

For my parents, who sacrificed so much to make sure that their oldest daughter could have a college education – something they did not get to have. And for the communication department at Saint Peter's, who helped mold me into the young professional that I am today. I would be nowhere without their guidance.

Abstract

For the 2016 United States Presidential election, 61.4% of the voting-age population reported voting, “a number not statistically different from the 61.8% who reported voting in 2012,” (“Voting in America”, 2017.) While race, economic status and age are seen as obvious factors that contribute to an active voter, there are factors that are just as important but have been less researched. If a person was raised in a household that openly discussed politics, are they more likely to actively vote in local, state and national elections? If a person’s parents or friends subscribe to a specific political party, how likely is it that a voting-age adult will feel pressured to vote for a certain candidate? Does the type of media that one consumes have an effect on a person’s voting habits?

These are just a few of the questions that were answered through the research conducted. With the use of printed surveys and later on, an online survey, 102 respondents were asked 24 questions about their voting habits, and the habits of their friends and family. The study shows that most young adults do consider themselves “active voters,” and vote in local, state and national elections, although the emphasis is placed on the national election. The research also showed that individuals who grew up in politically active households (their parents voted, they discussed politics, etc.) were more likely to become active voters themselves versus individuals who had parents who did not vote and did not discuss politics. This was despite the fact whether the individuals agreed with their parents about politics. These results suggest that a person’s upbringing and who they hang around with does have an effect on the type of voter that they are.

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Literature Review

There has been extensive research presented on the factors that contribute to one's voting habits, but these studies have usually been done outside of the United States, and many of them did not combine the outside influences of friends, family members and the media. In a longitudinal data study conducted by Jan Šerek and Tomo Umemura (2015), young people in the Czech Republic that discuss politics with their peers are "characterized by higher voting intentions and subsequent electoral participation," (Šerek and Umemura, pp. 285-300.) Despite this, Šerek and Umemura found that political news and political discussions with parents had little to no effect on a young adult's intentions to vote.

This research contradicts the findings of Gidengil, Wass and Valaste (2016), who only studied the parent-child link for voter turnout in Finland. Based on their research, they concluded that "parental education does affect the turnout of young adults," but that "parental voting rather than the transmission of education from parent to child appears to be the more important mediating factor," (Gidengil, Wass and Valaste, pp. 373-383.) Their research demonstrates that there is a strong correlation between parents who are active voters and the turnout of their voting-age children, versus parents who make the attempt to 'educate' their children.

In his field experiments conducted in the United States, Nickerson (2008) looked to answer the question: "Is Voting Contagious?" Households with two registered voters were canvassed, and residents that answered the door were either given a "Get Out the Vote" message (treatment) or a "Recycling" pitch (placebo.) According to Nickerson, both experiments found that 60% of the inclination to vote is passed on to another member of the household. "This

finding suggests a mechanism by which civic participation norms are adopted and couples grow more similar over time,” (Nickerson, pp. 49-57.)

Bartha and de Aguiar (2017) researched voters in the United States, but specifically, the social and external influences that play a role in selecting candidates. By researching social influence and a century’s worth of U.S. presidential election data, they found that a candidate’s choices are affected by sources that convey ‘consistent partisan biases’ that are skewed in favor of one candidate over another. They also found that in addition to these social factors, voters are also influenced by others, referring to it as “social imitation.”

Ohme, de Vreese and Albaek (2017) also chose to study first-time voters, but focused their research on social media and the impact it has in the weeks leading up to the 2015 Danish National Election. By surveying first-time voters and those who had voted already, it was found that the “social media exposure of first-time voters’ is responsible for their increase in certainty as the campaign progresses, while this effect is absent for experienced voters,” (Ohme, de Vreese and Albaek, pp. 3243-3265.) This demonstrates the importance of media in the formation of a voting decision.

On the topic of media, Cohen and Tsftati (2009) studied media and voting behavior before two Israeli elections (one in 2003 and one in 2006) to test if media influences people to vote strategically, or to vote for the less preferred candidate. “If news media are perceived to persuade other voters to switch their votes, it will more likely be necessary to switch one’s vote to either conform to or counterbalance the effects of media on others,” (Cohen and Tsftati, pp. 359-378). Their research goes to show that not only will people watch political news and take into account what the media reports, but that they will also vote depending on the information reported.

