student's sense of political efficacy and their perceptions of the campus political climate impact their likelihood of voting? We use original data from our survey, a multivariate model, and focus groups to develop quantitative and qualitative findings which identify the most salient motivators and determinants of likelihood to vote among UMaine students. Of all the factors we measured, the perceived campus political environment was the greatest area of concern for our students across the political spectrum. This suggests that if the university seeks to increase its student turnout rates, it needs to invest time and resources into shifting the narrative surrounding politics and political discourse on campus.
DEDICATIONS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States of America, a citizen's fundamental right to vote has never been guaranteed to all. Since the beginning of our democratic experiment in the late 1700s, certain populations of American citizens have been denied the right to vote with the first electorate being composed singularly of rich, white, male, landowners. Social movements like the Women’s Suffrage Movement of the early 1900s and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s responded to modern forms of voter oppression, demanding equal access to the right to vote. The inclusion of all voices through movements like these is now seen as a critical marker of equality and freedom in modern nations by increasing turnout and representation. The highest-ever recorded turnout in U.S. history was the election of 1876 between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democratic opponent Samuel Tilden with turnout at 82.6%, taking place just after the passage of the 15th amendment which guaranteed the right to vote to black men (Little, 2020). Throughout the early-mid 1900s turnout, rates remained high, rivaling the turnout of other developed democratic nations.

Today, the U.S. hosts one of the lowest voting rates in the developed world, with voting rates that have been trending downwards for the last several decades, particularly among younger voters (Desilver, 2020). Even as legal barriers at the federal level dropped over the decades, states have taken it upon themselves to erect new barriers between citizens and the polls in the form of poll taxes, literary tests, voter ID laws, limited poll availability, and more. According to the Brennan Center for Justice at the New York University Law School, Republican lawmakers in 43 states have introduced
more than 250 bills that would make it more difficult to vote as of February, up from about 100 in 28 states two months ago (Vasilogambros, 2021).

Since 18-year-olds were given the right to vote in 1972, there has been a persistent and increasing gap in voter turnout by age group. In 1972, only 50% of 18 to 24-year-olds voted compared to 70% of those above the age of 25; this gap persisted in 2012, with turnout levels at 41% and 65%, respectively (Holbein and Hillyus, 2016). Even in the 2016 presidential election, when turnout for those aged 18-35 years of age peaked, turnout was still only 50.8%. To compare, in 2016 to those aged 71 and older voting at a rate of nearly 20% more (Krogstad, Manuel, Lopez, 2020). If current population trends hold, Gen Z (birth year 1997-2012) is projected to comprise 10% of eligible voters by the 2024 presidential election (Cillufo and Fry, 2020). Having such a significant portion of the electorate continue to distance itself from our democratic processes endangers the future legitimacy of our democratic systems by rendering young voters’ policy preferences increasingly under-represented (Smets, 2012).

Low turnout rates among young voters are often explained by a series of common assumptions: that young people are not interested in politics; that they have low levels of political efficacy; that they are less informed about politics and how government works; that they don’t have access to the resources necessary to vote; or that they are less likely to overcome the procedural barriers related to voting (Bergan et al. 2021, McDonald, 2009). Yet, many of these assumptions are easily disproved by existing research. Public opinion polls frequently show that young people are, in fact, as interested in politics as older generations (Bergan et al. 2021). Further, though some assert that this is a problem
of political socialization, there is little evidence that youth civic education interventions that currently exist are effective at increasing turnout, regardless of associated increases in political knowledge and efficacy (Hart and Youniss, 2018).

To understand what is driving low turnout, and ways that it could be overcome, researchers have often turned towards colleges and universities. Universities present an easily accessible, sizable group of young people who, despite common assumptions about colleges as hotbeds of political activism, consistently mimic the low voting trends of their age demographic. In addition, colleges and universities present a setting in which those same scholars and researchers can be involved in efforts to increase student voter registration, education, and turnout. About half of Americans between the ages of 18-25 are enrolled in an institution of higher learning (Kiesa 2007). Accessing this population of voters at university comes with methodological benefits as well, as the institutional structures in place allow for easily controlled population studies (Bergan et al. 2021).

Bennion and Nickerson (2016) further attest to the benefits of the college campus research setting both because the classroom is a ready-made venue for communicating messages to student audiences and because university administration can give access to specific data, making matching students to a voter file much simpler.

The attention given to college campuses goes beyond research outcomes though. Higher education has been routinely called on by society to serve as a conduit for civic identity and democracy, shouldering the hope that, at college, students will develop a set of intellectual and civic skills that will instill in them an enduring commitment to our democracy (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement
In 1999, the federal government even went so far as to mandate that universities engage in certain voter registration activities in their reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Further, voting has been shown to be a habitual action that is often established at a young age, making focusing on younger people an effective way to consistently increase overall voter participation (Hart and Youniss 2018, Coppock and Green 2016; Franklin 1945; Plutzer 2002). Lastly, schools have been found to be important venues for political socialization, a necessary first step towards engagement (Aggeborn et al 2020; Neundorf & Smets, 2017).

We see the same trends and possibilities in youth voting at the University of Maine (UMaine) that play out across our nation. According to the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement’s (NSLVE) 2019 report, only 63% of students voted in the 2016 presidential election and only 39.3% voted in the 2018 midterm election (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2019). It should be noted that this turnout rate is about 10% higher than the voter turnout of other public, four-year institutions, and far above the average turnout rates for 18-24-year-olds as a whole (NSLVE, 2020). With the hope of better understanding these low rates, we follow in the footsteps of previous scholarship by examining the barriers between students and the ballot box at our own institution.

Our hope is that this research will directly benefit our campus community, but also the larger body of research by answering this question: how does a student’s sense of political efficacy and their perceptions of the campus political climate impact their likelihood of voting? Building a conceptual framework from rational choice theory and
social identity theory, we developed a study to examine the relationship between these attitudinal and environmental factors and likelihood of voting. We believe that while this study is directly tied to UMaine, its results have broader applicability. Although college students are not a representative sample of all young people, the way that interactions are structured on college campuses allows for a more controlled study that offers broader conclusions about the way social pressure can be used to influence turnout rates. Using a mixed-methods research design, we explore the relationship between our proposed independent variables (1) political efficacy, (2) perceived campus environment, and (3) political engagement and a student’s likelihood of voting. Further, we present preliminary results from a multivariate model related to the impact of political polarization on which future student voting research can build. We add richness to these quantitative findings by analyzing student’s own qualitative interpretations of their motivations, impediments, and interactions with the campus environment at UMaine (accessed through both focus groups and open-ended survey questions).

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Following this introduction, we present an overview of the theoretical framework upon which our main research question is based. We discuss the merit and application of Tajfel’s (1978) and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory and Downs’ (1957) rational choice theory. Next, we review the literature related to major themes in voter choice and youth voter turnout research as well as recent research that relates to our theoretical framework components. What follows is the presentation of the empirical findings from our survey and qualitative items, as well as an overview of our multivariate model. Finally, we synthesize the results to draw broad
conclusions about the voting behavior of students at the University of Maine. These findings set the stage for the conclusion of this project, which is our recommendations for future institutional improvements we believe will increase voter turnout at the University of Maine, and potentially other similarly situated institutions of higher learning.

The results of our survey indicate that students at the University of Maine have high levels of political efficacy, are generally civically and politically engaged, and understand their options for voting. We also find that students perceive the campus environment surrounding political discourse and expression to be negative. The results show a relationship between increased perceptions that the campus environment is negative and one’s identification as conservative. We also find that perceptions of political discourse on campus are generally negative, regardless of political ideology. Based on these findings we offer two categories of recommendations to the university: one having to do with the procedural barriers on campus and the other having to do with reducing the level of polarization and negativity on campus.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When voting behavior became a major field of study in the mid-20th century, the choice to vote was viewed mainly as an individual choice each citizen makes that can be influenced by a variety of personal, procedural, or social factors. Downs’ (1957) rational choice theory was the first major theory of choice related to voting leveraged as an explanation to the changes in turnout researchers were seeing. According to this theory, voters are viewed as rational actors who make the decision to vote only if the benefits associated with this decision outweigh the costs. Over time, as will be outlined further in this review, rational choice theory fell under scrutiny. From this, two major camps of research emerged around those who still thought rational choice theory was the most viable explanation and those who were looking for a different missing piece.

Tajfel (1978) and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory emerged as that potential piece by looking at how people make decisions based on societal expectations and group behavior. Our theoretical framework integrates both Tajfel (1978) and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory and Downs’ (1957) rational choice theory. We believe that it is likely to see factors and influences from both theories at work in the attitudes and behavior of student voters. While rational choice theory has been directly applied to voter-decision-making research historically, social identity theory’s application has been more indirect. Rather, factors that fall under the social identity umbrella such as group decision making, social/peer pressure, party membership, and more, have been accessed individually as potential influences. Rational choice theory pays insufficient attention to
the attitudinal factors related to voting, while social identity theory often looks over the concrete procedural barriers associated with low turnout. Through this theoretical framework and the literature review, we will outline the strengths and weaknesses of both theories and how we believe they may be partially remedied by the other.

