

# **How Can Social Media Improve Youth Voter Engagement?**

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## **Introduction**

Social media has increasingly become an integral part of modern society, including politics. While previously viewed as an inconsequential tool for civic engagement and youth voter turnout, recent research indicates its potential to significantly impact political engagement. This project aims to examine the literature on the use of social media in political engagement and identify effective elements to be applied to the nonpartisan Valley Votes Project, which seeks to encourage trust in elections in the Shenandoah Valley. Through the implementation of social media tactics and methods extracted from the literature, this study will measure the success in comparison to each tactic based on digital interaction and viewership. By analyzing the effectiveness of various social media strategies, this project seeks to enhance the use of social media in political engagement and strengthen democratic participation.

The Valley Votes Project is an organization with a mission to enhance trust in elections in the Shenandoah Valley by means of voter education, voter registration, a speaker series that focuses on the mechanics of elections, and a social media presence. This initiative is supported by the Scholars Strategy Network, a non-profit non-partisan organization that employs research to inform public policies. This paper will utilize the social media of the Valley Votes to implement literature-based methods of engaging youth voters.

## Literature Review

The increasing use of social media platforms has changed the way information flows in the world of politics. Social media platforms provide opportunities for citizens to consume, share, participate in political debates, and create grassroots campaigns. Studies show that using social media can increase voter turnout, especially when combined with peer encouragement. Personal communication about politics and encouraging people to vote through social media have been found to be more effective than traditional methods, such as leafleting and direct mail campaigns. Social media can also mobilize a previously untapped segment of the population and increase democratic participation, particularly in younger demographics. In this literature review, debates within the field of social media and its effect on voter turnout are presented, highlighting the various factors that shape the use of social media in politics.

Social Media can be used to increase voter turnout measurably. (Jones et. al., 2017; Boroughs, 2010; Rainie, 2012; Green & Gerber, 2019; Swigger, 2013). One study found that Facebook status updates can be a useful tool for increasing voter turnout, even surpassing the impact of face-to-face voter contact. However, it's worth noting that the social pressure for increased participation mainly came from politically active individuals with a history of engagement both on and off Facebook. This is a relevant factor to consider since it closely mirrors the conditions under which these social media platforms might be employed by supporters of a candidate or cause, and can thus leverage relevant social capital (Haenschen, 2016). This effect can be seen in the 2020 US presidential election. Political candidates used social media platforms to engage with voters and share their policies and views which was instrumental in increasing voter turnout, particularly among young people. It allowed young voters to register to vote, get

information about voting locations and hours, and receive reminders to vote (Joseff & Woolley, 2020). Another study by Bimber posited a disagreement with the aforementioned findings. Bimber performed an empirical study that the internet should not be expected to increase voter turnout. This study however was conducted in 2001 and is hence not up to date with recent developments in political media (Bimber, 2001).

In today's increasingly digitized world, technology is shaping the attitudes and beliefs of young Americans toward democratic values, according to Nathaniel Swigger. Online socialization is changing the fundamental beliefs and norms that individuals hold (Swigger, 2013). As technology continues to play a more significant role in our daily lives, it is becoming increasingly clear that its impact extends beyond just changing the way we communicate. As highlighted by Nathaniel Swigger, William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner, the digitization of society is having a profound effect on how young Americans view democratic values and how information is shared. Outhwaite and Turner suggested that the internet has created new communication channels that have drastically changed the way information flows when compared to traditional media (Outhwaite & Turner, 2017). William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner explore the effects of this shift on political knowledge and examine the influence of social media on politics in their book *The SAGE Handbook of Political Sociology*. The book analyzes how the networked nature of the internet fosters different forms of political engagement, which have been further expanded with the advent of social media. Social media platforms provide citizens with new opportunities to not only consume information, but also to share it, participate in political debates, and create grassroots campaigns. The capacity for social media to influence politics depends on the specific framework and conditions that shape its use. The digital space

allows individuals to directly and actively access information, increase their political knowledge, and participate in political debates without being limited by time or geography, and without the hierarchal dynamics that may exist in some communities (Outhwaite & Turner, 2017).

Studies have found that voting participation increases significantly when social media is used in conjunction with peer encouragement. One such study showed that when individuals received messages from their peers to go to the polls, their close friends' voting participation also increased (Jones et. al., 2017; Green & Gerber, 2019). A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012 found that 38% of social media users used these platforms to promote political information or to "like" political content.

Young people are particularly susceptible to the "Social Vote" phenomenon, which means that they are more likely to vote if they see their social groups doing so (Rainie, 2012). Simple reminders to vote have little effect on voter turnout. However, campaigns that focus on the fact that users' friends have already voted, such as the "I Voted" campaigns, have been found to be more effective. Studies have also shown that Canvassing and direct mail campaigns that distribute voter guides have produced disappointing results. Instead, mobilizing voters is more like inviting them to social occasions. The decision to vote is influenced by one's social environment, and voters need to be in a social milieu that encourages their participation. One way to increase voter turnout is through personal communication about politics (Green & Gerber, 2019). Using social media to encourage and spread information about voting, coupled with personal encouragement from peers, has been found to be an effective strategy to increase voter participation.