Media, familial and peer pressures aside, what if people are voting because they feel that they have to? Doherty, Dowling, Gerber and Huber (2017) discovered that even ‘battleground’ states have “modest” effects in U.S. national elections, which raises the questions of why individuals vote in less significant states. Battleground states, or ‘swing states,’ are states in which Republican and Democratic candidates have similar levels of support,” (Merriam-Webster.) These states are considered more important than others because they can ‘swing’ either way during Presidential elections, and therefore determining the election entirely. Through their research, it is discovered through their research that a great deal of individuals vote based on the behavior of others. “Compared to those who do not vote at all, people can reap about half of the social rewards associated with always (rather than never) voting by voting only when those they know are also likely to vote,” (Doherty, Dowling, Gerber and Huber, pp. 1095-1100.)

Research Question

With candidates gearing up for the 2020 United States Presidential Election, hopefuls are focusing on issues such as immigration, healthcare and gun control, (“The Issues,” 2019.) But one-in-10 voters will come from Generation Z, defined as anyone born in 1997 and onward, (Dimock, 2019.) This means that Millennials and other generations will account for a smaller share of eligible voters than they did in 2016, (Cilluffo and Fry, 2019.) This may scare some, considering the fact that young voters aren’t known for their impressive voter turnout, with only 20% of 18 to 29 year olds voting in the 2014 midterm elections, (CIRCLE: The Center for Information & Research On Civic Learning and Engagement.) However, it is important to understand their voting habits, and what factors contribute to those habits. Civic engagement is

also a vital part of education, and it is important for young voters to understand the roots of their habits, and that while a single vote in a country of millions may seem insignificant, at the end of Election Day, every vote truly does count.

The research question seeks to discover the habits of young voters and the factors that influence them, whether it is their parents, their peers or the news that they consume, and whether these influences actually play a role in the decision one makes when they enter the ballot box.

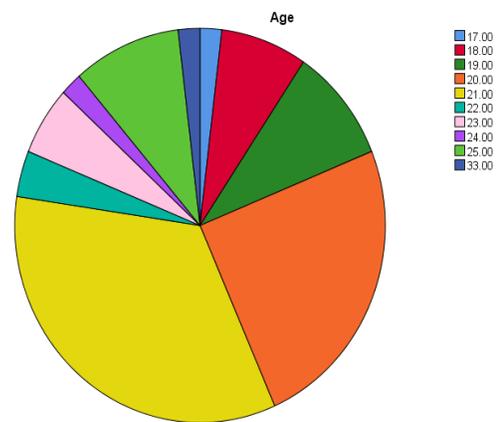
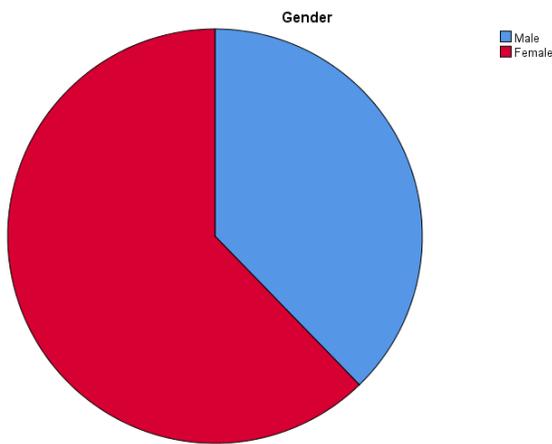
Round One: Methodology

Research was first conducted by the use of paper surveys that were handed out randomly to Saint Peter's students in November of 2019, specifically on Wednesday, Nov. 13 and on Monday, Nov. 18. The survey asked subjects 24 questions about their political affiliations, if they consider themselves to be an active voter, if they vote in local, state and national elections and to write down the last election they voted in. The survey asked individuals about where they get their political news from, giving them the options of CNN, Fox News, The New York Times, social media and 'other,' which allowed them to write in responses. The survey also asked that subjects if they felt that the media was influential in the way that they vote, giving them options ranging from "Very Influential" to "Not influential at all."

