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# Online Political Participation: Evaluation of the Changing Effects Over Time

Gabriel Davis May

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ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: EVALUATION OF THE CHANGING  
EFFECTS OVER TIME

by

Gabriel Davis May

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the College of Arts and Sciences,  
and the School of Social Science and Global Studies  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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May 2019

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## ABSTRACT

The internet is a political participation medium that has been subject to constant changes. Just since 2008, there has been a significant increase in the amount of people who use the internet for political purposes. Building on the work of Brian Kruger and others I evaluate whether the internet brings new participants into the political process or if the internet only "reinforces" those who already participate. I utilize data from recent American National Election Studies to employ an ordinary least-squares regression model for recent presidential election years and assess whether the internet has brought new participants into the political fray via online political participation. I then employ a mixed effects model to identify the driving force behind an increase in online participation. Similar to Krueger and other's findings I can conclusively claim that the internet is continuing to serve as a medium for participation by those who are not known to be active participants through traditional means, namely those of a younger age; that effect is shown to continue over time. I also find that the increase in online participation is due to the growing importance of internet-based skills in political participation.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Scholars within political science agree on the fundamental underpinnings of political participation in the United States. It is well documented that one's socioeconomic standing plays a determinant role in the time, manner, and place of political participation. Citizens' socioeconomic standing is the key determinant of whether one participates in the political process [Milbrath, 1965]. Moreover, it is socioeconomic status that gives her the resources, such as money, civic skill, and free time, that allows her to participate in the political process [Brady et al., 1995, Verba et al., 1993]. However, simply acquiring these resources is not enough to drive one to expend them for political purposes; these resources might be easily spent elsewhere in society. Possessing these resources, however, allows political elites to identify and mobilize citizens to participate [Rosenstone et al., 1993]. For example, those who develop civic skills do so because they are involved in a community organization, employed, or participate in a like activity. Political campaigns utilize the networks through these community organizations and businesses to mobilize voters to their benefit.

Elites can mobilize citizens to participate in ways such as voting and donating money, but elites can also mobilize through more expressive ways such as joining a protest, wearing a button or sticker, discussing their views with family or friends, and volunteering for a political campaign. Through these mobilization efforts, and the subsequent participation, citizens develop the psychological notion that their participation in the political process has a substantial impact [Campbell et al., 1980].

If securing the proper resources through socioeconomic status flags one to be mobilized to participate in the political process, it is also true that those who do not fit this mold

would not be targeted for mobilization. Those of lower socioeconomic status cannot earn an adequate income to donate to a political campaign of their choosing, nor do they possess a substantial amount of free time and civic skill to volunteer in a community organization or political campaign. This reality leads political elites to neglect seeking the support of citizens of low socioeconomic status. Due to the neglect of elites, citizens of low socioeconomic status are left with the belief that their participation in the political process would be largely ineffective [Campbell et al., 1980, Finkel, 1985, Pasek et al., 2008].

Yet the advance of technology, namely in the realm of the internet, offers more time- and cost-effective ways for one to involve herself in the political process. The internet also provides a more effective avenue to participation, allowing one to draw off a different skill set than for traditional participation.

The technological advances of the last three decades have altered (maybe affected) politics along with every other area of society. Through social media one can observe friends voicing their opinion on the day's developments. The news of the day is also delivered directly to one's fingertips in the form of push notifications. Politicians are now evermore connected to the electorate through various social networking platforms where they can communicate policy positions by a Tweet, blog post, or video.

Politics aside, information, and products pertaining to virtually any need are readily available at the push of a button. One might be able to reevaluate her latest financial transactions, check the weather outlook, keep up with the score of the local basketball team, and summon a ride-share all within the same minute. In short, the internet delivers innovative accommodations to those who were not able to acquire these services previously; it is folly to believe that the internet cannot accomplish the same in the political sphere [Bimber, 2000].

Building on the work of Brian Krueger and others I seek to determine whether the internet brings new participants into the political process or if the internet only reinforces those who already participate. I utilize data from recent American National Election Studies to employ an ordinary least-squares regression model for recent presidential election years

(2008, 2012, 2016) and assess whether the internet has brought new participants into the political fray via online political participation. I then employ a linear mixed effects model to see which variable has been the driving force of online participation. Similar to Krueger and others' findings I claim that the internet is continuing to serve as a medium for participation by those who are not known to be active participants through traditional means, namely those of a younger age.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The types of citizens who participate in the political process has been a conundrum for political scientists since voter turnout began to decline in the post-war period [Putnam, 1995]. Early analysis does not indicate one trait where one can point to the source of political participation. Rather, there are many traits of a person that foster political participation, and each trait seems to reinforce others. Simply, people of greater socio-economic status are more likely to participate than people in lower classes [Milbrath, 1965]. Citizens of high socioeconomic status think that politics impacts them the most, and they have more opportunity to interact with political leaders. More specifically, the four underlying traits that aid in fostering participation are social position, education, occupation, and income [Brady et al., 1995, Campbell et al., 1980, Milbrath, 1965, Rosenstone et al., 1993].

#### 2.1 Foundational Literature

Sam Seaborn in Aaron Sorkin's drama *The West Wing* inspiringly identifies education as the "silver bullet" of success. That analysis came close to truth for Lester Milbrath (1965) in his analysis of political participation. An adequate education allows one to have the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to play an active role in the political process. Education lays the groundwork for a person, teaching her the mechanics of government [Berinsky and Lenz, 2011, Brady et al., 1995, Galston, 2004, Mayer, 2011, Mossberger et al., 2007]. Political knowledge allows one to observe the current political climate and to know what issues are at stake in each election cycle. It enables one to conduct research on political topics and gather all the information necessary to discern a political opinion [Kenski and Stroud, 2006, Galston, 2004, Galston, 2001, Rosenstone et al., 1993].

Once one confidently establishes her political opinion, she is then inclined to align herself with a political party, making her a prime target for political mobilization. Experiences leads to familiarity, familiarity leads to alignment with a political party, and then alignment leads to mobilization by that party. All this taken together gives one a sense of confidence that her involvement will make a difference.

Those who are more efficacious are more likely to participate [Milbrath, 1965]. Having a greater amount of political knowledge gives one greater confidences that she can do somethings to affect the outcome of a policy issue. Two types of efficacy can be identified in political participation.