By providing easy and accessible ways for individuals to access political content and engage with political issues, social networking websites (SNWs) can help to mobilize a previously untapped segment of the population. Therefore, it is clear that the provision of accessible political content on social networking websites is essential in increasing political engagement and voter turnout. As Bryan Boroughs notes in his paper, individuals who engage with political content on SNWs are more likely to exercise their right to vote, indicating that these platforms can play a significant role in mobilizing a previously disengaged segment of the population. The study found that for every 11 to 25 people who accessed political content on SNWs, voter turnout increased by one vote. These results demonstrate the powerful impact that social media can have on encouraging civic engagement and democratic participation. As such, policymakers and campaigners would do well to recognize the potential of social media as a tool for driving political participation, particularly in younger demographics who are more likely to engage with political issues through digital channels. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 40% of adults in the United States used the Internet to discuss politics. Out of this group, 11% posted political content on blogs, 20% on Twitter, and 33% on social networking sites (SNWs) such as Facebook and LinkedIn (Pew Center, 2008).

The level of uncertainty in an election can have a significant impact on voter turnout. Research has shown that the higher the level of uncertainty, the more likely eligible voters are to go to the polls. This is because when there is a lot at stake and the outcome is uncertain, people are more likely to feel that their vote can make a difference. If someone is less uncertain about one candidate compared to another, they are more likely to be motivated to vote. In situations

where there is a clear front-runner, voters may feel that their vote is less important and may be less likely to go to the polls. However, when the outcome is uncertain, each vote can make a difference, and this can motivate people to take the time to cast their ballot. Therefore, political campaigns need to highlight the uncertainty of an election and emphasize what is at stake in order to encourage voter turnout (Ragsdale & Rusk, 2017).

## Methodology

Drawing upon the literature review, this study will extract methods and tactics as themes for social media campaigns. These methods will emphasize effective approaches supported by the literature that encourage youth to engage civically and cast their vote. The execution of creative ideas and media posts will build upon these methods. The success of these methods will be measured by viewer engagement and user interaction. The two primary social media platforms utilized will be TikTok and Instagram, both of which have extensive reach to the youth audience, with 40% of youth using Instagram and 21% using TikTok according to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2022 (Vogels et. al., 2022). The same content will be posted on both platforms, and interaction and outreach will be compared to determine which platform is more effective.

Professional dashboards are available on both Instagram and TikTok that measure engagement with The Valley Votes Social Media accounts, including view count, likes, shares, favoriting, and comments. This data will be utilized to measure the success of the tactics presented in the social media posts. From the literature review, three themes will be applied in this study. The first effective way to engage young people is through a phenomenon called “Social Vote,” the idea that people are likely to vote if those in their social groups are voting (Rainie, 2012). To apply this concept, a TikTok featuring youth from Bridgewater College stating why voting matters to them was created and can be easily transformed into a reel to be presented on Instagram. The next method is to engage youth by providing political information in a more digestible and easily accessible format (Boroughs, 2010). This approach can be applied on Instagram by creating a slideshow of multiple photos containing relevant information or on



TikTok through similar techniques. Finally, we can engage youth by emphasizing the uncertainty of upcoming elections and what is at stake (Ragsdale & Rusk, 2017). One method of applying this theme would be to explain recent news and how it relates to someone's voting power.

Within this paper, I will analyze the social media campaigns across both Instagram and Tiktok. I will analyze their engagement through both viewership and interaction (comments, likes, and favoriting). I will be comparing the campaigns from the three aforementioned approaches. All campaigns will remain non-partisan and will abide by the mission of the Valley Votes Project.

## **Analysis**

In this section, I will analyze the three tactics that I have identified for encouraging youth to vote through social media. These tactics - social vote, making political information more accessible, and highlighting the uncertainty of the future - have been drawn from existing literature in the field. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis, I will define each of these tactics and draw upon successful campaigns from outside of the Valley Votes project that has utilized them.

### **The Social Vote Phenomenon**

The social vote phenomenon refers to the idea that people are more likely to vote when they perceive that their social networks, such as friends or family, expect them to vote or have already voted (Rainie, 2012). The social vote phenomenon is based on the social influence theory, which suggests that individuals are influenced by the opinions and behaviors of others in their social network. This phenomenon has been observed in several studies and has led to the development of strategies aimed at leveraging social influence to increase voter turnout (Rainie, 2012; Outhwaite & Turner, 2017). For example, campaigns may use social media platforms to encourage individuals to publicly pledge to vote or share information about their voting plans, in order to create a sense of social pressure and increase the likelihood of others in their network also voting. The social vote phenomenon can be particularly effective in mobilizing young people, who should be more likely to be influenced by their peers and social networks.

There are numerous ways one can go about this, one such way is peer-to-peer outreach. The Michigan Democratic Party's "Coordinated Campaign" of 2002 provides evidence for the

effectiveness of peer-to-peer outreach in mobilizing young voters. The party's newly-formed youth caucus launched a "Youth Coordinated Campaign" (YCC) that targeted voters between the ages of 18-35 through a variety of outreach methods, including phone calls, door knocks, and door hangers. Notably, the majority of volunteers involved in the YCC were young people themselves, often college or high school students. The post-election results showed that the 18-35 age group turned out in greater numbers than in previous elections, with representation in the electorate increasing from 9% in 1998 to 17% in 2002. This suggests that young people working to engage their peers in the democratic process can have a significant impact on increasing political participation, particularly when peer-to-peer outreach methods are utilized (Friedrichs, 2003).

Similarly, the Center for Political Participation (CPP) designed a peer-to-peer curriculum program called *Why Bother? Which highlighted the Importance of Voting in America* to encourage high school seniors to get involved in the political process. The program was presented as a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation to motivate young adults to participate in politics. The program covered five elements, which included how political issues can directly affect young people, key party differences in the 2004 election, how a small number of votes can decide an election, the rights and obligations of citizens in a democracy, and the mechanics of voting. The program was presented to 468 students at eight different high schools in northwestern Pennsylvania by four college students who were trained to give the presentation. A split-half experiment was conducted to measure the behavioral and attitudinal changes of students. The survey found that students who heard the presentation expressed higher feelings of political motivation and were more likely to discuss the election with their friends than the

control group. The eligible students in the experimental group were more likely to be registered to vote and actually voted than those in the control group (Shea & Harris, 2006).

