



Ballot Buddies

Final Report Paper

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## **Executive Summary**

Over the last few months, Ballot Buddies worked to find a connection between media, voting, and college-aged students. The purpose of the research was to provide you, Rock the Vote, with new data that can help your organization to better understand why college students are or are not voting. Our team collected qualitative and quantitative data to figure out ways in which your organization can reach this public.

For our qualitative plan, our goal was to figure out why or why not college students vote and what makes them interested in politics. Our qualitative research question was: What motivates college students to be politically engaged? Our team wanted to create a broad research question in order to narrow down the exact motives of students attending Quinnipiac University..

After reviewing the findings from the previous study, our team wanted to learn more about college students and their voting habits. In our research, we discovered a potential link between media influence and politics. Our team decided to focus on these two subjects to test a potential correlation between media coverage and political engagement in college students. Our quantitative research question reads: Does following media coverage about politics relate to the likelihood of registering to vote and voting for college students? We decided to broaden our demographic for this specific plan in order to provide Rock the Vote with data that could reach more people in order to provide a well-rounded data set that reached more than just Quinnipiac students. In this report we provide a detailed background on the organization, summaries of our research and provide recommendations and takeaways from our findings.

## **Background Research**

Rock the Vote is a registered 501c3 organization focused on getting young people registered to vote and to go out and vote. We know your mission is to be a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to building the political power of young people. Rock the Vote, has used pop culture, music, art and technology to build up the power of young people and help them engage in politics. Rock the Vote has registered millions of young voters on college campuses, in communities, and online and continue to help young people fight and defend the voting rights they have in America. We recognize that Rock the Vote is the pioneer organization that helps raise voting awareness and issues across the country for young people.

We understand that your main goal is to make sure that young people realize that they do have a voice in this country and can have an impact on major social issues. Your organization has also made registration for voting easier for young generations with new and innovative ways. Rock the Vote encourages young people to vote based off on their personal values and elect politicians that will represent their best interest. Your organization has previously worked with social influencers, and we conducted research to see if this was the best outlet to utilize in obtaining your goals.

Since its inception, Rock The Vote has been able to garner celebrity support and endorsement. Celebrities like Miley Cyrus, Madonna, Robert Downey Jr., Christina Aguilera, Jake Gyllenhaal and Justin Timberlake have all appeared in public service announcements set to get younger votes to go to the polls. Rock the Vote has been able to use youth idols to carry their message unlike other organizations. We would like to conduct research about the effectiveness of promoting through celebrity influencers and expand to political influencers like past

presidents, news correspondents and politicians. It will help to show Rock the Votes efforts have been worthwhile. Though, our agency found that some of your most recent campaigns such as “Swipe the Vote” and tabling at major festival venues like Lollapalooza were successful. We wanted to find new ways of approaching your target demographic and look at celebrity culture.

Overall, we believe that the Rock the Vote is a perfect organization to represent voting for college aged students. We believe your values of keeping young adults active in politics and making it easier to vote is crucial for college students and the health of the United States democracy.

## **Qualitative Report Summary**

### ***Method***

We conducted 10 20-minute audio recorded one-on-one interviews from October 18th - 24th around the Quinnipiac campus in quiet spaces.

### ***Sampling Strategy***

We used a non-probability, purposive strategy to gather a wide range of participants.

### ***Sampling Boundaries***

Participants ranged from 18-21 years old who were already registered to vote. They came from Health Sciences, Business, Communications and Liberal Arts. Half of the participants identified as Republican, a little over a 1/3 as Democratic and the remaining 12% as Independents.

Collectively, they collectively identified as moderately politically engaged.

### ***Step-by-Step Procedure***

Standard messages were sent online to Quinnipiac students to recruit participants. They were asked to fill out an eligibility survey to indicate if they were interested in participating. Then we looked at the recorded responses from the survey and chose 10 participants that would represent a diverse sample. We assigned participants to interviewers that did not know each other. We contacted participants to schedule a date to meet, had them sign a consent form and then conducted an interview with a script. After we had all of the interviews transcribed, we started data analysis. We took a narrative approach to analyze our data and gathered common themes. For interview questions please refer to appendix A.

### **Results from Qualitative Research**

We found the following themes: issue based voting, voting convenience, the media coverage, and political influencers to be what drive college students to become politically active.

