

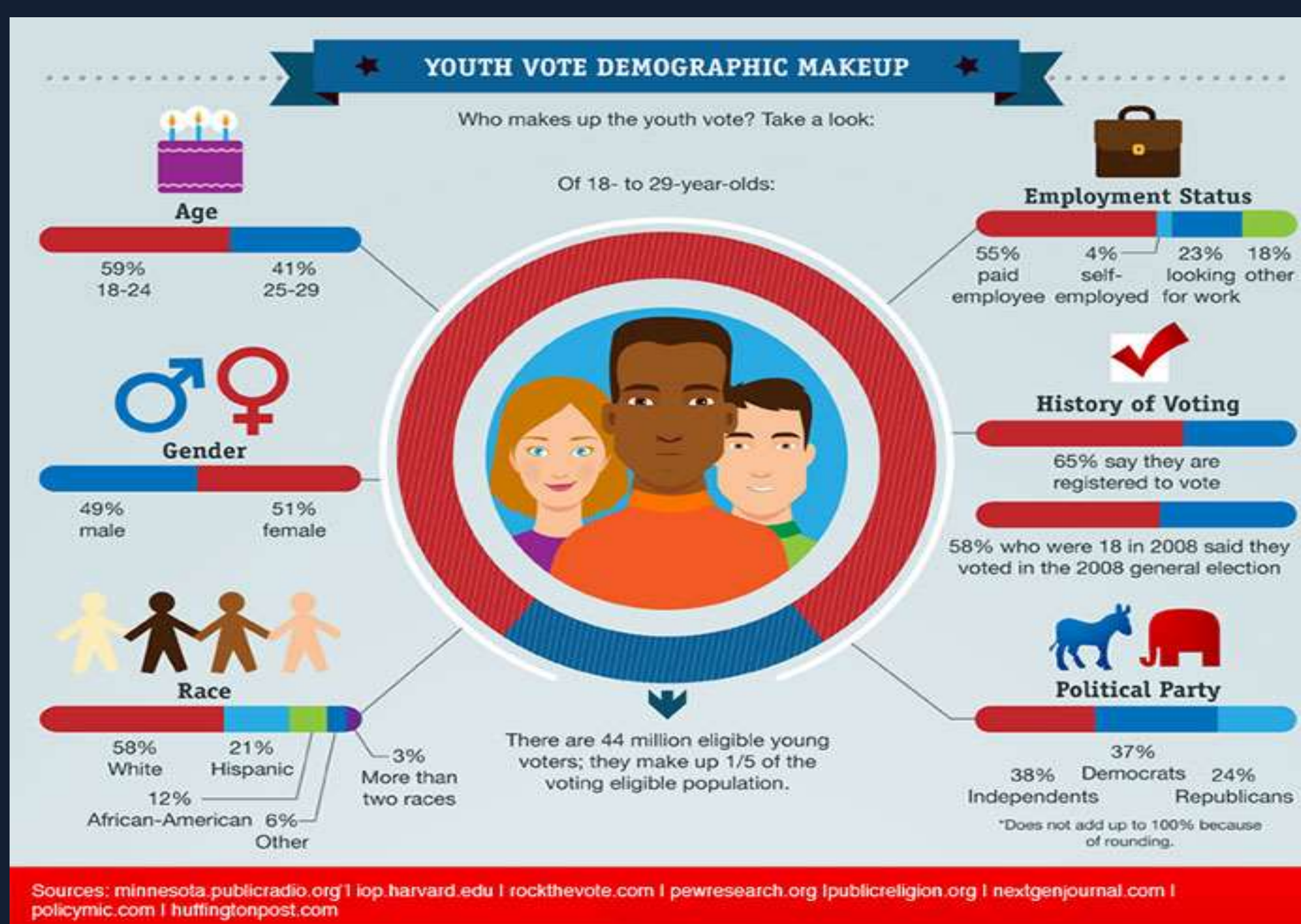
The consistency of voting habits among college students.