While there are various ways to engage young people in the democratic process, peer-to-peer outreach is effective. By leveraging social networks and peer-to-peer outreach strategies, campaigns and organizations can effectively mobilize young voters. As demonstrated by the Michigan Democratic Party's Youth Coordinated Campaign and the Center for Political Participation's Why Bother? program, young people themselves can play a crucial role in engaging their peers and encouraging greater political participation. Ultimately, by harnessing the power of social influence, we can work towards a more engaged and active electorate and a stronger and more vibrant democracy.

Another aspect of the social vote phenomenon is the social media aspect which is the centerpiece of this research. Social media has become an essential tool for political campaigns to reach voters and encourage them to participate in elections. Many campaigns have developed social media strategies that aim to create a sense of social pressure around voting. This can involve creating hashtags or memes that encourage individuals to pledge to vote and share their voting plans with their networks. Social media platforms have been used to spread information about voting deadlines, polling locations, and how to register to vote. The success of social media campaigns has been demonstrated by studies such as Facebook's "*A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization*," which found that positive social pressure caused more people to vote and that Facebook's nudging had increased voter turnout by at least 340,000 in the 2010 U.S. midterm elections. Overall, social media campaigns have

become an increasingly important way to mobilize voters and create a sense of social pressure around voting (Bond et. al., 2012).

A third aspect of the social phenomenon is a controversial one, yet a tactic still used in the field. In the months leading up to the midterm elections in 2018, various "vote shaming" tactics have become increasingly common and controversial. These tactics include customized letters sent to voters in New York and New Jersey listing the elections they have missed in the past, a mailer sent out by the North Carolina Republican Party reminding recipients that their voting history is a public record, and text messages and calls urging people to vote. Some campaigns have even used dating apps and other unconventional means to get out the vote. While some see these efforts as a way to increase voter participation, others view them as an invasion of privacy or an annoyance. Despite the controversy, some organizations believe that these tactics can be effective in getting people to vote (Farzan, 2018).

### **Application**

One effective way of engaging young voters is through social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. As a part of the Valley Votes Project, we utilized TikTok to encourage Bridgewater College students to register and vote in the upcoming elections. One of [the TikToks](#) we created was a video collage of many students stating their reasons to vote. This TikTok was later posted as a reel on our Instagram account to reach a wider audience. TikTok was created by setting up a table on the Bridgewater College Campus and giving out merchandise for all willing student participants to be recorded. Through this TikTok, we aimed to encourage their peers on campus to register and vote. Our efforts were successful as we received positive interactions from the students who participated and many others who viewed the video.

In addition to encouraging voter registration, we also aimed to address the obstacles faced by young voters in local elections. To achieve this, we created another [TikTok](#) in which we interviewed Bridgewater College students on the obstacles they face when attempting to vote. This TikTok provided an empathetic perspective by highlighting the fact that people are not voting for the same purposes. It also provided resources to solve the obstacles to voting. This TikTok was also posted as a reel on our Instagram account to reach a wider audience. Our efforts to address the obstacles faced by young voters in local elections were successful as we received positive feedback from the students who viewed the video.

### **Accessibility of Political Information**

Access to political information is an essential component of increasing voter turnout. Voters who have access to accurate and reliable information about candidates, policies, and issues are more likely to make informed decisions and feel confident in their choices. As Boroughs has shown that voters who are more informed about politics are more likely to turn out to vote (Boroughs, 2010). In today's digital age, the internet provides a vast array of resources for voters to access political information, including candidate websites, news articles, social media, and other online resources. Making political information easily accessible and readily available to voters through these channels can play a crucial role in increasing voter turnout. By providing information about the voting process, candidates, and issues in a clear and accessible way, more individuals may be able to make informed decisions and participate in the democratic process.

The Internet and social media platforms can also play a significant role in increasing access to political information. A study by Intyaswati et. al. found that students who used social

media and engaged in online political discussions had higher levels of political knowledge. This highlights the potential of social media to be utilized as a tool to promote political literacy and increase voter turnout. By integrating the instructional design of relevant courses that facilitate political discussion, instructors can leverage social media to provide students with the opportunity to engage with political issues and learn (Intyaswati et. al., 2021). Furthermore, candidates and political organizations can utilize social media to provide accessible and concise information about their policies and positions, which can help voters make informed decisions. Therefore, the use of social media as a tool to increase access to political information has the potential to not only improve political literacy but also increase voter turnout.

The notion that the accessibility of political information increases political participation leads us to consider how this is currently being applied. An excellent illustration of a successful social media political content deliverer is Congresswomen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or by her popular Acronym AOC. From the very beginning, AOC recognized the power of online media, using it to gain visibility for her grassroots campaign without relying on corporate donations or lobbyists. Her branding and logo have been symbolic of her liberal and diverse values, making her stand out in the political landscape. AOC's online presence has continued to grow, with millions of followers on Instagram and Twitter. What sets her apart is her ability to combine politics with her genuine personality, creating an online space where her followers can relate to her as an individual. AOC's use of different, informal methods of communication, like live streams, has humanized her public figure and allowed her to inform and educate while still being approachable. A prime example of this was her Among Us Twitch live stream, where she played

the game with other popular streamers while encouraging young people to vote, attracting over 400,000 viewers (Kang & Rankine, 2020).

