

*The Effect of External Political Efficacy on  
Electoral Participation*

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Within the “mobilization of support theory,” it is alleged that electoral “participation serves to increase popular acquiescence to governmental authority or, more broadly, to promote feelings of legitimacy toward the political system” (Finkel 893). External political efficacy, a trust and belief that the government will respond to our demands, epitomizes this theory and deserves to be observed. There has been an abundance of studies surmising how citizens’ feelings about the United States government affect political participation, and only a few have been done to learn why and how political action influences trust in government. According to Steven Finkel, political action should not only be expected, it should also have “beneficial or positive effects on the individual’s moral and political development” (892). While we know specifically that positive external efficacy generates higher electoral participation, and conversely, non-participation equates to a belief in the non-responsiveness of government, a larger all-encompassing theory exists. The existence of a reciprocal relationship between external political efficacy and electoral participation has been proposed. The reverse suggests that voting influences an individual’s sense of external political efficacy, or “feelings of ‘system responsiveness,’ political trust, and diffuse political support” (Finkel 894). Does external efficacy, then, nurture and promote electoral participation? That is the issue I intend to address.

The central research question that constitutes the purpose of my analysis is whether or not young people who are deficient in external political efficacy are neither

registered to vote, nor have ever voted. This question is important mainly because similar studies have illustrated a positive reciprocal relationship between higher levels of external efficacy, or trust in government, with voting, not to mention various other forms of political participation (Finkel 909).

Stemming from my predisposition to believe that this research question would provide answers to whether or not there was a link between trust in government and voting, this central research question came mainly from the academic assertions of Paul Abramson's book, *Political Attitudes in America*, as well as a study done by Steven Finkel entitled, "Reciprocal Effects of Participation and Political Efficacy: A Panel Analysis." Most of the previous research done on voting, voter registration, and external political efficacy relationship places efficacy in the independent variable category, while voting and voter registration takes the title of dependent variable. Generally speaking, most "young adults have not had particularly high feelings of 'external' political effectiveness," and correspond to the feelings of the electorate in total (Abramson 189). Conversely, government responsiveness has been steadily declining in the recent past. My central research question enables me to approach this relationship from the opposite angle, yet leaves room for the possibility that there may be confirmation of a reciprocal relationship that should be entertained.

Prior to a definitive decision on both population and sample for this survey, but with a rough idea of what they would be, two separate hypotheses were constructed. Conceptually, the first hypothesis tests how likely those who lack trust in government and hold a cynical view of our public officials with low external efficacy, are not registered to vote; moreover, the second hypothesis tests how likely people in the sample group who

do, in fact, trust our government and exhibit this trust with high external political efficacy also vote in elections. Using these hypotheses, I am able to move forward with my investigation.

Once again the two variables are electoral participation and amount of trust or cynicism in government and its officials, which is measured by external political efficacy. Electoral participation is comprised of my two dependent variables, whether the person surveyed is registered to vote or has ever voted. The second variable, level of external efficacy, implies that the respondent either trusts in our government system and those who run it, or are cynical about the government and its ability to meet our demands. Specifically, trust would imply the person being surveyed believes that the government cares about each one of its citizens and what they need, while cynicism suggests public officials do not care about what the electorate needs and lose touch with the people after being elected. The independent variable is external political efficacy, whereas the dependent variables are voter registration status and exercising the ability to vote in my hypotheses, although scholarly research does exist to support the opposite approach as well. Within the survey, once we determine each respondent's level of external efficacy, we can then compare it to his or her level of electoral participation to see if there is, in fact, a positive correlation.

These hypotheses are important to examine, because they enable us to test the expected relationship between the chosen variables: registration status and voting, in addition to the people's trust in our government and government officials, or external efficacy. By collecting information on response distribution and then interpreting the survey results, we will be able to discern whether or not government cynicism plays a

role in electoral participation. Specifically, I expect to find a trend that depicts a positive correlation between lower levels of external efficacy and not participating in elections. That is, the more cynical one's view of the government and those who run it is, the more apt one is to not register or not vote at all. On the other hand, I assert that the more likely one is to believe that government and its officials have their citizen's best interests at heart and in mind, the more prone he or she is to register and vote in elections. I am predicting that the patterns that arise will be evident, and as I previously stated.