Mychala Walker

Department of Political Science, College of Humanities, Virginia State University

mwal1086@students.vsu.edu



LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently college voters have four choices when it comes to voting, leave school in the middle of the semester to vote, go through the confusing process of absentee voting, attempt to vote at school, or not vote at all. (Ardion et al, 2015). It seems a lot of students are choosing the latter. According to U.S. Census, in the November 2018 election approximately 43.78% of citizens aged 18 to 24 did not vote. This follows the trend that voter turnout among all Virginia residents in the last four Presidential elections was, on average, 61.25%. In 308 political communities throughout the country, enrolled college students represent more than 20% of the population (Ardion et al, 2015). Teixeira(1987) suggests that voter turnout is effected by the costs (time and effort) and lack of benefits in voting. Ardion et al (2015) suggests that “unclear rules about how and where to register only adds to the costs of voting.” Powell (1986) suggests that voter turnout is effected by party system & institutional factors and registration laws. For example, in 2013 North Carolina attempted to pass a bill that would place a tax penalty on students’ parents if they voted outside of their home district, students would be forced to register to vote at the same address as their vehicle registration, and all voters would have to present photo ID when voting. Gerber et al (2003) suggests that voting is habit forming and not voting in a person’s first election may cause them to follow this in the future. Keeping this in mind and following Albert Bandura’s Social Cognition Theory, one can assume that voting habits are one’s behavioral cognition, costs, effort, and laws are environmental cognitions and the lack of benefits of voting add to the personal cognition.

METHOD

The data collected for this project was retrieved from a survey distributed through Qualtrics. This method was decided to be the easiest to reach the target group. The target group for this project is Virginia State University students. The target group was chosen due to the ease of collecting data and the demographics of students that attend the university.

The survey distributed asked questions regarding demographics, current voter registration status, and past voting history.

A total of 71 students completed the survey with 8 Freshmen, 16 Sophomore, 14 Juniors, and 33 Seniors over a five-day period in May 2020. Majority of the students are aged between 18 and 24. They were also diverse in studies with 27 different majors.

INTRODUCTION

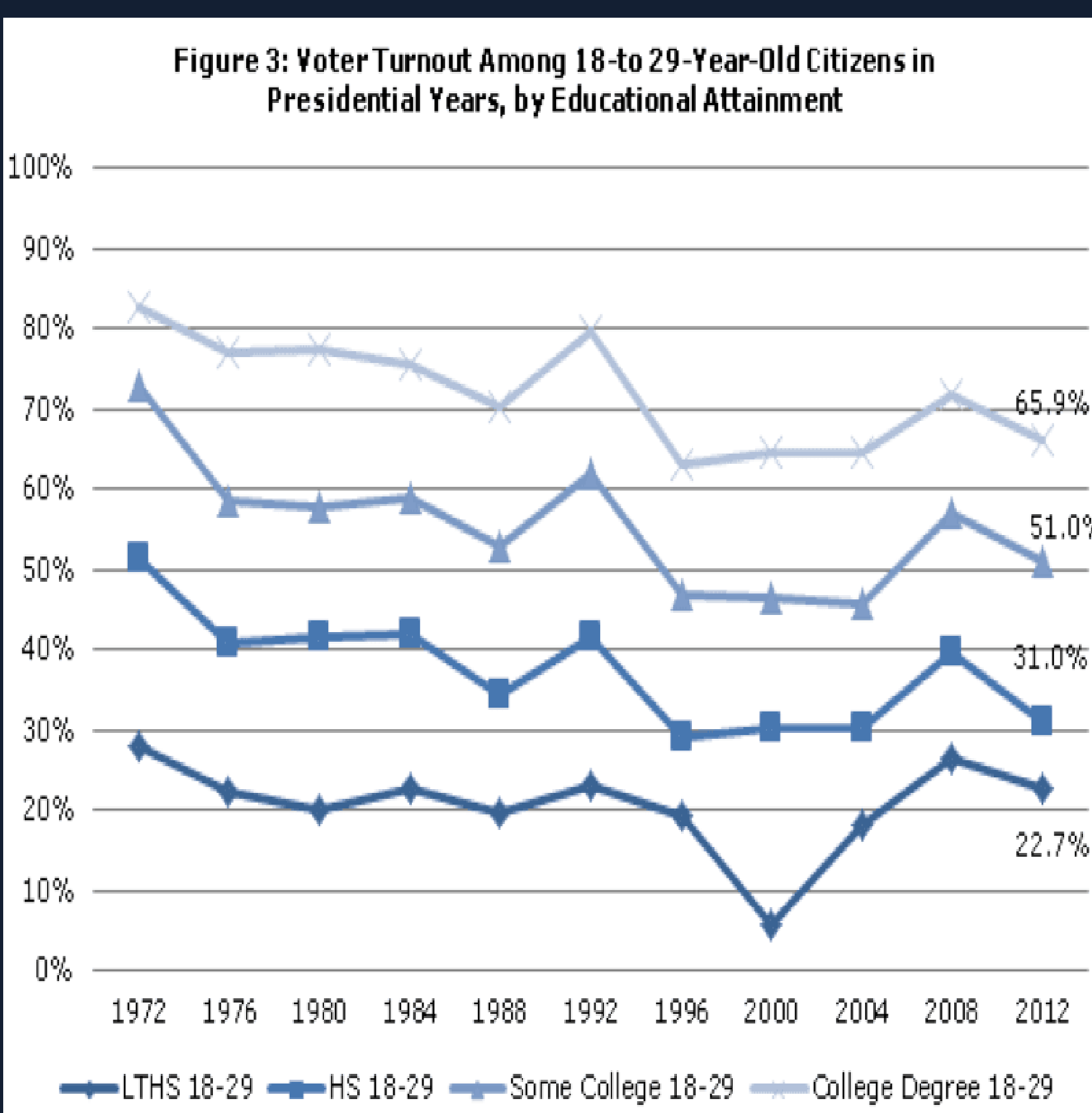
The purpose of this research project is to examine how voter disenfranchisement affects college students. I chose to use Virginia State University as a microcosm to all Virginia colleges in the United States of America.

