

Parent Encouragement and Young Adult Voting Behavior: A Potential Outcomes Approach

Youth & Society

1–20

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0044118X19896691

journals.sagepub.com/home/yas

Kelly Siegel-Stechler¹ 

Abstract

Although previous research consistently finds a strong relationship between parent and child voting, the role of parent encouragement, or verbal instruction, remains less clear. In addition, few studies in this area have attempted to determine the causal mechanisms which drive this association. This study models a potential outcomes approach to causality and investigates the causal relationship between parent encouragement to vote and young adult turnout and informed voting behaviors. Results indicate that, after conditioning on factors that determine selection into treatment, parent encouragement leads to an increase of 30% in likelihood of voting and increases scores on a 6-point informed voting index by 1.04. This demonstrates the large role that parents play in determining youth engagement, while beginning to develop a more complete causal framework for how and why young people come to be active participants in public life.

Keywords

political behavior, parenting, families, civic engagement, quantitative methods

¹Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD, USA

Corresponding Author:

Kelly Siegel-Stechler, Johns Hopkins University, 2800 North Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218, USA.

Email: ksiegel4@jhu.edu

Introduction

Political socialization is understood as “the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationship to the political contexts in which they live” (Sapiro, 2004, p. 3). Shifts in how young people engage with political life suggest that these patterns merit more focused attention. Although youth may be civically engaged via public expression or community participation, many scholars have suggested that young people are less engaged in traditional political activity, including voting (Levine, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Šerek & Umemura, 2015; Zukin et al., 2006). While voting is not the only way in which young people engage in civic and political life, it is certainly an important measure of democratic engagement in youth. Although it may be too soon to know whether these trends will continue, this is concerning, because these practices are habitual and likely to be stable over a lifetime, suggesting that low engagement among youth may have far reaching effects for long-term democratic engagement (D. E. Campbell, 2006; Plutzer, 2002). As such, deepening our understanding of the factors that influence how young people come to vote is crucial for ensuring the stability and equity of a democratic society over the long term.

Conventional wisdom suggests that parents play a crucial role in the political socialization of young people, and empirical evidence supports this assumption. Early work suggested that electoral participation was most strongly determined within the family (Berelson et al., 1954; Butler & Stokes, 1969; A. Campbell et al., 1960). Our understanding of these relationships has become increasingly nuanced over time, and more recent scholarship concludes that youth participation and intention to participate in civic and electoral activity is increased by discussing politics with their parents (Andolina et al., 2003; Valentino & Sears, 1998; Verba et al., 2005; Zukin et al., 2006). In seeking to better understand the relationship between parent and child voting, parental encouragement may offer one explanation for how they are causally related. However, it is difficult to estimate the causal impact of these conversations and the relative role they play in the political socialization process. Observational data and a variety of confounding factors in the lives of young people and their parents make it difficult to isolate individual causal mechanisms in youth voting behavior. In addition, despite an extensive line of literature exploring the role of parents and family in political socialization, few studies attempt to explore the causal mechanism underlying these questions. As such, this article will take a rigorous causal approach to the question of parent influence on voting, using a potential outcomes model to estimate the causal effect of parent encouragement on voting behavior among 18- to 24-year-old Americans using observational data.

Parents and Voting

Most research in this area builds on one of three theoretical models for how political reproduction from parent to child occurs. The most common approach is social learning theory, in which children adopt the modeled behavior of their parents through observation. The second possible approach is status transmission theory, which posits that children inherit the socioeconomic status (SES) and educational attainment of their parents, and as a result develop the same set of political attitudes and behaviors primarily because they are part of the same social and economic, and thus political, class. A third literature suggests that political preferences and engagement are related to traits that are genetically inherited (Hatemi et al., 2014). Many studies find that while both social learning and status transmission may be at play, social learning theory appears to be a better fit for the role of parental influence on voting behavior among young adults (Gidengil et al., 2010, 2016; Jennings et al., 2009; Kudrnáč & Lyons, 2017; Šerek & Umemura, 2015). In keeping with this model, the behaviors of adults should translate to the behaviors of their children, who are socialized at home, leading to political replication.

Although many studies are focused on the replication of party identification and partisan attitudes, some research does focus on parental influence into electoral engagement behaviors. The most commonly studied parental behavior in terms of influence on youth voter turnout is parent turnout. A number of studies have found a strong relationship between parent voting behavior and youth voting behavior, which is in keeping with the idea that young people adopt the behavior that they observe their parents modeling (Cicognani et al., 2012; Gidengil et al., 2010, 2016; Kudrnáč & Lyons, 2017). Observational learning of this type, however, does not focus on verbal instruction or engagement, a key component of parental encouragement and how parents and children interact politically at home (Gidengil et al., 2016). In this way, parent encouragement is closely related to, but ultimately distinct from, social learning theory. Most studies in this area consider whether parents talked about politics with their children. This evidence is less clear. A number of studies show a relationship between parent discussion of politics and voting or civic engagement (Andolina et al., 2003; Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014; Siegel-Stechler, 2019; Verba et al., 2005), and there is an extensive literature showing correlation of attitudes between parents and children (Achen, 2002; Coffé & Voorpostel, 2010; Cross & Young, 2008; Hooghe & Boonen, 2015; Kroh & Selb, 2009). However, there is also some evidence to the contrary. For example, Šerek and Umemura (2015) find that political discussion with parents was not related to voting intention among youth. Jennings et al. (2009) found that youth political interest was not predicted by parent political interest. Thus, the link between verbal communication and turnout is less clear than the behavioral link.