The first is internal efficacy. Internal efficacy spawns from one's own confidence in her understanding of the political process. One she has established confidence in her own understanding, she can have the confidence to participate. This, second, concept is called external efficacy, which, simply stated, is one's perceived influence on the political process [Rosenstone et al., 1993]. Both forms of efficacy, together, motivates citizens to take part each cycle and stay engaged with the political process beyond an election year. Additionally, those who are more efficacious are more likely to trust politicians and most inclined to feel that political decisions impact them. Efficacy, both internal and external, is a major component in the equation of political participation. Without it, people would lose confidence in the process and stop participating altogether [Balch, 1974, Kenski and Stroud, 2006, Finkel, 1985, Morrell, 2005].

Citizens with intense preferences to a certain political or policy outcome are, too, more likely to take part in the political process; moreover, people who have a strong preference for one party or candidate over others are more likely to take part [Milbrath, 1965]. Most who also feel that they have a direct stake in a political issue are more likely to participate. This sense of investment leads to citizens who are members of an associate with a specific mission to be more likely to engage in politics. Members of certain religious groups, labor unions, and civic organizations, for instance, are more likely to participate in the

wider political process than those who do not participate in those groups [Brady et al., 1995, Milbrath, 1965, Rosenstone et al., 1993].

The members of all of these groups unite around one common purpose. A labor union, for instance, might have goals of working to secure better pay and workplace safety regulations. These two goals serve to drive members of organized labor to pursue electing politicians who support collective bargaining rights and work place safety regulations. Likewise, members of religious organizations might unite to elect officials who support policies that that allow them to practice their religion freely. Members of the Muslim faith might work to elect a school board member who supports excusing Muslim children from school on Islamic holy days. Members of the Jewish faith might support a Congressional candidate who held a strong yet positive position towards the State of Israel. Citizens who, to the contrary, are not members of any type of organization and who are constantly concerned with personal issues are not likely to participate in the political process [Brady et al., 1995, Campbell et al., 1980, Milbrath, 1965, Rosenstone et al., 1993, Verba et al., 1993].

One's position in any given social network is also key to whether she participate in the political process. That is, one's distance from the center of society determines the likelihood she will be drawn into the political process [Milbrath, 1965]. Those who are closer to the center of a social network are more likely to participate than those who are further from the center. As an example, take a local small business with a sizable workforce. The person at the center of that social network would be the owner. The next step in the social network away from the owner of the business would be any manager that oversees a certain part of the company's operation. Proceeding on, there are assistant managers or veteran employees with whom the manager works closest. Furthest away from the center of the social network would be any new employee. At the time of her hiring, she is new to the company and has not solidified any relation with her coworkers, whether personal or profession, so she is a great distance away from the center of the network. Because of her position in this particular social network, the new hire is the least likely to be influenced by the political leaning of

the owner or the managers, leaving the chance she will participate in a desired political act unlikely.

The same concept can apply to one's social position in a community. The closer one is to other community members with strong political connections or convictions, the more likely she is to participate politically. The further away one is from the politically connected, the less likely she is from participating [Campbell et al., 1980, Mutz, 2002, Nie et al., 1969]. Moreover, extroverts are more likely to participate than introverts. An extrovert's desire to interact frequently with others increases the chances of her encountering a person who has strong political connections [Milbrath, 1965]. However, people who feel cynical about the political process—or society in general—are least likely to participate. If one feels alienated by society or those with intense political convictions, she is not likely to be willing to take part in any political activity.

Citizens are also likely to take part in the political process if they perceives an upcoming election as important [Milbrath, 1965]. This is increasingly true with elections for higher office. The turnout rate for Governor of any given state is larger than that of state legislature. Moreover, the turnout rate for President is much higher than that for a seat in the House of Representatives, even the Senate.

"Crisis elections," as Milbrath (1965) calls them, are always viewed as more important than normal elections. If any election is seen as having a great consequence, more people participate, desiring to affect the outcome. However, this is not universally applicable. One sect of voters may see the election as more consequential than others. This is true for almost every election where a Republican has won the presidency. According to NES data, there have been consistently more voters who identify as Democrats over Republicans. In practice, if the United States were to experience 100 percent voter turnout, a Republican should never win the presidential popular vote. Most elections that ended with a Republican in the White House were a direct result of Republicans perceiving those election more important than Democrats.

Voters on both sides are more likely to turnout at higher rates if they can perceive a clear difference between the candidates [Franklin et al., 2002]. If one is convinced that both candidates stand for similar policy initiatives, she sees no sense in giving to a campaign, volunteering, or even showing up to vote. If she believes that the policy outcome might be the same regardless of who wins the election, she might conclude that her participation efforts may be fruitless. To the contrary, if she sees a stark difference in the candidates, she might rally behind her respective ideologies in order to secure the preferred policy outcomes [Milbrath, 1965].

To this point, the story about participation is only one-sided. There is another major player in determining political participation: political leaders.<sup>1</sup> The above traits of political participants are well documented within political science [Brady et al., 1995, Campbell et al., 1980, Milbrath, 1965, Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, Rosenstone et al., 1993, Verba et al., 1993]. Political leaders seek out citizens who exhibit these traits with the goal of coaxing them to enter the political arena. This is not to say that political leaders select those who participate, but rather these targeting methods only reinforce those participatory traits that already exist.

Political mobilization is, "the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate" [Rosenstone et al., 1993]. Elites mobilize citizens both directly or indirectly. Elites mobilize citizens directly when they contact potential participants personally. In return, citizens usually respond by direct means through either donating money or free time to the candidate [Rosenstone et al., 1993].

Elites can mobilize citizens indirectly when friends and/or family contact them and encourage them to participate. This type of mobilization usually occurs via social networks, whereby political leaders directly mobilize a few citizens who, in turn, mobilize their own network of peers. [Rosenstone et al., 1993]. This has quite an effect. When friends,

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<sup>1</sup>Here it should be noted that "political leaders" is a broad term. For my purposes here, a "political leader" should be defined as any person serving in an elected or appointed, any person seeking an elected or appointed office, and any entity or person under her supervision (i.e. campaign staff, constituent services, legislative staff, etc.).

family, or coworkers attempt to mobilize others, they create a type of social expectation whereby one feels compelled to participate. This expectation creates the possibility of a "social sanction" if one does not performed the desired action [Knack, 1992, Knoke, 1990, Mann, 2010, Milbrath, 1965].

Political leaders might not need to mobilize every potential voter but only those with a strong chance of responding to the mobilization efforts. These individuals are typically found in the closest circles of the political leader's social network and include business leaders, faith leaders, leaders of labor unions, and members of other special interest groups [Knoke, 1990, Lim, 2008, McClurg, 2003]. These leaders are also citizens whose actions would be most effective in mobilizing others in a more distant social proximity from the political leader. [Rosenstone et al., 1993, Milbrath, 1965].