Goal

The goal of this project is to address voting issues for college students. Those who support students voting worry about student disenfranchisement, proper due process, civic engagement, and student’s interest in the local community.

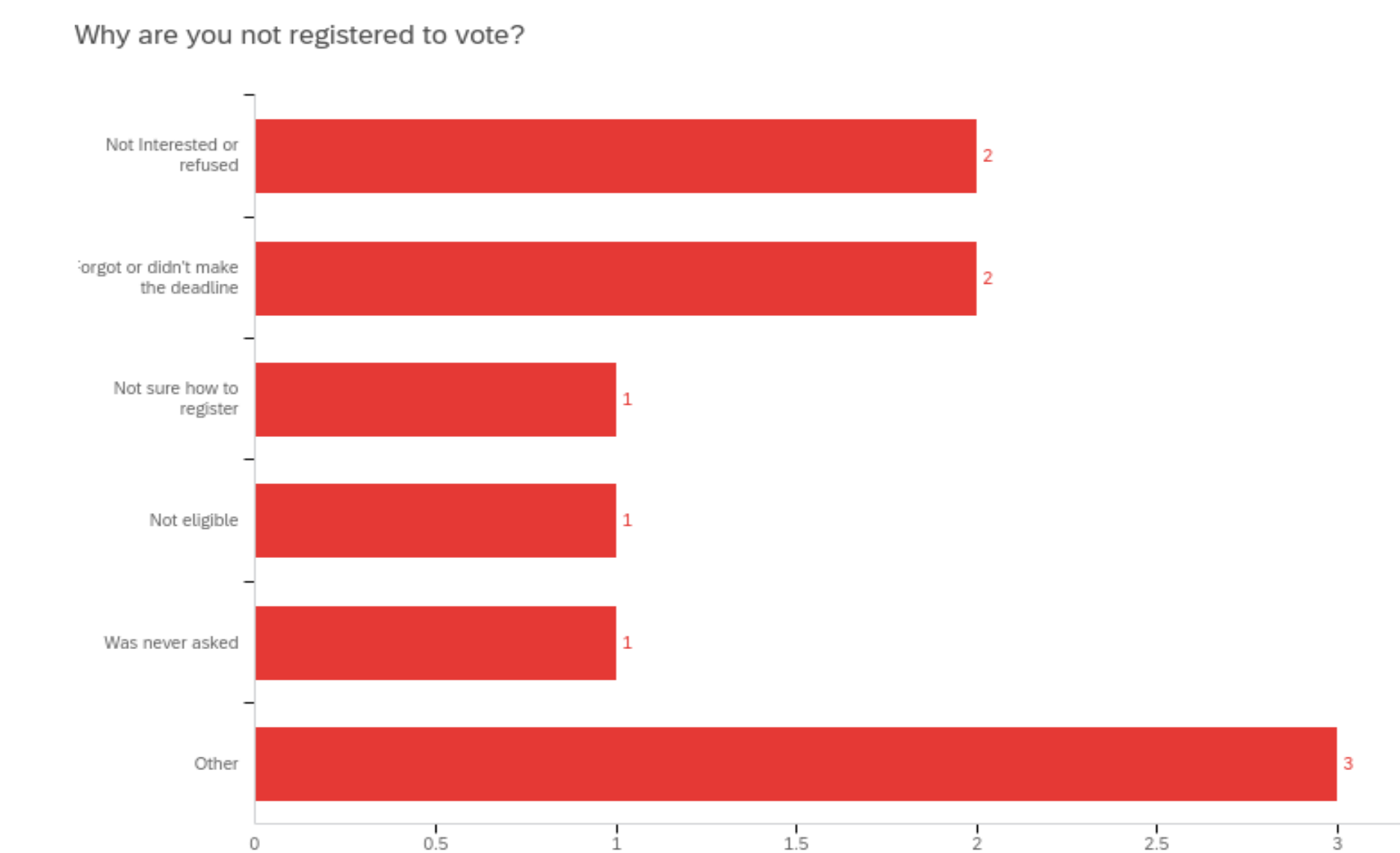
Hypothesis

College aged citizens do not vote because they are not registered and are unclear about the voter registration laws in their state.

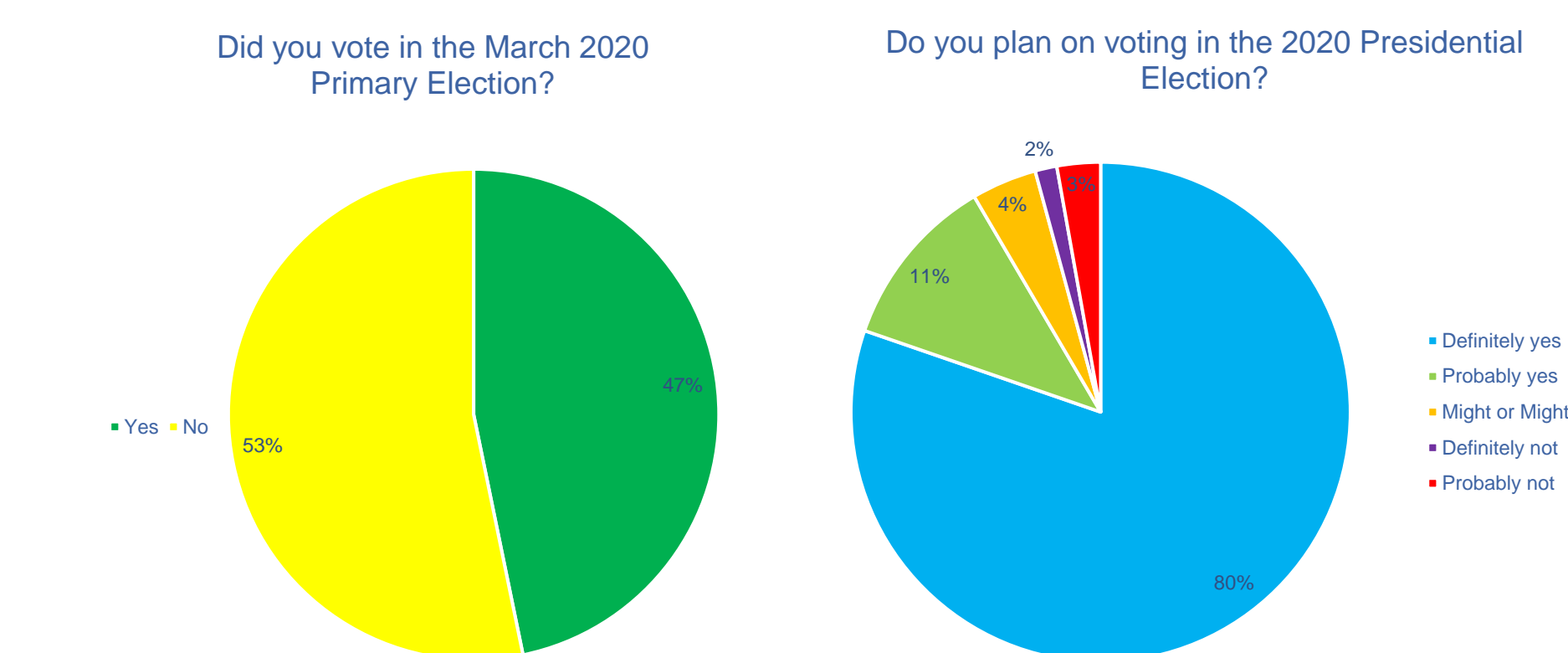


RESULTS

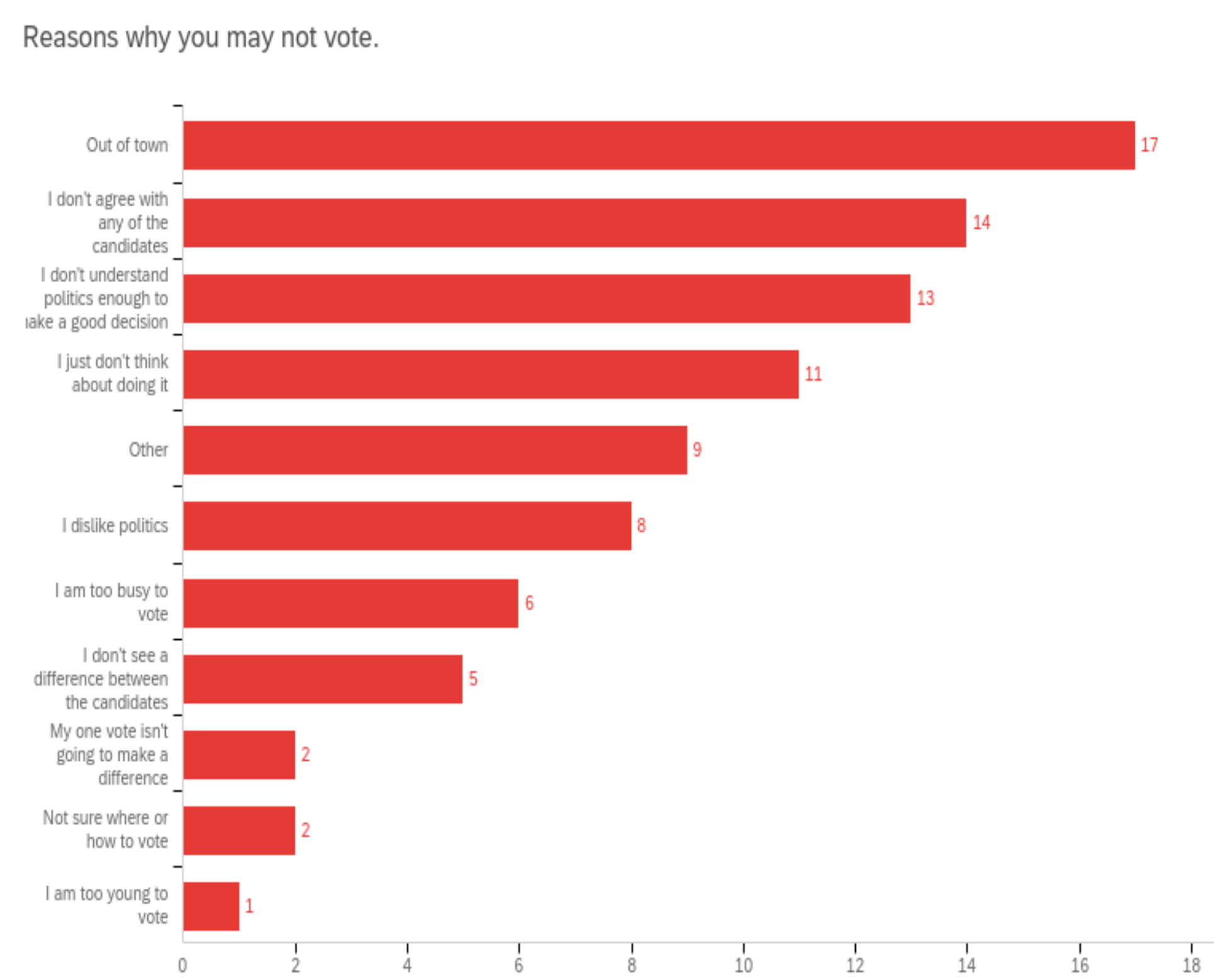
Majority if the respondents are registered to vote, with only 9 being unregistered. Of the unregistered, only 1 does not plan to register for the 2020 Presidential election. The most prominent reason why the students are not registered is because they forgot the deadline or are not interested.