A participant's interest in political issues is a major voting motivation. Examples of the issues include: women's rights, abortion, taxes, immigration, and environment. Participant B said, "I am really big on pro-choice... I think women have rights to their own bodies and it is not the government's place to regulate them." Participant B's passion towards the topic gets them eager to vote.

Voting convenience was another major theme. Most of our participants are out-of-state voters and needed to get an absentee ballot, which we found was an inconvenience for them. Others were from surrounding areas which motivated them to go home and vote. Participant E who stated, "It's easy being from Connecticut because I can just drive home to vote instead of getting an absentee ballot and what not."

We also found that participants had a general distrust in certain media sources which negatively impacts their ability to want to become engaged especially if they do not know who to trust. . According to Participant G, “Well, I took a class last year that had to do with media and a big thing that my project focused on was how the political networks were driven by money and I don’t trust what they say.”

Political influencers like parents or other close figures in their life have an effect. had varied responses whether their parents had an influence on their political views. When asking about their parents influence, Participant F stated, “I just feel like the connection I’ve had with my parents will always be stronger than any connection I could have with any news outlet.” Participants were more likely to trust a close figure than a famous figure or news outlet.

## **Survey Report Summary**

### ***Method***

We used a one time, cross-sectional design which we sent out via a 21-question Google form from November 8th to November 13th.

### ***Sampling Strategy and Sample Description***

We used a non-probability, convenience sampling strategy to gather participants eligible to vote in the USA and attended university. Participants ranged in political parties and gender. They also ranged from 18-23 years old and represented, 38 schools, 14 states and seven majors.

### ***Description of Measurement Materials***

Our survey featured 21 questions and asked about past voting history, sentiments towards politics, media as a means to get political news and social media influencers (See Appendix B).

References to our coded and edited data can be found in (See Appendix C). The survey included open ended questions to give more information on feelings toward politics.

### ***Step-by-Step Procedure***

The survey was distributed via Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and text message to gather participants. Participants had to consent to the survey before moving forward. After gaining 135 entries, we edited the data and removed 9 submissions that contained inconsistencies and errors. Afterwards, we coded the data to prepare it to enter the SPSS data analytics system where we will later analyze relationships between likelihood of registering to vote/voting and following media coverage.

### **Results from Survey Research**

The first chi-square test included the variables, “registration” and “influencers”. It found that there was no statistically significant association between following political influencers on social media and being registered to vote,  $\chi^2(2)=2.12$ ,  $p=.347$ . Our second chi-square test found that the association between previous voting history and following political influencers on social media was approaching statistical significance,  $\chi^2(2)=4.9$ ,  $p=.086$

We ran a t-test and found a statistically significant difference between those who follow accounts related to politics and those who do not on their likelihood on voting in future elections, which was statistically significant, such that those who follow political accounts ( $M=4.83$ ,  $SD=.49$ ) are more likely to vote in future elections than those who do not ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=.95$ ),  $t(108)=2.4$ ,  $p=.018$ . To see results from other t-tests, see appendix F.

Finally, we ran correlation tests. The analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between “important” and “knowledge” such that as political knowledge increases, the



importance placed on voting increases ( $r = .536, n = 125, p < .001$ ). The analysis shows a moderate-to-strong positive correlation between important and future elections such that as the likeliness of voting in future elections increases, the importance placed on voting increases ( $r = .708, n = 125, p < .001$ ). The analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between important and follow news coverage such that as one's following of political news coverage increases, the importance placed on voting increases ( $r = .522, n = 125, p < .001$ ).

When analyzing the short answer question about participants general feelings towards politics, we found there is an overall feeling of frustration, confusion and disinterest in politics. There were also those who believe, despite the negative feeling, it is a necessary duty.

### **Key takeaways**

We found many takeaways from the qualitative research report about college students and what motivates them to vote. We learned being registered to vote does not directly influence someone's motivation to vote. A majority of participants were registered to vote or have voted in the past. However, many of the out-of-state voters did not care about the upcoming election or did not know how to get an absentee ballot.

We also learned a majority of participants wanted to be more politically engaged but were unsure where to start. They felt as though they were too busy to become more politically engaged. If they had time they did not know who to trust or where to go to for information. We found media coverage and being politically engaged are not mutually exclusive, so, there needs to be something else like a parent or an issue they deeply care about that pushes them to vote.

Additionally, a bulk of participants felt that social media provided an overload of personal opinions. Despite this, participants felt that social media delivered quick updates, but did not provide enough information to make participants feel like informed voters.

