

Analysis of Impacts of the *Project Vote Smart* Young Voters Program—2002



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Introduction

Voting turnout among young Americans (18 to 24 years old) has declined by thirteen percent over the last twenty-five years, a drop off much greater than that exhibited by their elders (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2001). A number of reasons have been suggested for this low turnout rate among young Americans, including the well documented observation that many of them believe that “voting in elections has little to do with the way that real decisions are made in this country” (Y Vote 2000, p. 4). On the positive side, it is not the case that young Americans tend to see little difference between the two parties and offer this as a reason for staying away from the polls (Y Vote 2000: Politics Meets the Digital Generation). It has been suggested by some scholars that younger voters are less likely to be contacted by parties and candidates, and therefore experience less of a stimulus to vote (Hubbard, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, “Defy Convention: Court the Young Vote” November 1, 1998). Professors Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber studied the effects of a “get out the vote” campaign conducted among young people in the “vicinity of college campuses in five communities in New York, Colorado and Oregon” (The Pew Charitable Trusts, “Nonpartisan Voter Mobilization Efforts Increased Youth Turnout in 2000 Yale Study Finds,” @ www.pewtrusts.com/ideas). Young people who received a single phone call urging them to vote were eight percent more likely to cast a ballot than were those who received no call.

In an effort to further understand the reasons for the decline in young voter turnout, the Pew Charitable Trusts funded an experimental design analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of Project Vote Smart’s *Young Voters Program* campaign, which targeted young voters. That

campaign was designed to provide young voters with knowledge about and access to non-partisan materials created to stimulate voting by providing timely and relevant information about the choices available to the voter. The expectation was that individuals with greater knowledge about the availability of that information would be more likely to access it and retain it, and with this greater knowledge they would **both** be better able to make informed choices and be more likely to actually exercising those choices by voting. This report assesses the effectiveness of that PVS program.

This analysis will feature outcomes associated with the Project Vote Smart election-related materials-provision intervention through systematic observations collected in six major urban communities broadly distributed across the country. The evaluation approach used in assessing program impacts was that of an “R-comparative change” experimental design (Mohr, *Impact Analysis for Program Evaluation*: 62) whereby one group received PVS materials and a randomly selected control group of counterparts did not. The two groups of respondents were surveyed both *before* and *after* the November 2002 general election, with the treatment group intervention occurring prior to the election. Systematic analyses were conducted in which the attitudes, knowledge and behavior of the two groups are compared in order to assess the effects attributable to the PVS informational treatment intervention.

The Study Design

To investigate the impact of PVS *Young Voters Program* materials, the study team identified and contacted 3,022 randomly selected households featuring a young voter in the six target cities of Columbia (SC), Indianapolis (IN), Fort Worth (TX), Lincoln (NEB), San Jose (CA), and Tampa (FL). Each of these households contained at least one youth (18 to 25 years) willing to participate in the *Young Voters Program* evaluation study. Because of rules in force to protect the human subjects of research studies at both participating universities, all youth involved in the study

had to consent to both a pre- and post-election survey exposure. These 3,022 youth respondents to the pre-election survey were then randomly assigned to one of two groups (Groups I and II in Figure 1) of equal size (1,511 individuals) in order to conduct a quasi-experimental evaluation of the impact of the PVS *Young Voters Program* materials and the associated websites. Group I was sent *Young Voters Program* materials in the mail, along with a personal request to review the materials prior to the November general election. The following types of information were provided to the youth randomly assigned to Group I:

- Description and location of PVS Young Voters Program web site (plus brochure)
- PVS Voter's Self-Defense Manual
- Where to call toll-free for PVS voter assistance and information

Youth randomly assigned to Group II did not receive the *Young Voters Program* materials. After the election, both groups were surveyed anew and compared to each other in order to assess the degree to which the PVS *Young Voters Program* materials had an impact on *efficacy, political participation (including voting), level of information, political knowledge*, and the development of values and behaviors consistent with *civic engagement* in a “civil society.” Out of the 3,022 youth identified (approximately 500 in each of the six study cities), 1,724 responded to both pre-and post-election surveys (57 percent response rate).