**Rational Choice Theory**

Rational choice theory, first conceptualized by economist Anthony Downs in 1957, outlines a model for decision making which is based on individual cost-benefit analysis. The more perceived benefit and less associated cost tied to a decision, the more likely it is to be made. Fundamental to this theory is the assumption that the individual prefers outcomes with a higher utility to those with a lower utility and makes decisions with the goal of receiving more highly valued outcomes (Aldrich, 1993). Voters under this theory view their vote as a chosen investment of sorts, utilized only if the perceived benefits from that investment outweigh the associated costs (Fredderson, 2004). Rational choice theory asserts broadly that the reason people do not turn out to vote is that they don’t perceive enough value in the action of voting to make overcoming the associated barriers to voting “worth it”.

Lower turnout could be explained by increased barriers, lower expected benefit, or a combination of both. When examining voting behavior through this lens, researchers tend to look primarily at known procedural barriers to voting such as time commitment, registering to vote, finding information about the candidates, and travel time to the polls. When studying voting as a rational choice, one has to first understand the factors
influencing the voting calculus. On the one hand, procedural barriers play an obvious
deterring role, on the other hand, there may be attitudinal factors that tip the scale back in
favor of turning out such as higher levels of political efficacy and social benefits (Edlin et.al, 2007). We examine this potential relationship by testing for a variety of social and
procedural factors in the survey and focus groups.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory, conceptualized by Tajfel and Turner (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel
and Turner 1986) holds a different interpretation of decision making. It holds that people
develop perceptions of "psychological groups" based on the categorical group
membership of individuals that possess similar characteristics (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and
Turner 1986). Organizational membership fosters the formation of these groups which
subconsciously encourages group members to adopt similar beliefs, standards, views, and
behaviors, especially when there is an element of prestige at stake (Barnhardt et al. 2016).

The combination of these elements can be studied and described as a “campus
environment”. According to Haslam et al. (2012), universities possess all of the most
salient characteristics for social identity theory to hold true: a robust historical
component, emphasis on the distinction between the ingroup and the outgroup, and strong
indicators of how those within the organization do/do not behave provided by the
environment. This is why we believe an approach that recognizes the social realities of
life on a college campus, as well as the procedural complications related to voting, is
stronger than one that isolates either batch of factors. Following Barnhardt et al. (2015)
and Einwohner and Spencer (2005), we assert that universities communicate distinctive identities through the climates they create in formal and informal ways, amounting to a sense of “this is how we do things at this campus.” Social identity theory asserts that, opposed to rational choice theory, being a voter or not is something that a group can believe they are, meaning that those who don’t follow that behavior may automatically face social repercussions or punishment for being in the out-group.

**Overcoming The Voting Paradox**

Since Down’s (1957) seminal work on rational choice decision-making, researchers have struggled to understand how this theory alone can account for voter’s decisions to vote. The challenge of applying a rational choice model to voting is that there is a paradox that was identified by the very founders of rational choice theory (Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1970). In large elections, the probability that a single voter casts a decisive ballot is very small. It follows that if the cost of voting is any more than negligible, and voters care only about the impact of their vote on the outcome of the election at hand, then voting is irrational. It follows then that if everyone followed this rationality argument, nobody would vote. If nobody votes, the probability of each ballot being decisive would be guaranteed. The theory feeds back on itself in that if a voter expects everyone to follow the first calculus, then the rational response would be to *not* follow that calculus, and actually vote. Hence, the paradox.

We can see logically that not voting is the ideal choice given known costs associated with voting, yet, we know that millions still turn out to vote (and at times have
endured great hardship and personal danger to do so). Researchers are then faced with the challenge of “completing the theory” (Aldrich, 1993). This is where we have chosen to focus on the social dimension of voting through social identity theory. Actions are perceived as instruments used to achieve outcomes and have value insofar as they provide the desired outcome (Fiorina, 1976). Through our survey, we seek to discover how psychological benefits obtained by following group norms interact with barriers identified by rational choice theory. By examining how these competing theories interact to influence the intentions of student voters at UMaine, we believe we can enrich the existing body of research on student voting.

Thus far, research has asked very specific questions about how certain factors influence voter decision making: registering to vote, political efficacy, social capital, voter mobility, etc. These elements often serve as independent variables for research that is interested in measuring their impact on turnout rates. Historically, the primary way to research voter turnout has been through population surveys, particularly related to rational choice literature. Voter files and administrative records have also been popular sources for data collection (Fraga and Holbein, 2020). Scholarship looking at social identity’s impact on group behavior is often more qualitative in nature. Reflecting this, our research uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to understand how the two theories interact on our campus to affect student turnout.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The goal of this research project is to lend recommendations to the University as to how it can, as an institution, support its students in voting by eliminating as many barriers as possible and creating an environment of voting on campus. The primary focus of this research is to determine the influences behind the decision to vote, or not vote, for University of Maine students. From the rational choice literature, we have a general understanding of the calculus related to voting and the procedural barriers tied to that. Pomper and Sernekos (1989) identify that if voting is a low-cost, low-benefit decision, small changes to the costs/benefit calculus can make a significant difference. This is why we will begin with a general review of the empirical research examining commonly understood procedural barriers for college students before continuing on to a review of the empirical research literature related to the two theories identified in the theoretical framework.

When it comes to understanding the process of voting, college students are at a disadvantage. Their typically low levels of political knowledge and lack of media consumption limit their practical knowledge when it comes to the nuts and bolts of voting. Simply because they have never voted before, young voters often lack the practical knowledge required to navigate the registration and voting process (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020; Mindich 2005; Wattenberg 2007 as seen in Kittilson, 2009). These “nuts
and bolts" are what researchers translate into tangible procedural barriers, and they land more heavily on young people who are often relying on a similarly inexperienced and under informed group of peers to help them navigate the voting process for the first time. Sometimes referred to as the “start-up costs" of voting, these barriers include navigating the process of registering, identifying and locating polling places, learning about parties and candidates (Pultzer, 2002). It is because of the uncertainty surrounding voting resulting from these procedural barriers that young people often feel alienated from the polls (Holbein and Hillygus, 2020).

The most commonly examined procedural barrier related to voting is registering to vote. Like voting turnout, registration rates among 18-20-year-olds lag well behind those of older generations (Frisco et.al 2004, Parry and Shields, 2002). According to the US Census Bureau (2021), in the 2020 presidential election, 76% of 65-74-year-olds reported as registered to vote whereas only 51.4% of 18-24-year-olds did. Reducing the hassle related to registering to vote has been shown to increase youth turnout by 2-13% if the influence of the registration environment (like a University, for example) is leveraged as an informational tool for the potential voter (Holbein & Hilygus, 2016). Another commonly studied central disruption factor in deciding whether or not to vote is residential mobility (Squire et al., 1987; Grumbach & Hill, 2019; Anslabehere et al., 2006; Highton 2000; McDonald 2008). This barrier is particularly salient for college students, as they are an extremely mobile population. The fact that college students often change location every year requires them to re-register for nearly every election in many states (including Maine). This lends confusion to an already challenging and new process
as students often do not know that they even can register to vote locally in the community where their institution is located much less know where to go to do that, or the registration requirements of their new location (Haslup and O'Loughlin, 2004).

Simply alleviating this uncertainty regarding eligibility through on-campus registration drives and same-day registration has been shown to increase turnout across the board. Ulbig and Waggener (2011) found a turnout increase of over 20% compared to what they expected based on national averages through studying the effects of in-person registration drives. Grumbach (2019) similarly found that same-day registration laws disproportionately increase turnout among individuals aged 18-24, at about 2.3 and 10.3 percentage points. Their findings are supported by Garnett (2018) who found that advance voting, when combined with on-site registration on advance voting days, increases turnout by about 7.6 percentage points.

The Shortcomings of Rational Choice Theory

As outlined in our theoretical framework, it is well known that voting in large elections cannot be explained in terms of the selfish benefits of voting to the individual as would follow under rational choice theory. For decades now, researchers have concluded that the probability of a vote being decisive is just too low for voting to be ‘worth it’ in an expected utility sense (see Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974; Meehl 1977; Aldrich 1993; Green and Shapiro 1994; Gelman, King, and Boscardin 1998). For the most part, theorists have bypassed this utility problem in rational choice theory either by eliminating voters as strategic actors or by assuming that
the decision to vote is independent of other strategic choices like mitigating harm (Feddersen, 2004). They chose to look past the problems of rational choice theory by explaining away the gap between theory and reality through unexamined social factors.

If the social benefits at stake in an election are large, then the expected utility of voting to an individual with social preferences could be more significant, increasing the benefit of voting and tipping the cost/benefit calculus in favor of turnout (Edlin et al., 2007). This is why, following Aldrich (1993) and subsequent scholars, we believe that the rational choice model is complementary with a social identity-driven understanding of voters and voting behavior. A review of the literature linking elements of social identity theory such as social environment, social pressure, peer-to-peer interactions, and the relationship between group norms and behavior, with traditional elements of rational choice theory, follows.