This example shows how social media can be used as a tool to not only provide political information but also create a sense of personal connection between politicians and voters. AOC's use of social media allows her to reach a younger and more diverse audience, who may have otherwise been disengaged from the political process. By using a combination of traditional political messaging and more casual and relatable content, she has been able to communicate her policies and positions to a wider audience, increasing political awareness and engagement among her followers. This approach is not limited to politicians, as political organizations and advocacy groups can also utilize social media to create a more personal connection with their target audience. By creating a sense of community and engagement through social media platforms, individuals and groups can mobilize support and increase political participation, ultimately leading to higher voter turnout. Therefore, the accessibility of political information through social media not only provides information but also creates a sense of personal connection and engagement, which can have a significant impact on political participation.

### **Application**

Through my work on the Valley Votes Project, I aimed to enhance the accessibility of political information for the purpose of engaging young people and fostering a culture of voting. To achieve this, I curated a series of slide shows that contained pertinent information regarding voting and Virginian politics. The slide shows covered a range of topics, including but not limited to, the functioning of the [Electoral College](#), different types of voting mechanisms, and techniques for identifying and avoiding misinformation. Additionally, I endeavored to facilitate a



connection between the past and present. One such example is a post highlighting the evolution of the [Voting Rights Act of 1965 to the John Lewis Act](#). The dissemination of this content was tailored to suit the unique posting requirements of various social media platforms. Specifically, on Instagram, the content was shared as an image slideshow, whereas on TikTok, it was presented as a video with sliding capabilities. It is worth noting that the content shared on Instagram did not appear on the Reels algorithm<sup>1</sup>. Through these efforts, I sought to expand the reach of political information and promote a more informed and engaged citizenry.

In addition to the aforementioned efforts, I further utilized video content to disseminate political information to the public. Specifically, I curated multiple videos that conveyed pertinent information on contentious political topics, with a particular focus on providing educational content that contextualized the headlines. One such example is a video detailing Governor Youngkin's veto of a bill that would have prohibited police from accessing menstrual data obtained from menstrual tracking applications. Through this video, I not only highlighted the story but also provided a comprehensive explanation of the governor's veto power. Similarly, another video addressed a federal panel ruling that a redistricting in South Carolina was deemed gerrymandering, thereby elucidating the concept of gerrymandering and its implications in the political sphere. By incorporating both informative and engaging elements into these videos, I aimed to foster political literacy and awareness among viewers.

Increasing access to political information is crucial in promoting political participation and ultimately, increasing voter turnout. The internet and social media provide a vast array of resources that can be leveraged to deliver political information in a clear, accessible, and

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<sup>1</sup> When people refer to the "algorithm" of Instagram or TikTok, they are usually talking about the complex set of rules and calculations that determine which content is shown to each user on their feed.

engaging manner. The success of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Valley Votes Project in utilizing social media platforms to disseminate political information and create a sense of personal connection with their audience demonstrates the potential impact of social media in promoting political literacy and engagement. By providing accurate and reliable political information, political organizations and advocacy groups can mobilize support and foster a culture of voting, ultimately leading to higher voter turnout and a more informed and engaged citizenry.

### **Emphasizing the Uncertainty of Upcoming Elections**

One of the most significant factors that can drive voter turnout is uncertainty about the upcoming election. As Lyn Ragsdale and Jerrold G. Rusk explain in their book "The American NonVoter," the element of uncertainty in the national campaign context can make it difficult for both candidates and the electorate to accurately predict what the future holds. This uncertainty can arise from a variety of sources, including political surprises or novelties that emerge in the months leading up to the election. The more unexpected and dramatic these changes are, the greater the sense of uncertainty and risk they can generate. However, despite the potential risks involved, many voters may choose to participate in the election precisely because they want to reduce uncertainty and minimize their exposure to negative outcomes. By casting their vote, they can help to shape the political landscape and influence the direction that the country takes in the future. Furthermore, the level of uncertainty surrounding an election can be a key factor in determining voter turnout. When uncertainty is high, eligible voters may be more motivated to go to the polls and participate in the election, as they recognize the potential impact of their vote on the outcome. Therefore, emphasizing the uncertainty of the upcoming election can be a

powerful way to increase voter turnout. By highlighting the potential risks and uncertainties of the political landscape, candidates and other stakeholders can help to create a sense of urgency and importance around the election, motivating eligible voters to get involved and make their voices heard (Ragsdale & Rusk, 2017).

Utilizing uncertainty as a strategic tool in political campaigns is not a novel concept and has been frequently employed by politicians to garner public attention toward their platform. For instance, recent research conducted by the Pew Research Center has shown that the Economy was the most crucial concern for voters during the 2020 elections (Pew Research Center, 2020). Notably, then-presidential candidate Joe Biden stated during an interview with CNBC in 2019, "I hope it's not true, but we're likely to inherit a recession or at least a significant economic slowdown," (Harwood, 2019) effectively utilizing the uncertainty of the future of the economy as a means to incentivize voters to support his candidacy.

Creating a sense of urgency is a common tactic used in political campaigns to mobilize voters to take action. One way to do this is by emphasizing the potential consequences of not voting, such as the risk of a candidate being elected who does not represent the voter's values or interests. For example, a campaign might emphasize the importance of a particular issue, such as healthcare or climate change, and explain how the outcome of the election could significantly impact this issue. In the 2020 U.S. presidential election, there was a strong sense of urgency around the outcome of the election, with both major parties emphasizing the potential consequences of the other party winning. For example, the Biden campaign emphasized the risk of another four years of President Trump's policies and rhetoric, while the Trump campaign

emphasized the risk of a radical shift to the left if Biden were elected. Both campaigns sought to create a sense of urgency around the election by highlighting the potential risks and uncertainties of the outcome.

