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Youth Internet Use and Recruitment into Civic and Political Participation



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The Civic and Political Significance of Online Participatory Cultures among Youth Transitioning to Adulthood

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Abstract

As political engagement moves online, candidates are more frequently relying on the Internet to share information and mobilize voters (Herrnson et al. 2007), and Internet recruitment is particularly likely to target youth (under 25) for varied forms of civic and political participation (Rock the Vote, 2008; Schlozman et al, 2010). This study draws on panel survey data of 436 youth surveyed in high school (ages 16-17) and following the 2008 election (ages 19-22) to examine whether and under what conditions recruitment in general and internet recruitment specifically encourage participation in varied civic and political activities. The implications for reliance on the Internet to promote youth civic and political engagement are discussed.

Youth Internet Use and Recruitment into Civic and Political Participation

Introduction

Politics is increasingly happening online. Following the successful use of the Internet as an organizing and fundraising tool during the 2004 U.S. presidential election, candidates are more frequently relying on the Internet to share information and mobilize voters (Herrnson et al. 2007). Indeed, social network sites, YouTube, e-mail, and SMS were all prominently used to share information, raise money, and mobilize participation in the 2008 election. Online recruitment into civic and political activity is believed to be particularly relevant for mobilizing the youth vote, the rationale being that young people spend much of their time online (and potentially removed from opportunities provided in face-to-face communities). For example, Rock the Vote recommended in 2008 that “new media tactics should be a central part of any campaign targeting the young voter” and that direct requests via e-mail and text messaging and

organizing Facebook events can be relatively inexpensive and effective tactics to encourage voter turnout among young people (Rock the Vote 2008). This seems to be translating into practice. Schlozman et al.'s (2010) analysis of a 2008 national survey conducted by Pew Internet and American Life found that youth aged 18–24 were far more likely to be recruited by e-mail than by phone and more likely than individuals in any other age group to be recruited by e-mail. However, the evidence for the effectiveness of these tactics is primarily anecdotal. It is currently unclear whether the availability of online communities and online options for political participation offer adequate substitutes for face-to-face facilitated political participation.

Understanding whether Internet mobilization is more or less effective with youth than other strategies, and under what circumstances, has considerable value in light of the relatively low levels of electoral participation within this age group. While increases in voter turnout for young adults received quite a bit of attention during the 2008 presidential election, youth participation overall remains low. For example, as the current Congress makes decisions about funding for education and services for returning veterans (many of whom are under the age of 25), fewer than one in four youth (21.3%) under 25 voted in the 2010 mid-term election (CIRCLE 2010), compared with 49% of those aged 25 and older. Furthermore, non-voting forms of electoral participation that indicate overall engagement that both extends and informs voting, such as following and discussing politics and working on political campaigns, appear to be relatively uncommon among youth (Lopez et al, 2006).

Given the growing use of the Internet to conduct a variety of political activities, the relatively low political participation rates among young people, and the uncertainty around the effectiveness of Internet-based efforts in recruiting youth, this paper examines the prevalence and outcomes of Internet-based recruitment for two samples of youth. We draw on panel survey

data from a diverse group of 436 young adults in California who were surveyed in high school and again following the 2008 presidential election. This paper begins by focusing on the prevalence of requests for participation in varied civic and political activities for the 19–22-year-olds in our sample and the forms that these requests typically take (Internet, face to face, or other). It then assesses the effectiveness of recruitment overall to increase political behavior within this sample. Finally, we examine the effectiveness of Internet recruitment specifically to increase political behavior within this sample.

Conceptual Framework: The Civic Voluntarism Model

In this paper, we draw on Verba, Schlozman & Brady's (1995) civic voluntarism model to examine the relationship between Internet use and civic and political participation. The model suggests that individual decisions to be civically and politically active depend on interest, skills (such as letter writing and meeting organizing), and opportunities (operationalized as recruitment or requests for participation). Indeed they find that each of these three variables act as independent predictors of political activity. When applying this model to Internet experiences, we focus specifically on the third factor: access to networks through which young people might be recruited into civic and political activity. We focus our efforts here for a few reasons. First, the effectiveness of recruitment is well documented (Abramson and Claggett 2001) but the effectiveness of the increasingly popular use of Internet-based recruitment has yet to be determined. Second, young people tend to be recruited through traditional methods at lower rates than their middle-aged counterparts (Brady et al. 1999), and they are more likely to be recruited via the Internet than individuals in any other age group (Schlozman et al. 2010). The question

remains whether Internet recruitment is more or less effective for this age group than traditional methods.