Voters as Identity-Driven Actors

Among the many functions society performs, one of its primary responsibilities is telling us how we should and should not act. The “rules” of society that we all understand intuitively are called “normative behaviors”, and we learn them by observing others. Originally emerging from research on evolutionary biology, this skill is suggested to help us know who is “one of us” and who is not. From psychology, we understand that for humans, part of remaining a member of a social group is emulating the normative behaviors and traits of the other members to a certain degree. In the modern-day context, we find ourselves in a myriad of social groups (and this is especially true of college
students) that are constantly telling us how we should and shouldn’t act based on the social environment we inhabit. From this understanding of normative behavior, we intuitively understand that all decisions are in some way a reflection of the perceived social norms around us.

Voting, then, is just another such behavior influenced by our social environment (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944 as found in Taddicken). If we have a sense that voting is an approved, normative behavior within our group, we are more likely to do it. It follows then that in order for social norms to operate, a referent group is necessary (Feddersen, 2004; Shulman and Levine, 2012). College campuses provide that referent group for their students. Within this context, there are several components that influence behavior under a social identity framework: social environment, social pressure, group normative behavior, and personal beliefs.

Social Environment

According to Chavis and Wandersman (1990), perception of one’s surroundings involves judgments about that environment such as perceived qualities, satisfaction, and problems with it. They found strong relationships between community perception and behavior, in some cases linking a strong sense of community to increased civic engagement. Quantitative findings from Barnhardt et. al (2015) indicate that students’ acquisitions of commitments to and skills for contributing to the larger community are largely influenced by the extent to which students perceive their campus as one that advocates for its students to be active and involved citizens. Who we are, and what we
do, is not shaped merely by self-interest and the utility calculation as presented in rational choice theory. In fact, self-interest and how we choose to act upon it, may in large part be determined by the expectations of the communities in which we are embedded.

Recent research has continued to examine the link between environment and behavior. David E. Campbell’s 2008 study analyzed data from CIVED, a major study of civic education conducted in 1999, found that the perceived classroom environment had an impact on the way students handled and perceived conflict. From this follows the conclusion that environment and perceived environment do have the potential to influence behavior. Students might perceive their campus as being more political because they overhear, or engage in, several political discussions (Shulman and Levine, 2012).

Further, Shram (1991) provides empirical support for Shram and Van Winden’s (1991) finding that social groups play a major role in influencing one’s decision to vote. Großer & Schram (2006) present a participation game in which they offer participants two options: vote with no costs, or abstain, pretending that you’re a strong supporter of one of the candidates involved. They find that the exchange of political information within a social group (organized by neighborhood in their study) significantly increases turnout. Through their participation game, they found that voters equipped with information from their community were over 20% more likely to vote.

### Social Norms

The “goal of affiliation” is our fundamental motivation to join and remain in social groups, as described by Cialdini & Goldstein (2004). This desire to affiliate
encourages us to win the approval of our social peers by conforming with both descriptive norms (what is) and injunctive norms (what “ought to be”, as described by others). Group formation and socialization is a huge part of college and often students will have many social groups in the form of clubs, classes, dorm environment, and more. Each of these venues within the college setting becomes a micro-society with its own set of accepted normative behaviors.

Jackson (1975) describes the “normative power” of these ideas as the amount of approval or disapproval from the collective related to behavior. Norms can be more or less “intense” and will exert more or less power over behavior relatively. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) further found that there is a correlation between psychological engagement with politics by discussing them with peers and higher levels of civic participation. They found that talk about politics and current events around peers correlated with information resource transfers among peers, increased psychological engagement with politics and current events, and instances of peers recruiting each other to participate. Their results are supported by Klofstad (2007), who found that this type of political engagement through conversation correlates with up to a 63% increase in civic participation. Finally, a 2009 study from Glynn et al. found that the perceived importance and frequency of voting to close friends and family were consistent predictors of intention to vote. They also found a strong correlation between voting intention and respondents’ aggregated perceptions of how often their close friends voted. Higher levels of political conversation among college students are linked with higher rates of normative perception related to political behavior. Shulman and Levine (2012) find that both formal
and informal political conversations are statistically significant predictors of political engagement.

**Social Pressure**

Social pressure has also performed as a stable influence across elections when directly applied by a political party through the mail (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1992; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Further research from Schram (1991), Schram and Van Winden (1991), and Bufacchi (2001) has also highlighted the positive role of social pressure in the decision to vote. Gerber, Green, and Larimer (2008) examined a sample of 180,002 households in Michigan to find that a social pressure appeal to turnout has a notable impact. They found through their “neighbors” treatment that, when it is made clear to potential voters that abstaining from voting will be negatively perceived by their group, people are much more likely to decide to vote. Their controls for social pressure translated to an 8.1 percentage-point increase in turnout among registered voters which translated into a 6.1 percentage-point increase in the overall turnout rate for their state where registered voters comprise 75% of voting-eligible citizens.

We can expect then that for college students, who are particularly susceptible to such influence, social pressure would be a salient tactic in increasing voter turnout. Bhatti and Hansen’s (2012) study supports this conclusion by finding that weak voting patterns among peers are associated with increased negative effects for college student voters compared to young-adult voters still living at home. It should be noted that per Glynn et al.’s 2009 study, which demonstrated that the expectation that students “should” vote or
that other students do vote was not significantly correlated with a higher level of intention to vote, that social pressure is only a viable tool to increase turnout when presented directly to the voter, in this case, through mailing the past voting behavior of one’s neighbors to potential voters. Social norm propositions claim that, particularly under situations of ambiguity, people refer to others for guidance (Latane & Darley, 1970). This explains how the power of social pressure may be emphasized for young voters encountering the voting process for the first time.

Belief-Behavior Relationship

In their review of the literature, Oskamp and Schultz (2005) argued that there is considerable evidence to suggest that attitudes and beliefs are “significantly related to behavior.” They identify that beliefs and behavior hold a reciprocal relationship in that while beliefs influence behavior so too does the response from the behavior inform beliefs. Political interest and information about voting have both been found to positively correlate with an intention to vote (Glynn et al. 2009).

Research That Combines Theories

There is relatively little research that directly links social identity theory and rational choice theory. There is, however, a growing body of recent research that seems to fill the gap left by rational choice models with a social explanation. Edlin et al. (2007) argue that voters do behave rationally, but that the social benefits associated with voting
are a part of their rational decision-making process. They provide suggestive evidence for their claim by examining other socially motivated political behavior like donating to campaigns and participating in opinion polls, examining the relationship between turnout and election size, and potential voter surveys. Research by Abrams et al. (2011) seems to support their claims. In a study of 3,171 participants, they find that a significant proportion of turnout can be explained by voters conforming to the expectations of the informal social networks of which they are part. Incentives arise from the importance most people attach to their acceptance by those that are close to them and the desire to avoid their disapproval. They further found that in the types of social groups where non-voting is more likely to be met by social disapproval the probability of voting is increased nearly 30%.

**Political Efficacy**

Political efficacy is broadly defined by Sheerin (2008) as a person’s self-belief in their own ability to understand politics, be heard, and make a difference politically. Efficacy has long been considered a powerful predictor of voter participation. Following Campbell et al.’s (1954) seminal work on political efficacy, much research has since suggested that youth non-voting may be explained by low levels of efficacy (ICR, 2006; Russell et al., 2002; UK Electoral Commission, 2006). Efficacy theory is comprised of two different components: internal efficacy-beliefs about one’s own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics, and external efficacy one’s perceptions about politicians and elections as responsive to citizen demands (Niemi et al.,
Empirical research has consistently linked political efficacy with a propensity to vote, and numerous studies since the 1950s provide evidence of this: Craig (1979), Craig and Maggiotto (1982), UK Electoral Commission (2006), Tedesco, (2011).

Conclusion

What all this research tells us is that the University of Maine has within its grasp an enormous tool to help encourage students to vote. The very nature of a University supplies the institution with social tools that can be leveraged as means to increase turnout: an organizational structure, established norms and community culture, and the social hierarchies needed to implement these norms and apply the subsequent pressure. The research tells us of a number of known barriers between students and the polls, their sources, and (in some cases) how to remedy them. Rational choice literature explains this. Social environment, and pressure literature then, tells us that the power to influence the voting calculus under rational choice theory exists within the micro-society that is colleges and Universities. What has gone under-researched is the relationship between these batches of influences. Our research fills this gap by examining specifically the impact of social identity factors that influence the voting calculus within a rational choice framework. Further, because our research is centered around the entire student body at UMaine, larger conclusions may be drawn from our findings for subsequent researchers looking to study the influence of the college environment on voting. Beyond adding to the existing body of literature on voter turnout, this project hopes to provide actionable recommendations to the University of Maine by answering this question: how does a
student's sense of political efficacy and their perceptions of the campus political climate impact their likelihood of voting? Our hope is that through this research and those recommendations the University of Maine will be able to continue its progress in increasing our student voter turnout rates.
METHODS

Overview

This study began with an analysis of National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) data for the University of Maine. NSLVE is a research initiative through the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education that is designed to help Universities better understand student voter turnout at their institution. They provide information about registration and voting rates for institutions that opt into their study. That data is then broken down by major demographic categories such as gender, race, and area of study. We used the 2012 and 2016 data to identify areas of low turnout within the University noting that men were voting at lower rates than women and that there were pockets of majors that also had relatively low turnout rates.