Logically speaking, if one does not trust the government, then he or she does not have faith in its ability to do what is needed to be done. Why, then, would someone who does not believe in our government opt to vote, or even register to vote? It does not make sense. That is why my hypotheses both assert that if a respondent does not have much external political efficacy when it comes to the United States government, then he or she does not vote or register to vote. Believing that there is no benefit to actively engaging in politics by voting or registering, the respondents refuse to do so.

In order to confirm my hypotheses, the pattern of relationship I would expect to find is that high levels of external efficacy results in correlating positive electoral participation. The pattern that would refute my hypothesis would be the antithesis of my inferred positive causal correlation. High external efficacy would correspond to low voter status and contradict my hypothesis.

In order to address my hypotheses, three questions were utilized from the "Civic and Political Attitudes of Young People Study, pt. 2." Since only these three specific questions pertain to my particular hypotheses, they are the only ones which can aid in finding out the answer to my hypotheses. The first question relates solely to the first

hypothesis, which relates voter registration to external political efficacy. On the eleventh page of the questionnaire, the question asks:

We understand that plenty of young people are not registered to vote, but we are wondering if you are currently registered to vote?

Yes  
No  
I don't know

In my opinion, this survey research question best measures the value of voter status, which is integral in determining the validity of my primary hypothesis. By obtaining the respondents' answers to this question, the data for the first independent variable will be discovered.

To ascertain the independent variable for my second hypothesis, comparing whether or not the respondent has voted and his or her external political efficacy, a straightforward question is used. The question inquires:

Have you ever voted?

Yes  
No

The simplicity and succinctness of the survey question is beneficial to the overall response rate in that respondents of all education levels will have no problem comprehending and answering what is being asked. Yet, it is still possible that they will refuse to respond to the question for a particular reason, such as embarrassment in never having voted, or unintentionally skipping the question. With the data that results from this question, it will be obvious what percent of the respondents have or have not voted. A comparison can then be made with the independent variable and its various responses.

For the independent variable, the survey research question from the questionnaire that best captures the essence of the variable is:

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Public officials don't care much about what people like me think  
Those we elect to Congress lose touch with the people pretty quickly  
In general, people getting together in their own communities can solve their problems better than the government in Washington  
The people in government do not waste the money we pay in taxes  
Most of the people running for office are smart people who know what they are doing  
Hardly any of the people running government are crooked

Each of these sub-questions epitomizes what is necessary to discern external political efficacy for the dependent variable. Using the matrix format and a two-directional intensity scale, more commonly known as the Likert scale, various statements regarding external efficacy gather the respondent's opinion quickly and easily. Each of the six statements pertain to external political efficacy, albeit some more than others. For example, asking how strongly the respondent agrees to "Public officials don't care much about what people like me think," pretty directly illustrates the level of belief that the government is concerned with his or her demands. Learning the response to "Hardly any of the people running government are crooked" does not directly link to external political efficacy, however it says a great deal on the general faith and trust in government. By combining the answers to each of these statements into the evaluation of my hypotheses, the comparisons can be made on a very broad scale.

In order to conduct the "Civic and Political Attitudes of Young People Study, pt. 2," Polimetrix, a company that conducts nation-wide surveys, created a target sample of one thousand young people. The underlying population for the sample was, in fact, young people. Drawing a random subsample of one thousand respondents between the

ages of eighteen and twenty-four, Polimetrix created the target sample from the American Community Study conducted by the Bureau of the Census. From there, the subsample was divided to include five hundred respondents of the target sample who were full-time college students, as well as five hundred respondents who were not full-time college students. Also significant was the fact that the sample excluded all full-time military persons.

A total of 1,629 interviews were conducted by Polimetrix with its panelists, and then the one thousand closest matching cases to the target sample were selected. Weights for the final sample were established by paralleling the sample marginals to the population marginals for age, race, education, and gender in two separate ways. First, these weights represented the characteristics of college and non-college respondents separately. The second set of weights represented the entire eighteen to twenty-four year old population on all four variables. My hypotheses are concerned with the second set of weights, grouping college and non-college respondents together.

For the hypotheses I have elected to evaluate, the underlying population is extremely appropriate. Whether or not an individual decides to register to vote occurs when he is of or slightly above the voting age, generally speaking. Likewise, if a young person chooses to begin voting in elections early on in his or her voting career, this trend will most like continue throughout his or her lifetime. Young people are more apt to have a strong opinion of our government and public officials, whether positive or negative, since they are the future of our country. By taking this sample of young people, we are gauging their civic and political engagement.

