Acknowledgements

I wish to first thank my committee, Dr. Raymond Scheele, Dr. Gary Crawley, and Dr. Dan Reagan. Your assistance has been irreplaceable. I would also like to thank Dr. Stephen Hall for his insights on the methodology I employ. Without the help of this distinguished faculty, I would not have been able to advance as far into this discourse as I have.

To my parents, family, and friends, your love and support over the years has been worth more than words can articulate. Without the kind and constant help you all have given me, I could never have achieved what I have today.

To Amy, vinaka vakalevu. I cannot begin to say how much you mean to me, or how much you have helped me. Distance has been no match for your able mind, wit, and ability to cool and calm my frustrations and strengthen my resolve. Your grace and patience under pressure amaze me. You are more than my best friend and will be for years to come, loloma.
## Table Of Contents

**Introduction**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  1

**Literature review**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  3
  - The American Voter  3
  - Explanatory Variables  7
  - Socio-Demographic Variables  8
  - Non-Demographic Variables  12
  - The Media  15
  - Political Knowledge  16

**Theory**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  18
  - The Relevance of Political Knowledge  18
  - The Cost of Political Ignorance  21
  - Political Knowledge and Voter Turnout  23

**Methodology**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  25
  - Defining Political Knowledge  25
  - An Ideal Measure of Political Knowledge  26
  - The NES Measure of Political Knowledge  29
  - The 2006 NES Measure  30

**Data & Results**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  32
  - 2004 NES Data  32
  - Results  32

**Discussion**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  36
  - The Success of the Comparison Index  36
  - The 4-Item Index  37

**Conclusion**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  40

**Bibliography**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  42

**Appendix A – Control Variables**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  49
  - Age  49
  - Education  49
  - Following Campaigns  50
  - Following Politics  50
  - Gender  50
  - Income  50
  - Race  50
  - Urbanity  51

**Appendix B – Detailed Variable Listings**  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  52
  - Four-Item Index  52
  - Comparison Index  53
Introduction

“The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” ~ attributed to Winston Churchill

There has been a considerable amount of study in the area of political participation, with much of that energy focused on voter turnout. In the 2000 Presidential election, only 52 percent of Americans eligible to vote turned out. During the 2002 midterm election, only 38 percent turned out (Abramowitz, 2004). On the world scale, the United States is lagging. Eligible voters have turned out, on average, only 48.3 percent of the time from 1945 until 2008, including midterm elections. The world leader, Italy, turns out 92.5 percent of its eligible voters.¹

Turnout attracts the academic eye because it is generally accepted that public policy is reflective of the voters, not the eligible voting population (Moore, 1987; Radcliff and Saiz, 1995; Peterson, 1997; Schur, et. al., 2002; Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Lassen, 2004).

2005; Griffin and Keane, 2006; McCann and Lawson, 2006; Lewis-Beck et. al., 2008; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008). This is interesting because the typical voter is not representative of the typical American: “... those who do vote are not representative of the entire population. Voters tend to be older, wealthier, and better educated than nonvoters.” In other words, voting rewards the voter’s interests at the expense of non-voter’s interests. As a result, understanding who votes and why is essential in order to develop a complete understanding of why the government makes public policy that favors one group over another.

Studies have looked extensively at voting behavior in the hope of being able to add to and refine our understanding of political participation’s most frequently employed tool. This study examines the link between a potential voter’s level of political knowledge and whether or not he votes. This study finds that having a greater amount of campaign political knowledge is correlated with a greater propensity to vote. Having a greater amount of general political knowledge is not significantly correlated with a greater propensity to vote.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Section two explores the major literature works on voting. Section three examines the theoretical link between turnout and political knowledge. The fourth section describes the methodology. The fifth and sixth sections discuss the data and results, respectively, and the seventh summarizes the findings and conclusions and sets forth suggestions for future research.

---

"However much we focus on the determinants of individuals’ votes, it is their impact on the political system that matters in the end."\textsuperscript{3}

\textbf{The American Voter}

The general body of scholarly work on political participation has increased drastically in the last 60 years (Lewis-Beck et. al., 2008). This expansion has largely been influenced by the classic work \textit{The American Voter} by Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes published in 1960. Originally, Campbell et. al. conducted surveys for the 1952 and 1956 elections and reported their findings. Since then, these surveys have been repeated every two years. These National Election Studies (NES, occasionally, ANES) have been “the gold standard” for research focused on election studies in the United States, and occasionally, abroad (Lewis-Beck et. al., 2008).

The American Voter is motivated by the idea that “… the voter has a picture of the world of politics in his head, and the nature of this picture is key to understanding what he does at the polls.” The authors argue that understanding this picture will involve the voter’s political biases and beliefs. The voter’s mental picture of the political landscape can be mapped and the resulting decisions clarified, if the various psychological forces and factors are taken into account. Psychological factors are treated as individual variables that can be looked at independently to form a larger landscape. This landscape, Campbell describes, is the actual motivating factor for an individual’s choice to vote. In The American Voter Revisited, Lewis-Beck point out that people frequently overstate the importance that The American Voter placed on these psychological factors.

Lewis-Beck also notes that the abridged version of the text leaves out the theory-based chapter, resulting in an unbalanced appreciation of the theory Campbell was expounding. Both Campbell and Lewis-Beck employ a “funnel theory of causality” that accommodates a number of variables or factors that influence the decision to vote and the choice to vote. The theory is based on a broad framework that allows for a variety of causal factors to affect the outcome. Funnel theory posits that certain factors, such as one’s race, affect the voter more when Election Day is more distant, and other factors like the candidates themselves will affect the voter when Election Day is nearer. As Election Day draws nearer, the ‘funnel’ narrows and certain factors are no longer able to affect the voter, making the remaining factors the proximate causes of both the decision to vote,

---

and the specific choice made when voting. Both *The American Voter* and *The American Voter Revisited* limit the scope of their books to the narrow section of the funnel, focusing on party identification, candidate orientations, and attitudes on issues (Campbell et. al, 1967; Lewis-Beck et. al. 2008).

Campbell discusses a variety of smaller factors that stem from other major factors. They included partisan intensity, the closeness of the race, interest, concern over the outcome, political efficacy, and a sense of duty. Campbell found that psychological factors were positively linked to turnout, whereby the stronger the psychological factors were manifested, the more likely one was to vote. Campbell also states that social class could be a psychological factor, if the voter had a sufficient awareness of her place in the social hierarchy, but did not state if the awareness would have a necessarily positive or negative effect. Lewis-Beck found that the effects described by Campbell some 50 years prior were still, essentially, the same. The more psychologically involved one is in the election, the likelier one is to vote.