The turnout patterns identified in that research along with an analysis of the existing literature led to the development of our three independent variables: political efficacy, perceived campus environment, and political engagement. We then developed a mixed-method approach to understanding the relationship between our variables. We opted for a (QUAN→qual) design, where the quantitative survey research and analysis took priority over the qualitative elements, using the qualitative data and analysis primarily to amplify and enrich the interpretations derived from the quantitative findings. We used a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics, beginning with a survey (see appendix A) to produce our quantitative data and then turning to the qualitative data through open-ended questions to lend clarity and depth to our findings. We then referred
back to the quantitative data to compare emerging patterns between the two sets. Using SPSS 27 we ran frequencies and correlations on our variables, eventually running a multivariate model as well. The specific data methods are outlined below.

Sample

To draw conclusions about the behavior of the undergraduate population we looked for a sample that was as large as possible while being representative in terms of gender, college, major, race, sexual orientation, and age. The original sample contained an $n$ of 318 but was re-weighted due to an oversampling of women. In the original sample, 66.7% of respondents were female and 25.2% male, the remaining 8.1% being comprised of trans, genderqueer/gender non-conforming, non-binary, two-spirit identifying respondents. Using SPSS 27, we changed the weights for those who indicated their sex was male from 1 to 1.98 and female from 1 to .75. After weighting, the sample had a revised $n$ of 342 that was 46.5% male and 45.9% female which is in line with statistics from the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) which reported the undergraduate student body to be 47.1% female and 52.6% male in 2020, but does not offer the variety of non-binary options we present in our survey. In addition, our sample includes 3.5% graduate students and the gender breakdown at that level is almost identical to the undergraduate level.

Racially, our sample breaks down in this way: 88.1% White, 2.8% Hispanic, 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and >1% Black/African American, South Asian, or Native American. These demographics align more or less with self-reported University
undergraduate statistics from ORIA which reports a student body that is 77.9% White, 4.4% Hispanic, 1.8% Black, and 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander.

Quantitative Methods

Data Collection.

The survey we used was developed and administered through the Qualtrics platform (see appendix A). We collected our survey data using a convenience sampling method primarily through email. This survey was first sent to students in the Honors College, as we understood this would be an easily accessible group that would likely have a high response rate given the characteristics of honors students. The result is a sample that is slightly less than half honors students before weighting. We included no control to identify honors students.

After distributing the survey to the Honors College it was sent to university club presidents through Student Government and to the dean of each college. These options were the next best way we could imagine to distribute the survey to as wide a population of the student body as possible since the University denied our request to have it sent to each student’s school email address. After collecting some initial data we sent the survey out to the College of Engineering again and to a few large classes: BIO 101, ANT 102, and CHF 351. From this second round, we got our final 150 or so responses.
Outcomes.

The dependent variable was the extent to which one identified as a frequent voter. The independent variables are individual political efficacy, perceived political environment on campus, and political engagement of students. Political efficacy was measured at the national, state, and community levels. We also paid specific attention to the level of efficacy students felt that voting provided. The perceived political environment was measured by looking at political expression online, on-campus, and peer-to-peer, as well as the tone of political discourse on campus, outreach from the University and professors, and outreach from outside organizations. Political engagement was measured through self-reported engagement with politics and voting. We also looked at civic engagement behaviors related to this variable such as the importance of attending a march or registering your peers to vote. Lastly, we included questions about the national political climate and COVID-19 pandemic. Our control variables were general demographics (gender, age, race, religion, religiosity, etc.), major area of study, political party, political ideology, political expression, perceived University outreach, and current political climate nationally.

Our independent and control variables were all measured on a five-point Likert scale. Efficacy, perceived political environment on campus, political engagement, and perceptions of the national political climate were measured on a strongly agree to strongly disagree scale. Civic engagement was measured on a very important to not important at all scale. Political expression and perceived university outreach were measured on an always to never scale. However, there was a typo in the perceived
university outreach section where two options for “sometimes” were given and no option for “rarely”. In deciding how to construct the questions for our survey we looked at existing research designs for the more commonly studied variables such as political efficacy and political engagement, while also developing original questions for the less studied variables such as perceived campus environment.

Analytical Technique.

We organized and arranged the data using the application SPSS 27. Initial work included data cleaning and restructuring, as well as weighting the model appropriately to accurately correct for oversampling on gender. We then prepared general trends through descriptive statistics by running frequencies on all our major variables. From there we ran crosstabs on relevant factors and identified major themes from those results. Finally, a multivariate model was run to identify the impact of our independent variables on students' perceptions of themselves as frequent voters.

Multivariate Model

We first went through and ran frequencies on our data points pulling out relevant descriptive statistics. We thought about the relevant relationships we were looking to examine, primarily the relationship between perceived campus environment and likelihood to vote, and concentrated on our measures related to that.
After that, we then ran an ordinal logistic regression model designed to measure the impact of our independent variables on our dependent variable. The fact that our survey dealt only with categorical variables mandated the use of this type of regression model. The dependent variable asked the degree to which respondents identified as a frequent voter. For our independent variables, we asked the degree to which respondents believe they influence national politics to capture political efficacy; we asked to what degree students feel they are able to openly express their political opinions on campus to capture perceptions of the political environment; we asked the degree to which respondents are interested in politics to capture political engagement. Our control variables were political expression, age, gender identity, and party identification. To capture political expression, we asked students the frequency that they express their political views on campus.

**Secondary Research Method: Qualitative**

The qualitative portion of the study adds richness to the quantitative findings by revealing students’ perceptions of the campus environment and their own relationship with the campus community in terms of their decision to vote. It also offers novel insights into the ways students interact with various elements of the college experience such as clubs and public spaces.
Data.

The Qualtrics survey we administered included six open-ended, optional, open response questions at its close designed to encourage students to expand and reflect upon the responses they had just given. We received 318 responses to each question. We identified several themes from each of the questions and linked these messages to our quantitative data. We also conducted two focus groups: the first was composed of seven students and the second had eight. See appendix A for the full survey with open-ended questions. See Appendix B for the focus group script.

Analysis.

Data analysis included open coding of the qualitative responses from the open-ended questions in the survey. From this, we identified the major themes related to each question and used these findings to lend clarity and richness to the quantitative findings of the survey.

Hypothesized Effects

Based on the existing research literature we hypothesized the following effects:

1. Efficacy: We anticipated that there will be low levels of political efficacy on campus. We expect relatively equal levels of efficacy across demographic variables.
2. *Civic Engagement:* We expected low levels of civic engagement on national behaviors.

3. *Political Expression:* We expected low levels of political expression. We anticipated that political expression will be slightly higher for Democrats and liberals over Republicans and conservatives.

4. *National Political Climate:* We expect that the national political climate would be perceived negatively.

5. *Perceived Political Environment on Campus:* We expect the campus environment would be perceived neutrally.

6. *Political Engagement:* We expected high levels of engagement.

7. *Perceived University Outreach:* We expected students would report high frequencies of outreach from the University.

8. *Age:* We anticipated age would have an impact on some of our measures related to campus climate and expression on campus due to the nature of the student body as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. *Party Identification:* We anticipated that Republican students would be less likely to feel comfortable expressing their political views on campus and engaging in political conversations with other students compared to Democrats.

10. *Political Ideology:* Similar to party identification, we expected that conservative students would be less likely to feel comfortable expressing their political views on campus and engaging in political conversations with other students compared to liberal students.
FINDINGS

Political Efficacy

The survey results as a whole suggest that, overall, political efficacy is high among respondents. A significant majority of students routinely responded affirmatively to questions related to the impact of their vote on governmental processes. 67.9% of students disagreed to some degree that the issues they care about would not be affected by voting (see Figure 1). Respondents also indicate a willingness to vote even if they did not feel passionate about the candidates or issues in a particular election. 76.2% of respondents disagreed to some degree with the statement “my vote doesn’t matter.”

Figure 1: Political Efficacy

Respondents demonstrate a lower level of political efficacy when asked questions about national institutions. Our questions related to national influence demonstrate a
bimodal distribution wherein our sample is relatively split on either side of neutral. This indicates that there is general pushback from our respondents to the idea that they do not influence national politics or that they do not have a say in what the government does (see Figure 2). Further, 69.1% of respondents indicate that they disagree that the people have the final say in how the country is run regardless of who is in office (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Political Efficacy; National Influence

Figure 3: Political Efficacy; Impact Of Vote
Women displayed higher levels of efficacy than men overall (see Figure 4). We find that men were less likely to indicate that they had an influence over national politics than women. The same follows for believing you have a say in what the government does. However, we did find that men were less likely to believe that their vote would have an impact on the issues they care about. Conversely, women indicated higher levels of informational efficacy than men. Party identification and political ideology seemed to have no impact on this measure.