To acquire the desired one thousand responses for our sample, the survey was given online by Polimetrix. According to the company's website, surveys are conducted through their website known as PollingPoint, which provides anyone who is interested the opportunity to participate in interesting and serious polls on a variety of topics. PollingPoint offers surveys to its panelists via e-mail. Additionally, a point reward system is in place for online survey takers. Specific to our survey was a raffle for one hundred dollars with the purpose of enticing the panelists to respond. If a person completed the survey, they then had their name entered into the online raffle for a prize of one hundred dollars.

Based on the age range of our target sample, the internet as a means to conduct our survey is the key to successful results. Generally speaking, it has been found that "response rates increase this method" and eliminates error that occurs when "researchers or their assistants enter data from questionnaires by hand" (Nardi 68-9). Today, the majority of young people ages eighteen to twenty-four spend vast amounts of time on the internet. We, as a generation, are easiest to reach and become interested through cyberspace. Thus, if the goal is to endeavor to produce a good response rate, then other methods, such as phone surveys and mail surveys, will never be as effective. One reason for this is the high percentage of the population disregarding the need for a house phone and utilizing only cell phones as a means to communicate. Those who are away at school, or do not have a steady home of their own, would not enable the success of a phone survey.

After personally testing the survey previous to its official distribution, there was one disadvantage I could discern with using the online survey format. The problem lies

with the respondents becoming weary of the survey, since it is, indeed, lengthy. If they do, then they may rush through the questions and give answers that do not represent their true feelings and opinions. Similarly, the reward offered upon completion of the survey may prompt the respondents to answer as quickly, and inaccurately, as possible. In general, however, the best approach to administering the survey is definitely via the web, as it is one of the quickest and most accurate methods of surveying.

There are multiple sampling methods that exist in survey research. It seems as if the best one to take a sample from the underlying population is a type of probability sampling known as stratified random sampling. In this method, a sample representative of the population is selected, because each person in the underlying population has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample study; however, what makes it unique in probability sampling is that it allows for a sample with comparison groups of equal size, even if they are not that way in the population (Nardi 116). For example, despite knowing that there are significantly less young people enrolled full-time in college than there are those who are not enrolled full-time in college, a stratified random sampling by Polimetrix garnered a half and half sample for this survey. Unfortunately, stratified random sampling is a very costly procedure, which is one of the reasons why our survey is so expensive. In addition, whether the survey had been done over the phone or on the internet, a great deal more people had to be asked in order to obtain the representation necessary for the stratified random sampling, which can be seen by the response and refusal rates.

When gathering the results of this survey, Polimetrix created a group of respondents that is representative of the actual population. This means that the sample

contained proportions of gender, race, age, and education which are directly proportional to the underlying population. By doing this, they helped reduce the margin of error and ensure our results were as accurate and representative as possible. Although no survey will ever be completely accurate or representative of the total population, Polimetrix consciously took every measure to try and dispel any faults in the survey process.

According to the Polimetrix response rate report, .993 respondents were invited directly to the study from the set of active panelists. Of that number, 95.2% qualified for the study. The within-panel response rate for those invited to participate was 31.2%. The remaining 636 interviews were done with screenouts from other studies that were fielded at the same time. Ultimately, of the eligible respondents redirected to our study, 66.7% completed it.

Before bivariate cross-tabulations were calculated, simple frequencies and valid percents of who among the respondents were registered to vote and who had ever voted in an election were determined. In Table 1.1 and Table 1.2, the results can be seen:

<b>Respondents Who Have Registered To Vote</b>					
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative</i>
<i>Valid</i>	Yes	718	71.8	76.3	76.3
	No	223	22.3	23.7	100.0
	Total	941	94.1	100.0	
<i>Missing</i>	I don't know	35	3.5		
	Skipped	24	2.4		
	Total	59	5.9		
<i>Total</i>		1000	100.0		

**Table 1.1**

<b>Respondents Who Have Ever Voted</b>					
		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative</i>
<i>Valid</i>	Yes	562	56.2	57.2	57.2
	No	420	42.0	42.8	100.0
	Total	982	98.2	100.0	
<i>Missing</i>	Skipped	18	1.8		
	<i>Total</i>	1000	100.0		

