

EXAMINING POLITICAL INFORMATION EFFICACY AND ITS CORRELATES IN
THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

by

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Abstract

During a controversial Presidential election, it could be daunting to determine what information is factual, especially to new voters. This confusion may cause their confidence to lower and, possibly, not participate at all. Scholars are concerned that young disengaged citizens will become older disengaged citizens. Political information efficacy is the confidence individuals' have in their political knowledge (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007). Previous research has shown that efficacy levels increase after reviewing political information, but research has yet to determine what other factors may also influence individuals' confidence levels, and therefore, their likelihood of participating in the political process. This study examines political information efficacy and its relationship with other variables such as gender differences, social capital, political socialization, political cynicism, and political knowledge. This study contributes to the political communication field by exploring, in further depth than previous research, a theoretical construct (political information efficacy) that can provide insight as to what influences individuals to participate in the political process and how their efficacy levels can change depending on interactions with other variables. Additionally, this study contributes to existing research to better understand young voters' involvement in the political process.

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Dedication

To Mom, Rodrigo, Rebecca, and Alejandro

Thank you for your constant support and patience during my academic journey. Without your encouragement, I would not have been able to accomplish all that I have.

I love you all to the moon and back.

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To Rebecca- You are amazing and brilliant! Never give up on your dreams and be everything you want to be.

To Alejandro- You are such a smart, crazy kid! And, no, I don't have any more homework, buddy, so, yes we can play a game.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Political Information Efficacy.....	3
Gender Differences.....	6
Social Capital.....	8
Political Socialization.....	12
Political Cynicism.....	15
Political Knowledge.....	18
Methods.....	22
Study Design.....	22
Procedure.....	25
Results.....	26
Discussion.....	31
Conclusion.....	39
References.....	40
Appendix A.....	50

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Variable Means and Standard Deviations.....	30

Introduction

“American youth attributes much more importance to arriving at driver’s license age than at voting age” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 194).

With so many technological opportunities for voters, there is a concern amongst scholars that young citizens will choose to avoid political messages and not participate in the political process. Scholars are worried that young disengaged citizens will become older disengaged citizens (Kaid, Fernandes, & Painter, 2011; Kaid, Postelnicu, Landreville, Yun, & LeGrange, 2007). This avoidance by young citizens could be because they do not care about the political process or could be because they do not feel they have enough knowledge on the subject, and, therefore, avoid politics completely. In a time when political engagement is critical, young voters need to understand the political process and participate at an earlier age. While politics can be daunting to some, many young voters may find that their political information efficacy, or confidence in the knowledge they have, can easily increase with researching a little information.

Numerous studies on political information efficacy have focused almost entirely on whether or not efficacy levels have increased after exposure to a stimulus (e.g. Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Tedesco, 2011). Research has consistently shown efficacy levels have increased, and at this point, should be considered an assumption of the political information efficacy concept. What has not been studied as much is the influence of other variables on individual efficacy levels. There have been studies which have compared gender differences (Tedesco, 2011), cynicism (Dunn, Butler, Meeks, & Collier, 2015), and political socialization (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016) with political information efficacy. However, even though there are few studies seeking correlations

between political information efficacy and other variables, there is insufficient research to determine what outside influences raise or lower efficacy levels beyond participating in a stimulus. Discovering those outside influences is critical in understanding how individuals' political information efficacy changes, which then may reflect on their political participation behaviors.

Understanding young citizens' attitudes towards the political process and what changes behavior is imperative to figuring out how to not only engage young adults in politics, but maintain that engagement throughout their lifetime. This study seeks to determine some of the variables which correlate with political information efficacy. Specifically, the following five variables were tested with political information efficacy: gender, social capital, political socialization, cynicism, and actual political knowledge. Interestingly, no study previously existed which compared political information efficacy and actual political knowledge, something that seems to be an obvious correlation. If individuals have high accurate political knowledge, it would seem logical for them to also have high political information efficacy. If individuals have low accurate political knowledge, it would seem logical for them to also have low political information efficacy.

By examining political information efficacy and its correlates, future scholars and political strategists might have more information on tactics to use in campaigns that are geared towards young adults and, possibly, not only increase young voter turnout in elections, but help create long-term engaged citizens.

Literature Review

Political Information Efficacy

For years, scholars have examined politics and what variables influence voters to participate in the electoral process. Political information efficacy is a variable that has helped to better understand young citizens' motivations to be more civically engaged. It is important to understand political efficacy in order to study its offshoot, political information efficacy. Political efficacy is broken down into two categories: internal and external (Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Lane, 1959; Balch, 1974). Internal efficacy is the perception of one's own ability to participate in the political process, while external efficacy is the perception of the "responsiveness of the political system" (Hansen & Pedersen, 2014, p. 303). External efficacy, more specifically, is the perception that an individual can have an impact on the political process because of how responsive the government is to their needs (Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Miller, Miller, & Schneider, 1980; Craig & Maggionto, 1982; Niemi, Craig, & Mattel, 1991).

A concern over the years has been that neither external nor internal political efficacy addressed the confidence levels citizens have in the political information they have obtained. It is one thing for individuals to believe in their ability to comprehend information, but another to actually have confidence in the information they have. It was not until 2007 when scholars Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco posited the idea of political information efficacy (PIE). According to Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007), political information efficacy is defined as the confidence one has in their own political knowledge and that he or she believes they can engage in the political process (p. 1096). While this concept can apply to any age of voter, research in the last decade has focused

on young citizens (age 18-24). Previous research has found a positive correlation between internal efficacy and political knowledge (Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Bennett, 1997; Jung, Kim, & De Zúñiga, 2011) and if political knowledge increases over the span of a campaign, then internal efficacy should increase as well (Hansen & Pedersen, 2014). This finding could aid in supporting the notion that if levels of political information efficacy increase, young citizens may become more engaged in the political process.

There are two reoccurring concerns, however, regarding young voters' participation in the political process: 1) young citizens being uninformed and 2) the lack of confidence in their own knowledge. According to Kaid, Fernandes, and Painter (2011), "young adults may be uninformed in regard to both registration and voting procedures as well as the issues and candidates at stake on the ballot" (p. 440). Through years of analysis of young voters' comments in focus groups, it was determined that the main explanation of why young citizens did not participate in the political process was that they felt they lacked the knowledge to be considered an "informed voter" (McKinney & Rill, 2009).

