Making Young Voters: Converting Civic Attitudes into Civic Action

Background
• Youth Voter turnout is dismal
  • 20-30 percentage points lower than older citizens
• Turnout gap between older and younger voters is larger in U.S. than other democracies

Key Findings
• Young people are not apathetic—surveys show high levels of political interest and intention to vote
• But they fail to follow through on civic intentions due to personal and institutional barriers
• Possible policy solutions evaluated:
  1) electoral reforms to make registration and voting easier
  2) rethinking civic education

Data & Methods
• Conducted NC and national Surveys
• Interviewed H.S. Civics Teachers
• Interviewed voting age young people
• Analyzed data from 9 youth surveys, 1957 to 2016, to document relationship between noncognitive skills and civic participation
• Evaluated the impact of multiple policy reforms / election laws on youth turnout across states and time

Ongoing Research
• Coding & analyzing content of Facebook ads from 2018 US Senate races
• Preliminary findings reveal:
  1) Campaigns (especially GOP) target young voters less than older age groups
  2) Ads targeting young voters emphasize engagement more than mobilization

Project Success
• Cambridge University Press Book (Feb. 2020)
• Recipient of two NSF grants
• Featured at CNSF exhibition on Capitol Hill

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