**Table 1.2**

Then, six bivariate cross tabulation tables were constructed. Each one compared the dependent variable, whether the respondent was registered to vote, to the six different independent variable external political efficacy responses. Tables 2.1 through 2.6 provide the resulting data:

**Voter Registration by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Public Officials Do Not Care About My Opinion</i>					<i>Total</i>
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
<i>Response to Being Registered to Vote</i>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	179	244	174	97	22	716
	%	81.7%	75.8%	69.9%	80.2%	78.6%	76.3%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count	40	78	75	24	6	223
	%	18.3%	24.2%	30.1%	19.8%	21.4%	23.7%
<b>Total</b>	Count	219	322	249	121	28	939
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2.1**

**Voter Registration by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Congressmen Lost Touch With The People</i>					<i>Total</i>
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
<i>Response to Being Registered to Vote</i>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	242	250	163	52	8	715
	%	81.5%	76.2%	69.7%	80.0%	72.7%	76.5%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count	55	78	71	13	3	220
	%	18.5%	23.8%	30.3%	20.0%	27.3%	23.5%
<b>Total</b>	Count	297	328	234	65	11	935
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2.2**

**Voter Registration by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Communities Are Better Than Washington For Problem Solving</i>					<i>Total</i>
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	
<i>Response to Being</i>	<i>Yes</i>	227	255	177	46	10	715
		84.4%	75.0%	68.9%	82.1%	62.5%	76.2%

	Count %						
<b>Registered to Vote</b>	<i>No</i>						
	Count %	42 15.6%	85 25.0%	80 31.1%	10 17.9%	6 37.5%	223 23.8%
<b>Total</b>	Count %	269 100.0%	340 100.0%	257 100.0%	56 100.0%	16 100.0%	938 100.0%

**Table 2.3**

**Voter Registration by External Efficacy**

		<b>Response To Government Does Not Waste Money</b>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Being Registered to Vote</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count %	17 85.0%	36 81.8%	108 67.9%	210 70.5%	342 83.4%	713 76.6%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count %	3 15.0%	8 18.2%	51 32.1%	88 29.5%	68 16.6%	218 23.4%
<b>Total</b>	Count %	20 100.0%	44 100.0%	159 100.0%	298 100.0%	410 100.0%	931 100.0%

**Table 2.4**

**Voter Registration by External Efficacy**

		<b>Response To Candidates Are Smart</b>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Being Registered to Vote</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count %	17 100.0%	158 77.1%	246 72.4%	191 79.6%	103 79.2%	715 76.3%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count %	0 0.0%	47 22.9%	94 27.6%	49 20.4%	27 20.8%	217 23.7%
<b>Total</b>	Count %	17 100.0%	205 100.0%	340 100.0%	240 100.0%	130 100.0%	932 100.0%

**Table 2.5**

**Voter Registration by External Efficacy**

		<b>Response To Candidates Are Honest</b>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>

				<i>Disagree</i>			
<b>Response to Being Registered to Vote</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	7	34	154	257	263	715
	%	100.0%	69.4%	67.0%	79.8%	81.9%	77.0%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count	0	15	76	65	58	214
	%	0.0%	30.6%	33.0%	20.2%	18.1%	23.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	7	49	230	322	321	929
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2.6**

Six more bivariate cross tabulation tables were constructed, this time comparing the new dependent variable, whether the respondent has ever voted, to same external efficacy responses constituting independent variables. Tables 3.1 through 3.6 provide the corresponding data:

**Having Ever Voted by External Efficacy**

		<b>Response To Public Officials Do Not Care About My Opinion</b>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Ever Having Voted</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	133	204	135	70	16	558
	%	58.1%	61.3%	51.7%	57.4%	59.3%	57.4%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count	96	129	126	52	11	414
	%	41.9%	38.7%	48.3%	42.6%	40.7%	42.6%
<b>Total</b>	Count	229	333	261	122	27	972
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3.1**

**Having Ever Voted by External Efficacy**

		<b>Response To Congressmen Lose Touch With The People</b>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Ever Having Voted</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	187	203	122	39	4	555
	%	61.3%	60.1%	48.8%	59.1%	33.3%	57.2%
	<i>No</i>						
	Count	118	135	128	27	8	416
	%	38.7%	39.9%	51.2%	40.9%	66.7%	42.8%