Figure 1

Schedule of Study Activity

| | Pre-election Survey | PVS Materials Sent to Participants | Post-election Survey |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Group I | August 1 to September 15 | October 1 | November 15 to December 30 |
| Group II | August 1 to September 15 | NA | November 15 to December 30 |

Many of the original respondents who were first interviewed during the Summer of 2002 were not available to participate in the post-election survey due to school or work schedule conflicts. Both mail and telephone surveys were utilized to encourage responses. Only those respondents who participated in *both* pre- and post-election surveys are included in the forthcoming analyses. Assuming no response bias, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is approximately plus or minus 3.4 percent for each group. As with all samples, question wording, refusals, and other difficulties encountered in implementing surveys can result in error or bias in public opinion surveys.

Figure 2
Respondent Group Sample Sizes

| <i>Cities:</i> | Total Respondents | Group I | Group II |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Columbia, South Carolina | 15.9% n=274 | 16.1% n=138 | 15.7% n=136 |
| Indianapolis, Indiana | 17.1% n=295 | 17.7 n=152 | 16.5 n=143 |
| Fort Worth, Texas | 17.0% n=293 | 16.3 n=140 | 17.7 n=153 |
| Lincoln, Nebraska | 16.4% n=283 | 16.1 n=138 | 16.8 n=145 |
| Tampa, Florida | 16.6% n=287 | 17.0 n=146 | 16.3 n=141 |
| San Jose, California | 16.9% n=292 | 16.9 n=145 | 17.0 n=147 |
| TOTALS | N=1,724 | N=859 | N=865 |

Respondent Characteristics

Respondents in both the treatment and control groups are rather comparable in terms of gender, educational attainment, age, partisanship, and interest in policy issues. Consequently, we

believe that aggregate level differences found between the two groups can be attributed primarily to treatment effects rather than to any demographic differences obtaining in the composition of the groups themselves.

Table 1
Respondent Characteristics

Respondent Gender

| | Group I | Group II |
|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Female | 52% | 53% |
| Male | 48% | 47% |

Educational Attainment:

| | Group I | Group II |
|--------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| High School or less | 20% | 20% |
| Some College | 45% | 42% |
| College Graduate | 32% | 34% |
| Vocational School/Other | 3% | 4% |

Respondent Age (years)

| | Group I | Group II |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 18 years | 10% | 10% |
| 19 years | 11% | 11% |
| 20 years | 11% | 11% |
| 21 years | 11% | 11% |
| 22 years | 12% | 12% |
| 23 years | 15% | 14% |
| 24 years | 15% | 15% |
| 25 years | 15% | 16% |

Respondent Partisanship

| | Group I | Group II |
|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Republican | 30% | 29% |
| Independent-Other | 40% | 41% |
| Democrat | 30% | 30% |

Table 2

Interest in Important Issues

The following is a list of issues that many people believe are important to the country. For each one, please indicate whether you are very interested, somewhat interested, or not interested at all? (pre-election survey)

Issue Interest

| | Very Interested | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|
| | Group I | Group II |
| Jobs and economic opportunity | 76% | 75% |
| Wages | 59% | 62% |
| Education | 87% | 87% |
| Crime | 64% | 67% |
| Social Security | 22% | 26% |
| The environment | 70% | 66% |
| Drugs | 43% | 43% |
| Guns | 38% | 40% |
| Health Care | 73% | 72% |
| Welfare and poverty | 49% | 46% |
| Family values | 69% | 69% |
| Homelessness | 53% | 51% |
| HIV/AIDS | 53% | 52% |
| Abortion | 45% | 44% |
| Foreign policy | 53% | 52% |
| Campaign finance | 21% | 21% |
| Local political elections | 34% | 33% |
| State political elections | 43% | 42% |
| National political elections | 64% | 60% |

Results

Section 1: Political Interest

The first section of the survey asked respondents several questions concerning their level of past and current interest in political matters.