These factors also exist in complicated relationship to other socialization agents in the lives of young people (Šerek & Umemura, 2015). In keeping with the role of the family in political socialization, demographic characteristics and family resources are strong predictors of civic and political outcomes (Gidengil et al., 2016; Gimpel et al., 2003). Separately from the socioeconomic and family background characteristics of children and their parents, their propensity to be informed voters is influenced by a variety of personal, experiential, and environmental factors including educational experiences, political interest, strength of opinions, local political climate and community norms and engagement, and political comprehension skills and media literacy (Conover & Searing, 2000; Gimpel et al., 2003; Gimpel & Lay, 2005; Jennings, 2007). This set of interactions is discussed in more detail below, but clearly the factors confounding the relationship between parent influence and youth outcomes are many. As a result, isolating the impact of parental influence on young adult voting behavior is relatively complex.

Thus, while there is evidence that parent voting and general discussion of politics are related to youth voting behavior, a third way that parents may socially influence youth turnout—verbal encouragement to vote—is relatively unexplored. We should, however, expect these factors to be related, as encouragement may be one way in which parents pass on voting behaviors to their children. Parents who perceive voting as important are both more likely to vote themselves and to encourage their children to do the same. In addition, few studies use sufficient methods to make causal inferences about the nature and magnitude of this relationship. In part, this is due to strong selection mechanisms and the expectation of differential effects across children who do and do not receive such encouragement. As such, this article provides an example of estimating causal relationships when experimental data are unavailable. What is the impact of parental encouragement to vote on voting behavior among young adults? This study estimates the magnitude of a causal effect of parent encouragement on voting among 18- to 24-year-old Americans.

Causal Framework

This study uses a potential outcomes approach to causal inference (Morgan & Winship, 2015). This model can be used to estimate probability of treatment assignment, and then these probabilities are used together with actual treatment assignments to produce weighted regression estimates of the average treatment effect (ATE), average treatment effect for the treated (ATT), and average treatment effect for the controls (ATC). This approach allows for

heterogeneity of both baseline outcomes between treatment and control groups and for the impact of treatment across the two groups. In the case of this study, there may be baseline differences in the type of young people whose parents encourage them to vote, and the impact of that encouragement may vary across these two types of youth. For a more detailed discussion of this causal framework, see Morgan and Winship (2015) and Pearl (2000).

Modeling Selection Effects

To determine a treatment assignment mechanism and identify a set of conditioning variables, a potential outcomes approach begins with modeling the relationship of interest using a directed graph. The determinants of selection into parent encouragement to vote and the complex relationship of encouragement to voting behavior are depicted in the causal graph in Figure 1. This figure is drawn from theory and literature in political socialization. In this model, the determinants of parental encouragement are family background and SES, community norms, and religious norms. Family background and SES are some of the strongest predictors of whether parents encourage their children to vote because socioeconomic advantage is typically translated to political advantage (Gidengil et al., 2016). For example, children whose parents are highly educated are more likely to be exposed to political discussion at home, and parental education is strongly correlated with turnout (Cicognani et al., 2012; Gidengil et al., 2010, 2016; Hooghe & Boonen, 2015; Jennings et al., 2009; Kudrnáč & Lyons, 2017). Community norms are also strong predictors of voter turnout, as community homogeneity tends to build strong civic norms, and close knit communities tend to have higher levels of civic and political engagement (D. E. Campbell, 2006). Finally, religious affiliation has long been a predictor of these same civic norms and beliefs, especially in the United States where religious congregations have traditionally been sites of political organizing (Putnam, 2000).

The determinants of youth voting behavior other than parent encouragement are educational experiences, political and media literacy, political interest, state political climate, and strength of opinions. A broad variety of high school and other educational experiences, both curricular and co-curricular, have been shown to have an impact on both young adult turnout and the intent to vote among students (Billig et al., 2005; D. E. Campbell, 2008; Siegel-Stechler, 2019; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The ability to understand and interpret political information is also an important predictor of electoral engagement, as well as interest in politics and strength of political opinions (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Zukin et al., 2006). Finally, the local political climate is directly related to voting behavior, as