Figure 4: Political Efficacy; Gender Cross Tabulation

Regarding civic engagement, our data align with our expected results which were in keeping with a frequent observation in the existing research on engagement for young people that there is a level of dissatisfaction with the government in general. In our civic engagement measure, students feel it’s important to volunteer in your community, but not...
for a political campaign. They indicate they’re interested in attending a march/demonstration, but aren’t interested at all in donating to a political campaign.

Peer-to-peer engagement was much higher though, with 81.4% of students indicating that they believe it is somewhat important or very important to register their peers to vote and a further 85.4% believing that it is important to convince their peers to vote (see Figure 5). Women performed higher on our measures of civic engagement across the board. Women respondents were more likely than men on every measure to rank the civic actions we were measuring as important or very important. This aligns with the lower levels of efficacy we saw among men earlier. This also aligns with the NSLVE findings that women at UMaine have higher levels of voter turnout than men.

Figure 5: Peer-To-Peer Engagement

Please respond to the following questions based on how you feel now. - Convincing your peers to vote.

The Political Environment On Campus

Our data on this measure was based on respondent perceptions of political expression on campus, political discourse on campus, and outreach from professors and
peers related to voting. Overall, our findings indicate that the perceived political environment on campus is negative for all groups but slightly less so for those who ideologically self-identify as liberal. This likely translates to lower levels of political engagement following findings of Shulman and Levine (2012) which hold that both formal and informal political conversations are statistically significant predictors of political engagement.

**Outreach from Professors and Peers.**

Students indicate that they are encouraged to vote by those around them: 76.2% say that they either agree or strongly that they are encouraged to vote by their peers and 79.4% say the same about their professors. It should be noted that there may be some inflation of this sentiment in our sample because we reached out specifically to professors who we knew were sympathetic to voter turnout efforts and who sent the survey to their classes directly which in itself could be perceived as encouragement to vote.

We received a mixed result as to whether or not students believe that there is a culture of voting at UMaine. On our measure “I feel that voting is something UMaine students always do”, 42.3% either agreed or strongly agreed but then 36.7% were neutral and 21% disagreed with this statement (see Table 1).
Table 1: Voting Culture At UMaine

**Please respond to the following statements according to how you feel now. – I feel that voting is something UMaine students always do.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid Strongly Agree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Agree</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Neutral</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Strongly disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>342</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Political Discourse.**

Our measure “talking about politics with people who I DISagree with on campus is generally stressful and frustrating” had a larger strong response than the other environmental measures. 18% strongly agreed and 26.5% agreed. There was a slight increase in conservative students indicating they agreed with this statement. On this measure, women were also more likely to indicate that they agreed compared to men with 56% of the women who answered this question indicating that they either agreed or strongly agreed compared to only 35% of men.

A majority of survey respondents either somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed with the idea that the political discourse on campus is generally positive. 38.7% were neutral. When we performed a cross tab on the political discourse question with party ideology (collapsing the categories of the latter variable to simply “liberal” and “conservative”) we found that only 25.4% of conservatives agreed with the sentiment that political discourse on campus is generally positive compared to 36.9% of liberals (see
Table 2). 39.8% of students indicated that they agree it’s hard to tell what the tone and nature of political discourse on campus is generally.

Table 2: Political Ideology Cross Tab

Please respond to the following statements according to how you feel now.
- The tone and nature of political discourse on campus is generally positive.

% within IDEOLOGY_COLLAPSED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>conservative</th>
<th>liberal</th>
<th>neither/no answer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Political Expression.

Respondents suggest that the willingness to engage in political expression on campus and online in general is low. Our results show 51.6% of respondents indicating that they rarely or never express their political views online. Similarly, 58.8% of students indicate that they rarely or never express themselves on campus. There was no significant difference between men and women in these measures. We did find differences with party ideology on this measure with 80% of conservatives indicating that they rarely or never express their political views on campus compared to only 47.8% of liberals (see Table 3).
Conservative students also expressed the feeling that constraints existed for students generally when expressing themselves on campus with 54.6% of conservative respondents indicating they disagreed that students can express themselves freely and openly on campus compared to only 11.6% of liberal respondents (see Table 4).

Table 4: Political Ideology; Student Expression Crosstab

We also see from the data that levels of peer-to-peer political expression are much higher than online or campus expression. 60.4% of respondents indicated that they always or often express their political views to their friends. Women indicated more willingness to communicate with others about their political views than men.
Political Engagement

Our respondents’ self-reported levels of political engagement are high overall. 72.2% either strongly agree (45.4%) or agree (26.8%) with the statement “I am a frequent voter” (see Figure 6). Further, 76% of respondents agreed with the statement that they are interested in politics. Slightly fewer respondents indicate that they are politically active, with 49.8% indicating they agree with the statement “I am politically active.”

Figure 6: Frequent Voter

Perceived University Outreach

We expected to see that respondents had been contacted by the University frequently given the mobilization efforts already in place on campus such as UMaine UVote and the heightened outreach that occurred alongside the 2020 election. Our expectations were correct, with 78.9% of respondents indicating that they are at least sometimes contacted by the university about voting (see Figure 7).
On this measure, we also asked some questions related to the informational costs tied to voting. We wanted to know how students interact with the “start-up costs” we identified in the literature review including navigating the process of registering, identifying and locating polling places, learning about parties and candidates (Pultzer, 2002). What we found was that students are confident about being provided with the information they would need to vote. 56.6% of students indicate that they know what their options to vote are often or always with a further 21.5% indicating they sometimes know (see Table 5).
Table 5: Informational Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know what my options are to vote on campus.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing System</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>342</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although knowledge about voting is high, understanding of which campus resources to turn to is lower. Only 37.7% of students indicate that they often or always know where to ask their questions about voting on campus. This confusion plays out equally across gender and political party.

**Other Controls**

We were also interested in examining the two exceptional circumstances occurring at the time this research was conducted: the COVID-19 pandemic and the national political climate. The COVID-19 Pandemic seemed to have no impact on turnout with 83.9% of students disagreeing with the statement “the COVID-19 pandemic decreased my likelihood of voting at all.

The national political climate was widely viewed as increasingly negative. 89% of students either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the tone and nature of politics in this country has become more negative over the last several years (see figure 8).
Qualitative Findings

Our qualitative data offer a number of observations about both the procedural and environmental barriers related to voting on campus. We find that students are most interested in receiving unbiased and reliable information and see the University as a potential source for that. They also offer a number of recommendations related to reducing the cost of procedural barriers such as registering to vote. In response to our question on environment ("in what ways does the political environment on campus encourage you or deter you from voting?") students indicated overwhelmingly dissatisfaction with the campus environment, citing phenomenon such as “cancel” culture and a negative environment surrounding expression through statements like “from my experience, most political conversations I’ve had were toxic. People generally wish to
express their own opinions, instead of listening, and more importantly, understanding other people’s opinions.” and “I could lose friends or be ostracized for having independent thoughts.” Some students even indicated that they were motivated to vote by a desire to help mend the polarization on campus. Results from the qualitative data are laid out in Appendix B and the discussion section of this thesis where they are used to add richness and depth to our analysis and interpretation of the quantitative findings.

**Multivariate Model**

Based on the findings from our qualitative research we identified that political polarization might be a strong influence on our data set. We ran a multivariate model designed to identify the impact of our independent variables on our dependent variable hypothesizing that perceived campus environment and political expression would be statistically significant indicators of likelihood to identify as a frequent voter. Our model proved to be statistically significant on the variables we hypothesized to be consequential which were political efficacy, the political expression on campus, and perceived campus environment. We find that the model accounts for 34-36% of the variance in our dependent variable. On our control variables which were age, gender, and political party the model was not statistically significant. The full breakdown of results from that model is included in Appendix C to supplement the descriptive data we collected through the survey which is the primary method for this research. For the purposes of this thesis, we choose to focus on the survey results for the majority of our analysis but include details of the model in the appendixes as a potential model for future research. Please refer back
to our hypothesized effects for more information about the causal model tested and the methods employed to do so.
DISCUSSION

As outlined in our theoretical framework and literature review, an impetus for this research was the idea that the campus culture at the University of Maine (UMaine) could serve as a referent group for normative social behavior. The idea was that, under social identity theory, the University could serve as a powerful actor in influencing the voting behavior of its students by promoting a culture of voting through expression, engagement, and outreach. In an ideal situation, students would feel that it was a part of their identity as UMaine students to vote, resulting in horizontal pressure to vote across social groups, campus organizations, and majors. We hypothesized that if this was happening we would see higher levels of turnout among students. To test this hypothesis, we designed a survey to measure the degree to which there is a culture of voting at UMaine which was followed up by open-ended questions on the influence of the college environment on one’s decision to vote.

We know from NSLVE data that approximately 63.1% of eligible students voted in the 2016 presidential election and 44.2% voted in the 2018 midterm elections (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2020). Obviously, since turnout is nowhere near 100%, or even a more realistic 80%, there is something missing in the voting calculus of some 20% or so of students and so we expected to see low responses to some known attitudinal barriers such as political efficacy, civil engagement, and political engagement in our survey. What we found were surprisingly positive results. When it came to declaring belief in the efficacy of their vote, 67.9% of respondents indicated that they
believed their vote had an impact. Political efficacy received pushback in instances when measures had to do with national politics or institutions. The bimodal distributions on these measures indicate that students are uncomfortable discounting their influence but are equally hesitant to put faith in the belief that they personally have an impact on national politics. We believe that the relationship between these findings highlights voting as maybe the only way that students believe they have a political impact.