Of course, not all those who are highly psychologically involved vote. Campbell tells us that turnout, and not the choice to vote, is strongly affected by non-psychological factors. These factors can be seen as intervening factors that simply disrupt the voting process. Lewis-Beck asserts that these factors prevent many individuals from voting, but are not relevant to the scope of study and can be considered random error.

Campbell views these characteristics as factors that can increase or decrease one’s exposure to “politically relevant experiences” and mentions occupation, education, sex,
and age, briefly, as potential factors that could affect turnout. Being a woman, for example, lowers the chances of having a political discussion. In the day that The American Voter was written, this was more likely to be the case; however, since society has changed in ways that Campbell could not have predicted, Lewis-Beck explored race and gender to a greater extent. Similar remarks were made of education, occupation, and age, whereby the younger, less educated and those with low-wage jobs tended to be politically uninvolved and less likely to turnout. Campbell saw these variables as simple and, indeed, an afterthought. They receive minimal mention in the work and their effects are considered facts of life, not worth further consideration.

Before proceeding onto other works, it is important to note a shortfall of both Campbell and Lewis-Beck. The American Voter Revisited explicitly lists three factors governing the inclusion of variables for consideration that Campbell originally posits: (1) relevant and irrelevant factors, (2) those of which one is aware, and those of which one is not aware, and (3) political and non-political factors. While the first and third are both reasonable and necessary, the second is a critical mistake. For now, suffice it to say that failing to examine what the voter does not notice only serves to limit one’s understanding of turnout. This matter will be addressed in more detail as this section comes to a close.

The American Voter and The American Voter Revisited, as mentioned earlier, limited their scope to party identification, candidate orientations, and attitudes on issues, but other authors have discussed many other variables. In the following, these works are explicated.

---

5 Ibid., p 250.
Explanatory Variables

A simple dichotomy can be made between those variables that help to explain one’s choice to vote and those that help to explain how one votes (Lewis-Beck et. al., 2008). This dichotomy has its benefits, but it also has drawbacks. This dichotomy will not work with variables that serve to not only motivate the voter to cast a ballot, but also to vote in a certain way. The dichotomy is, however, too simple; splitting all explanatory variables into two groups places some variables into groups to which they do not belong. This work will proceed instead by discussing lesser-known variables and then those that have a greater prominence.

In the 1960s the aggregate vote of the farmers was an important consideration for any aspiring politician (Campbell, et. al. 1967). Today, books can still be found that deal with the voting habits of nearly any group from farmers (Frank, 2004), to nurses (Schwartz-Barcott, 1988), military service personnel (Teigen, 2006), and the disabled (Schur, 2002). Other variables from The American Voter have remained prominent. For example, recent studies have found that individuals are spurred to vote for one candidate over another when the candidate’s political ideology is closer to the voter’s own (Plane and Gershtenson, 2004; Tomz and Van Houweling, 2008).

Recently, the prominence of any single group (other than sex, age, or ethnicity) as a subject of voter study has been scant. Other areas have developed that have attracted more interest. The effect of terrorism, for example, has been found to increase voter turnout (Berrebi, and Klor, 2008). Subjects such as terrorism, in terms of turnout, have only recently come into the view of the political scientist and American society in
general. The rise of democracy in areas of the world with a higher prevalence of terrorism has given us the chance to study these relationships when in the past we could not.

Efforts to study other variables have been left alone. A 1959 study found that family ties significantly affect both the decision to vote and how one votes (Glaser, 1959). The effects of the family have since been given less academic attention and replaced with studies that examine a larger range of relationships, like a community. A 2004 study found that the combination of strong partisanship and residing in “enemy territory” was likely to reduce turnout, especially among Republicans (Gimple, et. al., 2004). The area that has seen the largest increase in study has been the area of race, most recently focusing on the Latino population.

**Socio-Demographic Variables**

After the Civil War, African Americans voted at rates on a par with Caucasians in all but two Southern states. Within the next fifty years, various laws were enacted that complicated or completely prevented African Americans from voting; but since WWII, African American turnout has slowly increased (Filer et. al., 1991). Recently, Latinos have become the largest minority (Michelson, 2003), and a greater effort has been made to study their voting behavior. These studies have revealed that Latinos vote at very low rates when compared to any other race (Shaw et. al., 2000; Cassel, 2002; Michelson, 2003; Klesner, 2003; Barreto, 2005; Nicholson et. al., 2006). Similarly, African American turnout is low (Filer et. al., 1991; Lubienski, 2002; Gay, 2004; Griffin and Keane, 2006), but laws have made voting easier for African Americans, increasing their turnout in the past fifty years (Filer et. al., 1991).
Much of the work on Latinos has focused on mobilization. Face-to-face mobilization has been found to significantly increase turnout over more modern methods such as phone calls (Shaw, 2000; Michelson 2003), while traditional methods are effective for African American communities. Mobilization efforts have historically been more prevalent among Democrats and not Republicans (Wielhouwer, 2000); more recently, the GOP has been more effective at mobilization. Other African American turnout studies have indicated that there is a correlation between African American turnout and the level of liberalism inherent in public policy. When African American turnout increases, public policy becomes less liberal (Radcliff and Saiz 1995). The authors of the study note that these results are the opposite of what would be expected, but it may be the case that the lack of liberal policy served as an impetus to increase African American turnout.

A study of the 1996 Presidential election found that liberal African Americans would be more likely to vote if African Americans are representing them; the effect was not significant for conservatives (Griffin and Keane 2006). It has also been shown that Latinos are more likely to vote if they are mobilized by other Latinos (Michelson 2003). Others contend that increasing the number of African American representatives in government, as these studies suggest we ought to do, serves only to decrease Caucasian involvement and only rarely increases African American turnout (Gay 2001). It has also been shown that when African Americans have less trust in their government, they tend to vote more (Magnum, 2003).

African Americans have a sense of racial unity that has not been studied as deeply in Latinos. This racial connection gives the African American voter a sense that while
their personal utility may not be improved by their vote, the utility of all African Americans can be (Magnum 2003; Gay 2004). This may influence other studies that have shown socio-economic status to be a weak predictor of turnout because socio-economic status and race tend to be, for much of the United States, similar within neighborhoods (Gay 2004).