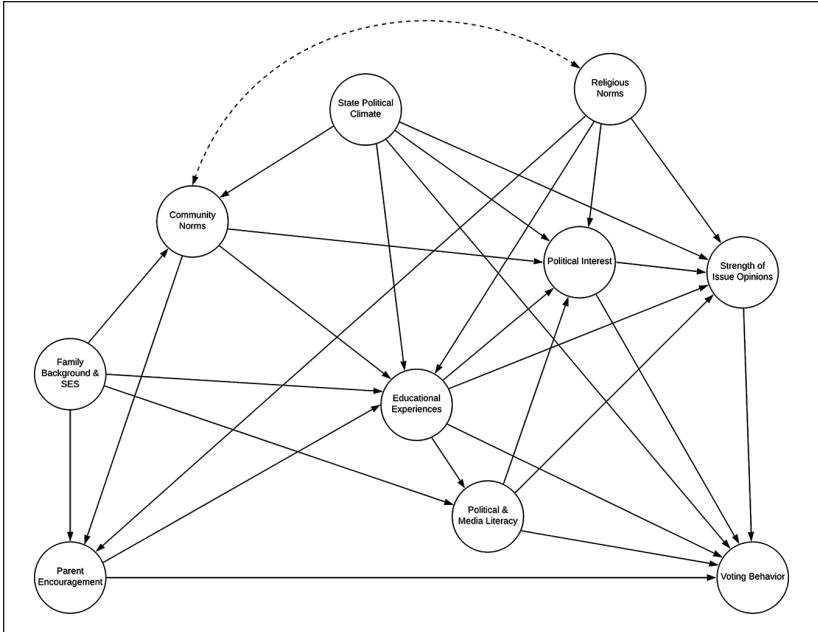


Figure 1. Causal graph depicting the relationship between parent encouragement and youth voting.

Note. SES = socioeconomic status.

people are more likely to vote in contested environments where they believe that their vote may have an impact on the outcome of the election (D. E. Campbell, 2006).

This relationship is further complicated by the complex set of relationships among the determinants of both parent encouragement to vote and youth voting behavior. For example, civic educational experiences are determined by the community norms, local political climate, and socioeconomic standing of the communities in which students attend school. Students of higher SES are more likely to receive quality civic education, and states with high levels of political heterogeneity are more likely to have robust civics requirements (D. E. Campbell, 2006; Conover & Searing, 2000; Dull & Murrow, 2008; Kahne et al., 2000; Siegel-Stechler, 2019). In turn, these educational experiences affect students' knowledge and political literacy, their interest in politics, and their sense of efficacy and strength of opinions (D. E. Campbell, 2008; Niemi & Junn, 1998). More broadly, the environmental contexts in which young people live, the experiences they have at home, school,

and in their communities, and their own interests, opinions, and abilities, all serve to create a complex web of causal influences on voting behavior. Because these relationships are so complex and highly endogenous to one another, it has been difficult to tease out the individual influence of any one factor on the voting behavior of young adults.

To estimate the causal effect of parent encouragement on voting behavior, it is not necessary to condition on all direct causes of an outcome variable to deal with omitted variable bias. Although traditional regression approaches would likely condition on all theoretical causes of voting behavior, this is likely an overspecification that would lead to an underestimate of the true causal effect. Instead, this method conditions only on those variables that theory suggests determine selection into treatment and which meet the criteria for closing “backdoor paths,” in a logic similar to matching estimates (Morgan & Winship, 2015).

Method

Sample

This study uses data from the Commission on Youth Voting and Civic Knowledge Youth Post-Election Survey 2012, conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University and Universal Survey, Inc. This is a nationally representative sample of 18- to 24-year-old U.S. citizens. For the purposes of this analysis, the analytic sample includes only those students who are native born and have native born parents. This represents about 80% of the complete sample. Prior research suggests that the patterns of political influence between parents and children differ in immigrant and native born families (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Callahan & Muller, 2013; Wong & Tseng, 2008). Thus, I have restricted the sample only to cases where respondents and their parents were natural born U.S. citizens. As such, findings are only generalizable to young people who are 2+ generation Americans.

This study includes structural missing data as a function of the survey design, and some data were also missing at random. Missing values were imputed using the MICE package in R (van Buuren, & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). To allow for robust imputation, the analytic sample excludes those respondents whose nonstructural missing data represented more than 20% of responses, or who were missing baseline demographic data including race, gender, or indicators of SES.

Unweighted characteristics for the analytic sample of 3,256 respondents are presented in Table 1. The final analytic sample is statistically

Table 1. Unweighted Sample Characteristics ($n = 3,256$).

Variable	Category	Proportion
Gender	Male	0.52
	Female	0.48
Race	Non-Hispanic White	0.64
	Black/African American	0.20
	Hispanic/Latino	0.11
	Asian and Pacific Islander	0.01
	Other	0.02
Party identification	Democrat	0.37
	Republican	0.23
	Another party	0.03
	No political views	0.08
Employment	Full time	0.38
	Part time	0.29
	Unemployed, full-time student	0.20
	Unemployed, not in school	0.13
Educational status	In high school	0.05
	In college	0.40
	In graduate school	0.03
	Not in school, plan to go back to school	0.27
	Already completed college or higher degree	0.13
	Not in school, do not plan to go back to school	0.12
Ideology	Liberal	0.25
	Conservative	0.29
	Moderate	0.35
	None of those	0.10