Our team wanted to continue to learn more about whether or not social media has an influence on college students' voting habits through our survey. Since there is no significance between being registered to vote and following political influencers, we suggest that you should not promote your messages through political influencers in attempt to gain more voters because people who are not registered to vote do not follow political influencers to begin with. By promoting their messages through these influencers, you would not see a sufficient increase in newly registered voters.

We concluded there is a significant relationship between people who follow political social media accounts/influencers and those who have voted before. These findings mean that people are more likely to vote in elections if they are following social media accounts related to politics. While political influencers are not a good medium for increasing voter registration, they are a good way to reach people who are already registered to vote. One of the big issues we saw in our data was a lot of our survey participants were registered to vote, yet they had never actually voted before. From our short answer questions, an overwhelming amount of responses mentioned that they felt lost when it came to political information and news. With this data, we suggest that you use political influencers as a platform for conveying clear and simple political knowledge. Their following, who is already registered to vote, would have an increased chance of seeing political news and thus feel more informed as a voter which, in turn, would increase their likelihood to vote. Our correlation test proves again that having more knowledge about

politics makes people more interested in politics. In the future, we believe conducting research on how people feel about political influencers before and after they collaborate with your organization would be beneficial in find ways to reach your public.

We found students would rather hear multiple viewpoints on issues when making political decisions. We suggest putting information out there that reflects all perspectives. Rock the Vote should reach out to politically-based clubs and clubs that may not be inherently political, but focus on topics affected by politics such as women's clubs and environmental groups. Rock the Vote can then educate young people about how politics affects their issue and the importance of electing politicians who will represent their best interest. Our team also felt it would be beneficial to reach out to parents and expand their target audience due to their impact on their children. We also feel it would be valuable for your organization to look into a larger demographic. We also believe conducting research on how people feel about political influencers before and after they collaborate with your organization would be beneficial in finding ways to better reach your public.

## Works Cited

Birkne, Christine. "After 26 Years, Rock the Vote Is Still Driving Young People to the Polls." *Adweek*, Adweek, 31 July 2016, [www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/after-26-years-rock-vote-still-driving-young-people-polls-172593/](http://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/after-26-years-rock-vote-still-driving-young-people-polls-172593/).

"2020 is Right around the Corner." *Rock the Vote*, Rock the Vote, [www.rockthevote.org/](http://www.rockthevote.org/).

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A.)**

Script Questions:

1. Do you follow politics?
2. How do you prefer to receive your news and why? (video, text/print, audio, etc.)
3. Has your interest in politics increased, decreased, or stayed the same since you became eligible to vote? Explain.
4. Are you passionate about any current issues and do those issues motivate you to vote?
  - a. Follow Up: Do you plan on voting on the midterm election?
5. Do you trust political information on social media more or equally to political coverage on news outlets?
  - a. Follow Up: Do you follow a lot of celebrities who share their political opinions?
  - b. Do you follow politicians on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook etc.?
6. What are some hurdles you have discovered when it comes to voting and registering to vote?
  - a. Do you find it to be harder while in school?
7. Do you feel as though media coverage of politics has more or less of an influence on your political opinions over how you were raised?
  - a. Do your parents or guardian push their views on you or do you make your own decision?
  - b. Are members of your family the same political party as you?

9. Is there any additional information you think is important for us to know about your voting habits or other things relevant to the study?

\*Other follow up questions varied based on participants response

## Appendix B.)

1. How old are you?  
Short Answer/Open Ended
  2. What is your gender?  
Male / Female / Prefer not to say
  3. What state is your university in?  
Short Answer/Open Ended
  4. What major are you?  
Short Answer/Open Ended
  5. What year do you graduate?  
Short Answer/Open Ended
  6. What is your political affiliation?  
Democrat / Republican / Independent / None / Unsure / Other
- 
1. How important is voting to you?  
1 Not at all important - 5 Very Important
  2. Are you registered to vote?  
Yes / No / Unsure
  3. If yes, in which state are you registered to vote? If no, skip to next question.  
Short Answer/Open Ended
  4. Have you voted before?  
Yes / No / Unsure
  5. If yes, how did you vote?  
In state / Early Voting / Vote by Mail
  6. Did you vote in the 2018 midterm elections?  
Yes / No
  7. How likely are you to vote in future elections?  
1 Not at all - 5 Very Likely
  8. How would you rank your political knowledge?  
1 Not very knowledgeable - 5 Very Likely
  9. What are your general feelings towards politics?  
Short Answer/Open Ended
  10. How often do you follow news coverage of politics?  
1 Not very knowledgeable - 5 Very Likely
  11. Where do you get your news? (Select all that apply)  
TV / Print / Radio / Social Media / Internet / Podcast
  12. How much political information do you consume everyday?  
Less than an hour a day / 1-2 hours a day / 3-4 hours a day / 5+ hours a day
  13. What social media platform do you use most to get news?  
Facebook / Twitter / Instagram / Snapchat / None / Other
  14. How often, if at all, do you use social media in a day?  
Never / 1-4 times a day / 5-9 times a day / 10 + times a day
  15. How often do you see political information on your social media feeds?  
1 Never - 5 Very Frequently
  16. Do you follow political influencers on social media?  
Yes / No / Unsure