In regard to the degree to which respondents discussed politics, government, and current events with their parents or guardians while growing up, we find 21 percent of respondents in both groups saying they discussed politics “often,” and over a third saying they discussed politics “sometimes” (Table 3). When asked how often both groups currently discuss political issues and current events with family and friends in the pre-election survey, 33 percent of Group I and 34 percent of Group II “often” discuss politics (Table 4). Again, then, no initial pre-intervention difference obtains between the two groups which would appear to mitigate the distinctive hypothesized effects of the experimental treatment provided by the PVS materials.

When asked how often they had discussed the 2002 November General Election or other current events in the post-election survey, 22 percent of Group I and 13 percent of Group II responded “often” (Table 5). The higher percentage is observed among Group I youth containing those survey respondents who received PVS materials; the difference between the two groups on this measure is statistically significant. Thus, there is some indication that the experimental treatment provided by the PVS materials had a demonstrable, albeit small, impact on the willingness of young voters to discuss election issues. It may well be that the content of the PVS materials provided to the Group I respondents armed them with greater confidence and greater stores of knowledge to carry into those conversations. Ironically, even though the PVS materials seemed to separate the two groups in terms of their discussion of the election, for both groups the levels of discussion about the election were lower than the pre-election levels of discussion about politics

and government in general. This observation from the pre- and post-election surveys would seem to reinforce the widely held assumption among scholars of the American electoral process that US elections tend to be seen by young citizens as not being particularly relevant to the important issues of politics and government about which they care.

This same pattern of electoral process disaffection is also evident for two other indicators of cognitive political involvement. Recipients of PVS materials showed significantly higher levels of self-assessed knowledge concerning the election than did Group II members – namely, those who did not receive such materials (Table 7). No such difference obtained between the two groups in the pre-election survey when the question was about information level in regard to government and politics in general (Table 6).

Table 3

Childhood Discussion of Politics, Government and Current Events

When growing up, how often did you talk about politics, government or current events with your parents or guardians? (pre-election survey)

| | Often | Sometimes | Not Very Often | Never |
|----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Group I – Pre | 21% | 36% | 31% | 12% |
| Group II-Pre | 21% | 35% | 33% | 11% |

Chi square = n.s.

Table 4

Contemporary Discussion of Politics, Government and Current Events

What about now, how often do you talk about politics, government or current events with your family, friends, or other acquaintance--often, sometimes, not very often, or never? (pre-election survey)

| | Often | Sometimes | Not Very Often | Never |
|----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Group I – Pre | 33% | 58% | 8% | 1% |
| Group II-Pre | 34% | 55% | 10% | 1% |

Chi square = n.s.

Table 5**Discussion of the 2002 November General Election**

How often did you talk about the recent 2002 November General Election or other current events with your family, friends, or other acquaintances--often, sometimes, not very often, or never? (post-election survey)

| | Often | Sometimes | Not Very Often | Never |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Group I - Post | 22 | 37 | 25 | 15 |
| Group II-Post | 13 | 32 | 35 | 20 |

Chi square = 43.93, $p = .000$

Table 6**Self-Assessment of Current Political Information Level: Pre-election**

In general, how well informed would you consider yourself concerning politics and government--not informed, somewhat informed, informed, or very well informed? (pre-election survey)

| | Not Informed | Somewhat Informed | Informed | Very Well Informed |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Group I – Pre | 3% | 35% | 42% | 20% |
| Group II-Pre | 4% | 36% | 42% | 18% |

Chi square = ns

Table 7**Self-Assessment of Information Level for 2002 Election: Post Election**

In general, how well informed would you consider yourself concerning the recent 2002 November General Election--not informed, somewhat informed, informed, or very well informed? (post-election survey)

| | Not Informed | Somewhat Informed | Informed | Very Well Informed |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Group I - Post | 6% | 29% | 40% | 25% |
| Group II-Post | 11% | 39% | 35% | 16% |