	Count						
	%						
<b>Total</b>	Count	305	338	250	66	12	971
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3.2**

**Having Ever Voted by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Communities Are Better Than Washington For Problem Solving</i>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Ever Having Voted</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	184	194	131	38	9	556
	%	67.6%	55.6%	48.0%	61.3%	60.0%	57.3%
	<i>No</i>						
Count	88	155	142	24	6	415	
%	32.4%	44.4%	52.0%	38.7%	40.0%	42.7%	
<b>Total</b>	Count	272	349	273	62	15	971
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3.3**

**Having Ever Voted by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Government Does Not Waste Money</i>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Ever Having Voted</b>	<i>Yes</i>						
	Count	11	25	85	172	265	558
	%	52.4%	51.0%	49.7%	56.8%	62.5%	57.6%
	<i>No</i>						
Count	10	24	86	131	159	410	
%	47.6%	49.0%	50.3%	43.2%	37.5%	42.4%	
<b>Total</b>	Count	21	49	171	303	424	968
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3.4**

**Having Ever Voted by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Candidates Are Smart</i>					
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Response to Ever Having</b>	<i>Yes</i>	13	120	193	158	72	556
	Count	76.5%	57.4%	54.2%	63.7%	53.3%	57.6%

<i>Voted</i>		%					
		<i>No</i>					
	Count	4	89	163	90	63	409
	%	23.5%	42.6%	45.8%	36.3%	46.7%	42.4%
<b>Total</b>	Count	17	209	356	248	135	965
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3.5**

**Having Ever Voted by External Efficacy**

		<i>Response To Candidates Are Honest</i>				<i>Total</i>	
		<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>		<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
<i>Yes</i>	Count	3	30	118	194	211	556
	%	42.9%	58.8%	48.6%	59.3%	63.4%	57.9%
<i>No</i>	Count	4	21	125	133	122	405
	%	57.1%	41.2%	51.4%	40.7%	36.6%	42.1%
<b>Total</b>	Count	7	51	243	327	333	961
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3.6**

After analyzing the data produced by the “Civic and Political Attitudes of Young People Study, pt. 2,” several interesting results became apparent. Initially, I felt it important to find out how many young people are registered to vote. In Table 1.1, it is evident that a valid percent of 76.3% sample respondents are, in fact registered to vote, whereas 23.7% of those young people ages eighteen to twenty-four are not. That implies that over three fourths of the valid percent have performed their civic duty and, at least registered to vote. Consequently, I thought it also important to discern how many respondents have ever voted. It is obvious in Table 1.2 that a valid percent of 57.2% of the sample have voted at least once in their lifetime; contrarily, the remaining 42.8% valid percent of young people surveyed have never voted. With this basic knowledge, my hypotheses can be tested.

Throughout the bivariate cross tabulation data analysis, various patterns can be detected within the survey results. These patterns, while not exactly what were expected in response to my hypotheses, show a different trend – that strong opinions about political efficacy are held by those with high levels of electoral participation. It cannot be inferred from these results that having strong external political efficacy breeds a strong voting base, but according to these results there is a correlation between the two.

One pattern that is evident within the data analysis can be seen by looking at the top row of Tables 2.1 through 2.6 and Tables 3.1 through 3.6. Each bivariate cross-tabulation chart shows that in each level of external efficacy on the Lickert scale compared with the electoral participation response, those who were registered to vote held the highest amount of participation. For example, in Table 2.1 the question “Do you agree that public officials do not care about my opinion?” was asked. In response to this question, 81.7% of those who “strongly agreed” were registered to vote, while only 18.3% of those who “strongly agreed” with the question were non-registered voters.

The pattern follows suit with the previous example; however, there also tends to be an overall decrease and then increase in the percentage of respondents with external efficacy responses who are registered to vote. Table 2.4 depicts decreasing and then increasing valid percent pattern. Of those who strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree that government wastes money, 85.0%, 81.8%, 67.9%, 70.5%, and 83.4% of those respondents, respectively, are registered to vote. There are a few infinitesimal anomalies within this pattern. Yet, the majority of responses and data analysis prove the increasing and decreasing from left to right pattern to be true. From this observation we can plainly see that expressing external efficacy, as

deduced by the responses to a government trust question, is mainly done by those young people who are registered to vote. This could give rise to the idea that having an opinion regarding external efficacy could lead a young person to register to vote, although this cannot be proven simply by looking at the data analysis.