17. If yes, can you name a few? If no skip to next question.  
Short Answer/Open Ended
18. Do you follow other accounts that relate to politics?  
Yes / No / Unsure
19. If yes, which ones? If no skip to next question.  
Short Answer/Open Ended
20. My political beliefs are influenced by celebrities / public figures on social media.  
1 Strongly Disagree - 5 Strongly agree
21. Is there anything else you would like us to know about your politics and social media intake?  
Short Answer/Open Ended



## Appendix C.)

Item in Survey	Variable Name	Response Options
Participant Number	Name	1-125
How old are you?	Age	18,19,20,21,22,23
What is your gender?	Gender	Female-1, Male-2, Prefer not to say-3
What state is your university in?	School	AL-1, CA-2, CO-3, CT-4, FL-5, MA-6, MI-7, NH-8, NJ-9, NY-10, PA-11, RI-12, SC-13, WI-14
What major are you?	Major	Communications + Art-1, Business-2, Natural and Health Science -3, Language-4, Social Science and Humanities- 5, Computer Studies- 6, Engineering-7
What year do you graduate?	Graduation	2019, 2020, 2021, 2022
What is your political affiliation?	Party	Democrat-1, Republican-2, Independent-3, None-4, Unsure-5, Other-6
How important is voting to you?	Important	Not Important-1, Very Important-5
Are you registered to vote?	Registration	Yes-1, No-2, Unsure-3
If yes, in which state are you registered to vote? If no, skip to next question.	State	AL-1 CA-2, CO-3, CT-4, FL-5, MA-6, MI-7, NH-8, NJ-9, NY-10, PA-11, RI-12, VT-13, WA-14
Have you voted before?	Previous_History	Yes-1, No-2 Unsure-3
If yes, how did you vote?	Previous_How	In State-1, Early-2, Mail-3
Did you vote in the 2018 midterm elections?	Midterm_Vote	Yes-1, No-2
How likely are you to vote in future elections?	Future_Election	Not at all-1, Very Likely-5
How would you rank your political knowledge?	Knowledge	Not very knowledgeable-1, Very Knowledgeable-5
What are your general feelings towards politics?	Feelings	N/A (Short Answer)
How often do you follow news coverage of politics?	Follow_News	Not often- 1, Very often-5
Print	Print	Yes-1, No-2
Radio	Radio	Yes-1, No-2
TV	TV	Yes-1, No-2
Social	Social	Yes-1, No-2
internet	Internet	Yes-1, No-2
Podcast	Podcast	Yes-1, No-2
source frequency	Frequency	Number of Sources: 1-6
How much political information do you consume everyday?	Consume_News	1: 0-1 hour, 2: 1-2 hour, 3: 3-4 hours, 4: 5+ hours
What social media platform do you use most to get news?	Social_Platform	Facebook-1, Twitter-2, Instagram-3, Snapchat-4, None-5, Other-6
How often, if at all, do you use social media in a day?	Social_Daily	1: 1-4 times a day, 2: 5-9x day, 3: 10+, 4: Never
How often do you see political information of your social media feeds?	Social_Political	Never-1, Very Frequently-5
Do you follow political influencers on social media?	Influencers	Yes-1, No-2, Unsure-3
If yes, can you name a few? If no skip to next question.	Name_Influencers	Short Answer
Do you follow other accounts that relate to politics?	Accounts	Yes-1, No-2, Unsure-3
If yes, which ones? If no skip to next question.	Name_Accounts	Short Answer
My political beliefs are influenced by celebrities / public figures on social media.	Celebrities	Strongly Disagree-1, Strongly Agree-5
Is there anything else you would like us to know about your politics and social media intake?	Anything_Else	Short Answer