Social media has emerged as a popular platform for creating awareness about the potential uncertainties surrounding an upcoming election and promoting civic engagement. With the help of social media, candidates, political parties, and advocacy groups can spread information about the risks and uncertainties associated with an election and mobilize voters to take action. Social media campaigns can take various forms, ranging from targeted advertising to viral videos and memes that draw attention to the significance of the election. By leveraging social media to create a sense of urgency and importance around the election, political actors can tap into the power of social networks to reach a diverse audience and motivate eligible voters to participate in the political process. President Trump's usage of social media is a prime example of such a strategy, where he utilized social media to instill fear about the uncertainty of the future. According to CBS News, in a tweet on September 8th, he stated that "Suburban voters are pouring into the Republican Party because of the violence in Democrat-run cities and states. If Biden gets in, this violence is 'coming to the Suburbs', and FAST. You could say goodbye to your American Dream!" (Watson, 2020). Those examples highlight the effectiveness of this method, but for the scope of this project, it must be used in a non-partisan informative way to stay aligned with the mission of the Valley Votes Project.

### **Application**

I have employed the aforementioned approach in my social media posts on The Valley Votes Project's social media. Specifically, I have utilized videos to underscore the

unpredictability of future developments in Virginia politics. In creating such videos, I have been judicious in avoiding any potential partisanship and have endeavored to provide objective educational content. My videos typically feature news headlines followed by a detailed exposition of their significance, incorporating relevant factual information that viewers can utilize to form their own opinions on the topic. By disseminating such content, I aim to both promote civic awareness and mobilize viewers by accentuating the uncertainties that characterize upcoming elections.

An illustrative instance of such an implementation is a [video](#) discussed earlier in this paper, where I discuss a federal lawsuit accusing the state of North Carolina of racial gerrymandering. Another [video](#) pertained to the review of Advanced Placement African American studies in Virginia, as well as the ban on divisive topics in the state. The video provides a comprehensive explanation of Critical Race Theory and its controversial nature in American politics, along with its relevance in Virginia's political scene. Another [video](#) details Governor Youngkin's veto of a bill that would have prohibited police officers from obtaining menstrual data through search warrants. Each of these videos functioned as both informative resources and platforms for emphasizing the contentious nature of these issues, underscoring the significance of articulating one's opinion and utilizing their voice in upcoming elections.

### **Analysis of TikTok vs. Instagram**

Prior to analyzing the data, it is important to note that as part of the Valley Votes Project, we hosted a tabling event to promote a movie screening, during which we offered merchandise to individuals who followed us on social media. Interestingly, we found that a significant number of people chose to follow us on Instagram over TikTok. Notably, the majority of our interactions on Instagram were from our followers, while on TikTok, only about 30% of our viewers were our followers, with the rest being recommended through TikTok's "For You" page, which uses an algorithm based on the viewer's interests. This divergence in viewership is crucial to consider when examining the disparities between Instagram and TikTok. We cannot draw any conclusions regarding the algorithm as it is not open-source. However, it is clear that Instagram's recommendation algorithm did not work in our favor as our viewers and interactors were primarily our followers, and our Instagram campaigns did not garner as much traction from non-followers compared to TikTok. We found that our viewership rate was higher on TikTok than on Instagram, and our interactions and likes were also greater on TikTok. Additionally, people engaged more with our campaigns on TikTok, resulting in extensive debates and discussions in the comment section.

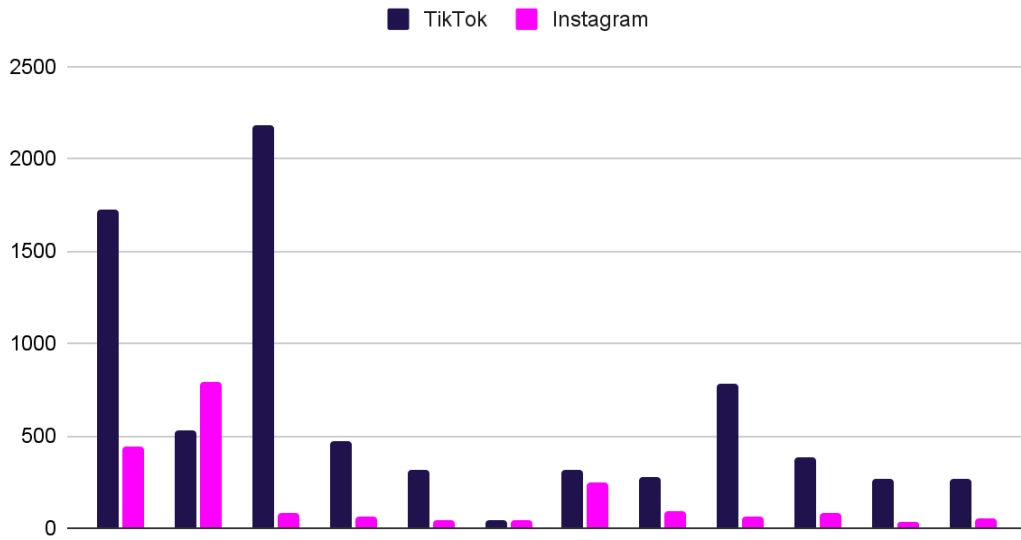
There could be several reasons why Instagram's recommendation algorithm did not work as well for the Valley Votes Project compared to TikTok's algorithm. One possible explanation is that Instagram's algorithm may not be as effective at reaching new audiences who are not already following the Valley Votes Project. On the other hand, TikTok's "For You" page algorithm is designed to recommend content to users based on their interests, even if they are not already following the account.