To examine this possibility further we looked at levels of political engagement. The levels of political engagement among students appear to also be high, with 72.2% either strongly agreeing (45.4%) or agreeing (26.8%) with the statement “I am a frequent voter”. It should be noted that this may be attributed to a “priming” effect given the timing of our survey relative to the last major election. Beyond simply identifying as a voter, students indicate that they’re interested and engaged in politics with 76% of respondents agreeing with the statement that they are interested in politics. With such high percentage responses, we found no difference between gender, ideology, or party identification on these measures. This indicates that within the student body there is the interest and willingness to be engaged voters, yet we are still seeing a gap in turnout.

The survey suggests that the explanation for this gap lies in an analysis of where political conversations are, and more importantly aren’t, taking place within the UMaine community. Our findings indicate that political conversations among UMaine students are primarily happening peer-to-peer on campus because the campus political environment is negative as a result of polarization. We see from the survey data that 85.8% of respondents express their political views to their friends at least sometimes but
the same is only true of on-campus expression for 40% of respondents. Further, we know from NSLVE data that there are some majors with almost triple the turnout rate of other majors. We also understand from the literature that the most potent communicators of normative social behaviors are those who are closest to us and so it follows logically that majors may serve as small cultural pockets within the larger patchwork of the University. This suggests, then, that political conversations and ideas circle around in these areas given the fact that we know from the data how political conversation among students is primarily happening peer-to-peer. Further, the data shows that 76.2% say that they either agree or strongly that they are encouraged to vote by their peers.

The fact that conversations are happening within social circles can be a positive influence within majors that are more engaged and a negative influence for majors that are not. If conversations are only remaining within groups then we see an echo chamber develop wherein like-minded opinions are promoted and protected, insulating members of that group from differing views as well out from the campus environment. As one student says “I don't really engage with conversations about politics on campus. This is because some people just immediately jump into explaining why you are wrong and they are right. I do talk with my friends, and we all encourage each other to vote, often regardless of political opinions.” To form the culture necessary for the University to be able to leverage its normative social power there would need to be some level of political expression and engagement on campus, and yet we know that these types of productive conversations are not breaking out of peer groups. We have to ask, why are these
engaged students, with high levels of political efficacy, not expressing themselves on campus?

The data suggest that the answer is political polarization. This answer, as we see it, was originally found in the qualitative data. We asked “In what ways does the political environment on campus encourage you or deter you from voting?” and the answers overwhelmingly referred to polarization within the campus environment and its negative impact on political expression. As one student says, “I do not feel comfortable discussing politics on campus. My ideas get shut down and it makes me not want to vote.” Our quantitative findings support the idea that there is a toxic level of polarization on campus between parties. The best support for this claim is found from our expression measures and how they break down along lines of party ideology. 79.2% of conservatives indicate that they rarely or never express their political views on campus whereas only 47.7% of liberals say the same. We expected some levels of Democrat/liberal bias given the fact that 60.9% of our sample indicated that they were at least leaning liberal. However, the data suggests that there is a pronounced level of discomfort expressing political opinions on campus regardless of party. When we performed a condensed cross tab on party ideology (reducing the categories to simply “liberal” and “conservative”) we found that only 25.3% of conservatives agreed with the sentiment that political discourse on campus is generally positive and only slightly more liberals agreed at only 36.9% of liberals agreed. As one respondent puts it “People from both sides are terrifying and sometimes make it hard to discuss opinions.” Although not a major component of this study, the results from our multivariate model further support the idea that campus climate is a
factor in whether or not respondents identified as frequent voters. Please refer to appendix C for specific outputs from the model.

Further, the national political climate over the last couple of years was perceived as negative by an overwhelming majority of 89% of respondents. While the University could serve as a refuge from the increasing perceived negativity in politics, the data suggests that the tone and nature of our own campus political discourse is generally perceived as negative as well. One student says, “There is a mentality to attack those who do not agree with you.” another adds, “This campus makes it seem that if you are not one way, you hate everyone and are a sick person. For someone like me who doesn't really know much about politics, if I were to ask someone one question about it, I feel as if I would be burned at the stake for even asking about it and not already knowing the answer.” Another student continues by saying, “From my experience, most political conversations I’ve had were toxic. People generally wish to express their own opinions, instead of listening, and more importantly, understanding other people’s opinions.” With such a negative perception surrounding political discourse on campus, it’s no wonder students are refraining from expressing their views publicly, opting instead to contain political discussion within their friend group.

For UMaine to be able to encourage voter turnout among its student body, the University needs to cultivate spaces in which we can all come together to talk about political issues, listen across lines of difference, and learn from each other. This means creating spaces in which students feel they can learn across differences, reach across the political spectrum, and engage in productive and encouraging political dialogue. Many
programs exist that the University could model our own pilot program against, however building these programs requires financial support and resources that are currently not allocated by the University. In our conclusion, we go into a series of recommendations based on the qualitative and quantitative findings of this research as to how we believe the University can achieve a goal of higher turnout.
CONCLUSION

As established in the introduction and literature review of this research project, voter turnout rates for young people have been trending downwards in recent elections. Increasingly, there is a gap between young people and the polls which translates into underrepresentation of the policy preferences, opinions, and influence of part of the electorate. Our goal was to examine the known and unknown influences behind the turnout rates among our own student body at the University of Maine with the hope that our findings would illuminate ways we could make improvements that would also be transferable to other campuses. Based on the analysis we presented in our theoretical framework and the findings of this research, we find that social identity leverage points are limited on campus because we have an environment in which students are reluctant to engage in political discourse. Points like social pressure, peer influence, and behavioral norms are not leveraged when social interaction is constrained or limited, in our case by polarization on campus.

After looking at the influence of political efficacy, the perceived political environment, and political engagement of students through our survey, we have identified a series of recommendations for the University as to how we believe it can improve turnout on campus. The first set comes directly from responses to our question “what could the university do to better support students who would like to vote?”

1. Cancel classes on voting day.
2. More transportation to and from the polls all day on voting day.
3. Increased information about different methods for voting. Students indicate that they are interested in a nonpartisan source of political information such as candidate profiles, dates of debates, and polling times/locations. Students indicate in the qualitative data that a lack of information is one of the only things that would keep them from voting.

4. Mail registration cards to students directly.

The second category of recommendations is directly related to our findings on the impact of polarization to campus dialogue. We recommend that, if the university is truly interested in having a more politically engaged student body, that they do the following:

1. Provide professional development and training for faculty on how to be nonpartisan in their classes and on how to host constructive political conversations in their classrooms. Faculty ambassadors could be identified and trained to lead these sorts of conversations and given the resources in order to do so from an established democracy institute on campus.

2. Create spaces on campus for political discussion. This might look like debates, round tables, watch parties, citizen’s dialogues, or simply coffee between folks with different opinions. One promising model for large-scale dialogue is America in One Room, an initiative from Stanford’s Center for Collaborative Democracy (America in One Room, 2019).

3. Call out polarization on campus when it’s seen so that the University of Maine can develop as a place of refuge outside the harmful national political dialogue.
We recommend developing a center at the University tasked specifically with looking at ways to foster positive conversation campus, combat political polarization, and increase voter turnout. The work that is currently being done in these areas on campus is currently on a volunteer basis and reliant on grant funding. UMaine should follow the lead of other Universities with democracy centers such as Stanford, Columbia, Maryland University, Duke University, and many more. For a list of institutions combating polarization please refer to the report from The Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, based out of Columbia University's Teachers College as cited in our sources.

We believe that in doing these things the University will be able to increase our student voter turnout and serve as a model for other institutions on how to encourage dialogue across differences on your campus. Not only will this help to remedy the voter age gap we are seeing on a national level but it will also help educate the next generation of leaders on how to communicate without judgement but with interest, empathy, and civility.

**Directions For Future Research**

There are a number of factors that would have had an influence on the outcomes of our research that future research may wish to avoid. Although we took all reasonable steps and precautions to generate findings which were as unbiased as possible there are always circumstantial factors that cannot be avoided.
One such factor that undoubtedly had an impact on the data we collected was the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of this element goes beyond the psychological implications of collecting data from a group who, for the first time ever, is experiencing a global pandemic. Such was the nature and timing of this thesis and could not be avoided. Future research might look to administer a similar type of study at a different time, ideally close to an election.

The national political climate over the last four years is another exceptional circumstance that certainly should be noted for its impact on our findings. It is well known that the Trump Administration was remarkably unique and changed the tone and nature of political discourse in the nation. Nearly all of the students surveyed would have only one experience with voting in a presidential election on campus, the 2020 presidential election, which itself experienced a higher level of turnout than average elections because of this polarization.