It could be the lack of knowing the registration and voting procedures are keeping young citizens away from the voting booths. Or it could be because candidates do not take young voters seriously. Research shows that candidates do not view this population as a "significant voting bloc" and by ignoring this group, cause young citizens to become disengaged and lack interest (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007, p. 1094). As proven in the 2004 election when MTV conducted their "Rock the Vote" campaign, it is possible to engage young voters when the candidates frame issues in a way that makes them pertinent to this population (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007). In a study comparing

the traditional forum of debates and the “Rock the Vote” forum, it was found that youth responded more positively to the candidates when viewing the “Rock the Vote” campaign, stating they felt more trust, greater political efficacy, and less cynicism (McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007, p.1171).

According to Dunn et al. (2015), individuals have seen “significant changes” in the ways they gather information to participate in the political process due to so many available means of technological communication (p. 604). After the 2004 presidential election, the Internet became a powerful medium for reaching voters. “By 2008, 49% of young adults indicated that the Internet was the main source for their election news” (Tedesco, 2011, p. 697). Since almost half of the young voter population indicated they use the Internet to receive political information, researchers began to examine if using the Internet would be a more effective means of engaging them in the political process (Tedesco, 2011). Some studies have shown that young voters appreciate the anonymity of the Internet because they are able to hide potentially discriminating facts about themselves, such as age, sex, and ethnicity, which is important for this population who feel “disenfranchised or alienated by our political process” (Tedesco, 2007, p. 1184). However, with a variety of ways to gather knowledge, some people still avoid political information all together (Dunn et al., 2015).

In order to understand young citizens’ motivations, opportunities, and rationale regarding participating in the political process, it is critical to examine their political information efficacy and if it changes when provided information to make more educated decisions. While it is important to measure if levels increase or not after viewing a stimulus, it is equally relevant to examine other variables that could influence an

individual's political information efficacy. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Participants' political information efficacy will increase after viewing political debates.

H2: There will be a positive correlation between internal efficacy and political information efficacy.

H3: There will be a positive correlation between external efficacy and political information efficacy.

Gender Differences

While there has been some research on gender differences in political information efficacy, results have varied in how each gender's posttest efficacy levels have risen or lowered. In a study conducted by Tedesco (2011), men reported "significantly higher levels" of political information efficacy than their female counterparts (p. 707). This is one of the concerns with political information efficacy. It seems that PIE does not discriminate against correct knowledge, only the *perception* of what knowledge an individual has. Consider someone who perceives their political information efficacy and political knowledge to be at high levels. It is reasonable to think a person such as this would feel confident in talking to others about politics and possibly creating group membership with others. However, if that individual was to talk with others and find their knowledge to be false, their efficacy levels should drop, in theory.

Previous research has found that "young women are less likely to give concrete answers to knowledge questions if they are uncertain of the answer and less likely to assert their political knowledge" (Tedesco, 2011, p. 707; see also Banwart, 2007;

Mondak & Anderson, 2004). Another study also found that “young female citizens expressed lower levels of confidence in their political knowledge than young male citizens” (Kaid et al., 2011, p. 444; see also Kaid, Postelnicu et al., 2007). This is a concern because women may have the perception of themselves that they are not as knowledgeable as men and report low efficacy levels, when in reality they may be just as knowledgeable. It is possible that men report such high efficacy levels from the beginning because of overinflated egos when in reality their political knowledge may not be accurate, and women report lower efficacy levels because of lack of confidence even though their political knowledge is more accurate.

Barabas, Jerit, Pollock, and Rainey (2014) stated that a gender gap exists in political knowledge and that females have the tendency to know less than males (p. 843; see also Dolan, 2011; Dow, 2009; Lizotte & Sidman, 2009; Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Stolle & Gidengil, 2010; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997). Barabas et al. (2014) further discussed that women tend to score higher in political knowledge when the topic is “gendered” (meaning geared towards females) and that there is more motivation to learn about a topic that is specific to their gender. An example of a gendered question is, “Taking your best guess, what is the percentage of women in congress?” (Barabas et al., 2014). Additionally, they state that the gender gap all but disappears or even reverses, with women scoring higher in political knowledge than men when the topic is more relatable to females (Barabas et al., 2014).

Muralidharan and Sung (2016) found that the ways in which men and women converse and collect information impacts their political knowledge and efficacy levels. More specifically, women tend to prefer two-way communication in receiving their

political information, while men prefer to collect data from traditional sources and make decisions based on that information (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). This indicates that when females communicate with others, there is a greater chance of increasing political knowledge than if males were to converse with others (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016; Banwart & Bystrom, 2001). Muralidharan and Sung (2016) suggest that campaign planners should analyze the gender differences between males and females in collecting political knowledge and information to determine the best channel to create political conversations and increase female activity in the political process. If planners were to use some of these tactics, there may be an increase in female political information efficacy (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). As such, the following hypotheses are posited:

H4: Females will have lower political information efficacy than males.

H5: Females' political information efficacy will increase at a higher rate than males'.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital has been around for decades; however, it was not until the late 80's and early 90's that prolific information emerged. Robert Putnam (1994) became one of the leading scholars on social capital. Putnam (1994) believed that social capital within social networks, norms, and trust creates mutual benefits for both parties (pp. 6-7). Researchers have long studied the relationship of "performance of individuals and collectives to networks of social relationships" (Gil de Zúñiga, 2012, p. 320; see also Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001).

Williams' (2006) Internet Social Capital Scales was created to measure bonding and bridging online and offline. Bridging social capital measurements are based on

several of Putnam's concepts, including aspects of outward looking, connecting with broad groups of people, viewing oneself within a broader group context, and reciprocity norms (Williams, 2006). Further, Williams' bonding social capital measurements are based on Putnam's concepts, including aspects of emotional support, limited resource access, and solidarity encouragement (Williams, 2006).

Granovetter (1973) investigated the building of social capital with regards to weak ties and strong ties. He stated that weak ties and strong ties were determined by reciprocity, time, intimacy, and emotional involvement (Granovetter, 1973). More specifically, Granovetter believed that strong ties came within one's intimate network, typically family, community, or friends; however, weak ties were actually more valuable in social capital (1973). He found that weak ties were more beneficial because of the amount of time that is put into building prospects and information gathering (Granovetter, 1973).