Chi square = 42.86, $p = .00$

Section 2: Community and Civic Engagement

One of the most haunting and contentious issues of the day has to do with *social capital*, the shared resource that results from individuals who express trust in others, use that trust as a foundation for working together to achieve common ends, and thereby engage in civic and community activity (Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 2000; Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, 1990; Ladd, *The Ladd Report*, 1999). Robert Putnam, among others, has argued that the level of social capital and the resulting sense of community have been declining to dangerously low levels in the United States. This decline, he believes, results from lower levels of trust, and along with that, lower levels of belief that people can have an impact on what goes on around them. Younger citizens are even less engaged in traditional politics than their older counterparts, although there is some evidence that the former are much more likely to engage in volunteer activities than are preceding generations. So, we confront the question of whether access to more information about the political world generally, and the election world in particular, might lead young citizens to believe that they can have an impact on their own community. The presence of that information may lead them to believe that he or she can confront the problems of the community with more resources and better understanding, and therefore intervene more effectively in their solution. The following tables reveal whether membership in Group I (receipt of PVS materials) or Group II (control group) makes any difference in the attitudes and beliefs expressed in the post-election survey.

Table 8**Self-Assessed Impact on Making Community Better Place to Live**

Overall, how much impact do you think PEOPLE LIKE YOU can have in making your community a better place to live—no impact at all, a small impact, a moderate impact, or a big impact?

| | No Impact | Small Impact | Moderate Impact | Big Impact |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Group I - Pre | 9% | 30% | 41% | 20% |
| Group II- Pre | 8% | 30% | 40% | 22% |
| Group I - Post | 12% | 29% | 41% | 19% |
| Group II - Post | 11% | 31% | 39% | 19% |

Pre-election Chi Square= ns; Post-election Chi Square=ns

Table 9**Self-Assessed Impact by Voting and Election Participation**

How much impact do you think PEOPLE LIKE YOU can have by voting and participating in elections – no impact at all, a small impact, a moderate impact, or a big impact?

| | No Impact | Small Impact | Moderate Impact | Big Impact |
|------------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Group I - Pre | 11% | 35% | 36% | 17% |
| Group II – Pre | 11% | 33% | 39% | 17% |
| Group I - Post | 13% | 30% | 34% | 24% |
| Group II - Post | 15% | 29% | 35% | 22% |

Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns

If knowledge is a resource that voters can bring to bear on politics in order to maximize their influence, one might expect that making known the availability of that information to young people would enhance their sense of being able to exercise an impact. However, as the findings reported in Tables 8 and 9 indicate, providing young voters with Project Vote Smart materials did nothing to distinguish them from the control group in terms of their belief that they can make a difference in government and politics – or that they can make a difference by voting and participating in elections.

Table 10

Sense of Community

We are interested in what gives you a sense of community or a feeling of belonging.

| | Yes – does give me a sense of community | No – does not give me a sense of community | Does not apply |
|---|---|--|----------------|
| Your old friends or new friends | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 85% | 10% | 5% |
| <i>Group II-Pre</i> | 86% | 10% | 4% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 79% | 13% | 9% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 79% | 13% | 8% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | |
| The people in your neighborhood | | | |
| <i>Group I – Pre</i> | 68% | 30% | 2% |
| <i>Group II – Pre</i> | 69% | 29% | 3% |
| <i>Group I – Post</i> | 66% | 28% | 6% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 65% | 29% | 7% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | |
| Living in your city | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 61% | 34% | 5% |
| <i>Group II- Pre</i> | 60% | 35% | 6% |
| <i>Group I – Post</i> | 56% | 37% | 8% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 53% | 37% | 10% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | |
| The people you work with or go to school with | | | |
| <i>Group I – Pre</i> | 71% | 20% | 9% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 72% | 19% | 9% |
| <i>Group I – Post</i> | 70% | 19% | 11% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 73% | 17% | 10% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | |

The surveys also asked respondents what gives them a sense of community or a feeling of belonging. Again, one might expect that individuals who have access to more information about the electoral politics of an area might feel closer to that community. A sense of familiarity and knowledge could create a sense of identification with that local community. However, as the results in Table 10 would seem to suggest, no post-election difference obtains between the two groups after Group I had been provided with the PVS materials. Table 11 contains the responses of individuals in both groups (I and II) in both the pre and post election surveys to questions about different sets of people they trust. Group I survey respondents and Group II survey respondents are no different in their trust of people in the neighborhood, or in people with whom they work, at either pre- or post-election administrations of the survey.