We also acknowledge that there is a social desirability bias associated with some of the self-reporting questions we were interested in such as “I am a frequent voter,” and “I am politically active”. Self-reports in surveys historically overestimate voter turnout. It has been speculated that this is because there are desirable social consequences attached to being a frequent voter such as an increased sense of civic responsibility and community participation (Holbrook, 2010). However, this concern is not as relevant to our findings as it has been primarily addressed when dealing with self-reporting turnout surveys. Conversely, our data is primarily concerned with personal preferences and behaviors related to voting but not necessarily tied to the benefits of claiming to be a
frequent voter. We also acknowledge that, given the nature of our study, students who are less likely to vote are also going to be less likely to want to participate in our study. We mitigated this by reaching out specifically to majors who were reported as having a lower turnout rate in the 2019 NSLVE report (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2019).

These circumstances and challenges leave room for future research to conduct similar studies related to examining the influence of campus culture on student voter turnout. More research on the specific impact of polarization is necessary to truly understand where the negative perceptions of campus environment and dialogue are coming from. Further, data that examines the impact of known procedural barriers to voting would be useful in developing a well-rounded approach to improving voter turnout at UMaine. Finally, we offer our multivariate model as a possibility for future research to continue with.

While there is room for improvement, it should be noted that the University of Maine has been doing comparably well in its voter turnout efforts relative to other public Universities and the national averages for youth voter turnout. Through efforts such as UMaine UVote, The Campus Election Engagement Project, and student ambassadors, the University has successfully increased its turnout over the past several elections to levels that significantly surpass national averages. These efforts were successful enough to earn UMaine the “Voter Friendly Campus” designation for 2020-2021, indicating a level of institutional accountability for student turnout. All of this progress has been achieved on a volunteer basis, without funding. With support from the University, informed by this
research, we believe that the University of Maine could leap forward and serve as a model in encouraging turnout and civil dialogue for other public institutions across the country.
Works Cited


ASTIN AND SAX 1998-QUOTE FROM Long-Term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years; ASTIN, SAX, AVALOS 1999


Fowler, A. G. (2013). Five studies on the causes and consequences of voter turnout


APPENDICES
Personal Political Efficacy

Please respond to the following statements according to how you feel now

Strongly agree---Somewhat agree---Neutral---Somewhat disagree---Strongly disagree

1. People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.

2. Under the United States government the people have the final say about how the country is run, no matter who is in office.

3. I do not influence national politics.

4. I do not influence state politics.

5. I cannot influence politics or policy in my community.

6. My vote doesn’t matter.

7. The issues I care about won’t be affected by voting.

8. I would vote even if I were not very interested in the parties and issues in the election.

9. There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence what the government does.

10. I have the tools to connect with policymakers to advocate for or against policy.

Please respond to the following questions based on how you feel now

Very important---Somewhat important---Neutral---Slightly important--not important at all

1. Registering your peers to vote.
2. Convincing your peers to vote.
3. Donating to a political campaign/organization.
4. Volunteering for a political campaign/organization.
5. Attending a march or demonstration.
6. Volunteering in your community.

Perceived Political Environment On Campus

Please respond to the following statements according to how you feel now

Strongly agree---Somewhat agree---Neutral---Somewhat disagree---Strongly disagree

1. Students feel they are able to freely and openly express their political views on campus.
2. I am encouraged to vote by my peers.
3. I am encouraged to vote by my professors.
4. I feel that voting is something UMaine students always do.
5. Talking about politics with people who I DISagree with on campus is generally stressful and frustrating.
6. Talking about politics with people who I DISagree with on campus makes me feel generally interesting and informative.
7. The tone and nature of political discourse on campus is generally positive.
8. It’s hard to tell what the tone and nature of political discourse on campus is generally.

Political Engagement Of Students

Please respond to the following statements according to how you feel now
Strongly agree---Somewhat agree---Neutral---Somewhat disagree---Strongly disagree

1. I am interested in politics.
2. I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.
3. I am better informed about politics and government than most people.
4. I am politically active.
5. I am a frequent voter.

Political Expression

Please respond to the following statements according to how you feel now

Always---Often---Sometimes---Rarely---Never

1. I express my political views online.
2. I express my political views on campus.
3. I express my political views to my friends.
4. I engage in conversation with others to explain why they should/should not vote for a specific candidate.

Perceived University Outreach

Please respond to the following prompts according to how you feel now

Always---Often---Sometimes---Rarely---Never

1. I am contacted by the University about voting.
2. My professors talk to me about voting.
3. I know what my options are to vote on campus.
4. I know who to ask my questions about voting on campus.

Current Political Climate Nationally
Please respond to the following prompts according to how you feel now

Strongly agree---Somewhat agree---Neutral---Somewhat disagree---Strongly disagree

1. Which of the following would you use to describe the tone of political conversation nationally?
   a. Positive, negative, productive, defeating, hopeful, inspiring, confusing, frightening

2. Thinking about our nation’s political climate makes me feel:
   a. Insulted, inspired, exhausted, respected, entertained, concerned, hopeful, proud, frightened, confused, happy, angry, embarrassed, informed, excited

3. Over the last several years the tone and nature of politics in this country has become more negative.

4. The COVID-19 Pandemic decreased my likelihood of voting at all.

Other

Please respond to the following prompts according to how you feel now

Frequently---Often---Sometimes---Rarely---Never

1. Leading up to the presidential election, how often were you contacted by an outside group (e.g. a political party; a non-partisan group encouraging student voting, etc.) encouraging you to vote or be politically engaged?

Demographic

What is your age?

☐ 18-20

☐ 21-23
Which best describes you?

- Graduate student
- International student
- First year undergraduate student
- Second year undergraduate student
- Third year undergraduate student
- Fourth year undergraduate student
- Fifth year or above undergraduate student
- Prefer not to answer

What is your race/ethnicity?

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic
- South Asian
- Native American
☐ White/Caucasian

☐ Other (please specify) ______________________________

☐ Prefer not to answer

What sex were you assigned at birth?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to answer

What is your gender identity?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Trans male/trans man

☐ Trans female/trans woman

☐ genderqueer/gender non-conforming different identity (please state): ______

☐ Two-Spirit

☐ Gender non-binary

☐ Other:________

☐ Prefer not to answer

Which of the following do you identify most closely with?

☐ Lesbian, gay, homosexual

☐ Straight, heterosexual

☐ Bisexual
Queer

Questioning/Unsure

Other: ________________________________________________

Prefer not to answer.

How would you identify your religious affiliation?

Protestant

Catholic

Jewish

Buddhist

Hindu

Muslim

Agnostic (uncertain about the existence of God)

Atheist (do not believe in God)

Other (please specify).

________________________________________________

Prefer not to answer

How important is religion in your life?

Extremely important

Very important

Moderately important

Slightly important
Which political party are you officially enrolled under?

- Democratic Party
- Green Independent Party
- Republican Party
- Unenrolled
- Other qualifying party
- Prefer not to answer

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself more as a Liberal, or Conservative?

- Strong Conservative
- Moderately Conservative
- Leaning Conservative
- Neither
- Leaning Liberal
- Moderate Liberal
- Strong Liberal
- Other (please specify).
- Prefer not to answer

What was your parents’ total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?
Less than $25,000
$25,000 to $34,999
$25,001-$49,999
$50,000 to $99,999
$100,000 to $199,999
$200,000 or more
Prefer not to answer
Don’t know

Optional Open-Ended Questions

These questions were also used as the script for our focus groups.

1. What could the University do to better support students who would like to vote?
2. In what ways does the political environment on campus encourage you or deter you from voting?
3. What might keep you from voting, if anything?
4. What motivates you to vote?
5. How do conversations on campus about political issues impact your likelihood of voting, if at all?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel is important to understanding student voting at UMaine?

Would you be interested in participating in a focus group on these topics?

1. Yes/No
APPENDIX B: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

What could the University do to better support students who would like to vote?

1. Emails to the student body about where to vote that are encouraging students to vote.
2. Cancel classes on voting day.
3. Electronic ballots.
4. Voting on campus for all elections.
5. Transportation to and from the polls all day.
6. Change the polling location to somewhere more accessible like a dining hall.
7. Increased information about different methods for voting.
8. Mail registration cards to students.
10. Require professors to outline the date and time of voting locations to their students.
11. Unbiased location for information about the candidates including third-party candidates.
   a. Have a helpline that students can call with their questions.
b. Explain to students about how the ballots are worded and what they look like. Also, explain what the referendum questions really mean in more simple language.

11. Have a place where you can always go for voting information in the Union in the days leading up to voting day.
   a. Make it obvious as to who you can go to for information.
   b. Host information sessions on campus.

12. Generate University-sponsored documents about where and when to vote, how you can vote, and the candidates.

13. Be extremely conscious about party bias and make sure to provide information for all parties without stigma. Especially recognize that professors are often unable to remain apolitical.

14. Offer opportunities for productive political discourse on campus.

15. Increase the amount of political conversation on campus by sending out a newsletter highlighting when candidates are coming to campus and the activities of our political clubs.

In what ways does the political environment on campus encourage you or deter you from voting?