indistinguishable at the $p < .05$ level from the full sample of 2+ generation Americans ($n = 3,419$) on observed characteristics. The sample includes young people between the ages of 18 to 24 at the time of survey, with a mean age of 21.3 and a standard deviation of 2.02. It is also important to note that this sample is somewhat biased toward voters. Sixty-two percent of the analytic sample reported voting, while actual turnout among the target population was closer to 48% (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014). All voter surveys tend to over-report turnout for two primary reasons—social desirability bias and correlation between the type of people who are likely to vote and to complete a survey. However, compared with other surveys in this area, overreport of voting in this data set is not unusually high (Morgan & Lee, 2017). Nevertheless, it is

important to recognize that this sample is slightly more representative of pro-social, voting inclined youth than a true national cross-section.

Measures

Dependent variables

Voter turnout. This is a dichotomous variable representing whether or not the respondent self-reported voting in the 2012 election. Sixty-two percent of respondents in the sample self-identified as having voted. Although this may be a somewhat inflated measure of turnout, as discussed above, it does provide a measure of whether respondents see voting as a social good, value the democratic system, and care about outcome of the election (D. E. Campbell, 2006; Morgan & Lee, 2017).

Informed voting behavior. Because voter turnout measures one behavior at a single point in time, it may be an overly simplistic proxy for electoral engagement and broader interest in electoral politics and democratic citizenship. As such, this study also includes an analysis using informed voting behavior as the outcome of interest, a hierarchical index designed as an indicator of desirable voting behaviors for citizens of a democracy. It is based on six binary indicators, including registering to vote, voting, campaign knowledge, general political knowledge, voting consistently with a stated opinion on a campaign issue of choice, and following the news during the campaign cycle. This index was developed by Kawashima-Ginsberg and Levine (2014) in their original work with this data set. It ranges from 0 to 6, with a mean of 3.27 and a standard deviation of 1.64.

Causal variable

Parent encouragement. The causal variable of interest is a dichotomous indicator for whether respondents answered yes to the question “Have your parents or guardians ever encouraged you to vote?” Approximately 83% of the analytic sample self-reported that their parents had encouraged them to vote. Importantly, this is distinct from whether respondents discussed politics with their parents or whether they saw their parents vote, and instead refers to direct encouragement specifically related to voting, not to other types of political or civic engagement.

Conditioning variables

Family background. This is a set of demographic indicators including race, gender, family resources, and relative educational progress. Family resources

is a standardized measure of three indicators which include maternal educational attainment, number of books in the home, and whether the respondent's family received a daily newspaper subscription while they were in high school. Educational attainment is an important indicator of SES, but not typically suitable for younger respondents. Relative educational progress measures deviation from the age-specific mean of educational attainment because the target population are likely to still be in school and have very different levels of attainment (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014). Higher scores mean that the respondent has completed more education relative to participants of the same age.

Community norms. Community norms are difficult to measure through survey research. However, strong civic community norms may be important determinants of whether parents encourage their children to vote (Gimpel et al., 2003). Although community norms are complex and multifaceted, they are adjusted for in this study by proxy from two angles by including both an indicator of whether the respondent attended a racially diverse high school, and a normalized score of how frequently the respondent's parent(s) volunteered in their community serves as a proxy for norms of community involvement. High school diversity may be indicative local demographic heterogeneity and social structures, and in addition, existing research suggests that attending a diverse high school may discourage civic participation by eroding peer solidarity and social norms (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000; D. E. Campbell, 2007; Jacobsen et al., 2012; Levinson, 2012). Not all students attend high schools that are reflective of the community in which they live, however. As such, an indicator of parent volunteerism attempts to capture norms of community involvement as indicative of civic values.

Local political environment. The level of local political heterogeneity was measured by whether the respondent lived in a "battleground state," or any state that was coded as "leaning Republican," "leaning Democrat," or "complete toss-up" in the lead-up to the 2012 election.

Religious norms. Religious norms are measured with an indicator of whether the respondent reported taking part in a religious congregation since completing high school (or currently for respondents still in school). The analysis also includes a normalized score for frequency of parent participation in religious activity. Although the relationships between religion and voting are complex and multifaceted, there is considerable evidence that religious attendance is associated with civic engagement across a variety of measures (Beyerlein & Chaves, 2003; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Clark, 1998;

Djupe & Gilbert, 2006, 2009; R. Driskell et al., 2008; R. L. Driskell et al., 2008; Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001; Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2014).

Statistical Analysis

I first present naïve estimates of the ATE of parent encouragement to vote on both voter turnout and informed voting. Next, the causal graph in Figure 1 models the theoretical relationship that is used to estimate propensity scores for assignment into treatment. These propensity scores are used to generate weighted regression estimates of the ATE, ATT, and ATC. This method allows for direct estimation of ATEs in the presence of individual-level heterogeneity across treatment groups, without some of the challenges of matching that result from having a small proportion of sample respondents in the control group.