A few limitations exist with social capital, however. Technology and ways to be socially connected are evolving yearly. "Networks," whether online or in person, are changing to include more anonymous apps such as *Whisper* and *Yik Yak*. More research needs to be conducted to determine if social capital can exist thru these types of networks where maintaining anonymity is the point or using brief messaging apps, such as *Snap Chat*. Additionally, it can then be determined if young citizens are not participating in as many "face-to-face" networks, such as clubs, groups, and organizations where the opportunity for social connectedness is greater. With so many ways for young voters to communicate with others, and the list of new apps seems to be growing monthly, it could be difficult to determine if creating social capital is possible online. Social capital can

take time to build up, especially if an individual is working with a weak tie. These brief snippet conversations on *Snap Chat*, *Whisper*, or *Yik Yak* may prevent enough self-disclosure and opportunities to create social capital.

In order to advance the concept of political information efficacy beyond an individual's efficacy rising or falling when viewing a stimulus, it is important to look at how other theories, concepts, and variables can enhance or enrich PIE. If PIE gauges the confidence level one has in their political knowledge, imagine someone with high efficacy talking to another person about the political process. People who exude confidence often are more persuasive in nature.

The concept of social capital has been around for a while, but, attempting to associate it with political information efficacy is a new approach. However, research does support the correlation of social capital and civic engagement. According to Hener, Rainer, and Siedler (2016), higher levels of social capital and civic engagement go hand-in-hand. They continue by stating that a "collective and collaborative" effort exists when groups work together towards civic engagement (Hener, et al., 2016, p. 635; see also Putnam, 1993).

Linking social capital to the political process is not a huge leap. Social capital, including reciprocity and trust, relates to increased and improved civic engagement (Putnam, 1995). Gil de Zúñiga (2012), studied social capital using political activity participation online and offline. Results indicated a positive response on political engagement when social network sites (SNS) were used for gathering of information, which suggests a potential for initiating community social life (Gil de Zúñiga, 2012).

Scholars have stated that some of the reasons for lack of political participation by young voters could be not only that fewer classes in schools are being taught regarding civic engagement, but also a lack of socialization (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Gans, 2004; Hollihan, 2001). Additionally, it has been speculated that young citizen voter turnout could be due to a decline in “political and social connectedness” (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007).

Researching the effects of networking in real time during the 2000 presidential campaign, Price and Cappella (2002) found aspects of social capital, such as political engagement and participation, increased with online discussions. McMillan (2002) reports that there are three modes of Internet interactivity: user-to-system, user-to-user, and user-to-document. His concept of “user-to-user” interactivity supports the idea that PIE can influence social capital. User-to-user interactivity maintains that “activity is dialogic in nature, characterized by communication between users or between user and host through real-time or post and response formats found in instant messaging, moderated chat, and discussion boards” (Tedesco, 2007, pp. 1184-85). If users are communicating via instant messaging or moderated chat, intangible resources, such as group membership, advocacy, reputation, and credibility can form.

According to Gil de Zúñiga (2012), having a large number of members in an individual’s network may also increase the “frequency of discussion about public affairs, which have been shown to have a direct effect on civic engagement” (p. 322; see also Shah, Rojas, & Cho, 2009). Additionally, if a young voter has a high level of political information efficacy, they might attempt to be more persuasive when participating in these chats and potentially create a social weak tie.

Bucy (2004) states that there are two types of interactivity available through websites: content interactivity and interpersonal interactivity. Each of these types is distinguished by one-way communication and two-way communication (Bucy, 2004). Similar to McMillan (2002), Bucy believes that interpersonal interactivity is “characterized by a form of real-time or monitored dialogue between site visitors or between site host and visitors (Tedesco, 2007, p. 1185). Again, this type of interaction is supportive of individuals with high levels of political information efficacy potentially influencing and creating social capital with other users.

Tedesco (2007) believes that encouraging young voters to participate in online discussions, to feel confident in their political information efficacy, and to express their opinions via “blogs, chats, threaded discussions, and other interactive opportunities” will help to reduce political cynicism and help the voter feel their concerns are important (p. 1186). Through this confidence and willingness to participate in discussions and provide their opinions (whether in an online network or face-to-face network), young citizens have a greater chance of creating social capital for themselves as well as increasing their efficacy levels even more. More research needs to be conducted to continue to draw connections between high political information efficacy and the building of social capital. Therefore, the following Hypothesis is posited:

H6: There will be a significant positive correlation between political information efficacy and social capital.

Political Socialization

A variable that may influence political information efficacy is political socialization. According to Quintelier (2015), political socialization is based on

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which states that "behavior that is reinforced by parents, peers, or other agents of socialization will be repeated" (p. 53). Additionally, Muralidharan and Sung (2016) further specify that political socialization is the "developmental process by which adolescents acquire cognitions, behaviors, and attitudes relating to their political environment" (p. 101). Political socialization can be broken down into two categories: direct and indirect socialization (Quintelier, 2015). Direct political socialization is when parents or peers are actively involved in the political process (Quintelier, 2015; Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Nesbit, 2012). Young adults who witness their parents or peers being involved in their own political environment are more likely to become active, engaged citizens in the political process late in life (Quintelier, 2015; Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012; McFarland & Thomas, 2006). Indirect political socialization is when parents or peers discuss politics with their young adult (Quintelier, 2015).

More importantly for voting-aged young citizens, peer groups may have a larger influence on them than parents, since they spend an exorbitant amount of time with their peers at school (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). If voting-aged peer groups can be so influential, then it is reasonable to assume that political socialization can increase individuals' confidence and understanding of the political process (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). This supports the notion that political socialization may have a positive correlation with political information efficacy, and, possibly, social capital.

Quintelier (2015) found, in prior research, five agents of political socialization to determine their influence on political engagement: parents, peers, school, voluntary associations, and media (see also Amna, 2012; Hess & Torney, 1967). Quintelier (2015)

states that individuals are able to develop political opinions and skills thru conversations with their peers (see also Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), and that peer discussions increase the likelihood of political participation because “discussions function as a mechanism for becoming recruited” (p. 54; see also Klofstad, 2011; McClurg, 2003). Quintelier (2015) also points out that voluntary associations allow young citizens an opportunity for public deliberation, sense of community, possible representation, and a shared identity (p. 54; see also McFarland & Thomas, 2006; Queniart, 2008; Verba et al., 1995). Quintelier (2015) created a political participation index: “wearing a badge, signing a petition, participating in a demonstration, boycotting products, forwarding political emails, displaying a political message, and attending a political meeting” (p. 56).