1. From the qualitative data, we learn that there is a high level of perceived polarization on campus. The data suggests that students feel that they are unable
to communicate their political opinions without worrying that they will be “judged”, “canceled”, or attacked.”

a. “People from both sides are terrifying and sometimes make it hard to discuss opinions”

b. “There is a mentality to attack those who do not agree with you.”

c. “I do not feel comfortable discussing politics on campus. My ideas get shut down and it makes me not want to vote.”

d. “Discourse feels aggressively liberal, and conservative voices are rarely spotlighted or addressed in a meaningful way.”

2. There is a feeling that if you tell your peers how you voted, particularly if you vote republican you will be “cancelled” under cancel culture.

a. “I could lose friends or be ostracized for having independent thoughts.”

3. Some students for whom the 2016 presidential election was the first election state that they voted simply to “get Trump out of office”.

4. The College Republicans are specifically mentioned multiple times in the qualitative responses as a negative force on campus. For some, this deters them from voting but for others it motivates them to vote so they can make change.

a. “Umaine republicans always discourage me and people I know.”

b. “Sometimes when I see an influx of conservative thought or anti-progressive values on campus it encourages me to vote and get others to vote.”
c. “When I see the college republicans being racist I want to vote more so they do not get their way.”

5. Generally feeling like the tone of the political campus is negative.
   a. “From my experience, most political conversations I’ve had were toxic. People generally wish to express their own opinions, instead of listening, and more importantly, understanding other people’s opinions.”
   b. “Sometimes it’s difficult to concentrate when everything is so politically charged, but it’s University, it’s expected that kids are political and take steps to make changes to a world that they want to live in, it’s not a bad thing. I would say I’m kind of neutral to it, I vote regardless.”
   c. “This campus makes it seem that if you are not one way, you hate everyone and are a sick person. For someone like me who doesn't really know much about politics, if I were to ask someone one question about it, I feel as if I would be burned at the stake for even asking about it and not already knowing the answer.”
   d. “I don't think it does. I worry that others will judge me for what I think if I shared how I voted, but it wouldn't stop me from voting.”

6. Political demonstrating has a positive impact in voter turnout.
   a. “Campus’s political environment encourages me to vote because most of the people I see demonstrating are right-wing, which speaks to a great need for left-wing voices to make themselves heard.”

7. Turning Point USA is mentioned by name several times.
a. “The group "Turning Point USA" has created an extremely hostile environment on campus. I feel threatened and intimidated by them.”

b. “The turning point assholes convince me to vote because I hate them and their stupid club and ideology. I want to see them upset.”

What might keep you from voting, if anything?

1. Not enough time.

2. Death/physical injury.

3. Pressure from other students.

4. Not having an opinion in the election.

5. A lack of transportation.

6. Not having a lot of information.

   a. “My own ignorance of candidate policies”

7. Not believing in any of the candidates.

8. Radicalization or pressure to conform to a specific party.

9. Polarization.

   a. “My concern for the division of our country.”

The data suggests that many students feel it is their duty to vote if they have the ability to do so. They don’t want to waste their privilege. A clear majority of the respondents to this question indicated that there is nothing that could keep them from voting.
What motivates you to vote?

1. A sense of duty to the country and also to use the privilege to vote because we have it.
   a. Minority groups in particular expressed that earning the right to vote was a battle hard fought and they owe it to their ancestors to do something about it.

2. A desire to make a change and have an impact.

3. Having a sense of information efficacy.

4. Wanting a certain candidate to win.

5. Having an impact on the government.

6. To have a positive impact on future generations.

7. A desire to mend polarization.

8. A sense of guilt for not voting.

9. Fixing the terrible politics we are currently in.


11. A belief that abstaining from voting is immoral.

12. Wanting to be able to participate in future political discourse: if you don’t vote you don’t have a say.

13. Specific issues of interest: climate change was mentioned often.

How do conversations on campus about political issues impact your likelihood of voting, if at all?
1. Students saying they don’t engage because it’s uncomfortable.
   a. “I don't really engage with conversations about politics on campus. This is because some people just immediately jump into explaining why you are wrong and they are right. I do talk with my friends, and we all encourage each other to vote, often regardless of political opinions.”

2. Many students indicated they believed that they had no impact.

3. Some people don’t want to talk about politics on campus because they might come off as “too political”
   a. “Personally, i' m voter. But I think for a lot of folks saying they're voting makes them worried about sounding "too political" (like the crazies). ...sort of like being worried that if they they say they go to church folks might think they're far-right politically. so if they're just moderate, it seems easier/less ostentatious to sit the election out. if only people would see how weird it is to make voting only something the fringes do!”

4. The liberal bias on campus encourages republican students because they feel their vote might count more.
   a. “I find it to be a snowball effect; the insane degree of liberal ideologies on campus builds a sort of sociological phenomenon that slowly seems to shift people's conservative ideologies to more liberal, progressive ones. This is what happened in my case. I found myself to be an independent when I arrived on UMaine campus; within 3 years I was a strong liberal with favoritism of very strong progressive policies.”
b. “They don't impact my likelihood of voting but I generally avoid a lot of political conversations because, as a moderate, they make me uncomfortable because I feel like neither liberals or conservatives understand or sometimes even respect me. Voting for me is a way to express my opinion without the backlash because I typically don't tell many people how I voted.”

5. “Hearing the other side encourages me to vote.”

6. “Conversations do not sway me to vote or not, I will always vote”.

7. “They upset me and make me want to vote”

Anything else?

1. “The conversation has to change. We need to be able to return to appropriate political discourse and listen to one another's opinions without bias or aggression.”

2. “Make sure each side is supported equally and fairly and people aren’t shamed to support what they believe in.”

3. “I hope that the conversations about voting, such as the emails I receive from UMaine and so forth, are more neutral instead of pushing democratic views all the time.”

4. “Stop favoring liberal ideologies. Stop demonizing the right side of politics. Stop integrating so many liberal topics into the classroom. I, personally, am not paying tuition to learn how to be a democrat.”
5. “I think students often feel overwhelmed by the polarity of voting, especially in an election such as 2020. I think helping students understand that voting is important even if you are not extremely politically active will encourage students to vote.”
APPENDIX C: MULTIVARIATE MODEL

Pseudo R-Square

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Dependent Variable

1. “I am a frequent voter.”
   a. Political Engagement of Students; question 5.

Independent Variables

1. Individual political efficacy
   a. “I do not influence national politics.”
1. Political Efficacy; set 1; question 3

2. Perceived political environment on campus
   a. Students feel they are able to freely and openly express their political views on campus.
      i. Perceived Political Environment On Campus; question 1

3. Political engagement of students
   a. “I am interested in politics.”
      i. Political Engagement Of Students; question 1

Control Variables
1. Political Expression
   a. “I express my political views on campus”
      i. Political Expression; question 2.

2. Age

3. Gender Identification

4. Party ideology
APPENDIX D: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

APPLICATION COVER PAGE

- KEEP THIS PAGE AS ONE PAGE - DO NOT CHANGE MARGINS/FONTS!!!!!!!
- PLEASE SUBMIT THIS PAGE AS WORD DOCUMENT

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS
Protection of Human Subjects Review Board, 400 Corbett Hall

(Type inside gray areas)
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Abigail Despres EMAIL: abigail.despres@maine.edu
CO-INVESTIGATOR: n/a EMAIL: n/a
CO-INVESTIGATOR: n/a EMAIL: n/a
FACULTY SPONSOR: Robert Glover EMAIL: robert.glover@maine.edu

(Required if PI is a student):
TITLE OF PROJECT: Student Voting At UMaine
START DATE: November 25, 2020
PI DEPARTMENT: Political Science/Honors

STATUS OF PI: FACULTY/STAFF/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE S (F,S,G,U)

If PI is a student, is this research to be performed:
☑ for an honors thesis/senior thesis/capstone? ☐ for a master’s thesis?
☐ for a doctoral dissertation? ☐ for a course project?
☐ other (specify)

Submitting the application indicates the principal investigator’s agreement to abide by the responsibilities outlined in Section I.E. of the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Faculty Sponsors are responsible for oversight of research conducted by their students. The Faculty Sponsor ensures that he/she has read the application and that the conduct of such research will be in accordance with the University of Maine’s Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. REMINDER: if the principal investigator is an undergraduate student, the Faculty Sponsor MUST submit the application to the IRB.

Email this cover page and complete application to UMRIC@maine.edu

******************************************************************************
FOR IRB USE ONLY Application # 2020-11-15 Review (F/E): E Expedited Category:

☑ ACTION TAKEN:
☑ Judged Exempt; category 2 Modifications required? Yes Accepted (date) 11/25/20
☑ Approved as submitted. Date of next review: by Degree of Risk:
☑ Approved pending modifications. Date of next review: by Degree of Risk:
☑ Modifications accepted (date):
☑ Not approved (see attached statement)
☑ Judged not research with human subjects

FINAL APPROVAL TO BEGIN 11/25/20 Date 10/2018

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AUTHOR’S BIOGRAPHY

Abigail Despres is from Fayette, Maine, where she grew up with her two sisters, parents, and dog named Douglas. She graduated in 2021 from the University of Maine with a Bachelor’s in political science where she also minored in French, international affairs, and legal studies. She is continuing on to earn a Masters of Public Policy from Brandeis University with a concentration in environmental policy.