Another factor could be the difference in the user demographics of Instagram and TikTok. Instagram tends to have a slightly older user base, while TikTok is more popular among younger users (*Report: TikTok Now More Popular Than Instagram Among US Gen Z Consumers*, 2021). It is possible that the Valley Votes Project's content may have resonated more with TikTok's younger audience, leading to greater engagement and viewership.

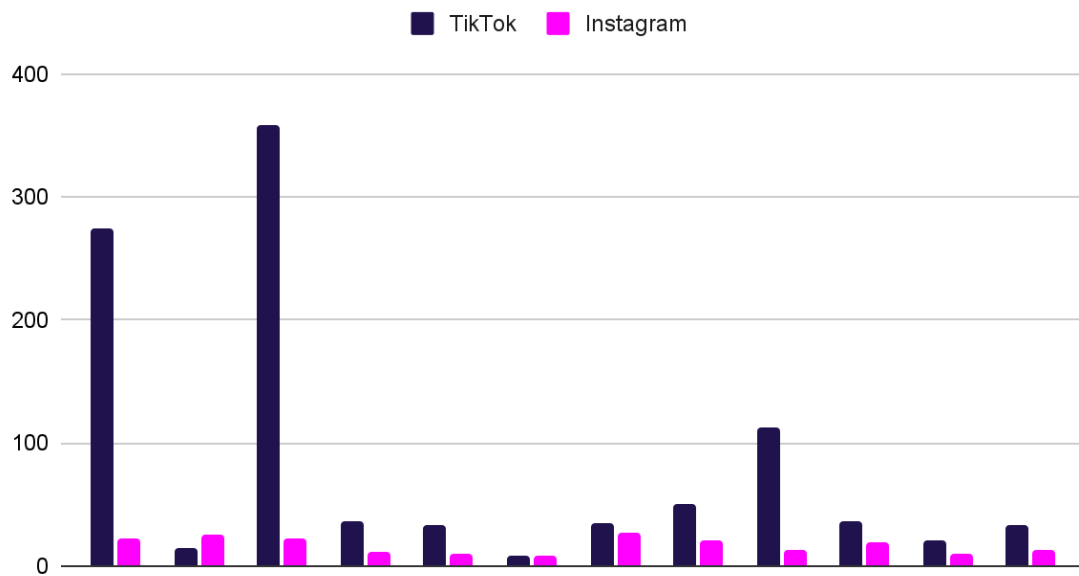
Finally, the Valley Votes Project's marketing strategy may have been more effective on TikTok, as the platform is known for its viral trends and challenges, which can help content spread quickly and gain traction. The engaging and interactive nature of TikTok may have also encouraged users to discuss and debate the project's campaigns in the comments section.

Overall, while it is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason why TikTok's algorithm worked better for the Valley Votes Project than Instagram's algorithm, it is clear that there are significant differences in the two platforms' recommendation algorithms, user demographics, and content formats that may have played a role in the observed disparities in viewership and engagement.

### TikTok Vs. Instagram Viewership



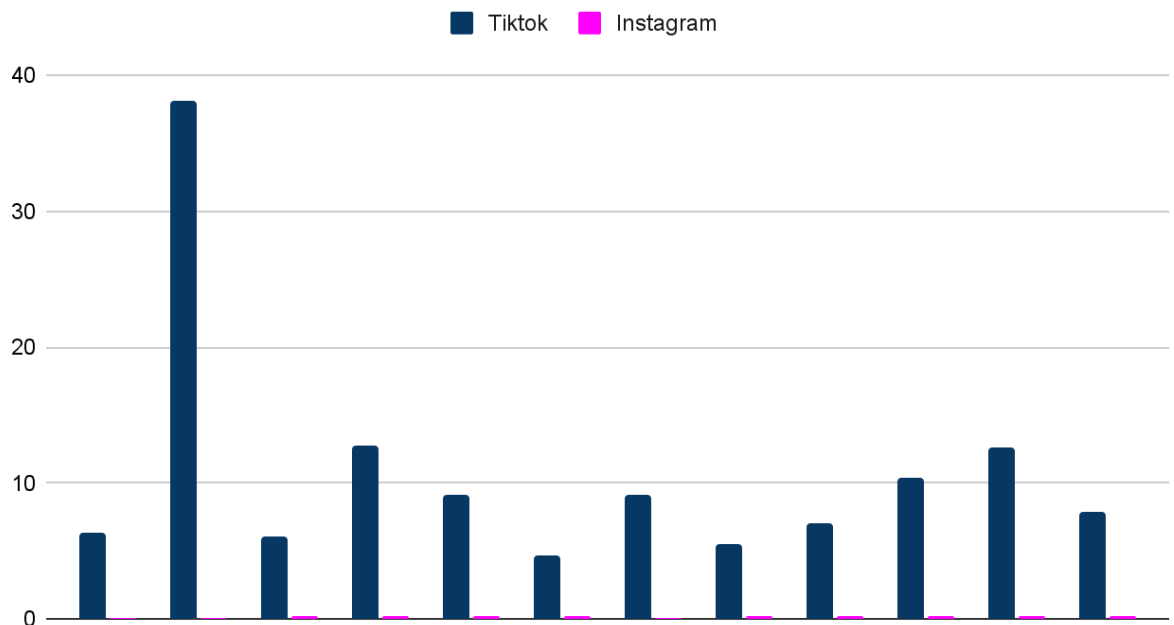
### TikTok Vs. Instagram likes





Another factor to consider is the ratio of views to likes on each platform. We observed that on TikTok, the ratio of views to likes was much higher compared to Instagram. This could be due to the different ways in which users engage with content on each platform. On Instagram, users may be more selective with their likes, while on TikTok, users may be more inclined to give a quick like as a form of acknowledgment or appreciation, even if they do not intend to follow the account or engage further with the content. Additionally, TikTok's algorithm is surface content that is likely to receive engagement, which could contribute to the higher ratio of views to likes. Ultimately, the reasons for the difference in engagement rates between the platforms are likely to be complex and multifaceted and may involve a combination of platform design, user behavior, and content type.