On trust of the local news media and local officials, Group I and Group II respondents are different at a statistically significant level in the **post-election** surveys. While the absolute trust differences are rather small, in both cases statistically significant, it is the case that slightly greater trust is expressed by those receiving the PVS materials as would be hoped by commentators concerned about declining levels of social capital in American society. One might hypothesize with some reasonable base in empirical evidence that having more timely and election-relevant information available during election periods provides the individual voter with greater resources by which to judge whether a particular group of people or specific candidates for office should be trusted. In this particular case, the additional capacity for discernment led to slightly greater trust. In other cases, however, it might be that the greater information would lead to decrements in trust among Group I respondents.

Table 11

Next, we'd like to know how much you trust different groups of people. For the following groups, please tell us if you can trust them a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?

| | Trust them a lot | Trust them some | Trust them only a little | Trust them not at all |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| People in your neighborhood | | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 30% | 52% | 15% | 4% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 27% | 56% | 14% | 3% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 30% | 53% | 13% | 5% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 29% | 53% | 13% | 4% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | | |
| People you work with | | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 43% | 44% | 10% | 3% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 41% | 46% | 12% | 2% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 45% | 42% | 10% | 3% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 41% | 45% | 12% | 2% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | | |
| The local news media | | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 4% | 44% | 37% | 15% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 5% | 43% | 40% | 13% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 11% | 40% | 36% | 13% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 7% | 40% | 40% | 14% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = 10.42, p = .01 | | | | |
| Your local elected officials | | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 5% | 44% | 37% | 14% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 5% | 40% | 41% | 15% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 7% | 42% | 36% | 15% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 5% | 37% | 41% | 17% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = n.s.; Post-election: Chi square = 10.23, p = .02 | | | | |
| Your state elected officials | | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 4% | 40% | 39% | 17% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 4% | 37% | 43% | 16% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 4% | 40% | 40% | 16% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 4% | 36% | 43% | 17% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | | |
| National elected officials | | | | |
| <i>Group I - Pre</i> | 7% | 39% | 35% | 19% |
| <i>Group II - Pre</i> | 8% | 36% | 38% | 18% |
| <i>Group I - Post</i> | 8% | 39% | 33% | 20% |
| <i>Group II - Post</i> | 8% | 35% | 38% | 19% |
| Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns | | | | |

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| SECTION 3 Political Participation |
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One of the reasons individuals may choose not to vote in a particular election is the feeling that he or she fails to possess sufficient information to make a meaningful choice. Thus, one might hypothesize that the availability of the PVS materials would increase the sense of confidence with which youthful voters might approach the election, and thereby enhance their probability of voting. In this section we report survey responses for when respondents in the pre-election survey were asked if they were likely to vote in the November general election, and then in the post-election survey whether or not they had in fact voted in the November 2002 general election. The results of this comparison of Groups I and II are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

**Self-Assessed Probability of Voting in Coming Election and
Report of Voting in the 2002 Election**

How likely are you to vote in the next general election in 2002? (1) Definitely will; (2) Probably will; (3) Probably will not; or (4) Definitely will not (Pre-election survey only)

| | Definitely will | Probably will | Probably will not | Definitely will not |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Group I | 30% | 32% | 29% | 9% |
| Group II | 27% | 32% | 30% | 11% |

Chi square = ns

Did you vote in the recent 2002 November General election? (Post-election survey only)

| | Reported Voting | Didn't Vote |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Group I | 34% | 66% |
| Group II | 32% | 68% |

Chi square = ns

The intervention of providing access to the PVS materials made no difference in the likelihood of the respondents voting in the election. Indeed, in the pre-election survey 62 percent

of Group I had indicated that he or she would definitely vote, or probably would vote, but only 34 percent actually voted. Neither one of those figures is significantly different from the Group II results. Thus, it seems clear that the PVS materials did not serve as a stimulus to voting turnout.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">SECTION 4 Political Knowledge Holding Effects of PVS Materials</p> |
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While the PVS materials may not have resulted in the disproportionate likelihood of voting, perhaps they result in higher “quality” votes, as indicated by the knowledge that young voters brought to the polling booth. In this section, we discuss the outcome of having asked respondents five information questions recommended by Delli Carpini and Keeter (*What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*, Yale University Press, 1996, pp. 305-306). While the PVS materials contained information relevant to these questions, they were not highlighted in those materials. It is plausible to suggest that the PVS materials may have stimulated a more general interest in political affairs and government, and thereby led to a general enhancement of political knowledge. Thus, one would hypothesize that the differences in knowledge levels would be greater between the two groups in the post-election survey than in the pre-election survey. The results of this comparison are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Political Knowledge Difference in Pre-election and Post-election Surveys

Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney?

| | <u>Group I</u> | <u>Group II</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percent correct pre-election | 66% | 64% |
| Percent correct post-election | 71% | 67% |

Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not...is it the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?

| | <u>Group I</u> | <u>Group II</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percent correct pre-election | 70% | 69% |
| Percent correct post-election | 72% | 69% |

Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns

How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a presidential veto?

| | <u>Group I</u> | <u>Group II</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percent correct pre-election | 66% | 66% |
| Percent correct post-election | 70% | 69% |

Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns

Which party is more conservative—the Republicans or Democrats?

| | <u>Group I</u> | <u>Group II</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percent correct pre-election | 57% | 57% |
| Percent correct post-election | 59% | 58% |

Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns

Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.?

| | <u>Group I</u> | <u>Group II</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Percent correct pre-election | 55% | 55% |
| Percent correct post-election | 61% | 58% |

Pre-election: Chi square = ns; Post-election: Chi square = ns

The findings reported in Table 13 suggest that the PVS materials had no significant impact on Group I survey respondents with respect to the level of their political knowledge. Just as in the case of voting turnout, the apparent quality of the vote as reflected in political knowledge was not

enhanced by the distribution of the PVS materials. Indeed, when comparing voters who received PVS materials with those who did not, on only one of the five knowledge questions is there a significant difference—the knowledge of Dick Cheney’s current position. At the same time, regardless of whether youth fall into in Group I or in Group II as a result of random assignment, voters generally are better informed than non-voters. Ironically, the differences between voters and non-voters in their knowledge levels are even greater in Group II than in Group I.

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| SECTION 5 PVS-Specific Questions |
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The final section of the survey asked respondents about their familiarity with Project Vote Smart and its materials. The results on the PVS-specific items are set forth in Table 14. Only about five percent in either group had heard of Project Vote Smart at the time of the first wave of the study’s surveys. Sadly, fewer than two-thirds of the respondents in Group I who received the PVS materials actually reviewed them. Among the respondents in Group II (those not receiving the PVS materials) only about eight percent indicated that they had used them for election voting purposes. When comparing the small number of Group II respondents who used the PVS materials with the Group I respondents who also used them, a rather surprising result emerges from the comparison. The Group II users were *more likely* to have accessed the various web sites, and were no less likely than Group I to use the Self Defense Manual and the Vote Smart Yellow Pages materials.

Even though Group I respondents were more likely to visit PVS web sites and were likely to spend more time on them than Group II survey respondents overall, when controlling for use (that is, comparing those in both groups who actually claimed use) the Group II members were actually more likely to use PVS materials for specific reasons, such as gaining information on a

specific candidate. Since Group II members sought out PVS materials on their own, rather than being directed to the information sources by the intervention of the experimental stimulus of the study, perhaps their greater motivation accounts for the greater use of the information and associated websites.

Table 14

Knowledge and Use of PVS Materials

Pre-Election Survey Question

Finally, have you ever heard of the nonpartisan, nonprofit organization called "Project Vote Smart?"

| | No | Not sure | Yes |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| Group I | 85% | 9% | 6% |
| Group II | 87% | 8% | 5% |

Chi square = ns

Post-Election Survey Questions

Finally, did you have a chance to review the Project Vote Smart materials sent to you? [Group I only]

| | No | Yes |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Group I | 36.2% | 63.8% |

Finally, did you use any Project Vote Smart services or materials since the last time we contacted you before the November general election? [Group II only]

| | No | Yes |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Group II | 92.5% | 7.5% |