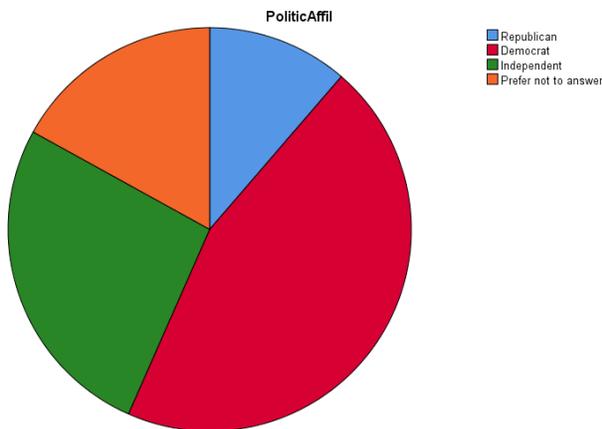
Questions were also asked about the respondent's parents and their political affiliations. Subjects were asked if politics were discussed in their household, if these conversations result in arguments or healthy conversations and if they feel that their parents influence the way that they vote. Later in the survey, the exact same questions were asked again, but this time, about the

subject’s friends and their politics. At the end of the survey, there were two open-ended questions that asked if 1) the subject ever felt pressured by their parents to vote a certain way or to subscribe to a certain political party, and if 2) if the subject ever felt pressured by their friends to vote a certain way or to subscribe to a certain political party.

In total, 53 students responded, with 20 of them identifying as male and 33 of them identifying as female. Most of them were between the ages of 19 and 21 years old.



Round One: Results



Out of the 53 people surveyed, 26 people called themselves active voters. Six identified as Republicans, 24 identified as Democrats, 14 identified as Independents and nine selected ‘Prefer not to answer.’

Over a half of the respondents said that they participate in local elections. Twenty-seven people said they participated in state elections,

while 26 people said they did not. Thirty-two people said they vote in national elections, while 21 people said they do not, proving that the emphasis is on national elections.

When it comes to their parent's political affiliations, seven said their parents are Republicans, 22 said their parents are Democrats, eight said their parents are Independents and 13 responded 'Other.' When it comes to the nature of political conversations in the household, 14 people said that they agree with their parents, 12 people said that they respectfully disagree, nine people said that they argue and 17 people said that they don't even speak about politics in their household. Thirty-two out of the 53 respondents answered that their parents are active voters, while 18 said they their parents did not actively vote. Three people said that they didn't know. When asked if they believe if their parents influence the way that they vote, one person said 'strongly agree,' 14 people said 'agree,' 12 people said 'disagree,' 17 people said 'strongly disagree' and eight people said that they don't vote, which shows that some people may listen to what their parents have to say, but the majority of them make their own decisions.

When it comes to their friends, three subjects responded that a majority of their friends were Republican, 32 responded that a majority were Democrat, five responded that a majority were Independent and 13 responded 'other.'

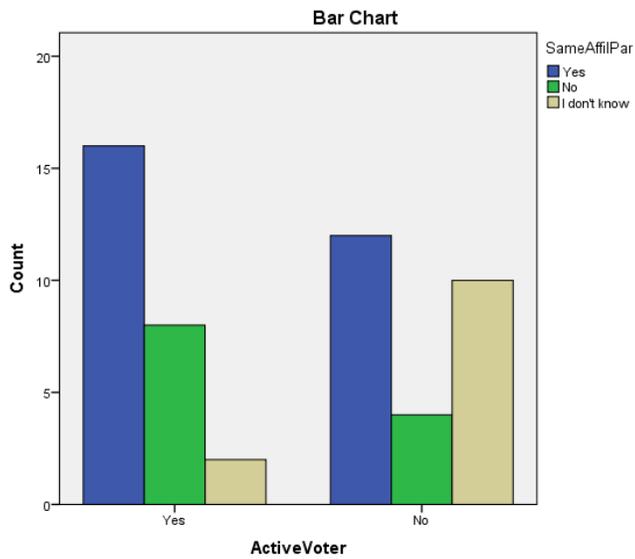
Thirty-four of the 53 respondents said that they discussed politics with their friends, while 19 said that they did not. When it comes to the nature of political conversations, 19 people said that they agree with their friends, 14 people said they respectfully disagree with their friends, four people said they argue with their friends and 15 people said that they don't discuss politics with their friends. Two people 'strongly agreed' that their friends influenced the way that they vote, 11 people 'agreed,' 21 people 'disagreed,' 14 people 'strongly disagreed' and five people answered that they did not vote. These responses are similar to the parents, which shows

that some people may ‘listen to’ their friends, but they make their own decisions based on their own convictions.