In order for a citizen to respond to these mobilization efforts, she must be targeted at the proper time during a campaign cycle, specifically the time leading up to the election. For participatory efforts to be maximized, there must be a strong link to salient political outcomes where important policy decisions hang in the balance [Rosenstone et al., 1993, Milbrath, 1965, Sides and Karch, 2008]. However, these efforts can be nullified if one's personal issues demand the most attention.

## **2.2 Online Participation Literature**

Those who looked to determine how internet would affect political participation outlined two possible outcomes: the internet could normalize participatory inequalities found in traditional behavior [Bimber, 2000], or it could mobilize citizens who do not participate through traditional means by lowering the costs of participation [Krueger, 2002]. Moreover, scholars have built a consensus around the internet's mobilizing capabilities [Best and Krueger, 2005, Gibson et al., 2005, Boulianne, 2009]. The literature finds significant evidence that the internet is lowering the cost of participation and bringing some to participate who did not previously have the means. No study that suggests the mobilization hypothesis observes the

effect of the internet on participation over time.<sup>2</sup> All research has focused on a single survey sample. This method puts the study in danger of being subject to election-specific contexts. This study looks to observe the effects on online participation over a course of eight years, with measurements being taken every presidential election year.

Studies contend that if the internet had any effect on political participation at all, its effect would reinforce participatory disparities [Anduiza et al., 2009, Bimber, 2000, Hirzalla et al., 2010, Muhlberger, 2003]. A central critique of the normalization hypothesis is, however, that it would be impossible to find positive results concerning the internet's effect on participation by using measures of traditional participation only [Krueger, 2002, Anduiza et al., 2009, Gibson et al., 2005, Best and Krueger, 2005, Gibson and McAllister, 2013].<sup>3</sup> In response to this issue, Brian Krueger looked to evaluate whether the internet has the ability to foster political involvement through internet specific means. As previously discussed, resource theory—the idea that people draw from certain resources such as money, free time, and civic skills—does a good job at describing the types of citizens who are most likely to politically participate in the US, but these traditional resources do not denote online participation. Thus, a new internet-specific resource theory must be employed to measure the participatory potential of the internet [Krueger, 2002].

By comparing the results from two logit models measuring online and offline participation separately, Krueger found a stark contrast between predictors of online and offline participation. The variables that significantly predicted offline participation were the ones that could be expected: age, external efficacy, political interest, and civic skills. Civic skills, however, measure the extent one participates in her job, religious organization, community group, and other organizational activities. These skills are specific to traditional (offline)

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<sup>2</sup>All except Vissers et al., (2011) who utilize a two wave panel study to measure the spillover effect of online participation onto offline participation. These findings are discussed later.

<sup>3</sup>Gibson and Cantijoch found that measures such as party identification, mobilization, and news consumption have similar attributes whether they are used to measure participation within the online and offline context. More expressive modes of participation do not have similar attributes, and should be used to measure participation given the online/offline context. For further reading see Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013

participation.

Krueger, therefore, developed a measurement for internet skills where he observed whether one was proficient in computer-based activities, such as building a webpage, bookmarking a webpage, receiving news online, sending an attachment via email, using a signature file, and sending a secure email [Krueger 2002, 485]. He then sought to observe the relationship of this measurement—along with other demographic and resource variables—and online participation, and found that gender (male), political interest, internal efficacy, free time, internet skills, and broadband access all significantly and positively predicted online participation.

Given gender, interest, and internal efficacy one might argue this model showed signs of the "reinforcement" hypothesis. It is interesting to note, however, that age did not return a significant effect for online participation, and income returned a negative yet significant effect for online participation also. Civic skills, moreover, had no effect on online participation as expected. While those who participate politically online might appear to be male and equally as interested as those offline, those who participate online are younger, receive less income, and draw from a different skill set than those who participate offline [Krueger, 2002, Best and Krueger, 2005].

Along with Krueger's findings, others looked to further test the mobilization hypothesis under different circumstances. Researchers looked to discover whether the internet has the ability to mobilize inactive citizens to participate in the political process within the British context. Gibson et al., found that only 17 percent of the British population participated through online means with those that required the least effort being the most popular; however, they observed that those active internet users were more politically involved in offline politics than non-internet users [Gibson et al., 2005]. As with previous findings offline participation was simply predicted by gender (male), age, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, the authors realized that the predictors of offline participation similarly predicted contacting political organizations online. However, they also found that these

predictors were not as influential on online participation, specifically in the area of age and socioeconomic status, as they were on traditional and offline forms of participation.

Other studies have looked to measure the effects of exposure to media and information via the internet on political efficacy, knowledge, and participation [Kenski and Stroud, 2006]. The authors noted that internet access and exposure to information concerning the 2000 presidential campaign showed a positive effect on internal efficacy. Moreover, the findings showed that internet access had a positive effect on external efficacy. Exposure to information had no effect on external efficacy but, they found that internet access and exposure had a small, albeit significant and positive, effect only political knowledge. Lastly, Kenski and Stroud found that exposure to campaign information online positively predicted political participation while internet access, simply, did not.

Further evaluating the validity of the mobilization hypothesis Shelley Boulianne examined findings in 38 individual studies that gauge the internet's capability of increasing political engagement. She suggested concerns that the internet could potentially suppress political participation were overblown, and she affirmed that there is sufficient evidence that the internet has a positive effect on engagement [Boulianne, 2009]. She claimed the main discrepancy originated from researchers' decision to include political interest in their model. The conclusions of studies vary given the inclusion of political interest; some studies showed significant effects of internet use on participation when interest was controlled for, but others showed insignificant effects when interest was controlled. Boulianne attributed these differences to the variation of interest given the specific year in which the respective authors performed the study, and also establishes political interest as, "the mediator in the relationship between Internet use and engagement" [Boulianne, 2009].

While young people appear to be the main beneficiary of the internet's ability to draw people to political participation, Johan Ostman looked to see how one's (Swedish adolescents ages 13–17) ability to create and interact with others' content affects political participation. He found that the use of the internet for information purposes positively affected political

knowledge, but political knowledge was negatively related to one's involvement with user generated content (UGC) [Östman, 2012]. Interaction with UGC, however, positively and significantly affected online and offline participation in adolescents.

Looking at social media specifically, it appeared that a person's interpersonal trust correlated with her perception of online activities as political participation. Additionally, it also correlated with one's willingness to communicate political ideas. People who exhibited characteristics of openness and outer circle trust were more likely to view online activity as political participation, use social media to communicate with other users about political information, and view political information online. However, openness only showed an effect on the use of social media for political purposes, whereas outer circle trust affected one's willingness to use any type of online media as a mean to participate politically [Himmelboim et al., 2012].