These seven items are particularly interesting because it has been found in qualitative research conducted by Contreras et al. (2016) that young adults (18-24 years old), when asked the various ways to participate in the political process, could only think of voting. These seven items, particularly in this day and age with so many young adults protesting in support of social justice and a heated presidential election, are extremely relevant and it is entirely possible that young citizens would participate in at least one of them, showing that they are engaging in the political process more than even they realize.

Quintelier (2015) found discussions of “politics with parents, peers, and voluntary associations correlated with higher levels of political participation” (p.57). Additionally, Quintelier (2015) found that engaging in social movements and having a diverse network, both lead to increased political engagement. These findings support the notion of a positive correlation between political socialization and political information efficacy, as it

is reasonable to assume one would be more confident in their political knowledge if they are participating in conversations with parents, peers, and voluntary associations.

Muralidharan and Sung (2016) found significant differences between males' and females' political socialization and political information efficacy with males having a higher efficacy level than their female counterparts (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016).

Furthermore, Muralidharan and Sung (2016) stated that peer communication had a significant impact on participants' political information efficacy, continuing to support the correlation between political socialization and political information efficacy. As such, the following hypotheses are posited:

H7: There will be a significant positive correlation between political information efficacy and political socialization.

H8: There will be a significant positive correlation between partisanship and political information efficacy.

Political Cynicism

With campaigns often becoming negative character attacks over policy discussions, it would be logical for individuals' cynicism levels towards the government to increase. However, research on political cynicism has been mixed, at best. Cynicism is the "lack of confidence in and feeling of distrust toward the political system" (Dunn et al., 2015; Pinkleton, Austin, & Fortman, 1998, p. 36). Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2000), more specifically defined cynicism as "belief that the government in general and political leaders in particular do not care about the public's opinions and are not acting in the best interest of the people" (p. 198; see also Rill & Cardiel, 2013). This definition is particularly relevant at the date of this study, as the public often voice mistrust in the

government and its leaders with tweets on Twitter, posts on Facebook, or general conversations with each other. According to Foa and Mounk (2016) Americans are losing “faith in the political system” (p. 15). Researchers have found levels of mistrust in political players and government institutions to be rising (Sweetser & Kaid, 2008). Citizens have become more critical of their political leaders and cynical towards political institutions, feeling that they have very little influence over public policies (Foa & Mounk, 2016).

Individuals’ levels of cynicism can run high in elections where the candidates are considered very unpopular. Enten (2016) reports record breaking numbers of citizens who view Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump as strongly unfavorable, more than any candidate in the past 10 election cycles. Additionally, Enten (2016) states that both Clinton and Trump have negative double digits regarding strongly favorable perceptions with citizens, also more than any other candidate in the last 10 election cycles. According to Strama (1998), one of the reasons young voter turnout is lower than that of older engaged citizens is because of the lack of confidence in the political process and cynicism. Research has found that youth have become more supportive of activism and less supportive of freedom of speech (Foa & Mounk, 2016). In order to have a strong political system, it is critical for citizens to be supportive of “key political values such as civil rights” as well as actively participating in politics and being informed (Foa & Mounk, 2016, p. 10).

In literature, political cynicism has been studied more as an outcome of viewing politically driven advertisements, debates, or news stories (Weaver Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011). According to Tedesco (2007), cynicism increased when participants

viewed negative political advertisements. Other studies have found an increase in cynicism after viewing negative political ads (Weaver Lariscy et al., 2011; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Kaid et al., 2000; Rahn & Hirshorn, 1999). However, other research suggested a decrease in cynicism after viewing political advertisements or debates (Kaid & Postelnicu, 2005; McKinney & Chattopadhyay, 2007; McKinney & Rill, 2009; Stroud, Stephens, & Pye, 2001; McKinney, Rill, & Thorson, 2014). Furthermore, other studies found no effect of political advertisements or viewing debates on cynicism levels (Dunn et al., 2015; Wald & Lupfer, 1978; English et al., 2011; Kaid, 2002; Jasperson & Yun, 2007; Kaid, Postelnicu et al., 2007). These results are concerning about continuing to draw connections between political information efficacy and cynicism.

Despite these findings, it is still important to study political cynicism as it relates to political communication, as it could affect individuals' voting behaviors (Rill & Cardiel, 2013; Hoffman & Young, 2011; Yoon, Pinkerton, & Ko, 2005). Limited research exists which studies the correlation between cynicism and political information efficacy. In an unpublished study, Contreras (2016) found that there was no significant correlation between PIE and cynicism in her pre-test or post-test; however, cynicism did increase and the difference was statistically significant (Contreras, 2016).¹

de Vreese (2005) conducted a study to determine the relationship between the news media and political cynicism. Even though de Vreese (2005) found that political cynicism is determined by many factors and there was a negligible effect on citizen participation, he did find that individuals with higher levels of efficacy were less likely to be cynical than those with lower levels of efficacy. This finding alone continues to

¹ Cynicism pre-test correlation was $r = .18$, $p = .14$, and post-test correlation was $r = .11$, $p = .40$. Cynicism pre-test mean was 3.24 ($SD = 0.55$) and post-test mean was 3.39 ($SD = 0.52$). The difference between the two means was statistically significant, $t(66) = -3.15$, $p < .003$.

support the idea that cynicism and efficacy may be connected and further research needs to be conducted. As such, the following hypothesis is examined:

H9: There will be an inverse correlation between participants' political cynicism and political information efficacy.

Political Knowledge

An important variable to consider when analyzing political information efficacy is actual political knowledge. To be clear, actual political knowledge is information that is factually correct or incorrect, where *perceived* political knowledge is what individuals *believe* to be correct or incorrect. If an individual is confident in their political knowledge and then finds out the knowledge they have is incorrect, their efficacy levels should decrease and vice versa. This is critical information when analyzing young citizens and what will maintain their political engagement later in life. However, despite the importance of looking at the possible correlation between knowledge and PIE, very little research has been conducted comparing the two. Political knowledge is defined as “the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory” (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996, p. 10).

Previous research has shown that political knowledge is connected to actively participating in the political process (Gil de Zúñiga, 2012). Individuals who follow political campaigns gain political knowledge (Hansen & Pedersen, 2014; Craig, Kane, & Gainous, 2005; Hansen, 2008), and those who follow campaigns longer tend to gain more political knowledge (Hansen, & Pedersen, 2014; Arceneaux, 2006; Stevenson & Vavreck, 2000). According to Barabas et al. (2014), there are factors that relate to ability, opportunity, and motivation in relation to political knowledge. Ability refers to

“the possession of cognitive skills,” opportunity refers to “the availability of information,” and motivation refers to “the desire to learn” (Barabas et al., 2014, p. 841). These three factors are salient when determining and analyzing how individuals process and retain political knowledge. Barabas et al. (2014) further specify that there are two dimensions of political knowledge: temporal and topical.