In the ‘interview’ section of the survey, there were many interesting responses. For the most part, most said that their family members respected their views, and that they shared similar viewpoints with their friends, so there wasn’t room with discourse. However, there were still a few answers that stuck out. One person, who described themselves as “more on the Democratic side,” explained that she gets pressure from her boyfriend, who is a Republican and has “completely different views” than she does. According to her response, they had to agree to stop talking politics, or else break up. Another described feeling “not as openly liberal” enough to the point where other people take notice.

One Republican-identifying respondent answered that his mother suggested that he vote Democratically in elections, but grew up to form his own opinions, which she now agrees with, although it was not made clear if he influenced her. The same respondent also wrote that most of his friends are Republicans, so if he ever chose to vote Democrat, he felt that they would give them a hard time about it. This, he said, does not change his voting because he votes Republican “out of my own free will and personal convictions.”

Based on these results, it is not unheard of to be influenced by the people one surrounds themselves with. However, many young active voters stand by the fact that they take into account what their parents and friends have to say, but choose to make their own decisions.



their parents. They scored $p=.027$ and $r=.37$

Another relationship discovered was between active voters and if they shared the same political affiliation as their friends. This scored a $p = .021$ and $r = .39$.

The research presented many strong correlations, one of them being the relationship between the subject’s active voting status and if their family influences the way that they vote. It received a $p= .021$ and $r= .47$. There was also consistencies between the subject’s voting status and if they shared the same political affiliation as

Round Two: Methodology

In the second round of research trials, the same survey was sent out to random Saint Peter’s University students on Google Forms. It was also posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and was made available from Friday, February 27 until Friday, April 10. The goal of bringing the survey to social media was to encourage a more diverse demographic of participants, seeing as how the first research trial garnered results from mostly college-aged Democrats.

This method proved to be successful, as the second round of research received results from 49 people. Their ages ranged from 19 years old to 70 years old, and 32 women and 17 men responded.

Participants [sp]



Officially, eight Republicans, 33 Democrats, seven Independents responded, with one person preferring to not answer. This was slightly better than the first trial, where only six people identified as Republicans.

Round Two: Results

Out of the 49 people surveyed, 42 people considered themselves to be active voters and seven considered themselves to not be active voters. Forty people said that they voted in local elections, 40 people said that they voted in state elections and 45 people said that they voted in national elections. Similarly to the first round of trials, this shows that there is a higher emphasis on national elections compared to lower-level government elections.

When it came to their parents' political affiliation, 21 participants identified their parents as Democrats, which was the highest amount. 15 said that their parents were Republicans, four said that their parents were Independents and nine listed their parents as 'Other.' Political

household conversations were slightly different compared to the first round of research trials, with 21 participants saying that they agree with their parents, 11 saying that they respectfully disagree, 10 saying that they argue and four saying that they don't even speak on the issue. As it seems, more people in the second round of trials discuss politics with the members of their households, even if it means that they disagree.

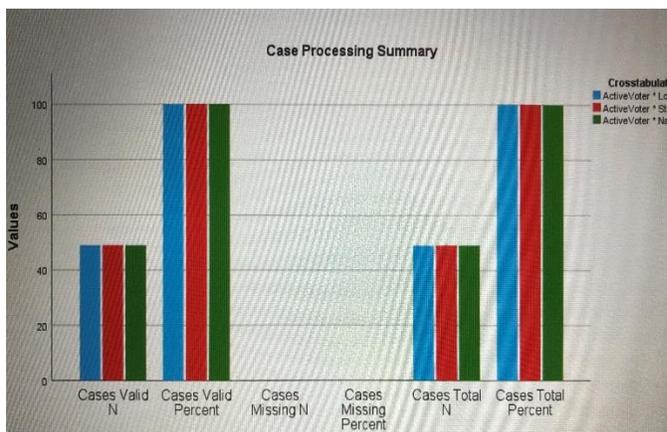
When asked if their parents influence the way that they vote, five 'strongly agreed,' 13 'agreed,' 24 'disagreed' and 7 'strongly disagreed,' with nobody selecting that they don't vote. This was much different compared to the responses in the first trial, where participants were much more unwilling to listen to their parents. This could be a result of the fact that many of those surveyed were older, so they no longer feel influenced by their parents.