In more recent research, Bode and Dalrymple explored ways by which Twitter users participated using social media platforms. Until this point, scholars have paid little attention to Twitter and how it draws users to participate through its platform. In terms of demographics, the majority of Twitter users appear to be white, male, and have a higher education and income; however, age is representative of the American population [Bode and Dalrymple, 2016]. Whereas education and interest significantly affected political tweeting, political knowledge did not. Those users who were more likely to participate via political tweeting were ones who read political tweets more often, followed political accounts, and read tweets with opposing ideology. Simply put, those who were more exposed to political information on Twitter were more likely to participate. It must be noted, however, that those who engaged through political tweeting were most likely to use Twitter for political purposes in the first place [Bode and Dalrymple, 2016].

Visser et al.'s article sought to identify the spillover effects of online and offline political participation. This is the only study that assessed the validity of the mobilization hypothesis using time as a factor. All other studies discussed utilized cross-sectional data to measure

participatory acts. The authors here employed a two-wave panel survey to estimate whether online participatory acts—specifically through Facebook—evolved into future online or offline acts, whether offline acts were watered-down by the simplicity of participating through Facebook, or if there was no effect at all [Visser and Stolle, 2014]. On the one hand, during the second wave of evaluation the authors found that Facebook participation, online participation, and offline participation all significantly predicted future participation for each medium. However, the size of the effect of Facebook and online participation on offline participation was small. Once normal demographic and internet-specific variables were introduced to the model, the authors were not able to confirm a spillover effect of Facebook participation on online and offline participation.

### 2.3 Hypotheses

The mobilization hypothesis suggests that the internet lowers the cost of participation exponentially. Online participation draws off a different skill set that is easier to cultivate than the skill set required of traditional participation. It both expands and limits participation among demographic categories. I first hypothesize that demographic characteristics will have a lesser but significant effect on online participation. Second, I expect socioeconomic status to have a diluted impact on online participation. Third, I predict that civic skills will continue to play a major role in influencing offline participation while internet skills do not. Lastly, I predict that internet skills will continue to play a major role in influencing online participation while civic skills do not

*H1: Demographic characteristics will have a diluted effect on online participation.*

*H2: Socioeconomic status will have a diluted effect on online participation.*

*H3a: Civic skills will positively influence traditional participation.*

*H3b: Internet skills will positively influence online participation.*

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

First, using data gathered by the American National Elections Studies I identified measurements that assessed demographics, political knowledge, political interest, offline participation, online participation, civic skills, and internet skills. Next, I recoded the measurements to maintain consistency in response values and to nullify any excess data. Then, I took the average of the number of participatory acts in which a respondent engaged and employed a series of ordinary least squares regressions to observe the effects on online and offline participation in 2008, 2012, and 2016. Finally, I constructed a mixed effects model using the aggregate data to gauge how time has affected the predictors of online participation.

#### 3.1 Dependent Variables

I observe the effects of demographics and resources on measures of political participation. Researchers that advocated for the normalization hypothesis reached their conclusion by looking at the effects of more traditional modes of participation (i.e. voting, attending a speech or rally, and viewing political news on television) on online political activity. Proponents of the mobilization hypothesis, however, posit that predictors of participation must remain medium specific [Krueger, 2002, Ward et al., 2003, Gibson et al., 2005, Vissers et al., 2012, Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013]. Therefore, consistent with previous literature, I observe two models each year using offline (traditional) participation as the dependent variable in one and online participation as the dependent variable in the other.

### **3.1.1 Offline Participation**

Using NES data I identify questions that determine participatory acts that can only be committed in an offline setting. I include gauges of all types of participation [Gibson and Cantijoch, 2013]. Participation constitutes measures that assess whether one joined a protest or march, attended a local government meeting, signed a paper petition, gave money to a political or social organization, attended a campaign rally, contacted a U.S. Representative or Senator, worked for a political or social organization, discussed politics with family or friends, written to a newspaper or magazine, displayed support for a cause or candidate, and viewed political news through an offline medium.

### **3.1.2 Online Participation**

Using the same qualifications in identifying offline participation, I include measures of active and passive online participation. Active online participation constitutes whether one signed an internet petition and discussed politics via online communication (email, social media messaging, etc.). Passive online participation gauges whether one viewed political news by online means and engaged with political information published by campaigns. Unfortunately, NES data measures acts of passive online participation more frequently than active online participation in a single survey, and measures offline participation more frequently than online participation overall.

## **3.2 Independent Variables**

As with my dependent variable, I keep with the convention of previous literature by measuring the effect of variables most commonly associated with political participation. In my model both online and offline participation is regressed against demographic measures, political interest, political knowledge, internet skills, civic skills, and efficacy.

### **3.2.1 Demographic and Socioeconomic Variables**

Presentation of demographic variables in prior studies is mirrored in my research. I include measures of gender (male), age, education, race (white), income, and one's employment status.

### **3.2.2 Civic Skills**

In measuring civic skills I draw from questions which asked if one has performed any community work, contacted an official to solve a community issue, attended a meeting to deal with a community issue, performed any other volunteer work, contributed to a charity, led a community or religious meeting, and asked the number of organizations of which one is a member. As with online and offline participation NES data contain more potential measures of civic skills than internet skills. While it is not helpful for the advancement of the literature, I do not expect this issue to bias my results.<sup>1</sup>

### **3.2.3 Internet Skills**

To construct the internet skills variable I include responses to measures which asked whether one has internet access at home, whether that connection is a broadband or dialup connection, the number of cell phones in one's home, and whether one's personal cell phone is a smart phone. Newer NES data provide more extensive measures of internet skills than older data. This discrepancy could potentially bias my model against the effect of internet skills. This issue is taken into account when evaluating the results.

### **3.2.4 Political Interest**

I relied on NES guides to determine accurate measures of political interest. I gauged overall political interest from questions that assessed how often one pays attention to politics, one's

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted that I did not omit measures of civic skill to offset the lack of measures of internet skills. I took an average of all measures to ensure consistency from year to year.

interest in following political campaigns, one's knowledge of her polling location, and if one voted in the previous presidential election.

### **3.2.5 Political Knowledge, Party Identification, and Efficacy**

I control for psychological factors using political knowledge, party identification, and efficacy. These measures are important to observe because one's knowledge, association with party, and efficacy can affect the extent to which one participates [Rosenstone et al., 1993, Campbell et al., 1980]. Questions assessing the knowledge of current domestic and foreign leaders, as well as knowledge of Congress compose the political knowledge variable. Questions measured whether one could identify the Speaker of the U.S House of Representatives, the Vice President, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and the UK Prime Minister. However, there is a variation observed in positions asked to be identified within the year to year political context. While this is frustrating, I do not expect this to bias my results.