Others take the opposite stance asserting that African American turnout can be “… correlated directly with both the closeness of the election and the constituents’ economic stakes in the outcome of the election and correlated inversely with the cost of voting.”\(^7\) Studies like this offer validation of the link between one’s economic situation (socio-economic status) and his likelihood of voting; typically turnout is reduced when voters have fewer economic interests at stake (Rosenstone, 1982). This study in particular found that the link between socio-economic status and race was so strong that by 1980 “virtually all remaining racial difference in turnout”\(^8\) could be accounted for by controlling for education and income, or socio-economic status (Jackson, 2003; Michelson, 2003).

The link between socio-economic status and turnout remains strong when race is held constant. Caucasians, native-born Latinos, and African Americans all voted at similar rates when their socio-economic status was held constant (Labovitz, 1975; Radcliff and Saiz, 1995; Cassel, 2002) while non-native Latinos still vote at lower rates (Barreto, 2005). African Americans do tend to vote slightly more frequently than


\(^8\) \textit{Ibid.}, p 393.
Caucasians when socio-economic status was held constant (Reiter, 1979; Radcliff and Saiz, 1995). Different races react differently to varying levels of socio-economic status (Classeen, 2004). For example, in a study on Latinos, religion should be taken into account, because their faith plays a dominant role similar to partisanship (Kelly, 2005).

Specifically for Latinos, however, lower socio-economic status has been theorized to decrease involvement in non-political organizations, decrease social trust, and increase the amount of TV watched. This serves to reduce political participation further (Klesner, 2003). Others have suggested that watching TV may increase the watcher’s level of political knowledge and in turn increase the likelihood that he be politically active (Nicholson, 2006). This argument fails to consider the increased number of TV channels that have become available in recent years. It is possible for political news to be avoided (Prior, 2005). Lower socio-economic status also has been correlated with poorer performance academically, which may also inhibit the desire to seek political information (Lubienski, 2002).

In terms of gender, historically, men have always voted at a higher rate than women. On a global scale, women are beginning to vote with a greater regularity. One study found that, across many nations, gender differences regarding turnout and political inclinations were realigning (Inglehart and Norris, 2000). In the 2000 United States presidential election, the gender gap was only 4.7 percent in favor of more men voting. Four years later it was down to 1.4 percent (Lewis-Beck et. al., 2008). A non-validated study found the gap in 2000 to be 2.6 percent in favor of more men voting (Abramowitz, 2004). This is a significant increase from the numbers in the past. In 1984, the gap was about 9 percent (Pomper et. al., 1985).
Another study preferred to view variables in terms of their restrictive power over the voter. These restrictions were viewed as either a legal barrier, a cost of voting, or a structural barrier resulting from the voting system. The author notes that a decline in turnout can be partly accounted for by considering the fact that citizenship and prior felonies can prevent a voter from being otherwise eligible. In 2000, for example, 8 percent of voting age people within the United States were non-citizens who could not vote. Forty-seven states have laws restricting the voting privilege of felons; ten states ban felons from voting for life (Abramowitz, 2004).

**Non-Demographic Variables**

Among variables that lie outside of demographics, registration laws have often been cited as a depressant of voter turnout. States where voters must register 30 days in advance, for example, tend to have lower turnout rates than those who only require that registration be completed one week prior to the election (King, 1994). Other studies have found these results to be incorrect. One such study found that when considering only states where registration laws are lax, turnout rates were similar to those in other states with more stringent laws. Registration did have an effect, but this was dwarfed by other variables like age or socio-economic status (Highton, 1997). Studies have also shown that different election types can affect turnout. One such study found that midterm election turnout could be increased with an all-mail election. The effect tended to be centered on those who were already predisposed to vote and was not seen as effective at motivating typical non-voters (Karp and Banducci, 2000).

The effectiveness of various campaign and mobilization efforts has met with greater agreement among scholars. Campaign advertising, specifically negative
advertising, has received a considerable share of recent research. Clinton and Lapinski (2004) found that negative campaign advertising had no long-term or short-term effect on turnout. This study was opposed to earlier studies that used NES data to show that negative advertising depressed turnout (Ansolabehere et. al., 1999; Kahn and Kenney, 1999). Recently, the debate has continued with studies arguing that turnout was increased 6 percent by exposing the voters to negative campaign mail (Niven, 2006), but that the effects of negative advertising are generally felt more by those with a higher level of education (Stevens, 2005).

Campaign methods have also been studied extensively. The value of the political campaign has come under fire recently. Critics assert that the campaign can do little to affect an individual voter’s choice because too many other factors will influence the choice with greater efficacy. Thomas Holbrook argues in his book Do Campaigns Matter? that campaigns are still relevant. Holbrook asserts that (1) since a large number of people make their electoral choice during the campaign, (2) the importance of party ID has waned, (3) candidate support varies greatly across election years, and (4) the campaign serves as the information medium for the voter. Each of these reasons contribute to the continued importance of the campaign. Perhaps most importantly, Holbrook acknowledges the importance of campaigns as information disseminators. He expresses this thought most clearly when discussing debates: “The most important function of debates is the provision of information.”

---

Holbrook’s issue of “the floating voter,” or, the voter that changes her vote or political affiliation during a term in office, has been studied more extensively. These studies have argued that the American voter has become more willing to change owing to an increase in political contact through campaigns that bring more knowledge about relevant political issues (Claassen, 2007). Such research that shows the willingness, or susceptibility, of the American voter to varying mobilization efforts has lead to an increase in the research on mobilization methods. Phone mobilization, a recent advent stemming from mass telemarketing, has been shown to be less effective at increasing turnout than the older face-to-face mobilization (Gerber and Green, 2001). A similar study found face-to-face mobilization to increase turnout by approximately 6 percent (Gerber and Green, 1999) or 8 percent (Niven, 2001) depending on the type of election.

Mobilization efforts have their critics; some argue that mobilization is being used less and has become less effective. One study, however, found no evidence that mobilization efforts have decreased, or that they have become less effective (Goldstein and Ridout, 2002). Face-to-face mobilization efforts have been directed at non-voters and young voters. One such study in 2000 used personal messages written two months prior by the individual on a post card that was mailed to them immediately preceding the election as an impetus to increase turnout. This method was found to be largely successful (Burgess et. al., 2000), but a later study refuted the effects by arguing that having an individual formally state her intentions to vote did not increase turnout (Smith et. al, 2003). These mixed results have left many to look at the effect of campaigns when the media is used to convey messages.
The Media

Without the media, campaigns in the United States would look drastically different. The media serves as the easiest method for campaign messages to reach the public. Studies have shown that campaign information viewed from commercials, news programs and the newspaper tends to be retained more than information sent out in other forms (Brians and Wattenberg, 1996). The TV has been shown to be an effective method of getting political information to not only older voters, but younger voters as well (Conway et. al., 1981). Young people who watch late night comedy shows like The Daily Show with Jon Stewart had higher levels of political knowledge than those who watched news programs (Young, 2004). Internationally, media use by youth has been found to be a strong predictor of political knowledge levels (Feldman and Kawakami, 1991).