Results

Initial analysis suggests significant differences in outcomes between respondents who did and did not receive parental encouragement to vote. Turnout among respondents who self-reported that their parents encouraged them to vote was 67%, compared with only 36% among those who did not, and the mean score on the informed voting index was 3.47 for youth who reported parent encouragement, as opposed to 2.29 for those who did not. Naïve estimates for the effect of parent encouragement on voting behavior are an increase of 31% in likelihood of voting with a standard error of 0.022, and an increase of 1.18 on the informed voting index, with a standard error of 0.073. These are very large effects. Many of the strongest predictors of voter turnout, such as educational attainment or strong party identification, have bivariate effect sizes closer to 10% or 15%. As such, the impact of parental encouragement appears quite large relative to other determinants of voting behavior. This is in line with prior research and suggests that parent encouragement has a strong impact on voting behavior in young adulthood.

However, these estimates are, as expected, biased upward by a considerable amount due to the presence of confounding variables and significant heterogeneity between the groups. After adjusting for confounding covariates using traditional regression estimates, the estimated average marginal effect on turnout drops to 0.22 and the effect of parent encouragement on the informed voting index drops to 0.84, though both remain statistically significant at $p < .001$. Furthermore, when media literacy and civic education experience are added to the model, both of which are determinants of voting behavior but are also descendants of parent encouragement, these estimates drop even further. This provides additional evidence in favor of the causal

Table 2. Regression Estimating Propensity Scores for Selection Into Treatment, Conditioning on Variables Z ($n = 3,256$).

Independent variable	Coefficient	Standard error	z statistic
Family resources	0.284	0.028	10.28
Relative education progress	0.165	0.052	3.15
Black	0.681	0.145	4.71
Hispanic	0.199	0.158	1.26
Asian	-0.468	0.426	-1.10
Other	0.065	0.350	0.19
Male	-0.076	0.102	-0.75
Diverse high school	-0.285	0.108	-2.63
Parents volunteer	0.281	0.059	4.79
Religious	0.074	0.118	0.63
Parents religious	0.104	0.052	2.76
Battleground state	0.123	0.072	1.72

graph in Figure 1, and for excluding these variables from the model. However, multivariate regression does not allow for exploration of differential treatment effects across treated and untreated respondents. Demographic characteristics between the two groups vary considerably, especially on SES and family background, race, and religious attendance, which were expected to influence treatment assignment. Therefore, we might expect that there is a difference between the ATT and the ATC.

Table 2 shows the logistic regression model used to estimate propensity scores, or predicted probability into treatment, which then adjust for endogenous selection into treatment based on the theoretical determinants of parent encouragement displayed in Figure 1. This model correctly predicts treatment assignment in 83% of cases. Propensity scores range from 0.30 to 0.98, with a mean of 0.83 and standard deviation of 0.12. Although the overall distribution of scores looks very different between the treatment and control groups, only six cases, or 0.2% of observations, fall outside a common range.

The estimated propensity scores can then be used to calculate weights for the ATE, ATT, and ATC based on likelihood of selection into treatment and actual treatment outcomes, to compare like cases. The weighted samples are much more similar on observable characteristics than the unweighted sample, as demonstrated Table 3. Although the resulting samples are not identical, the mean absolute difference is reduced from 0.24 in the unadjusted sample to 0.04 for the ATT and 0.01 for the ATC. Most importantly, family resources, relative educational progress, race, and religiosity are all much better matched among the weighted samples.

Table 3. Balancing of Treatment and Control Groups Using Inverse Probability of Treatment Assignment Weighting.

Variable	Unweighted		ATT		ATC	
	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment	Control
Family resources	0.39 (1.87)	-0.94 (1.88)	0.35 (1.88)	0.27 (1.85)	-1.03 (2.06)	-0.95 (1.89)
Relative educational progress	0.08 (0.97)	-0.28 (1.06)	0.06 (0.97)	0.02 (1.01)	-0.30 (0.99)	-0.30 (1.05)
Black	0.17 (0.37)	0.12 (0.32)	0.21 (0.41)	0.25 (0.43)	0.15 (0.36)	0.15 (0.36)
Hispanic	0.10 (0.30)	0.13 (0.33)	0.11 (0.31)	0.10 (0.30)	0.14 (0.34)	0.13 (0.34)
Asian	0.01 (0.10)	0.02 (0.13)	0.01 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.02 (0.13)	0.02 (0.13)
Other	0.02 (0.13)	0.02 (0.15)	0.02 (0.13)	0.02 (0.16)	0.02 (0.15)	0.02 (0.15)
Male	0.48 (0.50)	0.51 (0.50)	0.52 (0.50)	0.54 (0.50)	0.54 (0.50)	0.54 (0.50)
Diverse high school	0.32 (0.47)	0.40 (0.49)	0.34 (0.47)	0.35 (0.48)	0.42 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)
Parents volunteer	0.09 (1.00)	-0.40 (0.96)	0.08 (1.00)	0.09 (1.09)	-0.41 (0.92)	-0.40 (0.96)
Battleground	0.46 (0.74)	0.40 (0.69)	0.46 (0.73)	0.46 (0.74)	0.39 (0.69)	0.40 (0.69)
Religious	0.42 (0.49)	0.30 (0.46)	0.42 (0.49)	0.41 (0.49)	0.30 (0.46)	0.30 (0.46)
Parents religious	3.29 (1.53)	2.63 (1.61)	3.30 (1.53)	3.39 (1.61)	2.66 (1.51)	2.66 (1.61)
Mean absolute difference		0.24		0.04		0.01

Note. ATT = average treatment effect on the treated; ATC = average treatment effect on the control group.