I created the party identification variable by converting the NES measure gauged of which party the respondent considered herself a member. Those who indicated association with the Democratic, Republican, or "other" I noted as having positive party identification. Those who indicated "don't know" or "none" I marked as not having party identification.

Efficacy is one of the more consistent variables measured year to year. NES researchers asked respondents if they think politics is too complicated to understand, whether respondents feel they understand politics well, if they felt politicians care about their needs, and if they believe people like themselves can effect government actions.

## **Chapter 4**

### **RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Year to Year Effects**

Table 1 contains the OLS regressions modeling offline and online participation in 2008, 2012, and 2016. Overall, the models appear to be strong and reliable. The demographic variables show mixed results in terms of the mobilization hypothesis while the socioeconomic and skill variables give strong indicators of the hypothesis' validity. Political knowledge and interest continues to be a reliable control while efficacy presents mixed results.

##### **4.1.1 Demographics**

Demographic predictors of offline and online participation indicate mixed results. Gender (male) shows no significant effect on online or offline participation in 2008, and it only exhibits a slight positive effect on online participation in 2012. In 2016, however, gender displays a negative effect on both offline and online participation. In regard to offline participation, the effect was small but significant indicating that women were slightly more likely than men to participate by offline means. The online impact of gender was a bit more substantial. While there was a slight influence of gender (being male) on online participation in 2012, that results seemed to have reversed itself during the next election cycle. The results from 2016 indicate that while women were both more likely to participate than men, women were more willing to participate through online methods.

Age is the primary engine driving the mobilization hypothesis and it continues to be of importance. In 2008 and 2012 age had virtually no effect on offline participation. 2016

is an exception where age had a slight negative sway on offline participation. Age and its impact on online participation presents negative impacts across the board. These results, while the size of the effect is small, leads me to advocate that the internet is remaining a reliable participatory medium for younger citizens.

The effect of race on either participatory act is not exciting. Race is not shown to have a major impact on either form of participation. The only instance where an influence can be observed is in 2012 and 2016. On the one hand, in 2012 race had a slight negative influence regarding offline participation suggesting that minorities were more motivated than white citizens to participate in the political process. On the other, race had a slight positive affect regarding online participation in 2016 showing white citizens were more active online. While most demographic indicators display either negative or no effect on online participation, only two instances show slight positive outcomes that contradicts H1. These results are not

	Offline 2008	Online 2008	Offline 2012	Online 2012	Offline 2016	Online 2016
(Intercept)	-0.36*** (0.03)	-0.53*** (0.07)	-0.53*** (0.03)	-0.65*** (0.05)	-0.57*** (0.03)	0.34*** (0.07)
Gender (Male)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.14*** (0.01)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.06*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.06*** (0.00)
Race (White)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)
Education	0.08*** (0.01)	0.27*** (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)	0.14*** (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.04* (0.02)
Income	-0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.02*** (0.01)
Employment	0.00 (0.01)	0.06** (0.02)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.08*** (0.01)
Civic Skill	0.31*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.05)	0.23*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.10*** (0.02)
Internet Skill	0.08*** (0.02)	0.24*** (0.03)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.41*** (0.03)	0.06** (0.02)	0.76*** (0.04)
Political Knowledge	0.18*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.02)	0.32*** (0.03)	0.36*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.05)
Efficacy	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.08*** (0.01)	-0.06** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.01)	0.12*** (0.02)
Party Identification	0.00 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.04** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Political Interest	0.35*** (0.02)	0.34*** (0.05)	0.39*** (0.02)	0.79*** (0.03)	0.33*** (0.02)	0.05 (0.04)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.56	0.31	0.48	0.32	0.56	0.26
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.55	0.31	0.48	0.31	0.56	0.26
Num. obs.	2322	2322	5914	5914	4271	4271
RMSE	0.21	0.46	0.20	0.41	0.22	0.46

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

Table 4.1: OLS Regression: Offline and Online Political Participation 2008–2016

substantial, and even might be a result of the election's context rather than the results of the explanatory variable. Because of this I cannot fully reject H1.

#### **4.1.2 Socioeconomic Status**

Education appears to have a bit more substantial impact on participation. The only year education level influenced offline participation is in 2008 where there was a small positive effect. In terms of online participation, education influenced online participation notably in 2008 and in 2012. In 2016, however, this effect seemed to disappear, even reverse to a small extent.

Many naysayers of the internet's ability to foster political participation have suggested that the main roadblock to online participation is the financial cost of internet access [Bimber, 2000]. I have found that there is no evidence of this claim. Only in 2016 does income show to have a slight positive impact on online participation. Moreover, across the board income does not indicate any effect on offline participation. This finding suggests that while cost still might be a slight barrier to online participation, income does not appear to be a factor in more traditional means of participation.

As with income, one's employment status does not have any substantial impact on her participation efforts whether through online or offline means. Employment does not appear to have any effect on offline participation in the three elections cycles studied. The variable only has a slight effect on online participation in two instances. In 2008 there was a small but significant positive influence on online participation with the trend being mirrored in 2016.

There is no clear indicator of why this trend is evident. One might guess that the 2008 economic crisis might have prevented unemployed individuals from participating online while those who remained employed still had the means to do so. If this assumption were true I would observe no effect by employment in both 2012 and in 2016, but this is not the case. Moreover, if this were true income would also reflect the impact of the recession.

Whereas all three socioeconomic variables produce mixed results for online participation, I can state that I found evidence to disprove H2.

### **4.1.3 Skills**

The model displays both civic and internet skill's nuanced roles in political participation. In all three election cycles observed, civic skill produces both positive and significant results for offline participation. The variable has a considerable impact on online participation too. The model shows that impact is strong in 2008 and 2012, but then it is nearly cut in half in 2016. In all three cycles civic skill also influences online participation, but to a lesser extent each year than for offline participation. More interestingly, civic skill's effect on online participation mirrors the same trend as its effect on offline participation: the impact is nearly cut in half from 2008 to 2016. Regardless, civic skill is shown to be a significant predictor of offline participation; moreover, it is the second strongest predictor of offline participation in 2008 and 2016. With this finding I fail to disprove H3a further crediting the mobilization hypothesis.