The media began to gain political prominence in the 1980s when studies found that individuals who watched the news before voting and heard an election prediction were less likely to go out and vote (Jackson, 1983; Sudman, 1986). Since then, the media has been seen as both a positive and a negative force. As media attention of issues increases general awareness, general knowledge of those issues increases as well (Tichenor et. al., 1970; Jerit, et. al., 2006). Unfortunately, the media has become so vast in recent years that the wide array of choices has actually led to an increasing gap in political knowledge (Prior, 2005); significant events like 9/11 can trigger massive booms in media attention to politics that result in a higher level of knowledge held by average individuals (Prior, 2002).

Even people who are seeking political news have a variety of choices that cater to their respective political affiliation. FOX News, for example, was created to serve as a
“fair and balanced” assessment of the political news, and was largely the result of a general backlash against mainstream media’s ‘assault’ on politicians (Crawford, 2006). In the late 1970s, political scientists began to study the effect of biased news sources. They found that having a variety of news sources that pander to personal biases supports a deficit in knowledge between groups who get their news from different biased sources (Genova and Greenburg, 1979). The result is a knowledge gap.

**Political Knowledge**

Knowledge gaps are the most commonly studied aspect of political knowledge. Different authors have differing takes on where the gap exists and to what extent it exists. For example, the gap between high-status and low-status voters was explored in the 1980s. A study found that increasing the level of information available on an issue increased the knowledge gap between groups (defined predominantly by SES) (Moore, 1987). This study theorized that conflicting results found in earlier works could be the result of the time of knowledge measurement and the complexity of the knowledge being measured. The author theorizes that those with a higher education would gain knowledge of more complex issues faster than would those with a lower level of education.

As a result, knowledge gaps could be large, if the measure was taken shortly after complex political news was made public, or small, if the measure was taken with sufficient time for more people to understand and internalize the complex political knowledge. If the knowledge being measured was simple, not complex, knowledge gaps may not ever be present (Moore, 1987). More recent studies of gaps have focused on political ideologies (Peterson et. al., 2002), gender (Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Mondak and
Anderson, 2004), generation (Jennings, 1996), and on international transitional democracies (McCann and Lawson, 2006).

These studies have consistent results. Women tend to be more likely to answer survey questions incorrectly (Kenski, 2000; Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Mondak and Anderson, 2004). When the possibility of “don’t know” was removed, knowledge levels rose nearly 15 percent (Mondak and Davis, 2001). This is specifically interesting given that women are more likely to answer that they “don’t know” (Kenski, 2000). These gaps seem to raise the question of what causes one to have a certain level of political knowledge. One study examined the connection between education, political participation, media influence, and region with levels of political knowledge. They found that education was the most strongly correlated with higher levels of political knowledge (Lambert et. al., 1988). But why bother with examining political knowledge levels at all? How is political knowledge linked to voter turnout? These issues are discussed in the following section.
“Knowledge is power.” ~ Francis Bacon

The Relevance of Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is consistently relevant to the study of turnout. Historically, political knowledge was taken for granted; when only the elite, Caucasian, male landowner was allowed to vote, the electorate was generally believed to be knowledgeable. At that point in time, directly studying political knowledge levels would have been fruitless because of the general uniformity of knowledge. As the electorate grew in size and included a variety of classes, ethnicities, levels of education, incomes, both sexes and the overall knowledge level varied. Since then, it has become a well-accepted fact that Americans are generally poorly informed about politics (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996).

Discerning the level of political knowledge has become important for two reasons. First, the electorate is not uniform. The lack of uniformity has led to a gap in knowledge levels that has been studied and documented earlier in this paper. Second,
representative democracy operates at its best when voters are informed. This second statement assumes that “a broadly and equitably informed citizenry helps assure a democracy that is both responsive and responsible.” If citizens are informed, they will make decisions when voting that they believe will maximize the number of representatives for their respective interests. An ill-informed or uninformed electorate will produce representatives who may or may not actually represent the voters’ interests. This second point requires elaboration.

Consider the case of the uninformed citizen who wonders if he should vote. He knows little about politics, but has taken part in political discussions regarding ways the government should handle certain issues (without reference to a particular party or candidate). He does not know when the registration deadline is, and he does not know which party or candidate will best represent his interests. The level of knowledge (or rather, the absence of knowledge) that he has is overwhelmingly relevant to a study seeking to explain if he chooses to vote. Knowing his race, level of education, or income will be pointless if he simply does not know when or how to register.

Knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for voting. At a minimum, an individual must know how and when to register, know the date of the election, and know where and how she is to vote. If the vote is to be an informed decision, then the potential voter needs to also be informed on a larger number of issues and possess certain facts about the political world. Individuals who lack these political facts will not have any grounds upon which to cast their votes in an informed manner.

---

10 Ibid., p 1.
Consider another example. A woman is debating if she wants to vote. She only believes three issues to be genuinely important: human rights, woman’s rights, and abortion laws. She has received some emails from friends saying that one candidate is better than the other, but none of the emails pertained to her issues. She knows that each candidate is for human rights and “pro” woman. She is unaware of either’s stance on abortion laws. She ends up not voting because neither candidate stood out as more deserving of her vote. If she had known that one candidate held a position contrary to hers on abortion she would have voted. This example shows us the importance of knowledge. The amount of knowledge, or the specific set of facts known by an individual, is the first step in understanding what an individual will do on Election Day. Will she be motivated to vote? How will she vote? Both of these questions require an understanding of the voter’s set of political facts in order to be answered. To put it in Campbell’s terms, we need to know what the voter’s political landscape looks like.11

A final example can illustrate how knowing a voter’s level of political knowledge is critical to understanding turnout and specifically, how one votes. Consider an independent moderate voter who was informed via email that Barack Obama was not a citizen. She feels that it is ridiculous that the Democratic Party would allow a non-citizen to become their nominee, and decides to vote Republican. In this case, she is ill-informed and her decision to vote was directly affected by her wrong information. In this example, we can see the power of a single political “fact” on a voter.