Using these weights, I calculated bivariate weighted regression estimates of the ATE, ATT, and ATC. To ensure results were robust to researcher degrees of freedom, I estimated the ATE, ATT, and ATC both with and without limiting the sample to the region of common support, and with and without additional covariates, for both of the outcome variables. Estimates of all three measures remain statistically indistinguishable in all four cases, with an estimated ATE of an increase of 30% in the likelihood of voting and 1.04 on the informed voting index. This suggests an important causal role for parent encouragement in shaping young adult voting behavior both in terms of turnout and more broadly. The ATT was an increase of 31% in likelihood of voting and 1.07 for informed voting, and the ATC estimates an increase of 23% in likelihood of voting and 0.88 on the informed voting index. These findings are in line with existing theory in that there is a small but significant difference between the ATT and ATC for the effect of parent encouragement on voter turnout and informed voting behavior. Parent encouragement has slightly larger effects among the treatment group, but notably these effects remain significant and substantial even among the control group. This provides evidence that even among those youth least likely to receive encouragement to vote from their parents, that encouragement could have a meaningful impact on their behavior.

Discussion

This study provides a new approach to understanding the relationship between parent and child voting and the causal mechanisms that underpin political socialization in the family. Building on research that explores the validity of social learning theory, this article seeks to assess the impact not of observational learning, but the role that verbal encouragement to vote can play in influencing youth voting. Prior research has consistently found a strong relationship between parent voting behavior and youth voting behavior, which parent encouragement could help to explain because parents who perceive voting as important are both more likely to vote themselves and to encourage their children to do the same (Cicognani et al., 2012; Gidengil et al., 2010, 2016; Kudrnáč & Lyons, 2017). These findings suggest that parental encouragement is an important determinant in why young people vote and engage in democratic electorally engaged behaviors. The methods used here to address endogenous selection into the treatment group suggest that, even after adjusting for family background including parent education, we find that parent influence still plays a significant role in positive political socialization. This supports the assertion that it is in fact the actions of parents that have such large impacts on young adult voting behaviors, a finding

supportive of the underlying theoretical ideas behind social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Fowler, 2005). However, these results extend beyond social learning theory and establish a new model for explaining this relationship, by suggesting that direct verbal instruction, not just observed behaviors or actions, plays a role in youth voting.

Among a demographic age group which traditionally turns out at relatively low rates, an increase of 30% in likelihood of voting is a substantial impact. Although these data suggest that the majority of parents are already engaged in this practice, those respondents whose parents did not encourage them to vote tended to belong to more civically disenfranchised groups, especially in terms of family resources and educational attainment. Efforts to encourage parents to talk to their children about civic engagement and voting may go a long way toward closing the gap in political enfranchisement among traditionally disadvantaged groups (Levinson, 2012). Rather than assuming that increased parental encouragement toward democratic participation would be lost on those youths who do not currently receive such encouragement, this article makes the case that such encouragement can and does have a major impact on voting outcomes for all young people. In communities that are traditionally underrepresented in electoral politics, parental involvement could have a major impact in increasing turnout and, subsequently, representation among youth.

This study is not without limitations, however. When working with survey data, especially data that rely on respondent recall, response items are subject to measurement bias. Notably, these data appear to over-sample voters, however, they do not appear especially biased relative to other surveys (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2014; MacDonald, 2014; Morgan & Lee, 2017). However, this erodes generalizability of the sample because it may slightly overrepresent pro-social youth. In addition, the causal variable is also based on respondent recall and may capture whether the respondent remembers or believes their parent encouraged them to vote, as opposed to actual parenting behaviors. This carries some additional validity concerns. There may be a bias toward people who vote being more likely to remember conversations about voting with their parents because they enjoyed these experiences or were more interested in them. However, because these respondents are young and recalling the not-too-distant past, the bias derived from use of recall questions is likely to be lower than for other demographic groups. In addition, while we may expect this to bias results upward, the large magnitude and strong statistical power of these findings suggest that there is still considerable reason to believe that there is a large impact of parent encouragement. Finally, this analysis includes only those young Americans who were born in the United States and whose parents were also born in the United

States. This is a significant limitation, and as such findings are only generalizable to young people who are 2+ generation Americans. Further research that explores political socialization in immigrant households is certainly needed.