Internet skill is shown to substantially influence online participation in all three election cycles. In 2008 it has a significant yet modest impact on online participation, and this effect increased in 2012. Internet skills had its greatest impact on online participation in 2016. Shockingly, the effect of internet skills more than triples from what it was in 2008. The model shows internet skill also influences offline participation, but this effect is quite small and remains stable across all three cycles. This finding qualifies others from other literature that claims there is a significant difference in participatory habits observed when internet skills and civic skills are measured separately [Best and Krueger, 2005, Hirzalla et al., 2010, Gibson et al., 2005, Krueger, 2002, Krueger, 2005, Krueger, 2006, Ward et al., 2003]. The results discussed here lead me to conclude that I have found no evidence to reject H3b.

## Psychological Factors

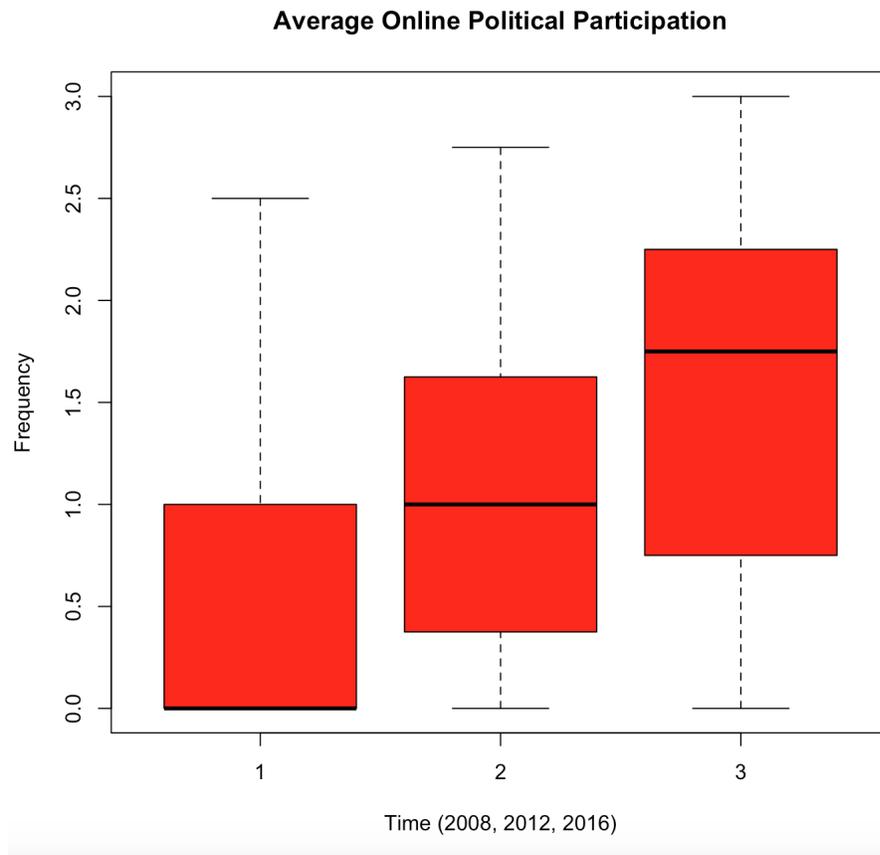
I introduced the four psychological variables to the model largely for control features. Political interest is known to be the central mediator in any form of political participation [Boulianne, 2009, Bode and Dalrymple, 2016, Campbell et al., 1980], and its effect is clearly noted here. Political interest has a strong influence on both forms of participation in every year except online participation in 2016. Political knowledge also is shown to be a strong motivating factor for both forms of participation. Knowledge remains a consistent influence in all three election cycles. Efficacy, however, is less consistent. Efficacy has no impact on either forms of participation in 2008. In 2012 it appears to have a contrasting effect: efficacy has a slight positive impact on offline participation but has a slight negative effect on online participation. This trend does not continue in 2016 where efficacy has a moderate impact on both forms of participation.

### 4.2 Linear Mixed Effect Results

Significant change in practices can be observed between 2008 and 2016. In 2008, 72.4 percent of the respondents received *some* political information from a website and in 2016 this percentage increased to 86.4 percent. Moreover, 62.9 percent received political news form online news papers; in 2016 this percentage increased to 81.5 percent (American National Election Studies, 2008, American National Election Studies 2012, American National Election Studies 2016).

More importantly, the amount of online political acts has risen a great deal over the eight year span. Figure 4.1 shows that in 2008, the average number of political acts online was a trivial amount. However, I observed nearly a 100 percent increase in online political participation from 2008 to 2012 and observe over a 50 percent increase from 2012 to 2016. This finding leads me the question the source of the rise of online political participation.

*RQ1: What variable can account for the sizable increase in online participation?*



*Figure 4.1: Average Online Political Participation (2008-2016)*

I append NES data from the 2008, 2012, and 2016 Time Series, and run a linear mixed-effects model using each year as my random effect. I question the extent—if any—to which these predictors have changed over time. I reason that if I observe that variables which are known to predict online participation indicate positive and significant change over these eight years, the findings can allot more credibility to the mobilization hypothesis.

Table 2 contains the results from the linear mixed effects models that uses the election year as the mixed effect. As with the election-to-election evaluation, I include one model for offline participation and one for online participation. The results from both mixed effect models confirm the same results previously observed in the first part of this section. When the election year is introduced as a mixed effect, however, I can observe just how much a change has taken place over this time period. On the one hand, when looking at the Offline Participation model, I observe that there has not been much change, specifically in regard to civic or internet skills. On the other, for the Online Participation model I observe a small amount of variance in the random intercept (time) with a great degree of change in both civic and internet skills.

#### **4.2.1 Fixed Effects**

Starting with the offline model, I observe the demographic and socio-economic factors do not indicate much effect, with the exception of gender, in influencing whether one participates in the political process over eight years (measured during presidential election years). Gender has a slight negative impact over this time period indicating that slightly more women participated than men. However, a person's civic skill is a significant determinant of whether a citizen participates, and internet skills have a significant yet much smaller impact. Political knowledge, on the other hand, affects offline participation the greatest out of any variable. Efficacy and party identification has only a small influence on offline participation with political interest being a bigger influence.

The model using online participation as the dependent variable shows slightly different results. The output indicates that demographics play a larger role in online participation than offline participation. Gender has a slightly bigger, yet still negative, impact on the dependent variable while age has a minute negative effect. Race is the only demographic variable to have a significantly positive results, indicating that more white citizens participate online than minorities. The only SES measures that indicate a significant effect are education and income. Both variables show a small but positive influence.