From Campbell we learn that the political landscape of the voter is the result of psychological factors. The landscape affects not only if one votes, but also how one

votes. Campbell also states that the voter’s picture is shaped by her beliefs about the world around her, as informed by her ethnicity, age, gender, occupation, education, income, media exposure, and biases. Although Campbell uses different language, he describes the voter’s set of political facts as being the foundation of his political belief structure. In this way, having knowledge about politics directly shapes the opinions that one forms about political actors (Campbell et. al., 1967). Similarly, having misinformation about certain elements in the political world directly affects the way that the voter will interact with that political world (Althaus, 1998; Dolan and Holbrook, 2001).

This brings this study full circle and back to the issue of political knowledge and turnout. When one considers the various predictors for voter turnout and fails to consider what the voter knows about politics, he fails to take into account the limits of that voter’s political landscape. If a voter is concerned with only three issues, and the last one is never discussed, he may not realize that the candidate for whom he intends to vote holds a view with which he strongly disagrees. If he has information on only two issues and both candidates have similar stands, he might not be motivated to vote because he will not perceive one candidate as stronger than the other. One candidate may hold a view that would be far better in the eyes of this voter, but if he is unaware of it, he cannot act on it. Simply put, knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for turnout.

The Cost of Political Ignorance

In theory, an ideal representative democracy represents citizens, regardless of their level of political participation. In practice, however, representatives tend to act in the best interests of those who voted for them. In this way, those who have the best
representation tend to be the voters, not the non-voters. This creates a government where politicians work for voters, not non-voters. If the voting portion of the country and the non-voting portion were similar in make up, there would, presumably, be an equitable distribution of beliefs and opinions in both groups. It turns out that this is not the case. As Althaus expressed it:

Because [politically] knowledgeable respondents are better able to form opinions consistent with their political predispositions and because they tend to give opinions more frequently than other people, the demographic characteristics of well-informed people – who tend to be more affluent, older, white, and male compared to the ill informed – can cause collective preferences to reflect disproportionately the opinions of some groups more than others.12

If the government is supposed to represent the people in accordance with their wishes, but the people fail to communicate those wishes, or they lack sufficient information to knowingly form opinions, the government will fail to be representative. One study found that if each citizen were fully informed, the collective policy preferences of the nation could shift up to 7 percent on some issues.13 Theories have been presented that assert that uninformed voter effects are neutralized in aggregate surveys, such as elections. Were these theories correct, the uninformed voter would not be a problem; however there is little evidence to support them (Bartels, 1996).

The United States finds itself in a position where many of its voters are uninformed and the voting population is not representative of the total population. This situation leads to a government whose ability to be representative is diminished by the ignorance and low turnout of its citizens. Ignorance of politics actually contributes to the

13 Ibid., p 553.
ineffectiveness of government. This ineffectiveness is so potentially crippling, that it may be unfair to call the U.S. a representative democracy. Specific policy facts can drastically change an individuals political choices (Gilens, 2001) and with political ignorance pervasive in the American society, it is reasonable to conclude that election results are not representative of the will of the whole nation.

**Political Knowledge and Voter Turnout**

As noted above, some knowledge about the election itself is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the act of voting. In order to vote, an individual must know how to register, what deadlines he must register by, where and when he can vote, what he will need to bring with him to vote, and more. Beyond the simple and obvious, various levels of political knowledge have been shown to affect turnout levels. The most recent study that directly addressed levels of political knowledge and turnout was done in 2005 in Denmark. David Lassen used a natural experiment to study the effect of varying levels of knowledge on the electorate. Some areas in the city of Copenhagen were given more knowledge about a city proposal than other areas. Lassen’s study found that being informed increased the likelihood of voting by 20 percent.\footnote{Lassen, David D., “The Effect of Information on Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Natural Experiment” *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 49, No. 1 (Jan., 2005) p 104.}

While Lassen’s results are impressive, they cover only one city in Denmark and individuals included in the study were all from an urban setting. It is also difficult to say if these results should be applicable in the United States. Citizens in European countries tend to turnout more than citizens in the United States, and it is possible that there are
endogenous effects specific to the Danes (political history or societal factors for example) that would not be comparable to the American situation.

The most prominent study done within the United States used NES data from the 1988 Presidential election. This study by Delli Carpini and Keeter is now 20 years old, yet the results remain striking. Of the upper-most 10 percent of informed citizens, nearly nine out of ten voted; only two out of ten in the lowest 10 percent turned out. As a predictor of turnout, political knowledge out-performed gender, age, race, family income, level of education, level of political engagement, internal and external efficacy, and strength of party ID.¹⁵

Political knowledge serves as such a powerful predictor for turnout because knowledge levels are dependent on a number of other variables and the effects of having knowledge promote civic actions. Since political knowledge is a complex variable that results from a number of other variables, its predictive power is greater than its individual components. In short, “Political Knowledge boosts participation because it promotes understanding of why politics is relevant.”¹⁶

---

“The trouble with measurement is its seeming simplicity.” ~Unknown

Defining Political Knowledge

Political knowledge as a concept is somewhat elusive. Studies have claimed to focus on political facts, political sophistication, or “levels of sophistication.” In general, disagreements about the title ‘political knowledge’ stem from the definition of political knowledge. It is typically accepted that political knowledge is related to expertise, awareness, engagement, and media exposure (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993), but a precise definition remains elusive.

For this study, political knowledge is defined as the set of politically relevant facts a person possesses that are true. This definition has three important features. First, all facts that are politically relevant are allowed to count as political knowledge. This is a double-edged sword; while it includes such factual items as the number of troops in Iraq and not the number of troops stationed in Kuwait, it also allows what counts as “politically relevant” to be ambiguous. Assume that all political facts measured in the
NES data are politically relevant. Second, this definition notes that the individual does, in fact, have or possess the political fact. Thus, knowing that the number of troops in Iraq matters (i.e., that it is politically relevant) but not actually knowing the actual number is insufficient to count as a political fact. Lastly, the definition limits us to only those facts that are “correct,” meaning that they have a definitive right or wrong answer. This will serve to eliminate questions like “Is the President handling the war correctly?”

With a working definition of what will count as a political fact and what will not, the next question is “How can we measure political knowledge?”

**An Ideal Measure of Political Knowledge**

Accurately measuring the level of political knowledge an individual possesses is complex and intricate. What facts must be known in order to constitute a ‘well informed’ voter? At what point can one consider a voter politically ignorant? Are some questions better than others at assessing what politically relevant facts are known by voters? What is the best method for assessing a general level of political knowledge?