When it came to their friends, five people identified their friends as Republicans, 35 people identified their friends as Democrats, five people identified their friends as Independents, and four identified their friends as 'Other.' Forty respondents said that they choose to discuss politics with their friends, while nine do not. When it comes to the nature of their political discussions, 31 say that they agree with their friends, eight say that they respectfully disagree, two say that they argue and six say that they don't even speak on the issue. These numbers are slightly different, because it shows that more people disagree with their friends as compared to the first round of trials. When asked if their friends influence them and their voting habits, three 'strongly agreed,' four 'agreed,' 26 'disagreed' and 15 'strongly disagreed,' with one person saying that they do not vote. This was slightly similar to the first round of trials, but the number of participants who 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' is higher. This also could be attributed to the older age of the participants.

In the interview section of the survey, many participants were able to give valuable insight on their voting habits and if their households and friends influence them in any way. For the most part, most answered that they don't feel pressured by neither their friends nor their family members to vote a certain way.

One participant, who identified herself as a Republican, explained that her “father is a strict conservative and certainly strongly shared his views with us and clearly expected us to agree.” She went on to say that although she agrees with him on some topics, she is not as “far right” as he is, which leads to heated arguments.

Another participant, who identified as an Independent, was able to provide some insight on her political discussions with her friends, in which she explained that she does not feel pressured by her friends to vote a certain way. “We discuss, but generally agree. My friends and myself don't 'pressure' each other. It's not something friends should do,” the participant wrote. One participant took the time to note that she has “friends who are Independent, Republicans and Democrats. We all see the world differently but we can have respectful discussions regarding our political stances.”



The second round of research also presented many strong correlations, such as one's active voter status and one's participation in local, state and national elections. If one considers oneself to be an active voter, that person has a higher

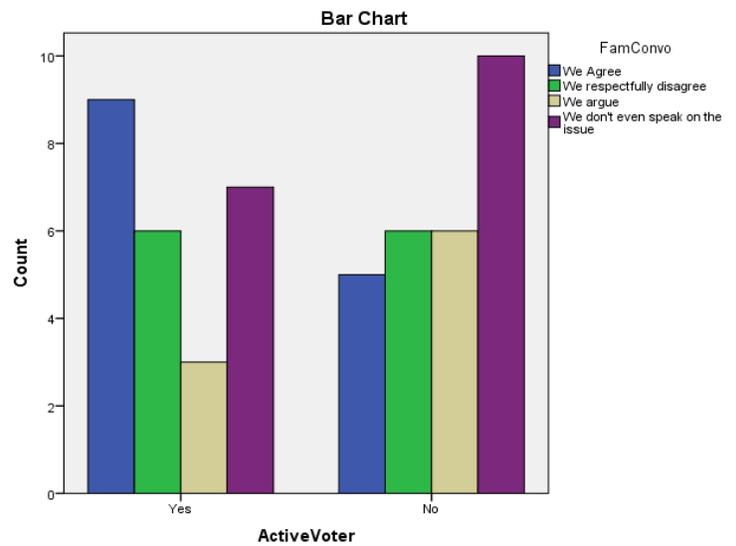
chance of participating in all three elections, although more applicants responded that they participate in national elections compared to lower-level government elections. Local

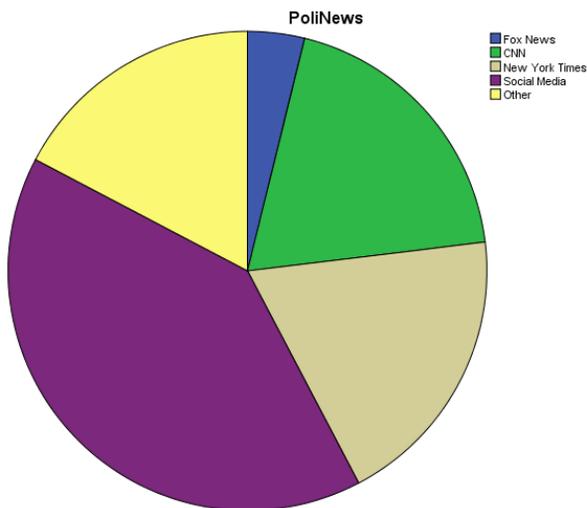
elections received a $p=.000$ and $r=.710$, state elections received a $p=.000$ and $r=.559$ and national elections received a $p=.000$ and $r=.517$.