Please tell us which of the following Project Vote Smart services you used during the November general election. (Percentages based on those who reported using services and materials)

| | Services Used | |
|--|---------------|----------|
| | Group I | Group II |
| The toll-free Voter's Research Hotline | 19% | 43% |
| The Voter's Self Defense Manual | 38% | 38% |
| Project Vote Smart's Web site | 28% | 61% |
| Young Voter's Program Web site | 20% | 44% |
| Vote Smart Web Yellow Pages | 12% | 13% |

This last question on the survey concerns Project Vote Smart's Young Voters Program Web site. How many times did you visit Project Vote Smart's Young Voters Program Web site?

| | Group I | Group II |
|----------------------|---------|----------|
| One visit | 10.6% | 2.3% |
| Two to three visits | 1.9% | 0.6% |
| Four to five visits | 0.6% | 0.3% |
| Six to seven visits | 0.1% | - |
| Eight or more visits | 0.1% | - |

Approximately how much TOTAL time did you spend visiting Project Vote Smart's Young Voters Program Web site?

| | Group I | Group II |
|------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Ten minutes or less | 5.1% | 1.4% |
| Eleven to twenty minutes | 4.7% | 1.3% |
| Twenty-one to thirty minutes | 1.9% | 0.5% |
| Thirty-one to forty minutes | 1.0% | 0.1% |
| Forty-one to fifty minutes | 0.2% | - |
| More than one hour | 0.3% | - |

Please tell us which of the following services or activities you used while visiting the Young Voters Program Web site. (Percentages based on those who reported visiting the website)

| | Services Used | |
|--|---------------|----------|
| | Group I | Group II |
| General information on the election | 24% | 94% |
| Information on American Government and Politics | 12% | 27% |
| Information on specific candidates | 25% | 91% |
| Information from the National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) | 15% | 27% |
| Contacting a candidate | 6% | 6% |
| Participation in the Young Voters Forum (chat room) | 5% | 6% |

A further question is whether the reason for using the Vote Smart materials influences the responses of the individuals in the samples. In particular, do Group I youth who used the materials as a result of them being sent to them differ in important ways from Group II youth who found their own way to those materials? Table 15 shows the results from the knowledge questions asked in the post-election survey. Those results indicate that individuals in Group II who found their own way to the Vote Smart materials are more knowledgeable than either those who did not use the PVS materials at all, or those who used them as part of the experimental intervention distinguish Group I. While the PVS Group II sub-sample is much smaller than the PVS Group I sub-sample, it is clear that having the motivation to find one's own way to the information source is reflected in much higher knowledge levels than either being led to information sources by the study or not accessing those materials at all. Indeed, it appears as though the relationship of the use of the PVS informational materials and/or services and the higher knowledge levels in the Group II sub-sample may be a spurious one – that is, both PVS informational use and knowledge holding result from greater inherent interest in and motivation to remain attuned to public affairs.

Table 15
Use of PVS Materials and Political Knowledge

| % Correct Knowledge | No PVS Materials | PVS Group II | PVS Group I | Chi Square Significance |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Dick Cheney</i> | 66% | 83% | 74% | .000 |
| <i>Who Determines If Law Const?</i> | 69% | 83% | 71% | .049 |
| <i>What majority to Override Veto?</i> | 68% | 79% | 71% | Ns |
| <i>Which Party More Conserv?</i> | 57% | 68% | 61% | Ns |
| <i>Party Most in House?</i> | 58% | 68% | 62% | Ns |

A second perspective is gained from looking at the information in Table 16 which displays the percentage of respondents expressing “some” or “a lot” of trust in various social actors in both the pre-election and post-election surveys, controlling for the nature of the respondent’s exposure to the PVS informational materials. The results of these analyses of “trust effects” are presented for the following three groups of survey respondents: those reporting no amount of use of PVS materials; Group II respondents reporting use of PVS materials; and Group I respondents reporting use of PVS materials.