Each of these questions may be relevant to certain studies of political knowledge, but only the last will be answered here; although, each has important implications. The first and second questions ask how ought one define ‘informed’ and ‘ignorant.’ These questions may have an answer, but they cannot be enumerated and defended here. Instead, these issues can be avoided by creating an index of questions such that each correct answer counts evenly with each other correct answer. Individuals with a higher score on the index will be ‘more’ informed than individuals who score lower. In this way, knowing a difficult question’s answer earns no more weight than knowing an easier question’s answer. By asserting that individual A scores a 3 out of 5 and that individual B
scores a 4 out of 5 allows us to discuss and compare the individuals’ relative levels of knowledge which are sufficient for the task at hand. This method does not allow comments on the value of specific knowledge issues; in other words, one cannot say what counts as ‘informed’ or ‘ignorant,’ but one could say that an individual scores higher than another individual.

The third question poses a more difficult disposition. What counts as a politically relevant fact when a voter is weighing the decision to vote? There is no simple answer because each individual voter may have different criteria. One may vote simply because he believes he has a duty to vote. As such, he may only know facts relevant to the registration process and how or when he is to vote. Another individual may only vote if the candidates hold views similar to hers on certain issues. In this case, questions pertaining only to those relevant issues would serve as an appropriate measure of her knowledge level. This suggests that in order to accurately measure the level of knowledge that is relevant to a particular voter would also require that one take into account that particular voter’s beliefs on what counts as politically relevant. This implies that one must ascertain which issues each voter was focused on, and use this information to give a tailored knowledge test to each individual. This would be a long, expensive, and difficult undertaking.

The final question gives way to a more approachable measure of political knowledge. If the goal were to measure specific knowledge facts, as the third question would require, a researcher would be mired in complicated subjective data. If, however, one sets out to measure political knowledge more generally, a researcher could devise a measure that broadly assesses political knowledge without approaching the finer details
of specific policy positions or obscure political facts. Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter took up this task in 1993.

The study had a number of goals. First, they wanted to assess the difficulty of measuring a variety of knowledge-based topics. Their second and third goals were to find the best test question format and best individual questions, respectively. The last goal was to find a short scale that could be used to assess general political knowledge. The final goal is perhaps the most important for this work. The NES questions typically do not include many knowledge-based questions (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993); as a result, it is important to find out if a reliable and valid measure can be produced from a limited set of questions.

The 1993 study used 39 knowledge questions ranging from very general to very specific, from easy to difficult, and from open-ended to fixed-alternative in format. Delli Carpini and Keeter were able to create a smaller index of only 10 questions that was able to explain 90 percent of the variance in the full 39 variable measure and a still smaller five-item index that explained over 75 percent of the variance.\(^{17}\) The five-item index did not have the greatest explanatory power compared to other smaller indexes; a party-centered index boasted an alpha of .79 whereas the five-question index only managed a .71. The power of the five-item index is that each question regularly appears on the NES survey.

The NES Measure of Political Knowledge

The five-item index, which is contained within the NES survey, is a mix of questions that cover both general civics knowledge and some questions requiring current knowledge. Each question was selected for specific reasons.

The first question asks if the respondent knows which party is in control in the House. This question has strong face validity, and has good “discriminating power as measured by logistic regression.”\(^\text{18}\) The second question asks if the respondent knows the amount of vote required to override a Presidential veto. This question has the highest discriminating power in the five-item index and is considered to be the most difficult.

The third question asks if the respondent knows what party tends to be more conservative. This question has strong face validity as it deals with a fundamental U.S. political institution. The fourth question asks if the respondent knows what institution is responsible for determining the constitutionality of laws. This question is relatively easy, but its inclusion insures that the Supreme Court is represented. The final question asks if the respondent can identify the name of the Vice President. This question has very strong face validity, and it serves to identify those respondents who are predominantly disconnected from politics.

The five-item index certainly pertains to political knowledge, but is it an accurate measure? In other words, is it valid? If one takes validity to mean the measure’s ability to accurately capture the concept being measured, then the index is valid. As Dellini Carpini and Keeter expressed it, “In a republican form of government, selecting public officials is often a citizen’s most significant political power. Therefore, knowledge about

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p 1198.
political leaders, political parties, and contemporary political alignments seems essential to citizenship." The concept of political knowledge must include the knowledge of the basic element of a citizen’s main form of interaction with government. A valid measure of political knowledge must measure a respondent’s level of knowledge pertaining to these elements which are essential to citizenship.

**The 2004 NES Measure**

The 2004 NES data contains each of the questions that compose the five-item index. Unfortunately, not all of the questions were contained in the election panel data series. The question asking if respondents know which party tends to be more conservative was omitted. Since this study is limited by the available data, only the four-item index is used. Another five-item index that was not studied by Delli Carpini and Keeter is employed to serve as a comparison index. This comparison index is composed of campaign knowledge questions, whereas the four-item index is general civic political knowledge.

The comparison index asks the questions: 1) Does Bush or Kerry favor making the Bush tax cuts permanent? 2) What is the income level at which Kerry would repeal the Bush tax cuts? 3) Does Bush or Kerry favor placing social security in the stock market? 4) Does Bush or Kerry favor a ban on assault weapons? 5) Is Bush or Kerry a former prosecutor? This comparison index asks knowledge questions pertaining to political campaigns and will serve as a measure of the effect of campaign specific knowledge on turnout. These questions are used for the comparison index because they focus on campaign knowledge. This will allow a comparison between campaign

---

19 Ibid., p 1182.
knowledge, or knowledge that is relative for the specific election, to the general civic knowledge questions which are not relative to the election year. For an explanation of why each control was selected, see Appendix A.

The 4-item index and the comparison index may appear similar, but they are not the same. Think of an analogy where the 4-item index, the index measuring general political knowledge, is a measure of a respondent’s level of general sports knowledge. The comparison index would then be the respondent’s level of knowledge of a specific sport, say cycling. Some people would do well on a general sports knowledge quiz, but fail on a quiz focused on cycling. Similarly, some individuals will score well on the 4- idem index and do poorly on the comparison index. Both indexes measure aspects of politics, but one is specific, and the other is general.

The 2004 NES election panel data includes a question asking each respondent if they voted. This question was included in two places in the NES survey, one before the election aimed at determining if the respondent voted early, and one after the election aimed at determining if the respondent voted in the general election by any means. This study uses the response of the post-election question to measure turnout.

One methodological quandary has thus far ignored by this study. This study has discussed the relationship between a respondent’s level of political knowledge and the respondent’s likelihood of voting in terms of ‘true’ knowledge. This is done with the goal of simplistic measurement in mind; however, an individual can be motivated to vote based on something that he perceives as true, be it true or false. This study acknowledges this issue, and has defined knowledge as ‘true’ to avoid the problem.
2004 NES Data

This study employs the general election panel study data that is part of the larger 2004 NES data set. The general election of 2004 was held on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of November. The pre-election interviews were held from mid July through the 1\textsuperscript{st} of November. The post-election interviews were held from November 4\textsuperscript{th} to December 28\textsuperscript{th} of 2004. The questions that compose both the four-item index and the five-item comparison index were asked before the election. The original study included 8,664 adults. For specific question prompts for both indexes, see Appendix B.