Pertaining specifically to my second hypothesis are the data analyses found in Tables 3.1 through Table 3.6. Each table presents a surprisingly split response. Of those who responded in each of the five external efficacy categories in the six questions, not a single one produced a majority leaning towards having ever voted or having never voted. For instance, the independent variable question, do you agree that Congressmen lose touch with the people, provides the closest data analysis implying a majority one way or the other pertaining to having voted or not. The numbers 61.3%, 60.1%, 48.8%, 59.1%, and 33.3% correspond to the five Lickert Scale responses and those respondents having voted in the past. Contrarily, the five possible independent responses produced percentages of 38.6%, 39.9%, 51.2%, 40.9% and 66.7%. As we can tell, there is no definitive pattern that emerges. Nor is there an absolute majority; furthermore, this lack of pattern can be seen in Tables 3.1 through 3.6. The conclusion we must come to, then, is that external efficacy does not have a positive causal effect on electoral participation.

In the end, my hypotheses were not proven true with the data analyses. In reality, however, my desire was to do a data analysis on the opposite causal effect, the relationship between voter registration and having ever voted and corresponding levels of external political efficacy. I firmly believe that if my hypothesis had used electoral participation as the independent variable and external efficacy as my dependent variable, then significant trends would have been discovered.

For the most part, the questions my hypotheses focused on worked the way I had hoped they would. The two questions determining electoral participation were, for the most part, straightforward. There are, unfortunately, numerous reasons why the questions I identified might not measure the full idea of each variable. For example, in order to correctly measure electoral participation, the respondent must be completely honest. If he or she is worried about providing an answer that is socially acceptable and not embarrassing, then he or she may respond yes to being registered to vote when in reality the answer is no. A question that is offensive or abrupt may also cause a false response. The survey question, “Have you ever voted?” is terse, and can be construed as patronizing to those who have never been to the polls. Thus, for future surveys my question wording must as non-condescending as possible.

Drawing conclusions about external political efficacy with only one question, albeit in matrix format with a two-directional intensity scale, is feasible; yet, it would be ideal if the entire survey had been dedicated to efficacy and my hypotheses. The third question also only *implies* external efficacy, which can be argued is subjective and does not produce objective data. To improve the questionnaire on the whole, a larger quantity of government trust and efficacy questions would be necessary. A similar matrix-style format could be used for some questions, as well as a much broader array of questions and possibilities of answers would suffice.

Unmentioned in my research question and hypotheses is the idea that different forms of efficacy could convey stronger and weaker levels of electoral participation. I suggested that there is a positive relationship between trust and faith in government and registration and voting. However, a respondent may have voted in every election since

he or she turned eighteen and, therefore, have a much stronger external efficacy than someone who is twenty-four and has never voted. The questions necessary to determine this potential influencing factor and its corresponding data were not included, but are something I would be interested in learning more about.

In addition there is the possibility that outside factors aside from voting and voter registration which may have played a role in determining each respondent's feeling of external political efficacy. For instance, future studies with similar hypotheses may endeavor to control for education by asking questions specific to the type and extent each respondent has.

Both the population and sample were appropriate for my topic. Yet, the sample size could always be larger to provide for a more accurate analysis. Over all, however, the population of eighteen to twenty-four year olds was ideal to measure young people's electoral participation and corresponding external efficacy. If, in the future, there was an interest to study voting and voter registration trends compared to external political efficacy of the population as a whole, or to compare older to younger age groups, a whole new population and sample would be necessary.

Although the study was implemented as best as can be expected, there were serious time and budget constraints. Without a cap on length of time or amount of money available, it may have been better to implement the survey as a longitudinal rather than a cross-sectional study. Specifically, if we conducted a panel study, it would enable us to measure the level and change of the external political efficacy of panelists through time. Establishing whether or not a reciprocal relationship between the variables, which Finkel and many other scholars have asserted exists, could also be determined, and would

provide further pertinent research on political engagement of youths. Fear lies in the risk of losing people on the panel due to death, changing of a name, moving, or other factors. Ideally, face-to-face interviews would produce the most accurate results; however, it would also be the most expensive and time consuming.

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