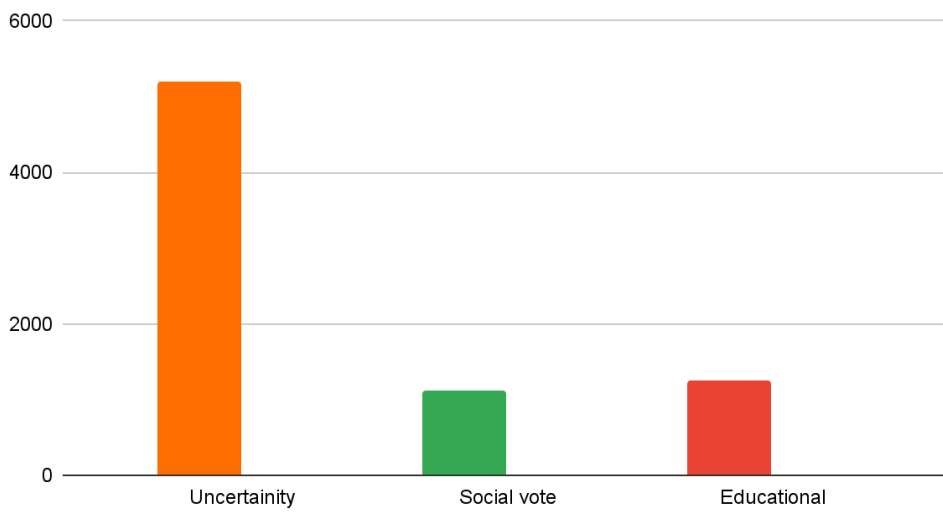
Ratio of views/Likes



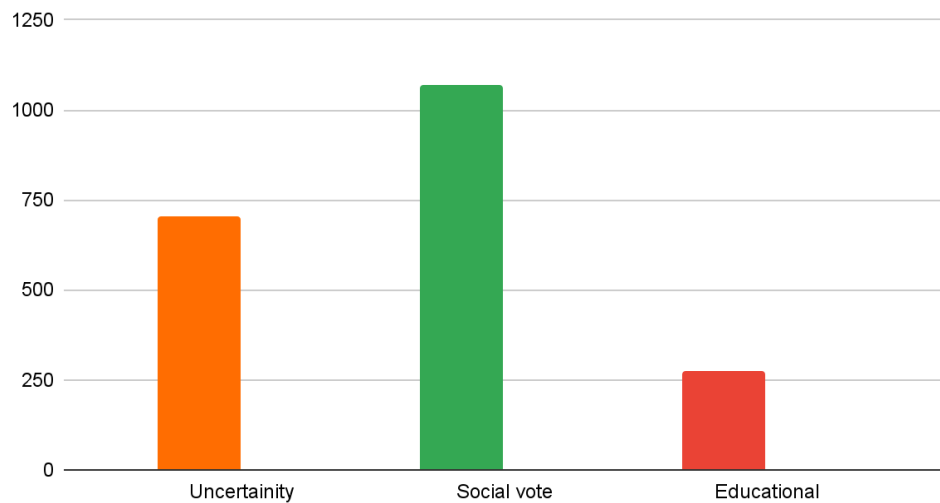
**Analysis of What Worked and what didn't?**

I will be extracting viewership and likes data from TikTok and Instagram. I will thereafter compare them with each other based on the three methods I extracted from the literature review, the social vote phenomenon, accessibility of political information, and finally the uncertainty of upcoming elections.

TikTok views Data



Instagram views Data



One possible explanation for the different popularity of our content on Instagram and TikTok could be the nature of our follower base. As we have previously noted, the majority of our Instagram followers are Bridgewater College students, which may account for the popularity of our videos that highlighted the social vote phenomenon, since they featured Bridgewater students and were likely to resonate well with our follower base. In contrast, on TikTok, our most popular videos were those that focused on the uncertainty surrounding upcoming elections. The educational method was pretty constant and garnered similar traction on both Instagram and Tiktok.

There could be several reasons why some methods were more popular than others. One possibility is that the topic itself is more appealing to a broader audience. For instance, the videos that focused on the uncertainty surrounding upcoming elections may have been more popular on TikTok because election-related topics tend to generate a lot of interest. Another reason could be the way the information was presented. It's possible that the videos that were more visually engaging or had a more engaging narrative style captured the attention of viewers and were therefore more likely to be shared and receive more views.