Results

This study uses a binomial variable for turnout coded “0” for “did not vote” and “1” for “voted;” because the variable for voter turnout is used as the dependent variable, analysis will require logistic regression. As a starting point in the analysis, a number of control variables and the two political knowledge indexes are individually regressed on voter turnout. Race (Caucasian, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American) is
regressed individually, not collectively. See Table 1. Due to data constraints, this study is unable to control for civic interest or sense of civic duty and suffers as a result.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Variables Regressed on Voter Turnout</th>
<th>( \beta ) (S.E.)</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1.006*** (.058)</td>
<td>2.734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow politics</td>
<td>.952*** (.051)</td>
<td>2.591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow campaign</td>
<td>.883*** (.054)</td>
<td>2.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>.761*** (.094)</td>
<td>2.139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Index</td>
<td>.600*** (.054)</td>
<td>1.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-item Index</td>
<td>.474*** (.105)</td>
<td>1.607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.413*** (.025)</td>
<td>1.512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.308*** (.019)</td>
<td>1.361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.198*** (.072)</td>
<td>1.219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanity</td>
<td>-.034 (.051)</td>
<td>.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-.287** (.142)</td>
<td>.751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>-.944*** (.262)</td>
<td>.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>-1.041*** (.241)</td>
<td>.353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-1.714*** (.103)</td>
<td>.180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Significant at the .000 level
**  Significant at the .05 level
Urbanity stands as the only variable that was not significant when individually regressed on voter turnout. Table 1 shows that *Education* and *Following Politics* have the greatest individual effects on voter turnout. Table 2 shows the combined effects when the variables are all present in the same regression.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$\beta$ (S.E.)</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow campaign</td>
<td>.574***(.220)</td>
<td>1.776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.507***(.114)</td>
<td>1.661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparison Index</td>
<td>.360**(.148)</td>
<td>1.434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.173**(.084)</td>
<td>1.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.638(.328)</td>
<td>1.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanity</td>
<td>.410(.224)</td>
<td>1.506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.365(.262)</td>
<td>1.440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow politics</td>
<td>.160(.222)</td>
<td>1.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-item Index</td>
<td>-.113(.204)</td>
<td>.893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-.168(1.326)</td>
<td>.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-.299(.635)</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>-.686(1.104)</td>
<td>.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>17.710(17558.094)</td>
<td>4.913E7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>18.450(11524.804)</td>
<td>1.030E8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Significant at the .000 level  
** Significant at the .05 level
Table 2 reveals interesting results. When regressed along with other variables, the significant effects of Race were controlled for. Gender, Urbanity, and Education also had no significant effect on voter turnout. The effects of the 4-item index and Following Politics were controlled for, and are no longer significant. The effects of the comparison index were, however, significant. In fact, for each additional campaign knowledge question answered correctly, the odds of voting increased by 319 percent, or an increase in the odds ratio of 4.195. A one-unit increase in Follow campaign increases the odds of voting by 490 percent, or an increase in the odds ratio of 5.906. Age and income both increase the odds of voting at 426 percent and 220 percent, or an increase in the odds ratio of 5.264 and 3.280 respectively.
The Success of the Comparison Index

This study yields what may be considered to be conflicting results. On one hand, the 4-item index when regressed individually has an Exp(b) of 1.607 at the 99.9 percent confidence interval, meaning that for each additional knowledge question correctly answered, the odds of voting increase by 398 percent. Yet, when regressed with controls, the effect is no longer significant. On the other hand, the comparison index has an Exp(b) of 1.821 when individually regressed on voter turnout. This figure means that for each additional knowledge question correctly answered, the odds of voting increase by 517 percent. This effect, however, cannot be made insignificant by adding controls. The 4-item index advocated by Delli Carpini and Keeter fails to serve as a significant predictor of voter turnout while the comparison index used in this study succeeds (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1993).

In order to understand why the comparison index performed well, one need only examine what the index itself measures. The comparison index measures campaign specific knowledge. This knowledge is distinctly political, but it is also limited to facts
that pertain to the current political election cycle. Each question asked in the comparison index required detailed factual knowledge about current political affairs. As such, the comparison index measures, in part, one’s attentiveness to the political events of the day. The predictive power of the comparison index remains, although reduced in magnitude, when controlling for the respondent following the campaign.

**The 4-Item Index**

The 4-item index measures general political knowledge that predominantly focuses on civics. Asking if the respondent knows the party in control of the House does have implications for the level of general political knowledge that the individual possesses, yet it does not have a strong bearing on the act of voting. Two of the questions in the 4-item index have static answers; that is to say that the answers will not change with the next election cycle. As such, respondents who simply remember their High School government class would score well even if they lack any current political knowledge because the 4-item index measures material that is covered in High School.

The 4-item index fails to be a significant measure of voter turnout because the type of political knowledge that it measures, knowledge about the workings of government and current government facts, is not the type of knowledge that is needed to inform the act of voting. Political knowledge that relates to voting, centers on the election, not general civics. Who are the candidates and for what do they stand? Will this candidate fight for legislation that best suits the voter’s opinions on how the government will operate? Does this candidate believe in the war? Is this candidate fiscally responsible? These questions drive the American voter, not those asking if one knows which branch of government interprets the Constitution.
One can also consider the failure of the 4-item index and the success of the comparison index in terms of concept validity. This study stated earlier that validity was the ‘ability to accurately capture the concept being measured.’ For the 4-item index, the concept being measured is general political knowledge. For the comparison index, it is political knowledge that pertains to voting, specifically campaigns. As a result, one can justly consider the comparison index to be a measure of a subset of political knowledge, namely campaign knowledge. In terms of concept validity, the 4-item index is a broad measure of political knowledge. The comparison index is a narrower measure that is better suited for the study of voter turnout.

In light of the performance of the 4-item index, this study questions the finding of Delli Carpini and Keeter who assert that higher levels of general political knowledge correspond to higher percentages of voter turnout. The Delli Carpini and Keeter study did not utilize any controls; this study was able to control for the effect of the 4-item index on turnout. The findings of Delli Carpini and Keeter are similar to those of this study; however, there are two key differences. This study’s use of controls renders more robust findings, and this study claims that political knowledge of the campaign increases turnout, not general political knowledge.

