

Is Voting From Your Dorm the New Norm: Understanding College Students' Preferred Vote Method

Alana Rivas-Scott

RESEARCH FOCUS

In 2020, **65% of youth used nontraditional methods of voting**, like vote-by-mail (Fabina and Scherer 2022). Also, **vote-by-mail turnout was higher for college-educated youth** (de Guzman, Medina, and Mapara 2022).

What will influence students' preferences for one method of voting over the other in the future?

RQ: What is the effect of political interest on college students' preferred method of voting?

THEORY

Lots of debate about how different age groups feel about vote-by-mail (e.g., Berinsky, Burns, and Traugott 2001; Bonica et al. 2021).

Some literature suggests that **individuals high in political interest prefer in-person voting because it is more rewarding** (Plescia, Sevi, and Blais 2021).

College students are less likely to vote in person when they face certain costs (Niemi and Hanmer 2010; Richman and Pate 2010).

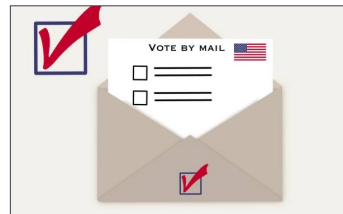
Some scholars argue that **youth might be more likely to vote if they make a pledge** (Costa, Schaffner, and Prevost 2018) **or if they use same-day registration** (Grumbach and Hill 2022).

HYPOTHESES

H1: College students high in political interest will be more likely to prefer in-person voting.

H2: If the costs of voting in-person increase, then college students high in political interest will be more likely to prefer vote-by-mail.

H3: College students low in political interest will be more likely to prefer vote-by-mail.



SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Sample Questions:

- *How interested are you in information about what's going on in government and politics?*
- *How likely are you to vote in the 2024 general election?*
- *Would you prefer to vote at a polling station or vote by mail?*

Cost of Voting Variables: Voter ID, Home State, Polling Location, Distance, and Car Access.

RESULTS

Table 1: Political Interest

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
How Interested	3.36	1.05	1	5
How Closely	2.89	1.01	1	5
How Often	3.25	0.96	1	5
Political Interest	3.17	0.92	1	5

Note: N = 281

Table 2: The Effect of Political Interest on Preferred Vote Method

Vote Method	Political Interest			Total
	Low	Moderate	High	
By Mail	45	18	62	125
Polling Station	52	15	85	152
Total	97	33	147	277

Note: $p = 0.414$, Cramer's $V = 0.0797$

Table 3: The Costs of Voting

Variable	χ^2	p-value	Cramer's V
Voter ID	2.5979	0.273	0.1043
Home State	6.6623	0.01*	-0.1551
Polling Location	11.8344	0.001**	-0.2067
Distance	1.6983	0.637	0.0915
Car Access	6.0944	0.014*	-0.1483

Note: * ($p < 0.05$), ** ($p < 0.01$)

Table 4: The Effect of Total Cost on Preferred Vote Method

Vote Method	Total Cost				Total
	3	4	5	6	
By Mail	25	53	30	17	125
Polling Station	63	58	22	9	152
Total	88	111	52	26	277

Note: $p = 0.000$, Cramer's $V = 0.2540$

Table 5: The Effect of Political Interest on Vote Method When Total Cost is High

Vote Method	Political Interest			Total
	Low	Moderate	High	
By Mail	23	9	15	47
Polling Station	15	2	14	31
Total	38	11	29	78

Note: $p = 0.221$, Cramer's $V = 0.1967$

RESULTS

Table 1: Average level of political interest was 3.17 (high).

Table 2: **No relationship between Political Interest and Preferred Vote Method.**

Table 3: **Not knowing where one's polling location is, attending college away from home, and not having a car are all negatively correlated with preference for in-person voting**

Table 4: Total Cost is negatively correlated with preference for in-person voting.

Table 5: **Total Cost does not affect the relationship between Political Interest and Vote Method.**

My hypotheses were not supported, but evidence suggests that Home State, Polling Location, and Car Access influence preferred vote method.

IMPLICATIONS

Policies could expand opportunities for mail-in voting and minimize the costs of voting in person.