The “temporal dimension” consists of political facts that are either more recent in becoming a fact or seldom change and “topical dimension” consists of political facts that have to do with either public concerns or the institutions/people that enforce public policy (aka government) (Barabas et al., 2014, p. 841). Barabas et al. (2014) discussed four different categories of political knowledge questions: general, policy-specific, static, and surveillance. Each of these categories of questions was cross-examined with each other to determine which combination provided higher levels of political knowledge for individuals (Barabas et al., 2014). Static knowledge was identified as knowledge which seldom changed, while surveillance knowledge changed more frequently (Barabas et al., 2014).

Hansen and Pedersen (2014) state that almost more important than the outcome of an election is questioning if voters’ levels of knowledge increase, which is “necessary to navigate the political space,” but also how campaigns “affect voters’ perceptions of the political process and their own political competence” (p. 303). This supports the notion that looking for correlations between political knowledge and political information efficacy (political competence) is necessary to understand individuals’ motivations to participate in the political process.

It can be difficult to measure and compare political knowledge to PIE because there are so many types of political knowledge questions that can be asked. To date, and to the knowledge of this researcher, only one unpublished study exists looking at the correlation between political information efficacy and political knowledge (Contreras, 2016). Contreras (2016) created a political knowledge instrument using either general or specific knowledge questions, four of which were adopted from Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996). Results found that young citizens' political knowledge to specific knowledge questions had a significant positive correlation with increased levels of political information efficacy, yet there was no significant correlation to general knowledge questions and PIE.²

Specific political knowledge questions were defined as questions that have changing answers dependent on the time in which the question were asked. Examples include: who is the Speaker of the House of Representatives?; what political party is Donald Trump seeking the nomination from?; and what position does Joe Biden hold? These questions will have a different answer depending on when they are asked. General political knowledge questions were defined as questions in which the answers never change, no matter when they are asked (Contreras, 2016). Examples include: in what month is the presidential general election held?; who is third in line for the presidency should something happen to the President or Vice-President?; and what does the first amendment to the constitution address? (Contreras, 2016).

Contreras (2016) further investigated the specific knowledge correlations to determine three areas that had significant, positive correlations to political information

² Political information efficacy had a significant correlation with specific knowledge questions ($r = .51, p < .001$) but did not have a correlation with general knowledge questions ($r = .21, p = .082$).

efficacy: knowledge of the caucus and primary results, knowledge of the candidates' affiliations, and knowledge of the current government.³ Of the 37 political knowledge questions, female participants answered 22 correctly and male participants answered 27 correctly (Contreras, 2016). These results indicate that young citizens are paying attention to current politics and it is affecting their efficacy levels in a positive way, further supporting the notion that candidates should include young citizens in their campaigns.

Political knowledge should increase if young citizens already have low political knowledge upon being exposed to political messages (Dunn et al., 2015). If actual knowledge is not taken in to consideration, efficacy levels reported during a controlled stimuli session could be meaningless unless researchers know the political knowledge starting point. Accordingly, the following hypothesis and research questions are asked:

H10: There will be a positive correlation between political knowledge and political information efficacy.

RQ1: Do females differ from males in political knowledge?

RQ2: What kinds of political knowledge correlate with political information efficacy?

³ Specific Knowledge Questions which positively correlated with political information efficacy: knowledge of the caucus and primary results ($r = .55, p < .001$), knowledge of the candidates' affiliations ($r = .46, p < .001$), and knowledge of the current government ($r = .34, p < .006$).

Methods

Study Design

This study followed a pre-test/post-test design using online questionnaires. Participants viewed one of two 2016 presidential debates in an on-campus computer lab or classroom. Before and after viewing the debate, participants completed questionnaires administered online using the computers in the lab or using pencil and paper. Within sessions, all participants viewed the same stimulus and filled out the same questionnaires (there are no separate manipulations or control groups). Participants were provided a random number upon arrival to enter on the pre-test and post-test questionnaires. This number allowed the researchers to match answers from the same participants between the pre-test and the post-test without having to ask them for any identifying information. One of the strengths of this research design is the opportunity to have participants watch current campaign content. Participants watched a live debate of the presidential candidates.

Several of this study's statements/questions are based on previously published scales. Political information efficacy was measured using the four statements adapted from Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco (2007). PIE was measured on a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree*) that includes "I consider myself well qualified to participate in politics;" "I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people;" "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country;" and "If a friend asked me about the Presidential election, I feel like I would have enough information to help my friend." This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .932$).

Internal and External Efficacy were measured by adapting Hansen and Pedersen's (2014) scale. Some statements to measure internal efficacy included "When politicians debate economic policy, I only understand a small part of what they are talking about;" "Citizens like me have opinions on politics that are worth listening to;" and "I do not find it difficult to take a stand on political issues (reverse coded)." This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .583$). Some statements to measure external efficacy included "The politicians waste a lot of the taxpayer's money;" "Citizens like me do not have any influence on decisions of the government;" and "Usually you can trust the political leaders to do what is best for the country (reverse coded)." This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .450$).

Social Capital was measured by adapting statements from Williams (2006) study. Statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ($1 = \textit{strongly agree}$, $5 = \textit{strongly disagree}$) which included "I am always the last in my network to find out information (reverse coded);" "People in my network come to me for the information they need;" "I am a trend setter in my networks;" "I know people who can help me get the information I need;" "People in my network can't be trusted (reverse coded);" "I am encouraged to make independent decisions;" "Most of the people in my network are just like me;" "I feel free to talk with people in my networks about problems and difficulties I may be having;" and "I have influence regarding the decisions people make." This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .626$).

Political Socialization questions were adapted from Quintelier (2015) and included "How often do you discuss politics with peers" (never, once in a while, often, always); and "How much diversity of political opinions do you encounter in your peer

group” (ranging from 1 = *everyone agrees* to 5 = *no-one agrees*); “How often do you discuss politics with your family and/or parents” (never, once in a while, often, always); and “How often do you discuss politics in the classroom” (never, once in a while, often, always). This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .461$).