As expected, internet skills has a significant impact on online participation. This is consistent with prior literature and the previous section. Surprisingly, however, civic skills has a slightly smaller yet still significant impact on online participation. In fact, civic skills has a greater effect on online participation than it does for offline participation. Nonetheless, in this aspect, the results from the hypothesis testing in the previous sections still hold true in the aggregate.

In terms of the psychological variables I can observe slightly differing results. Efficacy has a stable impact on both forms of participation. Party identification, however, is a different story. Party identification has a small positive effect on offline participation but has a small negative effect on online participation. This indicates that people who do not identify with either of the major two parties are more willing to participate online, and people who do identify with the two major parties are more willing to participate offline. The political interest variable has a larger effect on online participation than offline participation. This leads me to conclude that online individuals are more interested in electoral politics.

#### **4.2.2 The Mixed Effect**

Time, or year, is held as a mixed effect in both the offline and online Participation model. Simply, a mixed effect is a random variable that needs to be accounted for but cannot be manipulated. Time is an excellent example of a mixed effect. Because time cannot be manipulated from a statistical sense, it should be controlled for as a mixed, or random effect,

rather than a fixed effect [Winter, 2013].

In the offline participation model, I observe online slight variance when year is controlled as a mixed effect, meaning that there is little difference to the affect on offline participation year to year. I delve deeper into the model and examined the coefficient for each variable given the specific year. I am able to locate the source of the variance in two variables: civic skill and political knowledge. Civic skill saw its largest impact on offline participation in time 1 (2008). At time 1 the model returned a coefficient of 0.24. After time 1, the influence of civic skill ultimately dips where I observe a coefficient of 0.17 at time 2 and a coefficient of 0.12 at time 3 (2016). Overall, civic skill is shown to have a decreasing effect on offline participation.

With political knowledge, however, I observe an upward trend. At time 1, the model returns a coefficient of 0.13 but then increases to 0.16 at time 2. At time 3, however, the model shows a large increase at to the effect of political knowledge on offline participation; it returns a coefficient of 0.28.

While these results are small, the trend here is intriguing. Civic skill is known in the literature to be the decisive indicator of offline, or traditional, political participation [Brady et al., 1995]. Previously, if one targeted a wealthy educated male with high income to participate in electoral politics but this individual had no history of being involved in the community, there was little chance he would participate.<sup>1</sup> However, if one asked an African American soccer mom who was highly involved in her church and school organizations, there is a much higher chance she would participate than the individual mentioned above.

Now turning to online participation I observe more variance in terms of the election year than with the offline participation. Moreover, there are more variables which are the source of this variance. Changes in the effect of gender, race, education, internet skills, political knowledge, and political interest can be observed.

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<sup>1</sup>It should be noted here that being male, educated, or wealthy hardly has any impact on offline participation in the present according to Table 1; however, this was the case when Brady et al., 1995 was published and was the case for years. Irrelevant trends noted in prior literature will be discussed in the conclusion.

	Offline Participation	Online Participation
(Intercept)	-0.19*** (0.04)	0.14 (0.20)
Gender (Male)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.07*** (0.01)
Age	0.00*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Race (White)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.05** (0.01)
Education	0.00 (0.00)	0.03*** (0.01)
Income	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Employment	-0.01 (0.00)	0.04** (0.01)
Civic Skills	0.15*** (0.00)	0.19*** (0.02)
Internet Skills	0.03*** (0.01)	0.32*** (0.02)
Political Knowledge	0.20*** (0.01)	0.50*** (0.03)
Efficacy	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.01)
Party Identification	0.01* (0.00)	-0.03* (0.01)
Political Interest	0.11*** (0.00)	0.26*** (0.01)
AIC	-2024.20	26904.51
BIC	-1912.69	27016.02
Log Likelihood	1027.10	-13437.25
Num. obs.	12507	12507
Num. groups: Year	3	3
Var: Year (Intercept)	0.01	0.12
Var: Residual	0.05	0.50

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Table 4.2: Linear Mixed Effects Model

The demographic explanatory variables have differing influences on online participation. At times 1 and time 2 gender (male) had a small impact on online participation. At time 1 the variable had a slight negative effect (-0.04); then, that effect became positive at time 2 (0.06). At time 3, I observe a moderate jump in its effect returning to a negative influence (-0.26) at time 3. This was undoubtedly the byproduct of the 2016 election, the first time a major parties' nominee was a woman. Race (white) accounts for a small amount of variance where at times 1 and 2 there is hardly no effect (0.02 both times). There is a slight increase in its effect at time 3 where it returns a coefficient of 0.12. The last demographic variable where I observe variance is education. Education has a small impact at time 1 (0.1) but has appeared to lose its influence over the course of the past eight years.

I notice a remarkable tendency with civic skill and internet skill as to their relation with online participation. Over the three year period, civic skill had a stagnant effect on online participation. At time 1 I observe a coefficient of 0.16 where there is a gentle increase at time 2 to 0.17. At time 3, its effect drops back to the level at time 1.

The influence of internet skill, on the other hand, sees a drastic change in this time period. At time 1, I observe a coefficient of 0.16, notably amounting to the same influence as civic skill on online participation. However, internet skills had a slight increase in its effect on online participation where I observe a coefficient of 0.3 at time 2. At time 3, I see a large increase in internet skills' impact where the model reports a coefficient of 0.97, a sizable effect.

In terms of the last discussion of the psychological variables political knowledge and political interest had the most drastic changes in influence. At time 1, knowledge had a minor impact on online participation where the model reports a coefficient of 0.28. That effect increases to 0.49 at time 2 with a slim decrease in effect (0.43) at time 3.

The model reports that political interest had a marginal effect on online participation at time 1 where I observe a coefficient of 0.26. There is a small increase in political interest at time two where I observe the variable had a larger impact (0.52). However, the effect

bottoms out at time three where the model reports a coefficient of 0.1.

RQ1 demands that I provide a satisfactory answer that pinpoints the cause of an increase in online participation. After reviewing the individual coefficient in the mixed effects model, I can conclude that the increase in the effect of internet skill is the prime contender to answer RQ1.

Many other variables show significant fluctuations in their effect on online participation. However, all variables except internet skill are variables that heavily depend on the context of American politics. The influence of all demographics are dependent upon the context of the election in two ways: mobilization and specific interest. In some contexts, one demographic group might have faced a stronger mobilization effort than others [Rosenstone et al., 1993]. Generally, if a candidate or campaign discovers that younger females are more likely to vote for her, then the candidate would be wise to mobilize that specific group.