Although the correlation between parent political engagement and discussion and young adult electoral activity has been well established, this study takes a step forward in attempting to estimate the true casual effect of specifically parent encouragement—verbal instruction, above and beyond general discussion or modeled behavior—on young adult voting behavior. Results show that parents do have a substantial impact on youth turnout and informed voting, even after conditioning on determinants of endogenous selection. This opens the door to developing a deeper and more complete understanding of what drives people to vote and paves the way for studies that seek to unpack the other causal mechanisms that influence young adult political engagement and a more nuanced theory of political socialization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Kelly Siegel-Stechler  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0974-3524>

References

- Achen, C. H. (2002). Parental socialization and rational party identification. *Political Behavior, 24*(2), 151–170.
- Alesina, A., & La Ferrara, E. (2000). Participation in heterogeneous communities. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 115*(3), 847–904.
- Andolina, M. W., Jenkins, K., Zukin, C., & Keeter, S. (2003). Habits from home, lessons from school: Influences on youth civic engagement. *PS: Political Science and Politics, 36*(2), 275–280.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice Hall.
- Berelson, B. R., Lazarsfeld, P. F., & McPhee, W. N. (1954). *Voting*. University of Chicago Press.
- Beyerlein, K., & Chaves, M. (2003). The political activities of religious congregations in the United States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42*(2), 229–246. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5906.00175>

- Beyerlein, K., & Hipp, J. R. (2006). From pews to participation: The effect of congregation activity and context on bridging civic engagement. *Social Problems, 53*(1), 97–117. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2006.53.1.97>
- Billig, S., Root, S., & Jesse, D. (2005, May). *The impact of participation in service-learning on high school students' civic engagement* (CIRCLE Working Paper 33). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED495215>
- Bloemraad, I., & Trost, C. (2008). It's a family affair: Intergenerational mobilization in the spring 2006 protests. *American Behavioral Scientist, 52*(4), 507.
- Butler, D., & Stokes, D. (1969). *Political change in Britain: The evolution of electoral change in Britain*. Macmillan.
- Callahan, R. M., & Muller, C. (2013). *Coming of political age: American schools and the civic development of immigrant youth*. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/22178/>
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. (1960). *The American voter*. John Wiley.
- Campbell, D. E. (2006). *Why we vote: How schools and communities shape our civic life*. Princeton University Press.
- Campbell, D. E. (2007). Sticking together: Classroom diversity and civic education. *American Politics Research, 35*(1), 57–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X06294503>
- Campbell, D. E. (2008). Voice in the classroom: How an open classroom climate fosters political engagement among adolescents. *Political Behavior, 30*(4), 437–454.
- Cicognani, E., Zani, B., Fournier, B., Gavray, C., & Born, M. (2012). Gender differences in youths' political engagement and participation: The role of parents and of adolescents' social and civic participation. *Journal of Adolescence, 35*(3), 561–576. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2011.10.002>
- Clark, A. S. (1998). Religious influences on political participation. *Southeastern Political Review, 26*(2), 293–311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.1998.tb00483.x>
- Coffé, H., & Voorpostel, M. (2010). Young people, parents and radical right voting: The case of the Swiss people's party. *Electoral Studies, 29*(3), 435–443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2010.03.015>
- Conover, P. J., & Searing, D. (2000). A political socialization perspective. In L. McDonnell (Ed.), *Rediscovering the democratic purposes of education* (pp. 91–124). University Press of Kansas.
- Cross, W., & Young, L. (2008). Factors influencing the decision of the young politically engaged to join a political party: An investigation of the Canadian case. *Party Politics, 14*(3), 345–369. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068807088126>
- Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. Yale University Press.
- Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2006). The resourceful believer: Generating civic skills in church. *Journal of Politics, 68*(1), 116–127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00374.x>
- Djupe, P. A., & Gilbert, C. P. (2009). *The political influence of churches*. Cambridge University Press.