There were also correlations between whether if the participant discussed politics with their friends, and if that participant knew their friends as active voters. This correlation received a $p=.006$ and a $r=.401$.

Discussion

Both rounds of research garnered many surprising results, it was most interesting to learn of the correlations involving active voters. The results imply that people are more likely to become active voters if their parents were active voters, or if they share political affiliations. The research also showed that if families discussed politics (whether they agreed politically or not,) then their children were more likely to become active voters.





It was also fascinating to see where subjects get their news from, as most people, across political spectrums, get their news from social media. This was interesting to see, as the individuals surveyed are no longer getting their news from traditional news sources (CNN, Fox News, New York Times, etc.) but from what their friends post on social media.

The 'other' option also gave respondents the opportunity to fill out individual answers if they chose to. In the first round of research, not many people chose this option, but for those that did, answers such as 'YouTube' and 'MSNBC' were received. In the second round of research, many selected this option, and they took the time to list all of the news sources that they refer to, which included many of the sources already listed, but also included podcasts, local news sites and blogs.

The results of this survey show that while civics education in schools are important, home involvement in politics is just as important. It also goes to show that social media is the forefront of news moving forward, which is fascinating to note for news outlets and political candidates looking to reach young voters.

Moving forward, the survey can be tailored to fit the needs of the community, something that was not initially thought of when formatting it. Not just different populations in different states, but also rural, suburban or highly metropolitan communities. The survey can also be modified to study one individual political group, such as Republicans, Democrats or Independents. It should also be taken into account that one's two parents may have differing

political opinions. In the original survey, it asks about the political affiliation of both parents, but only gives the option to select one. If this were to be handed out again, the survey should be changed to accommodate those instances.

In the first survey, participants were asked if their parents were active voters. However, this question was omitted in the second round of trials because it was made clear that not everybody's parents are able to vote due to their citizenship status. Their voting ability should not affect their ability to have their own political opinions, but that question in particular was removed in order to remain inclusive.

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Appendix

1. What gender do you identify as?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Prefer not to answer
2. What is your age? (write your answer) _____
3. What is your political affiliation?
 - a. Republican
 - b. Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. Prefer not to answer
4. Do you consider yourself to be an active voter?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. What was the last election you voted in? (write in your answer)

6. Do you participate in local elections?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. Do you participate in state elections?
 - a. Yes

- b. No
8. Do you participate in national elections?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
9. Where do you get your political news, if from anywhere?
- a. Fox News
 - b. CNN
 - c. New York Times
 - d. Social media
 - e. Other _____
10. Do you feel the media is influential in the way you vote?
- a. Very influential
 - b. Slightly influential
 - c. Not very influential
 - e. Not influential at all
11. What is your parents' political affiliation?
- a. Republican
 - b. Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. Other
12. We discuss politics in my family.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree

- c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
13. If yes, how do your conversations typically go?
- a. We agree
 - b. We respectfully disagree
 - c. We argue
 - d. We don't even speak on the issue
14. My parents influence the way I vote.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. I don't vote
15. I have the same party affiliation as one or both of my parents.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
16. My parents are active voters.*
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
17. What is the political affiliation of the majority of your friends?
- a. Republican

- b. Democrat
 - c. Independent
 - d. Other
18. Do you discuss politics with your friends?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
19. If yes, how do your conversations typically go?
- a. We agree
 - b. We respectfully disagree
 - c. We argue
 - d. We don't even speak on the issue
20. My friends influence the way I vote.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
 - e. I don't vote
21. I have the same party affiliation as most of my friends.
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
22. A majority of my friends are active voters.
- a. Strongly agree

b. Agree

c. Disagree

d. Strongly disagree

23. Growing up, did you ever feel pressured by your parents to vote a certain way / subscribe to a specific political party? Explain your answer below and feel free to be as specific as you'd like:

24. Do you ever feel pressured by your friends to vote a certain way? Explain your answer below and feel free to be as specific as you'd like:

*Question was removed in second round of research trials