Voters of a specific demographic, too, are more likely to participate if they have a vested interest in getting a like-minded person into office. For instance, I observe a weak effect of race (being white) on online participation in 2008. Likewise, I notice a strong but negative influence of gender (being male) in the context of the 2016 election. The absence of the influence of race is explainable by the fact that Barack Obama was the first member of a racial minority to be the first major party nominee, then on to run again as the incumbent president. Racial minorities had a great incentive to involve themselves in both election years since there was potential the nation would select a like-minded person for that office. Moreover, the same was true with the 2016 election where Hillary Clinton was the first major party nominee to be a woman. A multitude of women rallied around her to send her into office.

One thing both candidates had in common was an opportunity to break the glass ceiling of American politics. As time goes on, it's quite possible that the nation will see multiple female presidents and multiple African American presidents. Time will tell if this trend continues.

The 2016 election context can also explain the fluctuation of education's effect. In both 2008 and 2012 education had a slight positive impact on online participation, but in 2016 it had a slight negative effect. This can be attributed to Donald Trump's extreme campaign emphasis on manufacturing jobs in the Rust Belt and Midwest regions of the country.

The influence of political knowledge relies heavily on one's willingness to indulge herself in American politics. To have strong political knowledge, one is required to dive into current events and actively seek out the events on the national stage. In this study, many measures asked respondents to identify holders of key offices in American and foreign government. Therefore, knowledge of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court can only come from actively seeking out information about the Court or certain rulings. It can also come from following the nomination process. Correctly knowing the current Chancellor of Germany can also only come from actively seeking out information concerning NATO or other current foreign policy issues. In short, political knowledge is not a passive phenomenon. In order to gain adequate knowledge that can, in turn, be applied comes from one actively seeking that information.

Political interest simply comes from one being interested in an election. Interest can spawn from multiple facets. A citizen might garner great interest in an election if she sees it as important, more specifically if a certain policy issue hangs in the balance. Up-ballot races, in general, are seen as more important than down-ballot races [Milbrath, 1965]; therefore, it can be presumed that one would have more interest in the race for president than she does for U.S. Congress, and one would have more interest in a gubernatorial race than for state house. Citizens also might be uninterested in participating if one cannot tell an adequate difference in the policy positions of the candidate. The average voter is more likely to stay at home if she perceives that the same policy would be carried out regardless of her participation.

Internet skill is a concept that is cultivated outside the context of American politics. One might employ online capabilities for social, business, and educational purposes. Its utility is

multidisciplinary, therefore so is one's development of online skills. One can develop these skills as a part of her socialization. Entertainment is increasingly becoming an online activity with on demand streaming services and the like. Today it is common for a child to use an internet-capable device for entertainment. Almost every aspect of business is internet-based. Employees use electronic records of customers, products, and services to accomplish their work goals. An ever increasing trend is the use of self-service portals and applications to aid consumer needs. Learning institutions, too, are ever increasing their capacity for students thanks to online learning; and even of in-person learning, many interactions are online. The internet is, in fact, making it easier to participate in politics because citizens are more likely to be equipped with the necessary internet skills than traditional civic skills.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

In this paper I have worked to reevaluated the claims made by Krueger and others that the internet has the potential to mobilize known inactive populations in American politics. Researchers found adequate evidence for this claim when the internet was first introduced to the home, but it has not been tested since. In an era of rapid technological advancement and integration this hypothesis needed to be tested in a more present-day circumstance. I used ANES data from 2008, 2012, and 2016 to test the difference in the effects of demographic, socioeconomic, skills, and psychological variables on offline (traditional) and online political participation. I then aggregated that data to observe which variable has become the most influential trait in participation.

My first hypothesis sought to test that demographic variables might have a more diluted effect on online participation than for offline participation. The data showed there is adequate evidence to not reject this hypothesis. My model showed that in every year there is more evidence for the mobilization hypothesis, while there is hardly any for the reinforcement hypothesis.

My second hypothesis tested the claim that socioeconomic characteristics might have a more diluted effect on online participation than for offline participation. These variables presented a more mixed bag of results. Where there is some indication that the internet is mobilizing people of lower socioeconomic status - specifically in terms of income - there is greater evidence that the internet is reinforcing participatory trends, specifically in terms of education.

I must note here that, while it was not apart of my research objective, I noticed a great

deal of participatory differences in my observations of offline participation as compared to the trends noted in previous and highly regarded literature. Most of the foundational work in political participation was published between the years 1960 and 1980. After these two decades, political scientists moved on to study other effects on participation. This literature that I mention claimed that men, white Americans, and older Americans were the demographics that participated at a higher rate than others. Likewise, those with greater income, education, and those who are employed were more likely to participate than the poor, uneducated, and unemployed. My observations in terms of offline participation showed that these foundational understandings of American political participation no longer hold, and future research should look to update the literature regarding such.

I divided my third hypothesis into two parts because of the demand made by previous literature to evaluate civic skills and internet skills separately. I found great evidence not to reject hypothesis 3a. Civic skills had a heavy influence on offline participation in each year observed; however, it can be seen in the OLS and mixed effects model that, while its influence is heavy, its impact on offline participation is starting to decline.

Like hypothesis 3a, I found no evidence to reject the validity of hypothesis 3b. Previous literature noted internet skills to have a major influence on online participation, and I can claim that influence held strong. Moreover, I found through the linear mixed effects model that internet skills has become the most influential trait one could have to participate online. This effectively answered my research question that asked what variable can account for the sizable increase in online participation. Simply put, not having internet skills puts one at a disadvantage in participating online while having them puts one at a great advantage.

I faced several issues early on in the research process that I had to work to overcome. At the center of these issues was the inconsistent measures used year to year by ANES researchers. For instance, one year they might have asked respondents five questions concerning online political participation. The next year, they might have asked three questions, and in the final year they might have asked six. This lead to a second issue where

I used an undesirable, but adequate, model with which to test my hypotheses. However, I have no reason to expect that this skewed my results in any way. The third issue I faced was the lack of data available for online participation. The internet had been incorporated into citizens' personal lives since the 1990s, but ANES researchers only began consistently asking questions regarding internet use in 2008. If there were more data available, I think I could have work with a more desirable test, such as a time series, to test the validity of my hypotheses.

Future research should look at making the methodology, specifically the data gathered, more stable and consistent. Further, once there is consistent data available, future research should look to employ more complex and accurate tests of the mobilization hypothesis. Additionally, one observation that I can note from my work is that offline participation appears to be stalling overall. There are many interpretations to this finding, but future research should look to diagnose the cause of this and allow for enough time to pass in order to observed if there is actually a demobilizing trend taking place. One should look at the effect of civic skills, specifically, and see if there is any evidence to the possibility that citizens are no longer equipped to participate in an offline setting.

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