- Driskell, R., Embry, E., & Lyon, L. (2008). Faith and politics: The influence of religious beliefs on political participation. *Social Science Quarterly*, 89(2), 294–314. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2008.00533.x>
- Driskell, R. L., Lyon, L., & Embry, E. (2008). Civic engagement and religious activities: Examining the influence of religious tradition and participation. *Sociological Spectrum*, 28(5), 578–601. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170802206229>
- Dull, L. J., & Murrow, S. E. (2008). Is dialogic questioning possible in social studies classrooms? *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 36(4), 391–412.
- Fowler, J. H. (2005). Turnout in a small world. In A. S. Zuckerman (Ed.), *The social logic of politics* (pp. 269–287). Temple University Press.
- Gidengil, E., O’Neill, B., & Young, L. (2010). Her mother’s daughter? The influence of childhood socialization on women’s political engagement. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 31(4), 334–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2010.533590>
- Gidengil, E., Wass, H., & Valaste, M. (2016). Political socialization and voting: The parent–child link in turnout. *Political Research Quarterly*, 69(2), 373–383. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912916640900>
- Gimpel, J. G., & Lay, J. C. (2005). Party identification, local partisan contexts, and the acquisition of participatory attitudes. In A. S. Zuckerman (Ed.), *The social logic of politics* (pp. 209–227). Temple University Press.
- Gimpel, J. G., Lay, J. C., & Schuknecht, J. E. (2003). *Cultivating democracy: Civic environments and political socialization in America*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Hatemi, P. K., Medland, S. E., Klemmensen, R., Oskarrson, S., Littvay, L., Dawes, C., . . . Martin, N. G. (2014). Genetic influences on political ideologies: Twin analyses of 19 measures of political ideologies from five democracies and genome-wide findings from three populations. *Behavior Genetics*, 44(3), 282–294. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10519-014-9648-8>
- Hooghe, M., & Boonen, J. (2015). The intergenerational transmission of voting intentions in a multiparty setting: An analysis of voting intentions and political discussion among 15-year-old adolescents and their parents in Belgium. *Youth & Society*, 47(1), 125–147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X13496826>
- Jacobsen, R., Frankenberg, E., & Lenhoff, S. W. (2012). Diverse schools in a democratic society: New ways of understanding how school demographics affect civic and political learning. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(5), 812–843.
- Jennings, M. K. (2007). Political socialization. In R. J. Dalton & H.-D. Klingemann (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*. Oxford University Press.
- Jennings, M. K., Stoker, L., & Bowers, J. (2009). Politics across generations: Family transmission reexamined. *The Journal of Politics*, 71(3), 782–799. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381609090719>
- Jones-Correa, M. A., & Leal, D. L. (2001). Political participation: Does religion matter? *Political Research Quarterly*, 54(4), 751–770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290105400404>
- Kahne, J., Rodriguez, M., Smith, B., & Thiede, K. (2000). Developing citizens for democracy? Assessing opportunities to learn in Chicago’s social studies classrooms. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 28(3), 311–338.

- Kawashima-Ginsberg, K., & Levine, P. (2014). Policy effects on informed political engagement. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 58(5), 665–688. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213515219>
- Kroh, M., & Selb, P. (2009). Inheritance and the dynamics of party identification. *Political Behavior*, 31(4), 559–574.
- Kudrnáč, A., & Lyons, P. (2017). Parental example as a motivation for turnout among youths. *Political Studies*, 65(Suppl. 1), 43–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321716644614>
- Levine, P. (2007). *The future of democracy: Developing the next generation of American citizens*. Tufts University Press.
- Levinson, M. (2012). Diversity and civic education. In D. E. Campbell, M. Levinson, & F. M. Hess (Eds.), *Making civics count* (pp. 89–114). Harvard University Press.
- MacDonald, M. (2014, September 3). 2012 November general election turnout rates. *The United States Election Project*. <http://www.electproject.org/2012g>
- Morgan, S. L., & Lee, J. (2017). The White working class and voter turnout in US presidential elections, 2004—2016. *SocArXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/Y3V56>
- Morgan, S. L., & Winship, C. (2015). *Counterfactuals and causal inference: Methods and principles social research* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Niemi, R. G., & Junn, J. (1998). *Civic education: What makes students learn*. https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_2085420
- Pearl, J. (2000). *Causality: Models, reasoning, and inference*. Cambridge University Press.
- Plutzer, E. (2002). Becoming a habitual voter: Inertia, resources, and growth in young adulthood. *The American Political Science Review*, 96(1), 41–56.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone*. Simon & Schuster.
- Sapiro, V. (2004). Not your parents' political socialization: Introduction for a new generation. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.012003.104840>
- Šerek, J., & Umemura, T. (2015). Changes in late adolescents' voting intentions during the election campaign: Disentangling the effects of political communication with parents, peers and media. *European Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 285–300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323115577306>
- Siegel-Stechler, K. (2019). Is civics enough? High school civics education and young adult voter turnout. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 43(3), 241–253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2018.09.006>
- Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., & Schulz, W. (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: Civic knowledge and engagement at age fourteen*. http://works.bepress.com/wolfram_schulz/8
- Valentino, N. A., & Sears, D. O. (1998). Event-driven political communication and the preadult socialization of partisanship. *Political Behavior*, 20(2), 127–154.
- van Buuren, S., & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, K. (2011). mice: Multivariate imputation by chained equations in R. *Journal of Statistical Software*, 45(3), 1–68. <https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v045.i03>

- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Burns, N. (2005). Family ties: Understanding the intergenerational transmission of political participation. In A. S. Zuckerman (Ed.), *The social logic of politics: Personal networks as contexts for political behavior*. Temple University Press.
- Wald, K. D., & Calhoun-Brown, A. (2014). *Religion and politics in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Wong, P. J., & Tseng, V. (2008). Political socialisation in immigrant families: Challenging top-down parental socialisation models. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(1), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830701708742>
- Zukin, C., Keeter, S., Andolina, M., Jenkins, K., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2006). *A new engagement? Political participation, civic life, and the changing American citizen*. https://catalyst.library.jhu.edu/catalog/bib_2610434

Author Biography

Kelly Siegel-Stechler is a doctoral candidate at the Johns Hopkins University School of Education and a research fellow with the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy.