

College Voter Turnout

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Abstract: This is a comparative study about how college students decide to vote in presidential elections in Boston and San Jose, Costa Rica. Specifically, the research investigated what cultural factors influenced college students to vote in the 2010 presidential election in Costa Rica and the 2012 presidential election in the United States. Given the lower level of political participation amongst youth in comparison to the rest of the population and a similar governmental form in Costa Rica and in the United States prove them to be comparable areas of study. The research is an analysis of both primary and secondary qualitative and quantitative sources obtained in both countries primarily during the 2012 calendar year. Between the two countries close to 200 students were surveyed and nearly 30 were interviewed in regards to the topic. The investigation has found that in both countries active, personal mobilizations of students prove to be effective in influencing college students to vote in elections.

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I Introduction

There is a widespread, worldwide belief that young people do not vote. The phenomenon of abstaining from voting has been studied by many political scientists who have found varying reasoning to why there is a lack of voter turnout amongst the youth. Although extensive research on why youth voters¹, specifically college students, decide not to vote there has been very limited research on why college students decide to vote. This research project will look at two countries that are often seen as role models of democracy, Costa Rica and the United States and see how college students in each of those countries decide to participate politically via voting. Specifically, I will research what cultural factors influenced undergraduate university students to vote in the most recent presidential elections in San José, Costa Rica and Boston, United States.

There is an importance in studying college voters² because as the youth they tend to differ greatly in their political beliefs and issue-based needs in comparison to the rest of voters. Due to the divergence of beliefs and needs college voters often stray from other generations of voters politically (Dalton, 2009). These differences mean that youth voters often vote for candidates varying from older generations and therefore a higher voter turnout could influence candidate platforms and the outcomes of elections. Despite this potential ability, only a small percentage of youth voters vote which means that only a small number of votes are representing the total youth population. As it is youth voters often believed they are misrepresented by their government because presidential candidates tend not to focus on issues that would ignite the mobilization of

¹ Youth voters will be defined as those aged 18-29 who vote in presidential elections

² College voters will be defined as students enrolled in an undergraduate post-secondary institution who vote in presidential elections

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youth voters. The main factor for this lack of mobilization is due to the unreliable nature of youth voters. As author Martin P. Wattenberg explains there's a catch-22 of youth participation in elections: voters don't vote because they are not mobilized by candidates and candidates do not try to mobilize voters because of the unlikelihood that the youth will turn up at the polls (2008). This endless cycle of non-voting and non-mobilization have left youth voters from taking a larger role in the election process.

This particular study will look at the college voters that in many ways defy the statistics of the 'non-voting' youth. Political scientists are not wrong in concluding that there is a low voter turnout of the youth, however there is still a turnout that exists and therefore it deserves to be studied. In his book *Citizen Politics* author Russell Dalton references President Thomas Jefferson's belief that every person who can vote has a valid vote. Whether the person is a "ploughman" or a "professor" a person can still participate (Dalton, 2008). College students are eligible to vote, have a vote that counts just like any other person and therefore that vote deserves to be studied. By studying cultural factors such as media, party affiliation, social capital, and religion I would like to discover why college students decide to vote in presidential elections. Through studying why these students choose to vote I'm hoping to discover the mentalities of the up and coming generations in two countries. By comparing these countries I will learn whether or not college voters in Costa Rica and the United States have similar or different cultural influences.

There are several reasons to compare Costa Rica and the United States to do this project. The United States and Costa Rica have similar Constitutions that set up three branches of government: the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch. In many ways both countries are the standard for their sects of the world; the United States setting the standard for much of the western world, and Costa Rica setting the standard for much of Latin

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America. That being said, the two countries certainly have their structural differences—differences which will be discussed later in this analysis.

The recent elections in the United States and Costa Rica are additional reasons to choose these countries to compare. This research project will focus on the 2012 presidential election in the United States and the 2010 presidential elections in Costa Rica.

The 2012 election in the United States was won by incumbent President Barack Obama. This win comes after a controversial first term by President Obama who won an unprecedented number of youth votes in his first election. This study will see if President Obama and other presidential hopefuls were able to mobilize the youth at rates similar or different than the efforts of 2008.

The 2010 election in Costa Rica was won by Laura Chincilla Miranda who became the first female president of the country. President Chincilla was the hand-pick successor of twice former President Óscar Arias who had a highly controversial term revolving around the signing of a free trade agreement with the United States. This study will see if students, who showed up for record numbers during the free trade agreement election, decided to also vote in the proceeding presidential election.

Given the controversies that surrounded both of these countries prior to their respective elections it will be very interesting to see how youth voters chose to vote and whether or not their vote assimilates with the rest of the population or not.

II Background

Literature Review on Cultural factors studied

Political Party Roles

In order to understand the relationship between potential voters and political parties one must remember the goals of both parties and voters. The number one goal of political parties is to try and mobilize like-minded voters in order to try and secure a victory (Davis, 1999). The number one goal of voters is to try and best align themselves with a party and/or candidate that will best suit their individual and national needs (Patterson, 2006).

On an international level youth voters tend not to have strong political party affiliations (Dalton, 2009). This lack of affiliation is often due to the lack of knowledge of political parties and the lack of political parties that actively try to mobilize youth voters, as well as a deviance from social norms and tendency to stray from traditional parties.

Aligning oneself to a party is often a lifetime commitment. Once a person has aligned themselves to a party people are very unlikely to permanently switch parties—even if they switch parties for certain elections (Dalton, 2009).

When people have party affiliations they are more likely to show up to the polls because of their invested interest in a party and their ideals. One reason that youth voters are less likely to show up for elections is their lack of attachment to a political party (Wattenberg, 2008). This lack of attachment is due to a number of reasons. Political parties tend not to try and mobilize younger voters due to their lack of turnout predictability. Senior citizen voters are often the typical target of political parties due to their predictable turnout rates (Wattenberg, 2008). This leaves many youth to feel like many politicians do not hear nor understand their needs. Political parties are more likely to mobilize voters that are more certainly going to vote, and youth voters are often too unpredictable to be deemed 'mobilization worthy.' Also, since college students are

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inherently younger than the rest of the voting population they have less time to have formed strong ties with political parties making them less reliable for parties to obtain.

Due to their age, college voters have had less time than their elders to learn on a personal basis about political parties. Since college voters are voting in their first or second presidential elections they have less time to familiarize themselves with political parties, candidates, voting regulations, and overall political history and how they function.

There are many types of mobilization tactics that political parties may use with varying effects on voters. Tactics include, but are not limited to, mass mailings, phone calls, rallies, and television/radio/internet advertisements.

Youth voters are more likely to show up to elections that are very competitive (Wattenberg, 2008). One reason for this is because political parties are more likely to try and mobilize younger voters during closer elections than during more predictable elections. This shows that when youth voters are indeed contacted by parties/candidates they are more likely to vote. Additionally, if a person believes that their vote will have an influence in the outcome of the election they are more likely to vote. Therefore highly competitive elections may attract voters who otherwise believe their individual vote has little worth.

Young voters are the most likely age demographic to vote for non-“mainstream” candidates due to their lack of connection to prominent parties. Youth both have less of an attachment to societal norms and a desire to stray from social norms which means they’re therefore statistically more tolerant than older voters to listen to minority party candidates (Dalton, 2009).

Once a person has affiliated themselves with a political party, whether this happens in their youth or at a later time) this tends to be

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a decision for life (Wattenberg, 2008). People align themselves with political parties for a number of reasons. One reason is that the society around the person is all aligned with a certain party and a person feels obligated to stick with the social norm (Patterson, 1996). Another reason is that people try to find a party that best suits their self-interests. People want to support themselves that they believe will support their needs, whatever those needs may be (Patterson, 1996). At varying levels people invest themselves into their political party and want to see their party win. This 'investment' often encourages voter turnout because people want to see their party win and the best way to ensure this win is by voting and encouraging other like-minded people to vote.

Voters want to elect a candidate who best suits his or her needs which means that some people decide to leave their 'historic' party for certain elections.. In certain times people's "default" party may not fit their country or individual needs. Political scientist Key (1942) theorizes that people look at the last presidential term and reflect whether they want the last four years to represent their next four years. In other words people try to "predict" the next four years by looking over the last four years of administration. The incumbent president's approval rating is often a good indicator of the political party who will be elected next. If a president from party X is very well liked then normally party X is going to be voted into office. However, if President X has very low ratings than it's more likely that another party will take office.

In conclusion, the more that political parties attempt to mobilize youth voters the more likely they are to show up on Election Day. When people have a real self-interest and investment in a party and or candidate they are much more likely to show up on Election Day.

Media

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The media can be very influential in the decision making of potential voters. As time progresses and the media changes forms people also change their preferences in how they learn about elections. Ideally the media's main goal is to present voters with quality, relevant information to help people learn about their options in terms of candidates, parties, and ideological platforms.

The intake of traditional media forms, such as newspapers and nightly news broadcasts is down in most industrialized nations (Wattenberg, 2008). Youth voters today are less likely to read newspapers daily (both in print and online) and are less likely to turn into nightly news broadcasts than youth from generations past. As these two forms of media as often deemed as the "best" ways to learn about campaigns younger voters are now more likely to have a disconnect from the traditional day-to-day stories of an election season (Wattenberg, 2008).

Today's generation of youth voters is more likely to have a general disconnect from campaigns due to their personal media habits. In today's world there are many forms of media distractions (recordings of television, several channel choices, selective internet use) younger voters are almost inherently more likely to skip out on traditional sources where they can learn about campaigns (Wattenberg, 2008).

As authors Fowler-Franklin and Goldstein (1996) explain the media uses two tactics, called priming and framing in order to influence voters. Priming occurs when people receive information about a topic and when asked about a topic they are likely to repeat the information that they just learned about from the media. With political campaigns the media has the power to "prime" the public into believing certain topics or events are important regardless of their true relevance to the campaign. Similarly the media has the power to not talk about certain topics which discourages people to talk about certain topics.

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Framing occurs when the manner in which a topic is presented influences the way that people view the topic. This can influence how people interpret certain topics in either positive or negative manners (Franklin and Goldstein, 1996).

These two tactics are very important when discussing college voters. Worldwide younger generations are more likely to pay attention to news that is relevant to them (Wattenberg, 2008). When media presents information that suggests that elections are relevant to youth needs this provides a spark for youth to learn about the election.

Similar to how there is a disconnect between political parties and young voters there is also a general disconnect from the media and the youth. Since the youth is less likely to engage in more traditional forms of media the traditional media is much more likely to try and address news stories that interest older voters. By appealing to older generations the media is almost guaranteed more viewers and can make more of a profit. The “unpredictable” nature of the youth leaves media from addressing news stories that the youth want or need to hear about. Since people are more likely to pay attention to media that is relevant to them the youth is often left out of learning from main-streamed media sources (Wattenberg, 2008).

As author Holbrook (2006) explains, the media often compares presidential campaign coverage to horse races because the candidates are always “ahead” or “behind” one another in the polls. This lack of informative media prevents youth from gathering important information to help them decide to vote in elections—but still ensures that media obtains a large profit.

Social Media

There are currently hundreds of millions of Facebook accounts, Twitter users and several billion cell phone users

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worldwide. As the technology for social networking becomes more global the more that social networking devices become intertwined into societies worldwide. As these forms of networking become more intertwined into society the more politicians are using them as a way to reach out to younger voters (Soule and Naime, 2009). Reading newspapers and watching the news may be down for youth voters, however, social networking usage has increased greatly. In many ways social networking has become both of a form of advertisement and media during election seasons. Candidates from both Costa Rica and the United States have used social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to update people on their campaigns. As previously stated, people are more likely to invest in a campaign that promotes their self interest and social networking sites certainly spark youth's interest in ways that other forms of media have failed to do recently.

Religion

In both Costa Rica and the United States religion remains a major influence in today's politics. Church related issues such as abortion, in-vitro fertilization, birth control regulations, and gay marriage remain very prominent in political agendas (Chalker, 1996). Consequently these topics are often on the mind of the public when deciding to vote.

Each religion has distinct beliefs and distinct view on talking about politics. Therefore "religious people" or "religious influences" are very broad term because of the different beliefs that people have (Kelly and Kelly, 2005).

The influence of religious issues correlates with a person's religious orthodoxy. People are more likely to look for political guidance from their religion (Kelly and Kelly, 2005). Likewise, the

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less religious a person is the less likely they are to find political messages from their religion.

Determining someone's orthodoxy can be described as how often a person attends services, how often they read and or discuss religious text, and volunteer with their place of worship (Kelly and Kelly, 2005). The more religious a person is the more likely a person is to feel entitled to a set of ideals that they find basis to vote for. On the other side of the spectrum, those claiming no religion or very little religious affiliation are likewise more likely to vote due to a different moral code (Dalton, 2009). Being on the polar end of the religious spectrum encourages people to vote, those who are less polarized are less likely to vote due to their lack of attachment to a religious sect.

Young voters tend to be less religious than older generations. Overall they are less likely to attend religious services on a regular basis (Keeter, 2008). However, social issues that are often very important to college students are also often highly controversial with religious institutions. This means that although students may not deem themselves 'religious' the issues that are deemed 'religious' by society are important to both religious institutions and college students making them indirectly related.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica has often been marveled throughout Central America for its stable democracy and peaceful elections. Located in an area of the world where peaceful democratic elections were rare until the past ten to fifteen years, Costa Rica has been at the forefront of providing a standard of a rare external governmental tranquility. Uncovering how Costa Rica has managed to have a relatively peaceful democracy in an area of the world where stability has been rare is crucial in understanding the Costa Rican society of today.

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Following a brief forty four day Civil War in 1948 Costa Rica has been known for its peaceful tendencies and stable elections in the country. In 1940 Rafael Ángel Calderón was elected president of Costa Rica with nearly 86 percent of the vote. Calderón is accredited with starting the social welfare system that exists in Costa Rica today. A healthcare system, unemployment benefits, the University of Costa Rica, among other things, were started under Calderón's presidency. (Calderón, Figueres and the civil war of 1948, 2007). However, the president's close ties with the Catholic church and 'corrupted policies' were controversial and lead to the Civil War of 1948. The war was held in revolt of controversial presidential elections and was lead by José Figueres Ferrer (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011). Following the war Figueres served as Costa Rica's president on three separate occasions and is thought of as a national hero of Costa Rica. Under the rule of Figueres several changes were made to Costa Rican society. The national military was abolished, women and blacks were given the right to vote, and many sectors of the economy were publicized including banks, health care, and railroads (Watkins, 2011). This history has set the platform for a stable democracy and elections with high governmental involvement very important to voters.

There has been a strong disapproval of privatized industry amongst the Costa Rican population due to a belief that corruption increases with privatization. As recently as 2000 over 100,000 Costa Rican protesters took the streets of San José in protest of the privatization of state owned energy and oil corporations. (Frajman, 2009). In result of the strong distaste of privatization the Costa Rican government has taken a strong role in the civil society of Costa Ricans, or "Ticos."

Social programs, especially education, are very important in Costa Rica's society. As of 2010 nearly 50 percent of the national budget goes towards public education (Culture Grams, 2011). The average Costa Rican, both male and female attends school for 12 years (CIA World Factbook. 2011). Following middle school there is

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an option for students to choose between vocational schools and a more traditional public high school. There are currently six public universities and fifty six private universities in the country (Long, 2011).

Although the Costa Rican educational system is very advanced and a high education is very much valued throughout the country, there are still several faults to the system. Private high schools are becoming increasingly popular amongst the wealthiest of Costa Ricans, which help prepare for the very prestigious public universities. Advocates for lower classed Costa Ricans, such as Silvia Castro, suggest that this system is proving to be progressively more unequal as only privately educated students are accepted to public universities leaving publicly educated lower class citizens to attend private universities. The problem with this system, according to Castro, is that public universities are significantly more economical than private universities which mean that wealthy citizens have to pay less tuition for being accepted to the public universities leaving less wealthy citizens having to pay for high priced private institutions (Long, 2011). These problems help set up the stage for the type of college students that will be studied in this project.

The official state religion of Costa Rica is Catholicism. 76.3 percent of the population is Catholic, 13.7 percent Evangelicals, 1.3 percent Jehovah's Witnesses, with the additional 8.7 percent classified as "minority religions" (CIA World Factbook, 2011).

It is widely known that Costa Rican politicians must be Catholic despite the Costa Rican government being 'secular.' Candidates are very unlikely to speak out about religious issues and very rarely stray away from the church on issues such as gay marriage, IFV, and abortion.

In addition to the three branches of the Costa Rican federal government is a separate Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (Supreme

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Court of Elections) or TSE. According to Article 102 in the Constitution of Costa Rica the Tribunal is responsible for some of the following things: “to provoke popular elections,” to ensure that people can freely vote, “to issue the declaration of President and Vice-President of Costa Rica,” and overseeing any legislation dealing with electoral ruling (1965).

The Tribunal is accredited with ensuring fair and free elections in the country by using very strict regulations in regards to the media that covers elections and topics that are discussed during campaigns. Certain controversial topics, such as abortion, are viewed as inappropriate for candidates to discuss during election season. The media is not allowed to cover “personal gossip” about candidates and must stick to campaign designated issues to inform voters. (Chalker, 1996). Despite these strict rules the media still strays away from the unbiased media that they are perceived to be.

Presidents are allowed to serve one consecutive four year term. However, Nobel Peace Prize winner Óscar Arias Sánchez served two non-consecutive terms: the first time in 1986-1990, and the second from 2006-2010. Presidential candidates are not allowed to serve as vice president in the year leading up to elections.

Costa Rica’s society currently encourages a multi-party electoral system. El Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) has been known as a prominent party in the country since its foundation in 1949 (Chalker, 1995). Since then nine out of seventeen presidents have come from the PLN. Despite its dominance the PLN has been defeated by minority parties on several occasions. During the 1990’s through the early 2000’s the country was primarily a bipartisanship in which the PLN and the Partido de Unidad Socialcristiana (PUSC) were the two competing powers. (Chalker, 1995). As recently as 2002 Abel Pacheco de la Espirella was elected president from PAC. However, the corruption scandals and incarcerations of two ex-presidents from the PUSC party during Espirella’s term shook this

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historic 'two party' system in the country and lead to the opportunity of a multi-party system.

This corruption scandal prompted former president Arias to run for an unprecedented second term, which he won in 2006. During his tenure as president Arias was a main advocate for a proposition of a free trade agreement with the United States and other Central American countries (referred to as CAFTA in English but most commonly referred to as TLC in Costa Rica). TLC sparked much debate throughout the country which lead lawmakers to decide to put TLC up to vote in early 2007. The TLC referendum passed with 51.2% "in favor" and 48.1% voting "against" (Rodriguez, Barrantes, 2008).

The most recent presidential election was held on February 7, 2010 when Laura Chinchilla Miranda (PLN) was elected as the first female president of Costa Rica. The president formerly served as one of Costa Rica's two vice presidents and is the hand-picked successor of Arias (Goldfarb, 2010). Chinchilla won the election with 46% of the vote defeating opponents Ottón Solís of the Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC) who garnered 25% of the vote, and Otto Guevara of the Movimiento Libertario (ML) who won 20% of the vote. (Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones, 2010) "La presidenta" as she's commonly referred, ran on a platform of "firmness and honesty" and focused on national "at home" issues (Goldfarb 2010).

Although there are few statistics available about specifically about college students available at the time of this study, it is believed that despite winning 46% of the national vote Chinchilla did not fare well with youth voters, with Ottón Solís(PAC) being the preferred candidate of the youth. Despite the youth population representing 40% of the total population they only represent 30% of the total vote in the 2010 elections (Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones, 2010).

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There are approximately 4.5 million residents of Costa Rica (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Despite a law passed in 1959 that voting in elections was mandatory voter turnout is relatively low in comparison to other Central American countries (Chalker, 1995). In the 2010 elections only 2.8 million citizens voted for president. 535,888 of these voters came from people ages 18-24 (Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones, 2010). Many of Costa Rica's governmental organizations are working to try and curb the low turnout by educating and encouraging the youth to take part in elections. Organizations such as El Instituto de Formación y Estudios en Democracia, Agenda Joven, El Consejo Nacional de Política Pública de la Persona Joven and offer classes, conferences opportunities about citizen participation in society and elections for Ticos to attend.

United States

The United States' society has promoted a stable democracy as well as fair and free elections for most of the country's existence. Understanding the basics of presidential elections and voter motivations in the United States is crucial in understanding college voters of today.

The United States holds presidential elections every four years with candidates allowed to run for two consecutive terms equaling eight years. The United States has two primary political parties: the Democrats and Republicans. These two parties have split the presidential office since the mid 1800's (Gill, 2010). Democrats are considered to be more "left wing:" socially liberal and fiscally conservative while the Republicans are more "right wing:" socially conservative and fiscally neo-liberal.

Up until World War II Americans voted primarily on economics based issues. When a certain party's economic ideals matched that of the public then that party was voted into power, and

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when that ideology no longer matched the majority of the people than the opposing party took over. However, after World War II voting motivations became much more complicated as the needs of voters changed (Patterson, 2006). The standard of living increased throughout the United States and, as political theorist Inglehart (2000) explains, as standard of living increases the complexity of needs also increases. Since the majority of Americans had the “basics” such as housing, jobs, and food covered the public could focus on more complex issues such as civil rights, foreign policy, and abortion.

In response to this increasingly complexity political parties were forced to further their stances on non-economics based topics. The new stances of political parties often meant that people had to choose between their old political party, which often did not reflect their new social beliefs, and the other political party which better represented their social needs. Some people chose to stay with their pre-existing political party, even though it no longer fit their economic needs, to keep with social norms and because of their party loyalty to that party. Others decided to switch parties to parties that better fit their needs. There was also a large part of the population that became unsure on what the new party stances were and gave up on caring about politics (Patterson, 2006).

This period of complexity in the United States is important to understand because, as previously stated, younger voters tend to be less informed on party platforms and affiliations. College voters therefore have the ‘disadvantage’ of being young and therefore less informed in addition to growing up in a society where a large part of the population was unable to identify party platforms (Patterson, 2006). This confused society further complexes youth’s ability to identify with a party. Without clearly stated answers to questions like ‘What does it mean to be a Republican or a Democrat?; Is there really a difference between the two (plus) parties?; Does one of these parties really represent me and my beliefs?’ youth, as well as many

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other members of society struggle for an affiliation that could help guide them to make a voting decision.

When youth voters do choose to identify with political parties they vote overwhelmingly and increasingly for Democrats. (Soule and Naime, 2009) Younger voters tend to be more socially liberal and more trusting of their government in comparison to older generations. (Keeter, 2008) These traits tend to work in favor for the Democratic Party.

When learning about presidential elections American youths are more likely to follow 24/7 broadcast channels such as CNN, FOX, MSNBC instead of nightly local media broadcasts than older generations. Due to the busy schedules of today's youth it is often easier for students to tune in to watching a brief clip on a cable channel throughout the day instead of sticking to a concrete time of watching the news every day (Wattenberg, 2008). The problem with the cable news in the United States is that it is often biased, and the information that is presented is often little more than headlines. Cable news aims to make money and to keep costs low (Wattenberg, 2008) This often means repeating the same story over and over regardless of its relevance. As Holbrook (2006) explains, the media often compares presidential campaign coverage to horse races because the candidates are always "ahead" or "behind" one another in the polls. This lack of informative media prevents youth from gathering important information to help them decide to vote in elections.

Religion is becoming an increasingly polarized issue in the United States. As of 2011 the country is 51% Protestant, 23.9% Roman Catholic, 12% unaffiliated, 1.7% Mormon, 1.6% Jewish and other minority religions representing the remaining 9% of voters. (CIA World Fact book 2011). Although the US Constitution promotes a separation between church and state religion still plays a large role in politics in many parts of the country. There is an

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increasing divide between those who consider themselves very religious and those who renounce religion all together.

III Research Design

Focus

This project is focused on decision making. My research question is based on a college student's decision to vote in a presidential election and the process in which they came to make that decision.

Methods:

I use both quantitative and qualitative data in my research. I have used the concurrent triangulation strategy in which both quantitative and qualitative information is collected simultaneously and studied to see if there are similarities and or differences in the data collected (Creswell, 2009).

Questionnaires will primarily be used to collect my quantitative data. Demographics and basic information concerning religion, party affiliation, media and social capital consumption will be discussed on the questionnaires. (See Appendix A) In certain cases questionnaires will be a way for me to determine whether a person fits my sample, an undergraduate university student who voted in the previous presidential election, as well as provide a screening process for follow up questions in either an informal or a formal interview.

The most conducive place to do my research was on college campuses. By Gaining access and receiving permission to do my research through student organizations or academic departments at universities I can conduct research and around Boston, the United States and San José, Costa Rica. I intend on handing out 350 questionnaires with a 1/3 return rate success rate. I will deem a

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questionnaire to be successful if it is completed by a college student who voted in the election.

Both formal and informal interviews are necessary for obtaining qualitative data. Formal interviews with college students will most likely be in the form of conversations and will serve as a basis to screen respondents to see if they fit the sample as well to learn basic qualitative information. Certain interviewees may be contacted again for more formal in-depth interviews. I plan on conducting a minimum of 10 formal interviews and 15-20 informal interviews with college students.

Additionally I plan on having formal interviews with various experts related to my research. I'd like to conduct interviews with people such as local church youth group leaders, organizations that aim to increase voter turnout, research experts, campaign workers etc. in order to learn about the information that was presented to college students during the election season. I would like to conduct between three and five of these formal interviews. I plan on gaining access to these experts by contacting both governmental and non-governmental organizations related to youth voting and referrals.

Documentary analysis will come in the form of analyzing election information that was available for college students during election season. This will include examining campaign propaganda, newspaper, TV broadcasts, and advertisement clips, pamphlets etc. that were accessed by college students. I plan on gaining access to these materials through university research institutes.

Research Methods by Sub-question

Demographics

All questions can be answered via questionnaires or informal interviews.

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Media

- 1) *What are the media consumption habits of college students?* This answer can be answered by questionnaire, interviews with college students, and document analysis of media consumption of college students.
- 2) *What is the political content of these media outlets?* Document analysis of media coverage will be needed to answer this question.
 - a. *How does the media portray political parties?* Document analysis of media coverage will be needed to answer this question.
 - b. *How does the media portray presidential candidates?* Document analysis of media coverage will be needed to answer this question.
 - c. *How do political parties/presidential candidates campaign via the media?* Documentary analysis of candidates in the media will be necessary to answer this question, as well as formal interviews with people directly related political parties and/or candidates about campaigning through the media.
 - i. *Is this campaigning accessed by college students?*
Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 3) *How do college students perceive political content through these media outlets?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 4) *How does the media influence college students decision to vote?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.

Party Affiliation

- 1) *What are the political affiliations of college students?* Questionnaires or informal interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 2) *What are the political affiliations of the families of college students?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.

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- a. *Does the party affiliation of the family of college student influence their decision to vote?* Interviews can be used to answer this question.
 - 3) *What are the political affiliations of the friends of college students?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
 - a. *Does the party affiliation of the friends of college student influence their decision to vote?* Interviews can be used to answer this question.
 - 4) *Do political parties try to mobilize college students?* Document analysis, interviews with college students and or experts can be used to answer this question.
 - a. *How do political parties try to mobilize college students?* Document analysis, interviews with college students and or experts can be used to answer this question.
 - b. *What causes changes of political parties of college students?* Document analysis and interviews with experts can be used to answer this question.
 - c. *How effective is party mobilization?* Document analysis, interviews with college students and or experts can be used to answer this question.

Religion

- 1) *What is/ are the prominent religions among college students?* Questionnaires or interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 2) *What are the religious practices of college students?* Interviews can be used to answer this question.
- 3) *What political content is discussed during religious practices?* Questionnaires or interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.

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- a. *How are presidential elections portrayed by religious organizations?*
Interviews with college students and documentary analysis can be used to answer this question.
 - b. *How are candidates portrayed by religious organizations?*
Interviews with college students and documentary analysis can be used to answer this question.
 - c. *How are candidates and or parties campaign through religious organizations?* Interviews with college students and/or experts, and documentary analysis can be used to answer this question.
 - i. *Is this form of campaigning accessed by students?*
Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 4) *How are students interpreting political content through religious organizations?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
 - 5) *How are these interpretations influencing college students to vote?*
Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.

Social Capital

- 1) *What are the social media habits of college students?* This answer can be answered by questionnaire, interviews with college students, and document analysis of social media consumption of college students.
- 1) *What is the political content of social media?* Document analysis of social media can be used to answer this question.
- 2) *How do political parties/presidential candidates campaign via social media?*
Document analysis and interviews with experts as well as college students can be used to answer this question.
 - a. *Is this campaigning accessed by college students?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 3) *How does social media influence college student's decisions to vote?*
Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.

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- 4) *What organizations do college students belong to?* Interviews with college students can be used to answer this question.
- 5) *How are candidates perceived by student organizations?* Interviews and document analysis with college students can be used to answer this question.

IV Hypothesis

It is likely that certain demographic measures, media, party affiliation, religion, and social media will influence college students' decision to vote in presidential elections. Although there will be varying influence in both countries of these cultural factors I hypothesize that all five will be important factors.

Demographics:

Certain demographic measures are likely to influence voter turnout of college students in Costa Rica and in the United States. Socioeconomic level, major, and gender are likely to influence the youth's decision to vote in both countries.

In both Costa Rica and the United States the influence of familial values is also likely to influence college student's decision to vote.

Media

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Due to the varying standards and regulations of media outlets in Costa Rica and the United States it is likely that the media has different influences on the decision making of college students. Due to the extensive regulation by the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones in Costa Rica it is likely that there is overall objective coverage of the presidential elections. This objectivity will probably mean that college students have a high level of trust of the media and therefore are positively influenced to vote by the media.

The lack of regulation of the United States media means that there will likely be more subjective coverage of the presidential election. The extensive subjectivity will likely have a polarizing effect on college students with some students being reassured about their thoughts with the media and being more likely to vote as well as students who have a high level of distrust of the media and therefore are not influenced positively to vote due to the media.

Party Affiliation

The sense of community that comes with a party affiliation will mean that party affiliation will have a positive influence in deciding to vote in both Costa Rica and the United States.

Due to the typical “coming of voting age” being older than my sample in Costa Rica it is likely that there is not a very strong sense of party ideologies amongst college students. Those who are associated with a political party will likely be influenced positively to vote in presidential elections however it is unlikely that students have strong political party attachments.

In the United States youth voters are more likely to stray from the most popular political parties. However, an overwhelming amount of college students said they cared about which party won the presidency. This means that it is likely that college students do not have strong party affiliations but are still influenced by the party affiliations of presidential candidates. Therefore it is likely that

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personal political party affiliations or attachments are influenced by presidential candidate's party affiliation to vote.

Due to the young age of the sample studied in this project it is likely that family's past voting history and their level of civic involvement will influence student's decisions to vote.

Religion

In Costa Rica it is likely that college students who consider themselves "religious" are more likely to vote due to the community empowerment that comes with belonging with a religious organization. Neither the presidential candidates' religion nor stances on religious issues are likely to influence college students to vote due to the homogeneity of religious affiliation of candidates.

In the United States it is likely that college students who consider themselves "extremely religious" and "extremely non-religious" are likely to be influenced by religion when deciding to vote in presidential elections. Those who consider themselves "extremely religious" are likely to have a sense of community as well as many religious issues that encourage them to vote in presidential elections. Those who consider themselves "extremely non-religious" are also likely to be influenced by their stance on often controversial religious issues to vote in elections. The religious affiliation of presidential candidates' is likely to have a positive influence on voter turnout due to the lack of homogeneity of candidates' religions.

Social Media

It is likely that social media outlets greatly influence college students to vote in presidential elections in both Costa Rica and the United States. Social media platforms address the youth directly and therefore encourages them to vote in elections.

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In Costa Rica, it is likely that college students who were contacted via social networking websites were more likely to vote in the presidential election.

In the United States it is likely that college students who were directly contacted via social media were more likely to vote in the presidential election. Whether this contact comes from candidates, campaign workers, volunteers, or peers the encouragement of voter turnout is very likely to have a positive link with deciding to vote in the election.

V Results

Costa Rica

This research is based on both quantitative and qualitative data which was gathered through questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. The sample includes 185 questionnaires, 16 formal student interviews (14 face to face, one via phone, one via email), three formal expert interviews, documentary analysis of Costa Rican newspapers and scholarly literature, in addition to participation observations in classrooms and around college campuses.

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All questionnaires were administered in person by the researcher on the following college campuses: La Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR), La Universidad Latina at the San Pedro Campus (U. Latina), and El Tecnológico de Costa Rica (TEC). Participants were pooled via access to six college classes, random sampling at college campuses, and referrals.

Student interviews were conducted in person, via email, and via the phone. Expert interviews were conducted both in person, and via Skype. Participation observation took place in and around college campuses in San Pedro (UCR and U. Latina) and Cartago (TEC).

The duration of this study took place in January through April of 2012. At the beginning of the study U Latina was the only college campus sampled that had begun regular semester classes. TEC began classes in February, and UCR held “summer” classes through February before starting a full semester of classes in March. The University of Costa Rica and the surrounding areas of San Pedro are a hub of college life regardless of where students were enrolled which made the area an excellent backdrop for this research. The late start of regular semester classes at UCR, in addition to week-long vacation for Holy Week, limited student participation.

Questionnaire generated data

The questionnaire included nine demographic questions, four religion based questions, three political party affiliation based questions, five media consumption based questions, four social media based questions, and an open ended question about their overall decision to vote.

Demographics

A total of 185 Costa Rican college students took the questionnaire. Table 1 shows a breakdown of youth broken down by

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whether or not they were in college³ at the time of the 2012 election. For the remainder of this analysis there will be an analysis of the 72% of respondents that stated they were college voters at the time of the election. 51% of respondents were female, and 49% male. Students were surveyed by eleven different universities, with several students saying they were enrolled at two different universities at the time of the election. The majority of voting students surveyed, 69%, stated that they attended UCR (and possibly another university simultaneously). Student's ages at the time of the election ranged from 18-36 with the average age of students being 20 years old. Students ranging from over thirty different majors were surveyed.

Religion

Approximately 58% of voting college students responded they identify as Catholic, 23% responded as identifying as Atheists or without religion, 11% identify as Evangelicals, and 7% identify as another religion. Respondents were asked on a five point Likert scale to define both the importance of religion in their life and the importance that voting had in their decision to vote. Table-2 shows the responses to these questions. Approximately 69% of students felt that religion had importance in their lives, however only 14% of respondents believe that religion influenced their decision to vote.

Political Party Affiliation

Students were asked both if they had a party affiliation and, if they did, what that party affiliation was. 22% of students declared that they did have a political party affiliation, with 78% declaring that they did not have a party affiliation. However, given the possibility that students assumed that the question meant to ask if they had an

³ Students who answered that they were *matriculada* (registered for classes) at the time of the election were counted as college voting students. The February 7th election occurred before the start of semester at many universities.

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official⁴ political party affiliation 27% of students responded to the question “what is your political party affiliation” with the name of a party. Of the thirty one voters who said they had an affiliation nearly half (47%) said they were members of PAC, 26% identified as members of PLN, and the remaining 27% stated they were members of five smaller political parties.

Media

Students were asked several questions about their media consumption habits. Specifically, they were asked about what types of media they used (if any) to learn about the election, how frequently these media forms were accessed, and if that media had any influence

on their decision to vote. Table-3 shows the results of how frequently students learned about the election. The most frequent response to the question was weekly with 44% of respondents saying they used a media source weekly to learn about the election. The vast majority of students (89%) used some sort of media form at least once a month to learn about the election. Most students used more than one media source. Table 4 demonstrates the different types of media that students used to learn about the election. National television news and paper newspapers were the majority media sources with 68% and 53% of students stating they used those two sources respectively. When responding with what sources of media there was a varied response, however the following sources were the most cited by students: Canal 7 “Teletica” News (television broadcast), La Nación (countrywide newspaper), Canal 6 “Repretel” (television broadcast), Canal 13 (television broadcast), Semanario Universidad (college newspaper), and Al Dia (countrywide newspaper).

Social Media

⁴ Costa Ricans must enroll with a political party in order to have an ‘official’ party affiliation. This enrollment often includes a monetary fee.

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Students were asked several questions about their social media consumption habits in relation to the election. 41% of students stated that they never used any form of social media to learn about the election. Of the remaining 59% of students many of them used multiple forms of social media in order to learn about the election. Table 5 shows the breakdown of how many students responded to using different forms of social media. Even though only 51% of total students chose to use Facebook as a form of social media to learn about the election 87% of students who used social media to learn about the election used the social networking site. Of the students who used social media websites to learn about the election the majority of students, 49% used some sort of social media site daily, 31% weekly, and the rest either monthly or yearly.

Other

Students were asked an open-ended question regarding what “other” factors, besides the ones previously discussed, influenced their decision to vote in the election. There was a wide range of answers; however, many of them were repeated rather frequently. 38 students stated that the specific candidate, political party of the candidate or the *propuesta* (government proposal/plan) of either the candidate or party influenced their decision to vote. 29 students answered that the political history and or climate of the country influenced their decision to vote. More specifically, students answered that it was their “duty to vote” as told by the history of Costa Rican elections, and many students referenced the climate following the passage of TLC in 2006. Students said both that they “wanted to continue the work had already been started” by the previous administration, and that they “wanted change” from the previous administration. Fourteen students stated that *familiares* (family, friends, and members of the community) were influential in their decision to vote.

Data Generated by Interviews

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Dr. Ciska Raventós Vorst is a renowned University of Costa Rica researcher, professor, and author of the state-supported study *Abstencionistas en Costa Rica; ¿Quiénes son y por qué no votan?* (Abstainers in Costa Rica: Who are they and why don't they vote?) Dr. Raventós spoke about how the political and civic history and context of the country are sources of pride and motivation for Costa Rican voters (personal communication, April 2012). According to Dr. Raventós the TSE can be thanked for ensuring the competitiveness of elections in the country that keep potential voters interested. “Not everyone has opposition (to the largest political party) and we do. If we don't have the TSE we may lose that opposition.”

The pride of elections is instilled from an early age which helps inform youth about what it means to vote at a very early age. Interviews with Dr. Raventós, Gina Sibaja who is a professor at UCR and the author of a currently unpublished thesis about adolescent political participation and perceptions, and Mariela Castro who works both as a professor at UCR and as a member of the Training and Research of Democracy Division at the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones revealed that high schools in the country are set up with mock elections tools through the TSE that instill a feeling of nationalism and pride that students live in a peaceful democracy (Personal communication, April, 2012).

University students Ramon, César, and Carolina agree that the instilment of civic values whether it be in class or by a person or event in their life, is vital in students decisions to vote. Carolina and César both grew up in families where the importance of voting was very important. Ramon said that he wasn't “very interested in politics” but voted because the act “affected everyone” (Personal communication, March 2012). César, while being a political science major himself, stressed that many of his peers vote because it's a societal norm (Personal communication, March, 2012). Given the changing of party values and society's perceptions of corruption in politics many people are confused by what candidates and political parties stand for. César insists that Costa Ricans vote because it's

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“they're told to vote and they do it just because they can.”

In terms of active mobilization efforts aimed for youth there are limited efforts. Andrés, a college student, said that the TSE is the only non-partisan entity that encourages youth, and the overall population, to vote (Personal communication, March 2012). Each political party has a “youth sector” that is run by young members of political parties that work to inform like-minded students of party ideals. But as student Leticia puts it there are students who are “very involved but the majority are not very interested in political parties” (Personal communication, April, 2012). This extreme leads to only a small, select percentage of the student population to be influenced by youth sectors of political parties.

Political parties and the TSE started using social media sources such as YouTube and Facebook to contact and encourage student voting but few interviewees said that they accessed these pages to learn about the election.

Media sources were overall viewed as a way to learn about who to vote *for* but did not necessarily only the act of voting. Professor Castro said that the TSE ran television and radio advertisements encouraging voting but they were the only media entity doing so (Personal communication, April 2012). David, a student, said that different media sources had various levels of portraying different parties and candidates equally for the population to learn about. “Telenoticias gave equal time to different parties for debates and for the most part portrayed the parties equally.” National newspapers could not officially endorse a candidate or party per the TSE but it was widely believed that certain candidates and parties were given preferential coverage over others.

Religion was a sensitive topic amongst interviewees and few students believed that religion was influential in their vote. Carolina said that although her Catholic faith is “very important” in her life that it had “no influence in her decision to vote.” Furthermore, she said that her church leaders “encouraged voting” but did not specifically endorse or encourage a specific candidate to vote for

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(Personal communication, April 2012). Dr. Raventós and Professor Sibajas emphasize that there has been an inexplicable increase in the polarization between very religious and a-religious students. Despite an increase in “religious” students Dr. Raventós says that students may be unaware, or unwilling to believe in the political influences of their religious affiliations.

United States

This research is based on both quantitative and qualitative data which was gathered through interviews, questionnaires, document analysis, and participant observations. The sample includes 90 questionnaires, 8 formal student interviews, document analysis of US newspapers, websites, and literature, in addition to participant observation in classrooms and around college campuses.

Questionnaires were administered in two ways: either in person by the researcher or via a GoogleDocs survey administered online. Participants were pooled via the contact of six on-campus clubs and organizations, classes, and referrals.

Although document analysis and participant observation could happen before the November 6th election however interviews and questionnaires could not be administered until after the election took place. The brevity of time between the election and the final submission of this research for academic credit limited student participation.

Questionnaire generated data

The questionnaire included eight demographic questions, two religion questions, six party affiliation questions, five social capital questions, four media questions, and an open ended question about their overall decision to vote.

Demographics

A total of 90 Boston-area college students took the questionnaire. All respondents who took the questionnaire were college students at the time of the election. Table-5 is a breakdown of voters and non-voters for respondents who took the survey in

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person and online.

74% of students who were surveyed voted in the election. Of respondents who voted 72% were female. Students were surveyed from a total of 14 Boston area schools. The range of ages of students was 18-22 with the average age of voters being 20(19.96) years old. Students from 17 Boston area schools were surveyed.

Religion

Out of the 67 respondents who identified as voters 36% identified as Catholic, 25% identified as Christian(Other), 24% identified as atheist, and the remaining 15% identified as other religions. Respondents were asked on a five point Likert scale to describe how important religion is in their life. Table 6 outlines the importance of religion in students' lives. Approximately half of students stated that religion was important in their lives, with the other half declaring that religion was unimportant.

Political Party Affiliation

Students were asked to define their political party affiliation and 43% of student voters defined themselves as a Democrat, 31% independents, 22% Republicans, and four percent identified as members of smaller parties. 55% of students stated that they were contacted directly by a political campaign. Some students were contacted by more than one campaign, any all students who were contacted by "smaller" parties, such as the Libertarian Party and the Green Party, were also contacted by one of the "larger" parties, either Republicans, Democrats, or both. Of students who were contacted by the "larger campaigns" there was a 50/50 split between who was contacted by Democrats and who was contacted by Republicans.⁵ Table 7 is a comparison of how important students felt that party affiliation was to their vote by who was contacted by a political party

⁵ The question asked whether or not students were contacted personally by campaigns but the question may have be interpreted as asking if the student personally contacted political campaigns themselves to receive information.

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and those who were not. There is an equal number of voters who were contacted by a political party and those who weren't that believed their party affiliation had an important impact on their decision to vote. Of those who were contacted by a political party 15% believe that their party affiliation was unimportant while 27% who were not contacted by a political party did not believe that their party affiliation was important in their decision to vote.

Students were also asked whether or not they believed their candidate could win the election. 76% of students surveyed believed that their candidate could win the election, 18% said they didn't know if their candidate could win, and six percent did not believe their candidate would win.

Media

Students were asked several questions about their media consumption habits. Specifically they were asked about what types of media they used to learn about the election, how frequently they learned about the election, specific names of media used to learn about the election and the importance of media in their decision to vote. Table 8 demonstrates how frequently students used media to learn about the election. The majority of students used some form of media daily to learn about the election, and nearly 79% of voters used media to learn about the election at least once a week. Table 9 shows the percentage of students who used different forms of media to learn about the election. National news and social media were the most frequent form of media used by students with 84% and 73% of students using them respectively. When responding with what specific forms of media were used there was a varied response, however the following sources were most cited by students: Foxnews (National TV and online), posts on Facebook, posts on Twitter, CNN (National TV and online), New York Times (in print and online), boston.com (online), debates (accessed both on TV and on YouTube),

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candidate websites(online), NBC(national and local TV).

Social Capital

Students were asked about whether or not their parents and friends voted in the presidential election. 90% of voters stated that at least one of their parents voted in the election, 4% stating that neither of their parents voted, and 6% stating they weren't sure if their parents voted. All respondents said that at least some of their friends voted in the election. 46% of students believed that their friends and family were at least somewhat important in their decision to vote, 51% believed their friends and family were unimportant in their decision to vote, and 4% of voters did not answer the question.

Other

Students were asked an open-ended question regarding what “other factors,” in addition to those previously discussed, influenced their decision to vote. There was a wide range of answers; however many of them were repeated frequently. Twelve students stated that they voted because of a particular issue that they believed would be impacted because of the election. For example, some students stated they voted because of “social issues” such as “healthcare reform, gay rights, and women reproductive rights,” others stated that the “debt of the country” greatly influenced their vote. Ten students stated that since voting was their civic right they felt the need to vote in the election. Answers included “it’s my civic duty,” “I felt that I should as a citizen of age,” and “it was a right that was fought for and I want to uphold that right.” Seven students stated that they voted because of the specific candidate. Answers included “the plans of the candidates for our country,” “I wanted Obama out of office,” “I worked for a political campaign,” and “because Obama helped hurricane victims.”

Data gathered by interviews

The researcher conducted eight formal student interviews and had many informal interviews following the 2012 election. All

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students interviewed were voting in their first presidential election and had various reasons to be voting in the election.

All students interviewed expressed that even if they had wanted to not learn about the election they had to because of the constant forms of media that were displaying information about the election. Nancy, a college student, made a point to say that even though she frequently read newspapers and watched the news online that the online and cultural presence of campaign information kept her constantly informed (Personal communication, December 2012). She stated that the cultural presence on “YouTube, Saturday Night Live, and Late Night Talk shows” helped humanize candidates for her and made her more likely to feel comfortable voting for them. Another college student, Tina, said that the constant stream of information caused her to stop using social media websites in the time surrounding the election because there was “too much information” from people who “all of a sudden considered themselves to be political experts” (Personal communication, November 2012).

There was a range of party affiliation amongst interviewees: three were Democrats, two Republican, one Libertarian, and two independents. Many interviewees felt that the race was very close which increased pressure to vote in the election. As one student, Mindi, described it the race was “neck and neck” so although she didn’t believe her vote mattered in the election it was “important to have her voice heard.”

Some of the students interviewed described themselves as “religious” however many of the issues that are deemed ‘religious’ by American society were important to them. Mindi stated that she voted because she cared about “women’s health related issues” such as “birth control and access to Planned Parenthood.” Candidate and party stances on specific “religious issues” were often mentioned when describing students reasoning for voting. Other students, like

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Colin and Bert stated that they're religious and it's possible that the morality of their religion influenced their decision but they're "not sure" if that's the case (Personal communication, 2012) That being said, the candidates religious affiliation was not viewed as very important. When speaking to Tina, who was a Republican, about the candidates themselves she admitted that she did not know of former Governor Romney's religion until after the election.

All students interviewed said that they discussed the election with their family, friends, and peers. Many of the students encouraged their friends to vote but said that they "just didn't care" about politics and therefore did not vote. Students Tina and Nancy said that they grew up in households that were very civically active which definitely influenced their voting habits. Both said that their parents were present when they registered to vote. Tina also said that her mother, who is also a Republican, would inform her about how the Republican candidate would influence her life personally. That being said, not all students had such a civically active household. Students Bert, Colin, and Mindi said that although their parents voted the election was not frequently discussed at home.

VI Discussion of Findings

Costa Rica

Demographics

I originally hypothesized that demographics factor such as age, and gender would influence a person's decision to vote. Except for the obvious conclusion that college students who were of voting age were more likely to vote in the elections than students who were not of voting age proved true, the wide range of ages of college students showed little influence in voting decisions.

I had hypothesized that gender would be an important influence due to the first viable female candidate, and then president, of the country. This hypothesis was essentially a non-factor in students' decisions. Only one student surveyed stated that the gender of the candidate⁶ had a role in her decision to vote. Although it is possible that more students were influenced by their gender the researcher is able to conclude that gender did not influence students' decisions to vote.

Party Affiliation

I hypothesized that students with a party affiliation would be more likely to vote than students without a party affiliation. In some ways this hypothesis proved true, as all students who identified of having a party affiliation did indeed vote. However, the process of declaring a political party affiliation in Costa Rica is one that often includes a monetary commitment deterred many students who may have otherwise have had declared an affiliation. Therefore, although having a party affiliation greatly increases a student's chances of voting, the likelihood of students having an affiliation is so low that party affiliation can be deemed a minor factor in students' decisions to vote.

Religion

I hypothesized that students who described themselves as "very religious" would be influenced by their religion when deciding

⁶ The student wrote the word *candidata* which insinuates a female candidate

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to vote. Data collected from students would suggest that religion had very little influence on their decision to vote, however the societal influence of religion in Costa Rica suggests otherwise. The “silent but present” role that religion has in Costa Rican society suggests that although students are unlikely to believe they are influenced by religion, it’s likely that religion still has a great “silent but present” role in the decision process of students.

Media

I hypothesized that the strict regulations of the TSE would increase media objectivity and student trust of traditional media sources in the country would help students decide to vote. I can conclude that media sources influence college student’s decision in choosing a candidate and TSE run advertisements and debates helped encourage voting in an unbiased manner. However, there was a very low level of media trusts amongst students who believed that media sources were indeed biased. In fact, since media could not outwardly declare their candidate/party preferences the implicit favoritism of certain parties from many sources decreased student trust greatly. Many students were very critical of media sources for that reason; however it’s unlikely that students were completely uninfluenced by media reports.

Social Capital

I hypothesized that both family and friends would have a great influence in students decision to vote. I can accept my hypothesis that family and friends did indeed have a great influence in students’ decisions to vote in elections. I would go further than my original hypothesis and say that other close but influential people such as teachers, professors, local community leaders, and neighbors also have a positive influence in helping student’s decision making process.

I must reject my hypothesis that social media had a role in student’s decision to vote. The use of social media as a mobilization tool is a relatively new concept in Costa Rica and few people accessed this form of media in reference to the 2010 election.

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United States

Demographics

I originally hypothesized that major, and gender would be likely to influence students decisions to vote. Given the wide range of majors surveyed there is no evidence to say that certain majors vote more than others. 72% of students surveyed were females, however it is possible that females were more likely to answer the survey than males which leaves this result to be rather inconclusive. The average age of college students surveyed was 20 years old which suggests that students were voting in their first election.

Media

I hypothesized that students would be greatly influenced by the media due to the great, known bias of American news but that there would be a high level of distrust of the media. Although many students stated that they were skeptical of the media they tried to learn using different sources with different opinions to make up their decision. Other students suggested that the media was so overwhelming that they tried to avoid the media as much as possible. The large percentage of students that used media at least weekly does suggest that the media, regardless of the content, encouraged students to vote.

Party Affiliation

I hypothesized that students who had a strong party affiliation would be encouraged by their party affiliation to vote. The majority of students did not think that their party affiliation influenced their decision, however in interviews students stated that they did indeed care which party won. So although students may not have an official party affiliation they care enough about party ideals that they wanted a specific party to win.

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I additionally hypothesized that college students would be influenced by a candidate's party affiliation even if the student themselves did not have a party affiliation. There a sense of students along different political ideologies who suggested that they weren't necessarily voting "for" someone or a specific party but instead suggested they voted "against" a person or party. Many students stated that their needs were not necessarily met by candidates but believed that their candidate was the "least of all evils."

As seen in Table-7 students who were not contacted by political parties were less likely to believe that their party affiliation was important in their decision to vote. This data suggests that college students are not 'immune' to mobilization efforts that go against the 'logic' of many political campaigns.

Religion

About half of Boston area students believed that religion was important in their lives but no students interviewed stated that religion influenced their decision to vote. Nevertheless, topics that are often deemed "religious" by American society were very important to student voters. Social issues such as gay marriage and access to birth control were frequently mentioned when talking about voting decisions. This would suggest that there was an underlying religious influence but students were either not willing or unable to see religious influences.

Social Capital

I hypothesized that family voting history would influence students decisions to vote in elections. The vast majority of voting students stated that at least one of their parents voted in the election.

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I further hypothesized that if friends of college students voted in the election that students would also be more likely to vote. All students stated that at least some of their friends voted in the election. Despite voting family and friends students did not believe that their friends and family had a significant impact on their decision to vote. Given that American culture dictates that each person is an individual with individual thoughts and beliefs it's possible that students did not recognize the influence of their friends, family, and peers.

VII Conclusion

I found that that in both the United States and Costa Rica students voted when they believed that it was their civic duty to vote. This project existed in order to find out both where and why students who voted came to the conclusion that their civic duty was important enough to vote.

Students from both countries took pride in their political history and the fact that people fought for their rights to vote and that the fight should be respected via voting. Students from Costa Rica were likely to say their civic education in high school, family, and friends were the factors that instilled this value within them. Students in the United States were likely to say that the media, their family, and their party affiliations 'taught' them that voting was important.

Students from both countries stated that election-specific topics influenced their vote. In Costa Rica the passage of TLC sparked student interest in the 2010 election. In the United States, social issues such as birth control access, gay marriage, and the country's economic status greatly influenced student turnout.

Previous research on the topic of student political participation showed that students did not vote in elections because the topics that were presented by media, political parties, and society

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in general were not relevant to college students and therefore students did not vote.

This research shows that this is true, however if college students are made aware of issues and topics that are relevant to their lives they are more likely to vote. The “catch-22” theory presented by Mark Wattenberg and earlier in this paper stated that political parties did not try to mobilize students because students are not likely to show up to the polls and that students did not vote because they were not made aware of how candidates/parties could positively influence their lives. Although this theory was evident throughout this research there was also evidence presented that suggested that college students are not immune to political mobilization in both the United States and Costa Rica when issues that are relevant to them are presented on a widely-accessed basis.

The concept of college students voting is not something that is ‘impossible’ or should not be done as some experts suggest. An active mobilization campaign by different societal influences: whether it is family and friends, political parties, campaigns, and/or media sources have positively influenced students’ political participation as studied in this research.

Appendix A

Research Question and Sub Questions

What cultural factors influenced undergraduate university students to vote in the most recent presidential election in Boston the United States and San José, Costa Rica?

Demographics

- a) What is the age of college students?
- b) What is the major of college students?
- c) What is the socioeconomic status of college students?
- d) What is the majority gender of college students?

Media

- 1) What are the media consumption habits of college students?
- 2) What is the political content of these media outlets?
 - a. How does the media portray political parties?
 - b. How does the media portray presidential candidates?
 - c. How do political parties/presidential candidates campaign via the media? Is this campaigning accessed by college students?
- 3) How do college students perceive political content through these media outlets?
- 4) Does the media influence college students decision to vote?
 - a. How does the media influence college students to vote?

Party Affiliation

- 1) What are the political affiliations of college students?
- 2) What are the political affiliations of the families of college students?
 - a. Does the party affiliation of the family of college student influence their decision to vote?
- 3) What are the political affiliations of friends of college students?
 - a. Does the party affiliation of friends of college students influence their decision to vote?
- 4) Do political parties try to mobilize college students?
 - a. How do political parties try to mobilize college students?
 - b. How are political parties perceived by college students?

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- c. What causes the changing of political parties by college students?
- d. How effective is party mobilization with college students?

Religion

- 1) What is/are the prominent religions among college students?
- 2) What are the religious practices of college students?
- 3) What political content is discussed during religious practices?
 - d. How are presidential elections portrayed by religious institutions?
 - e. How are candidates portrayed by religious institutions?
 - f. How are candidates and or parties campaign through religious institutions?
 - i. Is this form of campaigning accessed by students?
- 4) How are students interpreting political content through religious organizations?
 - g. How are these interpretations influencing college students to vote?

Social Capital

- 6) What are the social media habits of college students?
 - a. What is the political content of social media?
 - b. How do political parties/presidential candidates campaign via social media?
 - i. Is this campaigning accessed by college students?
 - c. How does social media influence college student's decisions to vote?

Appendix B

Glossary

College voters- students enrolled in an undergraduate post-secondary institution

ML-Movimiento Liberacion (Libertarian Movement) right-of-center Costa Rican political party

PAC- Partido Accion Ciudadana(Citizen's Action Party)- Costa Rican left of center political party

PLN- Partido Liberacion Nacional (National Liberation Party) right-of-center Costa Rican political party

PUSC- Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (Social Christian Unity Party) left-of-center Costa Rican political party

TSE-Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones (Supreme Court of Elections)- Costa Rican Supreme Electoral Court which runs and oversees elections.

Voter mobilization is defined as the act of trying to assemble a specific demographic of people to vote in general, or for a specific candidate, party, or issue.

Youth or young voters are more typically described as people ages 18-29 as described in numerous articles, studies, and journals from both Costa Rica and the United States. For the sake of this article, "youth" or "youth voters" will be assimilated with the term "college voters."

Appendix C
Research Methods
Informal Reserach Guide

Introduction: Hi my name is Elizabeth Kelleher and I am conducting academic research about how college students decide to vote in presidential elections

Date: __/__/____
Location:
Time:
Setting:
Referrals:

Interviewee-

Name:
Gender:
Age:
Phone:
Email:
Address:

Name:
Phone:
Email:
Address:

Closing: Thank you for your time. Here is my card. May I have your contact information in case I have any future questions? Are there any college students you can refer me to do interview

Name:
Age:
Phone:
Email:
Address:

Interview Questions

1. Did you vote in the last presidential election?
2. Why did you/didn't you vote in the last presidential?
3. What/who influenced your decision to vote?

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Appendix C **Research Methods** **Formal Interview**

Introduction: Hi my name is Elizabeth Kelleher and I am conducting academic research about how college students decide to vote in presidential elections

Interviewee-

Name:
Gender:
Age:
Phone:
Email:
Address:

Date: __/__/____

Location:

Time:

Setting/Background information:

Referrals:

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Address:

Name:

Age:

Phone:

Email:

Address:

Closing: Thank you for your time.

Here is my card. May I have your contact information in case I have any future questions? Are there any college students you can refer me to do interview?

Interview Questions

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1. How old are you?
2. Where do you go to school?
3. What is your major?
4. Did you vote in the 2008/2010 presidential election?
5. Why did you vote in the presidential election?

Media

1. What forms of media (news broadcasts, newspapers, internet news, radio) do you use on a regular basis?
2. Why do you choose to use these forms of media?
3. What forms of media did you use to learn about the presidential election?
4. Why did you choose these forms of media to learn about the presidential election?
5. How often did you use this form(s) of media to learn about the presidential campaign?
6. How did the media portray the candidates during the time surrounding the election
7. Did the information you learned in the media influence your decision to vote?

Please explain

Party Affiliation

1. Do you have a party affiliation?
2. What is your party affiliation?
3. How did you choose your political party?
4. Were you ever approached directly (via person-to person contact telephone, or mail) by political parties?

IF YES

- a. Which parties contacted you?
- b. With what methods did this(these) party(ies) contact you?
- c. How did this approach influence your decision to vote in the presidential election?

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5. Did your party affiliation influence you to vote in presidential elections?

Explain

6. What did you think of the presidential candidates?

OR

7. The Dem/Rep candidate was ____ what did you think of him or her?
8. Did you think this candidate could win the election?

Religion

1. What is your religion?
2. How religious do you consider yourself?
3. How often to you attend services of your religion?
4. Did your place of worship talk about the presidential campaign during services?

IF YES

- a. How did your place of worship talk about the presidential campaign during services?
5. Did your religious beliefs influence your decision to vote?

Family

1. Does your family vote in presidential elections?
2. Does your family have a party affiliation?
 - a. What is the party affiliation?
3. Do you discuss presidential elections at home?
 - a. How often is the presidential election discussed at home?
 - b. What topics does your family discuss with respect to presidential elections?
4. What role does your family play in your decision making process to vote?

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Friends

1. Do your friends vote in presidential elections?
2. Do your friends have a party affiliation?
 - a. What is their party affiliation?
3. Did you discuss presidential elections with your friends?
 - a. How often is the presidential election discussed with your friends?
 - b. What topics does your friends discuss with respect to presidential elections?
4. What role does your friends play in your decision making process to vote?

Social Capital

1. Do you use social media(Facebook, twitter, youtube)? (social networking sites, text messaging, blogs etc)

IF YES

2. Did you receive any information about the presidential election via social media?
3. What kind of information did you receive/what did it say?
4. From whom did you receive this information from social media outlets?
5. How frequently did you receive information about the presidential election from social media outlets?
6. Did the information you received from social media influence your decision to vote?
7. Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?
 - a. How often do you attend events of these clubs and organizations?
8. Did your student organization discuss the presidential campaign?

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- a. What information was discussed about the election?
 - b. How often was the presidential election discussed?
 - c. How were the candidates perceived by your student club or organization?
9. Did your student club or organization play a role in your decision to vote?
 10. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me that you think is relevant or that I have not asked?

Is there anything else you think could help me with my research?

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USA Questionnaire

College Students 2012 Election Survey

The survey below is being conducted by Elizabeth Kelleher in an effort to learn what makes Boston area college students decide to vote in presidential elections. Your answers are completely confidential and will be released only in summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. This survey is voluntary. However, you can help us very much by taking a few minutes to share your experiences and your opinions. If you have any questions or comments about this survey you can contact me at 203-685-1598 or ejjelleher@suffolk.edu.

1. Are you currently an undergraduate college student?

- Yes No

2. What is your current grade level?

- Freshman Sophomore
 Junior Senior

3. Where do you attend college/university?

4. Did you vote in the 2012 United States presidential election?

- Yes No

5. What is your gender?

- Male Female

6. What is your age?

7. What best describes your ethnicity?

- African American Asian/Island Pacifier
 Caucasian/White I'd prefer not to answer
 Other _____

8. Do you consider yourself to be Latino/Hispanic

- Yes No I'd prefer not to answer

9. What is your religion?

- Buddhist
 Christian(other)
 Jewish
 Muslim
 Protestant
 Roman Catholic
 Other _____

16. Did your parents vote in the presidential election?

- Yes, both my parents voted.
 Yes one of my parents voted
 No, neither of my parents voted
 I don't know

17. How would you describe your parents' party affiliation?

Ex. My mother is a Democrat and my father is a Libertarian

10. How important is religion in your life?

1. *Very unimportant* 2. *Somewhat unimportant* 3. *Neutral*
4. *Somewhat important* 5. *Very Important*
1 2 3 4 5

Very Unimportant Very Important

11. What is your political party affiliation?

- Democrat
 Green Party
 Independent(none)
 Libertarian
 Republican
 Other _____

12. Were you personally contacted by any presidential campaign?

- Yes No I don't know

13. Which political campaigns were you contacted by?

- Gary Johnson-Libertarian
 Barack Obama- Democrat
 Mitt Romney-Republican
 Jill Stein-Green Party
 None
 Other _____

14. What importance did your party affiliation have in your decision to vote in the election?

1. *Very unimportant* 2. *Somewhat unimportant* 3. *Neutral*
4. *Somewhat important* 5. *Very Important*
1 2 3 4 5

Very Unimportant Very Important

15. Did you think that your candidate could win the election?

- Yes No I don't know Other _____

22. How often did you use media forms to learn about the election?

- Daily
 Biweekly
 Weekly
 Monthly
 Never
 Other _____

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18. In general, do your friends vote in presidential elections?

- Yes-All
- Yes-Some
- No
- I don't know

19. How would you best describe your three closest friends' party affiliations?

Ex. One is a Republican and the other two are Independents

20. What importance did your family and friends have in your decision to vote?

1. *Very unimportant* 2. *Somewhat unimportant* 3. *Neutral*
4. *Somewhat important* 5. *Very Important*
1 2 3 4 5

Very Unimportant Very Important

21. What forms of media did you use to learn about the 2012 presidential election?

Please check all(any) that apply

- Local TV Broadcasts
- National TV Broadcasts
- Newspapers(Print)
- Newspapers(Online)
- Radio
- Social Media Outlets(Facebook, Twitter)
- Blogs
- Other _____

23. What specific forms of media did you use to learn about the election?

Ex. I watched Fox News, read the Politico blog, and read information posted on Facebook,

24. What importance did the media have in your decision to vote in the election?

1. *Very unimportant* 2. *Somewhat unimportant* 3. *Neutral*
4. *Somewhat important* 5. *Very Important*
1 2 3 4 5

Very Unimportant Very Important

25. Do you think that your voter mattered in deciding the outcome of the election?

- Yes No I don't know

26. What other factors influenced your decision to vote? _____

27. The research is being conducted for academic research only. Would you be willing to be contacted by the researcher to contact you with follow up questions concerning your answers?

- Yes No

28. If Yes please provide your contact information.

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Thank you for participating!

Costa Rica Questionnaire

Encuesta a Alumnos(as) Universitarios(as)

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- Noticias locales (TV) Noticias nacionales (TV) Periódicos (impreso) Periódicos (en internet) Radio Otra _____
17. ¿Con que frecuencia usó esos medios de comunicación para informarse sobre las elecciones presidencial del 2010?
 Diario Semanal Mensual Anual Nunca
18. Por favor escriba los nombres de los medios de comunicación que usó para aprender sobre las elecciones de 2010 _____

19. ¿Qué importancia tuvieron los medios de comunicación en su decisión de votar en las elecciones presidenciales del 2010?
1 2 3 4 5
20. ¿Qué redes sociales usa Ud. con frecuencia?
 Blogs Mensajes de texto telefónicos Facebook Twitter Youtube Ninguno Otra _____
21. ¿Qué redes sociales usó Ud. para informarse sobre las elecciones presidenciales de 2010?
 Blogs Mensajes de texto telefónicos Facebook Twitter Youtube Ninguno Otra _____
22. ¿Con que frecuencia usó Ud. las redes sociales para informarse sobre las elecciones presidenciales del 2010?
 Diario Semanal Mensual Anual Nunca
26. ¿Qué otros factores influyeron en su decisión de votar en las elecciones presidenciales del 2010? _____

27. Esta investigación existe únicamente con fines académicos. ¿Podría contactarle la investigadora para una entrevista con preguntas sobre su encuesta?
 Sí No

Si su respuesta es "sí" por favor deja su nombre y sus datos

Nombre _____

Email _____

Teléfono _____

¡Muchas gracias!

Appendix D-Costa Rica Research Method Results

Over the past three months I have used many different tools and techniques to conduct my research on why college students vote in presidential elections in San José, Costa Rica. The following paper will discuss the various methods used to try and answer this question.

Background Information

Once I arrived in Costa Rica I needed to look at in depth background information about presidential elections prior to 2010, the TLC (Tratado de Libre Comercio) Referendum that led to the signing of CAFTA, among other political and apolitical topics. At the beginning of my term I frequently read local newspapers (*La Nación*, *Semetario Universitario*) in order to understand the current political sentiments of the country. Additionally I read about electoral history in books available at La Biblioteca Carlos Monge at the University of Costa Rica (UCR) I was also given information throughout my stay from my advisor, Mariela Castro, with information ranging from analysis of former elections to the national electoral code. I also obtained access to textbooks from UCR and have studied the book from a class on Costa Rican politics and society. At the end of my term I also received a high school social studies text book that goes over the civic education that is taught in public high schools.

Observations

I spent significant time on the campuses of UCR, Universidad Latina, and Instituto Tecnológico de Costa Rica. I observed the interactions of college students on campuses, the involvement of different political groups, and postings around the campuses. Additionally I attended several classes and seminars in which I observed teacher-student relationships about political manners.

Materials Collected

I obtained the following books, theses, newspapers, and textbooks: [Elecciones 2006 y Referéndum: perspectivas diversas](#) by Mariela Castro and Manuel Rojas. *Imaginario Político* by

Gina Silbaja, articles from *El Semanario Universitario*, *La Prensa Socialista*, and *La Nación*. Additionally I obtained a high school social studies (civics) book and a 3rd year university political science textbook on Costa Rican political society.

Interviews

I formally interviewed sixteen college students about their decisions to vote in presidential elections. I contacted these students from a variety of ways: through my academic advisor, through the classes that I attended, from approaching them on college campuses, and through referrals from friends and past interviewees. Most interviews took place on college campuses in classrooms or around quad areas. I had many informal interviews in the forms of conversations with different students from a wide range of universities.

Additionally, I had formal interviews with Dr. Ciska Raventós and Professor Gina Silbaja. Dr. Raventós specializes in absenteeism in Costa Rica and works for both the Universidad de Costa Rica and as a researcher from the Tribunal Supremo de Elecciones. Professor Silbaja specializes on youth perceptions on political and nonpolitical society in Costa Rica. I also attended the classes and

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had informal consultations with the following professors at the University of Costa Rica: Argentina Artavia, Dr. Fernando Zeledon, Jimmy Cruz, and Sergio Ivan Alfaro Salas.

Changes to Research Design

I made several changes to my questionnaire while abroad due to both language and cultural inconsistencies with previous versions. My initial plan/attempt to contact student organizations as a way to gain access to students and I instead relied heavily on classroom interaction and referrals for interviews.

Changes to US Research Methods

Following my research in Costa Rica several research methodology changes were made in order to conduct my US portion of research. When originally starting this research in June 2011 I planned on studying the 2008 US presidential election. Due to the upcoming election in 2012 I decided that the 2012 election would be most appropriate to conduct my research.

Many changes were made to the questionnaires. I changed the format of the questionnaires in order to fit more questions to a page. I also realized that many of the questions, most specifically about friend and family involvement, that I thought I needed to use interviews to gain information, could be obtained in questionnaire form. The US version was also put on a GoogleDocs form which was not done in Costa Rica due to time constraints and cultural norms.

Interview questions remained exactly the same from Costa Rica to the United States, however manner in which interviews were obtained changed drastically. In Costa Rica I relied heavily on referrals, classes that took the survey, and random people on college campuses. For the US portion of my study I had more access to clubs and organizations that often would send the questionnaire via GoogleDocs to its members. I relied less on referrals, and only entered one classroom at the time of submission of this research project for academic credit.

Appendix E

Data Tables

Table-1“Were you a college student at the time of the 2010 presidential election?	Voter	Non-voter
Yes	72%	13%
No	.06%	13%

N=157

Table 2: Question	% responding important (3/4/5)	% responding unimportant (1/2)
What importance does religion have in your life?	70%	30%
What importance did religion have in your decision to vote?	14%	86%

N=115

Table 3“How frequently did you use media to learn about the election?”	
Daily	36%
Weekly	44%
Monthly	9%
Yearly	3%
Never	4%
No Response	5%

N=115

Table 4 What forms of media did you use?	
Internet Newspapers	40%
Paper Newspapers	53%
National News(TV)	68%
Local News(TV) ⁷	34%
Radio	18%
“Other Responses:” candidate webpages, university, talking with family, friends who are government majors, blogs, youtube, debates, common(societal) beliefs”	

N=115

Table 5 Form of Social Media used to learn about the election	Percentage of Students using form of social media	Percentage of Social Media users using form of social media to learn about the election
Facebook	51%	87%
Twitter	11%	16%
Blogs	16%	26%
YouTube	22%	37%
Texting	8%	13%
None	41%	N/A

N=115

N=68

Table:6 “Did you vote in the 2012 presidential election?”	Paper questionnaire	GoogleDocs questionnaire	Total	Total percentages
Yes	35	32	67	74%
No	7	16	23	26%
Total	42	48	90	100%

⁷ There was no evident difference between “local television news” and “national television news” when reviewing Costa Rican media sources. This may have caused confusion amongst respondents.

Table:7	% responding important (3/4/5)	% responding unimportant (1/2)
Importance of religion in life	48%	52%

N=67

Table-8 Were you contacted by a political party?	Voters that believed party affiliation was important (3/4/5)	% voters that believed party affiliation was unimportant(1/2)
Yes	25%	15%
No	25%	27%
Not sure	7%	

N=67

Table 9“How frequently did you use media to learn about the election?”	
Daily	42%
Biweekly	10%
Weekly	27%
Monthly	3%
Never	3%
No Response	6%

N=67

Table 9 What forms of media did you use?	
Internet Newspapers	66%
Paper Newspapers	40%
National News(TV)	84%
Local News(TV)	66%
Radio	27%
Social Media	73%
Blogs	22%

N=67

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