Table 16
Trust in Political Objects by Exposure to PVS Materials

| Per Cent Trust “Some”/ “A lot | No PVS Pre | No PVS Post | Group II PVS Pre | Group II PVS Post | Group I PVS Pre | Group I PVS Post | Chi Square Sig: Pre | Chi Square Sig: Post |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Neighbors</i> | 83% | 84% | 83% | 83% | 80% | 82% | ns | ns |
| <i>Workers</i> | 87% | 87% | 86% | 86% | 87% | 87% | ns | ns |
| <i>Media</i> | 49% | 48% | 47% | 48% | 46% | 50% | ns | .000 |
| <i>Local officials</i> | 47% | 44% | 44% | 42% | 47% | 49% | ns | ns |
| <i>State Officials</i> | 44% | 42% | 40% | 40% | 41% | 42% | ns | ns |
| <i>National Officials</i> | 46% | 45% | 40% | 39% | 44% | 45% | ns | ns |

Once again it is clear that exposure to the PVS materials, whether by self-initiation or by experimental intervention, has little substantial impact on the attitudes of these young voters in terms of the trust they express in various objects in their social and political environment. While neighbors and co-workers are more trusted than media or officials at any level, PVS informational material exposure has no apparent connection with that level of trust.

Substantial attention has recently been given to the potential impact of those web sites that provide information about American government and politics. Lupia and Baird recently argued that findings from their study “signal(s) the substantial potential for political learning that effective Internet presentations can provide” (PS, 2003: 81). In the surveys analyzed here, respondents were asked whether or not they had used the PVS Web site. Table 17 presents a comparison of web site users and web site non-users in terms of their political knowledge on the same five knowledge questions derived from the Delli Carpini and Keeter study employed earlier.

Table 17
PVS Website Use and Political Knowledge

| Percent Correct on Knowledge Item | Web site Not Used | Web site Used | Chi Square Sig. |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Veto Over ride % | 72% | 71% | ns |
| More Conservative Pty | 63% | 59% | ns |
| Pty Most Members | 62% | 63% | ns |
| Dick Cheney Job | 73% | 81% | .05 |
| Who declares laws Unconstitutional | 73% | 71% | ns |

The findings reported in Table 17 clearly indicate that PVS web site use in itself has little effect on general political knowledge holding by the young people participating in this study. It should be noted, however, that the particular information contained in the survey questions on political knowledge was not highlighted in the PVS web site itself. While this information could be found under a number of more generic headings perhaps, it is highly unlikely that many web site visitors would intentionally make their way onto the PVS web site location and seek out the elements of the site containing that information.

Conclusion

This report has attempted to evaluate the impact of an experimental intervention involving the provision of access to Project Vote Smart (PVS) materials (Group I) to a sample of young voters and comparing their attitudes and behaviors both before and after the 2002 November general election to those of a sample of young voters who did not receive PVS materials (Group II). The two groups were composed on the basis of random assignment of over 3,000 young

voters selected through a random sampling of household process conducted in six US cities geographically spread across the country. The purpose of the study conducted was to explore possible strategies for increasing the involvement of young Americans in electoral politics in particular, and in civic life in general. Based on a systematic review of pre-election and post-election survey results and the comparison of treatment and control group findings, the overall conclusion must be that the experimental intervention of PVS materials had very little effect on the attitudes and behaviors of those young voters who received those materials.

To be sure, limited effects of use of PVS materials were indeed found in several cases. Slightly higher levels of discussion of the 2002 election, slightly higher self-assessed information levels, and slightly higher levels of trust in the news media and local officials were found among young voters in the group of youth receiving PVS materials. On the other hand, the treatment and control groups exhibited no difference in sense of community, no difference in voting turnout, and no difference in political knowledge.

It is perhaps telling that more than a third of those respondents who received the PVS materials admitted that they never reviewed them. It is also noteworthy that those Group II respondents (control group) who self-initiated use of PVS informational materials were actually more knowledgeable about politics than were those who received it as part of the experimental intervention. Finally, regardless of the reason for attending to the PVS web site, the use of that particular PVS informational source made little difference in the political knowledge the young voters brought to the election. While these results are indeed disappointing in a number of respects, it is important that continued efforts to stimulate young voter civic engagement be guided by sound information on what does and does not lead to desired outcomes.