Of the registered voters, 33 students did not vote in the March Primary and 29 students did. However, 53 of the registered students stated that they “definitely” vote in the 2020 presidential election. It was also found that majority of students that did not vote in the March Primary, didn’t so despite knowing about on-campus voting resources and understanding voter registration & absentee voting laws.



Of all the respondents, the most prominent reason why a person may not vote is because they are “out of town”. Second and third behind this is “I don't agree with any of the candidates” and “I don't understand politics enough to make a good decision”, respectively.



CONCLUSIONS

The results did not support the hypothesis for a variety of reasons.

1. First, a larger percentage of students are registered to vote than originally thought.
2. Second, the reasons why students are not willing to vote are more about them being out of town and less about them not being registered to vote.
3. In contrast, it was found that most students are registered to vote. Most of the students also have plans to vote in Presidential elections, while not in the primary elections.

This may suggest that college students are not disenfranchised, but instead are choosing not to vote.

Further Research

To determine voting patterns of all college students, further research is needed. This study only focuses on students at one college in Virginia.

Further researchers should aim to:

- expand the research to students at more colleges in Virginia or the United States. This would give more accurate data on the voting habits of college students.
- broaden the scope of the research survey by asking more questions concerning registration, “off-year” elections vs. presidential elections, on-campus voting vs. absentee voting, etc.
- conduct a similar study following the 2020 Presidential election. This would allow a follow up to the question regarding the 2020 Presidential election and allow a comparison of voting habits among primary and general elections.

Use of research

This research can be used to determine voting habits of the college students. It can also be used to improve the approach to increasing the college student vote.

REFERENCES

Ardion, Phillip J.; Bell, C.Scott; Ragazzino, Micheal M.; “The Partisan Battle over college student voting: an analysis of student voting behavior in Federal, State, and Local Elections.” *Social Science Quarterly*, November 2015

Gerber A.S., D.P. Green, and R.P. Shachar. “Voting may be habit forming: Evidence from a Randomized field experiment.” *American Journal of Political Science*, June 2003

Powell, G. Bingham. “American Voter Turnout in Comparative Perspective.” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 80, no. 1, 1986, pp. 17–43., doi:10.2307/1957082.

“Reported Voting and Registration by Age, for the United States, Regions, and Divisions: November 2018.” *United States Census Bureau*, Nov. 2018.

“Reported Voting and Registration for Total and Citizen Voting-Age Population, by State for Presidential Elections: 1972-2016.” *United States Census Bureau*, Apr. 2019.

Teixeira, Ruy A. Why Americans Don't Vote: Turnout Decline in the United States 1960-1984. *Greenwood Press*, 1987.