Political Cynicism was measured based on Jasperson and Yun’s (2007) study and included statements such as “Whether I vote or not has no influence on what politicians do;” “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does;” “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on;” “One cannot trust what politicians say;” “I believe the government listens to what I have to say (reverse coded);” “I believe my vote carries political influence (reverse coded);” “One can be confident that politicians will do the right thing (reverse coded);” “Politicians often forget their election promises after a political campaign is over;” “Politicians are more interested in power than what the people think;” and “One never knows what politicians really think.” These statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*). This scale was tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .730$).

Political Knowledge was measured by adapting Delli Carpini and Keeter’s (1996) knowledge questions of “who is the Speaker of the House of Representatives;” “what political office is held by [insert current vice president];” “whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not;” “which political party has the most members in the House of Representatives;” and “which party is more conservative than the others?” To measure political knowledge gender differences, statements were adapted based on the Dolan (2011) study which analyzed the gender gap in political knowledge.

Questions used either a multiple choice or short answer option and included “gendered” questions, such as “taking your best guess, what is the percentage of women in congress;” “off the top of your head can you name a woman member of congress, either Senate or U.S. House of Representatives;” and “of the nine members currently serving on the U.S. Supreme Court, do you happen to know how many are women?” This last question was altered, due to only eight members currently serving on the U.S. Supreme Court at the time of this study. This study was tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = .883$). See Appendix A for full list of political knowledge questions.

Procedure

Students arrived at an on-campus computer lab or classroom and were provided with a random number to enter on each questionnaire. Each participant was given a URL and QR-Code (as an option for smart phone users) that took them to an online pre-test questionnaire, or they were given a paper version of the questionnaire. Participants then watched the debate that occurred that night. Following the debate, participants were given another URL/QR-Code taking them to a post-test questionnaire or a paper questionnaire. Finally, the researchers debriefed participants by repeating the purpose of the study, answering any questions that participants had, and thanked participants for their time.

Results

Participants were recruited thru Communication and Political Science courses. There were 140 participants (N=140) with 68 males (n=68) and 72 females (n=72). Data collection occurred during the Presidential Debates on Monday, September 26th and Sunday, October 9th, 2016.

Hypothesis 1 stated that college students' political information efficacy would increase after viewing political debates. To answer Hypothesis 1 a paired sample t-test was conducted comparing pre- and post-test answers of participants. The results indicated that political information efficacy significantly increased from the pre-test (M=3.383) to post-test (M=3.689) for participants, $t(139) = -4.35$, ($p < .001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there would be a positive correlation between internal efficacy and political information efficacy. As these two variables were measured in the pre-test and post-test, this hypothesis was tested twice. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted with the pre-test political information efficacy and internal efficacy and found a significant correlation between the two variables ($r = .651$, $p = < .001$). A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was also conducted with the post-test political information efficacy and internal efficacy variables and found a significant correlation ($r = .624$, $p = < .001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 examined if there was a positive correlation between external efficacy and political information efficacy. As with internal efficacy, the correlation between external efficacy and political information efficacy was tested twice, comparing pre- and post-test answers. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted

comparing pre-test political information efficacy with external efficacy and found no correlation existed ($r = -.081, p = .342$). A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted comparing post-test political information efficacy with external efficacy and found no correlation existed ($r = -.101, p = .238$). As such, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 examined if females have lower political information efficacy than males. An independent samples t-test was conducted comparing males' and females' political information efficacy from pre-test to post-test. While male participants had higher political information efficacy ($M = 3.512$ in the pre-test, $M = 3.770$ in the post-test) than female participants ($M = 3.276$ in the pre-test, $M = 3.626$ in the post-test), there were no statistical differences between the genders ($t(134) = 1.22, (p = .222)$ pre-test, $t(132) = .911, (p = .364)$ post-test). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypotheses 5 predicted that females' political information efficacy will increase at a higher rate than males'. An additional variable was created by subtracting the pre-test political information efficacy from the post-test political information efficacy. An independent samples t-test was conducted using the new coded political information efficacy difference variable. While females' political information efficacy did increase at a higher rate ($M = .350$) than males ($M = .258$), it was not statistically significant ($t(133) = -.654, p = .514$). Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Hypothesis 6 stated that there would be a significant correlation between political information efficacy and social capital. To test Hypothesis 6 a Pearson Product Moment Correlation was performed comparing pre-test political information efficacy with a 9-

item social capital scale. Results indicated no correlation between variables ($r = .049, p = .563$). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

Hypothesis 7 posited that there would be a significant correlation between political information efficacy and political socialization. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted, comparing pre-test political information efficacy with political socialization, which was only measured in the pre-test stage. A significant correlation was found between the two variables ($r = .496, p = <.001$). Hypothesis 7 was supported.

Hypothesis 8 investigated if there was a significant correlation between partisanship and political information efficacy. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted and found a significant correlation ($r = .326, p = <.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 8 was supported.

Hypothesis 9 predicted that there would be an inverse correlation between political cynicism and political information efficacy. This hypothesis was tested twice using Pearson Product Moment Correlation, comparing pre-test political information efficacy with pre-test political cynicism and comparing post-test political information efficacy with post-test political cynicism. While results found a significant inverse correlation in pre-test comparisons ($r = -.357, p = <.001$), post-test comparisons were not significant ($r = .154, p = .071$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 9 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 10 investigated if there would be a positive correlation between actual political knowledge and political information efficacy. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted comparing participants' pre-test political information efficacy and correct answers to political knowledge questions. Results found a significant

correlation between political information efficacy and actual political knowledge, $r = .519, p = <.001$. Consequently, Hypothesis 10 was supported.

Research Question 1 asked if females differ from males in their accurate political knowledge. An independent samples t-test was conducted measuring the difference between the two sample groups' accurate political knowledge. Results found that males ($M = .5492$) and females ($M = .5030$) were not significantly different in their political knowledge ($t(128) = 1.387, p = .168$). As such, the answer to Research Question 1 was no.

Research Question 2 asked what kinds of political information correlate with political information efficacy. Political knowledge questions were divided into two categories: general political knowledge and specific political knowledge. As such, two tests were conducted to determine which of the types of knowledge correlated with political information efficacy. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted and found a significant correlation ($r = .349, p = <.001$) with general knowledge compared with political information efficacy. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation was also conducted for specific political knowledge compared with political information efficacy and a significant correlation was found ($r = .556, p = <.001$).