An argument can be made asserting that due to the complex nature of political knowledge, i.e., that it is the product of a number of other variables, controlling for many variables as this study has done may under-estimate the effect of political knowledge.

But because knowledge is intimately tied to other characteristics of good citizenship – for example, it is both a cause and an effect of political interest and participation – it is not always possible nor sensible to disentangle it from other related qualities. Indeed, by controlling for other variables in an attempt to isolate
the independent contribution of knowledge, we may be underestimating knowledge’s impact in some instances.20

This quotation suggests that the pertinent question is: “Are controls causing the study to inappropriately devalue the effect of knowledge?” This study approaches the problem of controls differently. If it is the case that a mix of controls can eliminate the statistically significant effect of a variable, then that variable’s usefulness is greatly diminished. Political knowledge is, indeed, a complex variable. As Delli Carpini and Keeter consider it, political knowledge can be controlled for and the resulting effects are statistically insignificant. This study uses a political knowledge index that can withstand the diminishing effects of controls. If, after controls, an independent variable still explains significant variation in the dependent variable, it stands to reason that such an independent variable is a better predictive tool than any other variable that fails such a test.

– Conclusion –

Political knowledge remains a relevant and under-examined component of the political science discipline. This study has shown that political knowledge of a certain kind, knowledge pertaining directly to the election cycle at hand, is strongly correlated with voter turnout. Political knowledge of another kind, knowledge pertaining to general civics, is not significantly correlated when other variables are controlled. This study also shows how a political knowledge measure can be an effective predictor of voter turnout. Earlier studies have only asserted that higher levels of political knowledge correspond to higher levels of turnout (Delli Carpini, 1996) or have used a natural experiment (Lassen, 2005). This study found that education, gender, urbanity, race, and following politics can all be controlled for by including the 4-item index of general political knowledge and the comparison index of campaign knowledge. Age, income, and following campaigns remain significantly correlated to voter turnout.

This study shows the need for further work on voter turnout and political knowledge. The existing body of research cannot answer many relevant questions. Do
Democrats or Republicans possess more misinformation? Of those who do vote, how many knowledge questions are answered incorrectly? Does being misinformed significantly contribute to election outcomes? Which knowledge facts are the least known; which are most widely known? This study has advanced the understanding of the relationship between turnout and political knowledge and helps fill a gap in the current body of research focused on low turnout levels in the United States.


Burgess, Diana, Beth Haney, Mark Snyder, John L. Sullivan, and John E. Transue, “Rocking the Vote: Using Personalized Messages to Motivate Voting among
Young Adults” The Public Opinion Quarterly Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring, 2000) pp. 29-52.


Control Variables

The following is a list of control variables included in this study and why each was included. The variables are in alphabetical order.

**Age** – Age has long been recognized as a significant predictor of voter turnout with younger people turning out less than older people. Age is potentially problematic for a measure of political knowledge. Younger people have had less personal experience with the political process. They have less experience with political history and less of an obligation to political parties. These deficiencies may manifest as lower levels of political knowledge. As such, age stands as a powerful theoretical control.

**Education** – Education is a fundamental component of knowledge levels. Higher levels of education prepare individuals to understand and retain political knowledge better than those with lower levels of education. This strong connection makes education a powerful control. Education stands as the most reasonable single variable to, in theory, reduce the effects of political knowledge.
Following Campaigns – Following a political campaign has a direct impact on the level of campaign knowledge an individual possesses. Controlling for following campaigns will help isolate the effects of the comparison index (measure of campaign knowledge). As such, following campaigns is an important control.

Following Politics – Following politics is similar to following campaigns, but its effect is directed more broadly and is able to have a greater impact on the 4-item index.

Gender – Gender has specifically been cited as a proponent of political knowledge gaps (Sanbonmatsu, 2003). The presence of a gender-based political knowledge gap suggests that gender should be included as a control. Gender has also been cited as a predictor of voter turnout, furthering the support for its inclusion as a control.

Income – Income, like education, is a fundamental component of political knowledge. Income is often paired with education to form Socio-economic status or SES. SES has been widely studied in association to voter turnout and generally believed to be a strong predictor. This study includes both education and income individually so that their effects can be analyzed individually.

Race – Race has been studied extensively, with an increasing focus on the Latino population. There is considerable evidence to support the proposition that different races affect voter turnout differently. This study will include controls for the individual races African American, Caucasian, Latino, Asian, and Native American.
Urbanity – Urbanity has been included in this study because it is reasonable to think that information would be more readily available in a large city than in a more remote location, and living in a city increases the likelihood that political solicitation will occur.
Detailed Variable Listings

Four-Item Index

Question 639 (coded - cMC01) – “Do you happen to know what job or political office is now held by Dick Cheney?”

If the respondent did not know: “Anything come to mind?”

Question 640 (coded - cMC03) – “Who has the final responsibility to determine if the law is constitutional or not? Is it the President, the Congress, or the Supreme Court?”

If the respondent did not know: “Anything come to mind?”

Question 641 (coded - cMC05) – “How much of a majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House to override a Presidential veto?”

If the respondent did not know: “Anything come to mind?”
Question 642 (coded - cMC07) – “Do you happen to know which party has the most members in the United States House of Representatives?”

If the respondent did not know: “Anything come to mind?”

**Comparison Index**

Question 367 (coded - cCC34) – “To the best of your knowledge, who favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?”

From 7/15/04 to 10/24/04 respondents who gave no answer were asked: “Anyone come to mind?”

Question 370 (coded - cCE37) – “To the best of your knowledge, who urges Congress to extend the Federal law banning assault weapons – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?”

From 7/15/04 to 10/24/04 respondents who gave no answer were asked: “Anyone come to mind?”

Question 381 (coded - cCB27) – “John Kerry says that he would eliminate George W. Bush’s tax cuts on those making how much money – over $50,000 a year, over $100,000 a year, over $200,000 a year, or over $500,000 a year?”

From 7/15/04 to 10/25/04 respondents who gave no answer were asked: “Anything come to mind?”
Question 382 (coded - cDA17) – “To the best of your knowledge, who is a former prosecutor – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?”
From 7/15/04 to 10/24/04 respondents who gave no answer were asked: “Anyone come to mind?”

Question 383 (coded - cCB25) – “To the best of your knowledge, who favors making the recent tax cuts permanent – George W. Bush, John Kerry, both or neither?”
From 7/15/04 to 10/24/04 respondents who gave no answer were asked: “Anyone come to mind?”