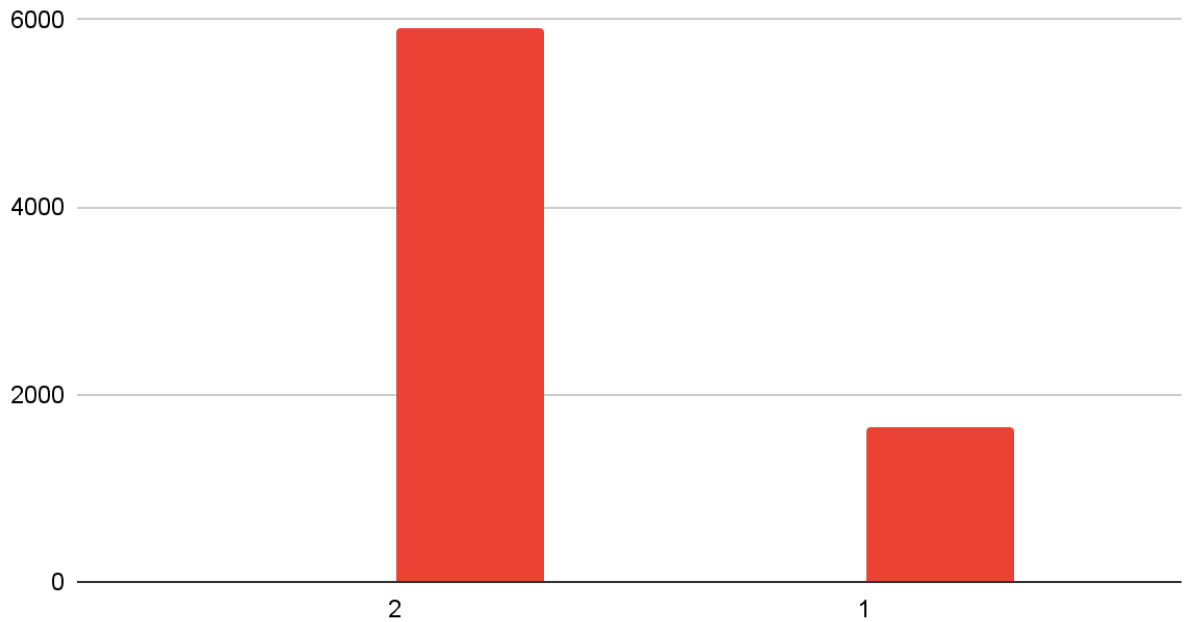
Additionally, the videos that used more contentious topics such as abortion or redistricting may have been more engaging and thought-provoking for viewers, leading to increased shares and engagement. TikTok is known for its ability to spread viral content and reach a broad audience, particularly among younger generations (*Report: TikTok Now More Popular Than Instagram Among US Gen Z Consumers*, 2021). The platform has become a popular outlet for political discussions and activism, making it an ideal place to share educational content on current events and political issues. Moreover, controversial or polarizing topics tend

to generate more engagement and discussion on social media, which can lead to higher engagement rates and increased visibility for the content. The incorporation of controversial topics such as abortion and policing in videos may tap into this phenomenon and generate greater interest and engagement among viewers. Overall, the combination of TikTok's young and politically engaged audience and the use of controversial topics may have contributed to the success of the method of focusing on the uncertainty surrounding upcoming elections on the platform.

### Concurrency of Methods

Many successful social media campaigns use concurrent methods rather than solely focusing on one. For instance, a campaign about reexamining AP African American studies in Virginia utilized both the uncertainty factor and the educational factor, which could have contributed to its success. Similarly, many of our own campaigns used two or more methods to reach a wider audience and maximize engagement. By combining educational elements with current events or using engaging visuals and storytelling techniques, we were able to create content that resonated with our followers and sparked meaningful conversations.

#### Number of methods used and the views it garnered



Graph illustrating videos that incorporate 1 vs 2 methods and their viewership count

### **Limitations and future steps**

This project encountered various limitations, as is typical of any research undertaking. A significant challenge was the constraint of time, which restricted the number of data points and video campaigns that could be executed. Given more time, we would have engaged in daily posting to increase our follower base. Additionally, we were limited in our ability to account for confounding variables, such as the release date of our campaigns. For instance, two TikTok videos utilizing the uncertainty of upcoming election methods could have differing views, despite similar content. We speculate that the release time of these videos could have influenced the difference in viewership. Other variables, such as video length, graphic content, and metadata, including hashtags, could also have impacted the recommendation algorithm and thus affected our results. While we aimed to conduct an extensive number of campaigns to mitigate these potential biases, the limitations suggest a need for future research to thoroughly investigate these variables.

Additionally, another limitation of this project was the lack of diversity in our follower base. As previously noted, the majority of our Instagram followers were Bridgewater College students, which may have limited the generalizability of our findings to a wider audience. Moreover, we were unable to control for the influence of external events and factors that may have affected the popularity of our campaigns, such as national news events or changes in social media algorithms.

To address these limitations and improve the effectiveness of future campaigns, several steps could be taken. First, more time and resources could be dedicated to creating and executing

campaigns to increase the sample size and variety of data points. Second, more attention could be given to developing a diverse follower base to better reflect the general population. Third, more rigorous controls could be put in place to account for external factors that may affect the popularity of campaigns, such as monitoring changes in social media algorithms and national news events. Overall, while this project experienced several limitations, it provides a useful starting point for future research on effective social media campaigns.

### **Conclusion**

Through this project, we have examined various methods derived from the literature to improve youth engagement in civic work and voting. By comparing and analyzing the success of these methods in our social media campaigns, we were able to identify the most effective ones for different types of audiences. Our findings suggest that the uncertainty surrounding upcoming elections was the most successful method in reaching a diverse audience, while the social vote phenomenon was effective in a communal-based setting. Despite the challenges that come with using social media to promote youth civic engagement, we conclude that it is a powerful tool that should be utilized in varying campaigns to encourage and mobilize young people in the political process. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of these methods in different contexts and settings. Ultimately, the promotion of youth civic engagement is essential for a healthy democracy, and social media can play a vital role in achieving this goal.



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