A summary of the results can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Variable Means and Standard Deviations

Variable Tested with PIE	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Standard Deviation
Political Information Efficacy	3.383	3.689 ^{***}	.8300
Males	3.512	3.770	1.097 (pre) .9135 (post)
Females	3.276	3.626	1.162 (pre) .9350 (post)
Political Cynicism			
Males	3.346	2.750	.5434 (pre) .4756 (post)
Females	3.177	2.811	.6041 (pre) .6205 (post)
Political Knowledge			N/A
Males	.5492	N/A	.1985
Females	.5030	N/A	.1911
*** = <.001			
N/A = no data collected			

Discussion

This study investigated whether political messages are impactful on individuals' political information efficacy and what other variables may influence their confidence levels. Participants were exposed to one of two presidential debates in September and October, 2016. To determine the effects of the stimuli on efficacy, participants answered a variety of questions/statements regarding opinions on confidence in their political knowledge and political leaders as well as information of societal influences. This section will discuss the findings regarding political information efficacy and its correlates and how this information is beneficial for future research.

To begin, this study found that political information efficacy levels in participants did increase at a significant level from pre-test to post-test, as consistent with previous research (i.e. Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007; Tedesco, 2011; Dunn et al., 2015). In fact, almost every study published thus far has shown this result, indicating that participants do benefit from political messages. It is important to note that this study used political debates as a stimulus, however, previous studies used other various forms of political messages such as articles, advertisements, and news stories and yielded the same results of a positive increase in political information efficacy levels. This supports the notion that political messages of any kind can be beneficial to the public.

Even though political information efficacy increased for participants, there was no significant difference between levels for males and females. While females began at a lower level than males and ended at a lower level than their counterparts, the differences between the two were not significant. While previous research has found that females were less confident than males regarding their political knowledge (Tedesco, 2011), this

study suggests that females should not be concerned with the differences between genders' confidence levels, as they are closer to each other than they think. While both genders' political information efficacy went up, neither group increased more than the other. This supports the idea that both males and females are processing and benefitting from the political messages at the same rate.

This study found significant correlations between political information efficacy and internal efficacy in both the pre-test and post-test, which is not surprising. Internal efficacy is very similar to political information efficacy in that both are examining internal reactions to external stimuli. This information supports the idea that there are other factors than can influence an individual's political information efficacy.

In contrast, there were no significant correlations between political information efficacy and external efficacy, which, again, is not surprising. While internal efficacy and political information efficacy examine how individuals view themselves in the political process, external efficacy examines what individuals think about outside sources. For example, while internal efficacy states "citizens like me are qualified to participate in political discussions," external efficacy states "the politicians waste a lot of taxpayer's money." Both statements are opinions of the individual, but one is about how they view themselves and the other is how they view a third party, in this case politicians. Statements that are self-reflecting are more in line with the premise of political information efficacy than those which are opinions of others.

One of the main purposes of this study was to determine if there were any variables that correlated with political information efficacy beyond just measuring if participants' confidence levels increased or decreased. Four additional variables were

tested with political information efficacy to discover if there were significant correlations: social capital, political cynicism, political socialization, and political knowledge.

While social capital is broad, including far more than could be included in this study, it was chosen as a possible variable because of the intangible resources one can gain from personal networks, such as credibility and reputation. Networks can include peers, family, churches, memberships, etc. It was posited that these intangible resources could have an effect on an individual's confidence levels, therefore correlating with political information efficacy. Results, however, found no significant correlation between social capital and political information efficacy. Even with these results, other researchers should further investigate the possibility of a correlation between the two variables. As of the date of this study, only one social capital scale exists which solely measures bridging and bonding, even though there are many more facets to the variable. Future researchers should develop another scale and test these two variables again to determine a possible correlation, as the connection between the two seems logical.

Political socialization was tested to determine if interactions with certain groups helped to increase individuals' confidence levels. By asking questions such as "how often do you discuss politics with peers" or "how often do you discuss politics with family" it was determined that there is a connection with how often politics are discussed within the groups of people and an individual's political information efficacy. Participants may find that the opinions and conversations with these groups help to confirm their own choices and, therefore, be more confident. It is important to note that the scale used to measure political socialization included one item that was not similar in

nature to the other three. This item measured the amount of diversity of political opinions in an individual's social group, as opposed to the other three items, which measured frequency of discussion of politics within networks. Because of this, the political socialization scale had a low Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha=.461$). Had the diversity question been removed, the Cronbach's alpha would have risen to an acceptable level ($\alpha=.596$). In a post hoc analysis, political information efficacy was measured with the three items related to socialization within network groups ($r = .524, p = <.001$). While the correlation increased by .028, it is supportive of the need for a further developed scale. For future research, it is suggested that the diversity question be left out and focus solely on socialization within network groups. It is also suggested that a more in depth scale be developed.

This study also investigated if partisanship correlated with political information efficacy. Results found that participants who had strong loyalty and closely identified with their declared political party were also more politically efficacious. This information is significant as it shows that individuals who have strong ties with their declared party are more confident in their political knowledge and may be more inclined to participate in the political process.

Surprisingly, political cynicism has not been tested to determine any correlation with political information efficacy prior to this study. Due to having a pre- and post-test design, it was necessary to test political information efficacy with cynicism twice, comparing pre-test answers for both variables as well as testing post-test answers for both variables. While the pre-test answers supported the hypothesis that there would be an inverse correlation, the post-test did not. In fact, the results showed that there was an

inverse correlation before watching the stimulus that switched to no significant correlation after watching the stimulus.

What is particularly interesting about these results is the content of the two debates that were watched by participants and the controversial nature of the campaigns between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Both debates were less about substance and potential policies, but instead, more about insults at each other's character. To the naked eye, one would think anyone would be more cynical about politics after watching the debates; however, the results indicated that participants became less cynical. The interpretation of these results is that participants were given enough information to help them make a decision as to whom they supported in the election and, therefore, become more confident in their own choice of whom to vote for. Even though the debates were more about character and less about how the candidate would govern, participants became less cynical. It would be interesting to see if the results would be the same in other political scenarios that didn't include these two controversial politicians.

In a post hoc analysis, it was determined that males ($M = 3.347$) were more cynical than females ($M = 3.178$) in the pre-test phase of the study ($t(134) = 1.343$, $p = .181$). While both genders became less cynical after watching the debate ($M = 2.751$ for males, $M = 2.812$ for females), males' cynicism dropped at a faster rate (.603) than females' (.357). A logical explanation of this may have been the issues and comments made by Donald Trump during these elections about Hillary Clinton and towards women. Female participants may have found it less forgivable than males regarding these comments and, therefore, their cynicism in the post-test was higher than males.

The last hypothesis and two research questions examine individuals' political knowledge. Since political information efficacy only focuses on the confidence one has in their knowledge, and not whether that knowledge is correct, it was important to determine if accurate information influences individuals' efficacy levels. A scale comprised of political knowledge questions from Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and questions created by the researcher were used as a quiz for participants. It was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between actual political knowledge and political information efficacy. Results were significant in that participants who answered more questions correctly reported being more politically efficacious.

Additionally, research question 1 asked if females and males differ in their accurate political knowledge. Politics, in general, are dominated by the male gender, and while more females are becoming prominent players in the political field, they still are in the minority. Determining if there is a political knowledge difference between genders could provide insight into ways in which females can be encouraged to engage more frequently in the political process. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between males' and females' political knowledge. This information can be used to demonstrate to young female citizens that they are equal to their male counterparts, despite the imbalance in the political arena, and hopefully inspire more women to become involved.

Lastly, research question 2 examined the types of political knowledge that correlates with political information efficacy. As not all political knowledge questions are necessary to be an active participant in politics, it was important to determine if

having basic or specialized political information correlated with participants' confidence levels. Two types of questions emerged from this study: general questions (where the answers do not change) and specific questions (where the answers change depending on circumstances). Surprisingly, both types of questions were significant in correlating with political information efficacy. Having basic knowledge of the foundation of the United States political system is important for citizens to feel confident to participate in the political process. However, even more significant is that specific knowledge, such as who is currently involved in the political positions of power as well as information of candidates in current elections, is correlated with individuals' feeling more efficacious. This information is particularly exciting because scholars are concerned that young citizens' not being engaged in the political process will lead to less engagement when they are older. These data not only shows that young voters are paying attention to current events, but that it is making them more confident that their vote carries weight. Knowing this information may help scholars determine more effective ways to engage young citizens in the political process.

Beyond learning if individuals' political knowledge is factual, there is a greater possibility with a scale such as the one created in this study. One of the more serious challenges of information gathering in this day and age is finding data that is fact and not fake news. Throughout the election, fake news sites were producing inaccurate headline stories that some of the public were taking as factual rather than investigating the information to determine the truth. This caused a great concern that the public is not doing its due diligence in researching information before promoting the truth for their political stance. Instead, sites like Facebook and Twitter, where people tend to post

political stories to support their ideologies or political candidates, are flooded with stories that are not true, yet so many people believe them. By not researching if the information is true, people are sharing or retweeting the fake stories and causing an avalanche of misinformation posing as factual knowledge.

Young citizens have already been confused with where to go to find factual information about a candidate or policy that having these fake stories only complicates the matter. It is imperative to have a scale that can measure political knowledge and provide critical information about the voters and how much they know about politics. More damaging than an uninformed voter is a misinformed voter. Therefore, continuing to develop a political knowledge scale is crucial in order for further research to be conducted on the most effective ways to reach young voters and ensure their information is accurate, providing them with the basic foundation needed to be an active political participant.

As with all studies, there were some limitations. Since the data were collected during a live debate, it was impossible to control participants' reactions to information said by candidates. It is unknown if those reactions had any effect on participants' answers during the post-test. Additionally, during debate 1, a large group of over 90 individuals gathered to have a debate viewing party, and only some were participants of this study. Several post-test surveys were not completed from this group, probably because it simply was too chaotic in the room. As such, when pre-test and post-test surveys were matched for coding, some had to be removed for incomplete information. For future research, it is suggested that when using a live stimulus, such as a debate, to have a smaller group in order to maintain control and have a better return rate.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine if other variables correlated with political information efficacy to have a better understanding of what factors influence an individual to engage in the political process. Understanding that there are many variables that can be tested, five were chosen to examine their relationship with political information efficacy. While some hypotheses were supported and others were not, all information is useful to guide researchers in expanding this concept beyond the foundation of increased or decreased confidence levels. Researchers should explore in more depth how and why some variables correlate with political information efficacy and some do not. Only after more in-depth research is conducted and tested with other theories and variables will there be a greater understanding of what influences citizens in participating in the political process, specifically, what resources and tools can be given to young voters so they feel efficacious and want to be involved with politics.

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Appendix A

The following political knowledge questions were created with options of multiple choice and short answers to include general knowledge and specific knowledge.

General Political Knowledge Questions:

- If something happens to the President, the Vice-President is next in line.
Who is 3rd in line for the presidency?
- Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not?
- Which political party is more conservative than the others?
- What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution called?
- How old must a person be to run for President?
- Who appoints the Supreme Court Justices?
- The 1st Amendment addresses:
- The 2nd Amendment addresses:

Specific Political Knowledge Questions:

- Who is the Speaker of the House of Representatives?
- What political office is held by Joe Biden?
- Which political party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives?
- Which political party currently has the most members in the Senate?
- Taking your best guess, what is the percentage of women in congress?
- Off the top of your head can you name a woman member of congress, either Senate or U.S. House of Representatives?

- Of the eight members currently serving on the U.S. Supreme Court, do you happen to know how many are women?
- From which political party is each candidate nominated? (Multiple Choice, candidate names are listed and participants choose party affiliation for each candidate)
- Is the current federal budget balanced, in a surplus, or in a deficit?
- What level of government has the most control over tuition and fees at Radford University? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate was formerly a senator for New York? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate is a medical doctor? (Multiple Choice)
- Which candidate is a real estate mogul? (Multiple Choice)
- Which candidate was formerly the Governor of New Mexico? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate is promoting the strictest measures on gun control? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate is the most against illegal immigration? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate wants to eliminate the IRS and replace them with a federal consumption tax? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate is the most supportive of free trade with other countries? (Multiple Choice)

- Which presidential candidate is offering the "New College Compact" to assist with college education? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate supports more restrictions on abortion? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate wants to eliminate the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to kill suspected terrorists? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate frequently complains about “political correctness” in American culture? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate believes the United States can completely shift to using renewable energy by 2030? (Multiple Choice)
- Which presidential candidate has stated regarding the federal budget that they propose a 20 percent reduction in federal spending with cuts to military spending, Medicaid, and Medicare? (Multiple Choice)
- Who is Hillary Clinton's Vice Presidential running mate?
- Who is Donald Trump's Vice Presidential running mate?
- Who is Gary Johnson's Vice Presidential running mate?
- Who is Jill Stein’s Vice Presidential running mate?