Literature Review

The Importance of Recruitment for Political Activity

Recruitment has long been seen as a key factor in political participation. As Abramson and Claggett (2001) noted, there are “studies dating back 70 years documenting the impact of recruitment on turnout” (p. 906). Recent studies have suggested that when citizens are asked to participate, either by political parties (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) or by leaders in their work, church, or community (Verba et al. 1995), their overall participation increases. Verba et al. (1995) found that between 30% and 43% of those who engaged in various activities did so, at least in part, in response to a direct request. Noting findings suggesting that those who are already active are more likely to be recruited (Brady et al. 1999), Abramson and Claggett (2001) compared the relationship between recruitment and political behavior, while controlling for prior behavior, and found an additional effect for recruitment above and beyond prior behavior. They also replicated findings that prior political activity augments the likelihood of recruitment.

While recruitment overall seems to be a reliable predictor of political behavior, the act of recruitment is far from a uniform endeavor. Not all individuals share an equal likelihood of being recruited into civic and political activity (Verba et al. 1995; Schlozman et al. 2010), and the sources and goals of recruitment can range from partisan efforts to issue-based efforts to encouraging general participation. In reviewing this literature while keeping youth participation in mind, we found that a few considerations seem to be of particular importance. Brady et al. (1999) determined three sets of variables to be important predictors of whether an individual is

recruited: (1) prior activity; (2) visible characteristics, such as education, income, and job level, that act as proxies for prior activity; and (3) less visible characteristics, such as civic skills, interest in politics, and cooperativeness, that suggest that efforts to recruit might be successful. Given that youth as a group are less likely to have a record of prior political participation, tend to be in the process of increasing education and income, and are reportedly less interested in politics, logic suggests that they are less likely to be recruited. As Brady et al. noted, recruiters of any sort are more likely to minimize their costs and focus their efforts where they believe these efforts will pay off. Indeed, when these other variables were not controlled for, young people aged 18–24 and even those in the next age bracket (25–34) received significantly fewer requests for participation than their middle-aged (45–54) counterparts.

The costs of Internet recruitment, however, are lower than for many other forms (Bimber 1998; Ward et al. 2003). Sending a message to 50 people is not much more difficult than sending it to one. This could potentially increase the amount of recruitment of young people, who are traditionally considered less promising targets. Brian Krueger (2006) tested the hypothesis that the lowered cost of Internet-based recruiting disrupts the tendency of recruiters to target only those most likely to respond positively. He found that for Internet-based recruiting, many predictors such as prior activity and civic skills were not significant, but that Internet skill was. Looking at age, the youth in Krueger's study appeared to have greater Internet skill, which increased the likelihood of Internet recruitment. When Internet skill was controlled for, lower age decreased the likelihood of Internet recruitment. Thus, to the extent that youth displayed greater Internet skill, it was more likely that recruitment efforts would extend to this often-dismissed group. A more recent study conducted in 2008 found that youth aged 18–24 were recruited by e-mail at higher rates than individuals in other age groups (Schlozman et al. 2010).

On the basis of these trends, we expect the Internet to be the most common source of recruitment for the young participants in our sample.

The Effectiveness of Internet-Based Recruiting

As Internet-based political recruiting has become more popular, political scientists and communications researchers have turned their attention to the effectiveness of this practice. While Internet recruitment might be relatively inexpensive compared with other forms, there is reason to believe it may not be as effective. Gerber and Green (2000) pointed out that many of the influential studies of recruitment that were performed prior to the 1970s were studies of campaigns that primarily employed face-to-face contact. In these authors' 1998 experimental study of the effectiveness of face-to-face canvassing, direct mail, and phone contact (vs. no contact) on general voter turnout, they found that only face-to-face canvassing had a substantial effect on voter turnout. One might expect, then, that Internet-based recruitment is cheap but has no consistent effect beyond informing those who are already planning to vote.

That study, however, looked only at requests from strangers (a hired canvassing organization). Verba et al. (1995) found that about one-half of the requests for participation in their sample came from people who were known to the study participants and that these types of requests were about twice as likely to be successful as requests from strangers. Internet-based recruitment is not so clearly delineated. While phone and mail solicitation from campaigns tend to come only from the campaign workers, e-mail from campaigns can be direct or forwarded from a friend or acquaintance. Conversely, when they are sent out as mass e-mails, direct requests from friends or relatives can take on some of the impersonal nature of requests from campaigns via direct mail or phone canvassing.

Unfortunately, there appear to be few studies that have directly looked at the effects on political participation of direct requests via the Internet. The current evidence tends to be in the forms of case studies or anecdotal accounts of successful efforts to use e-mail and Web sites to facilitate fundraising for political campaigns (see review in Krueger 2006) or organize protests or other kinds of direct action (Bennett 2003; Juris 2005). A recent experimental study by Hooghe and colleagues (2010) has begun to address this gap. These authors found that, regarding donations to environmental causes, Internet and face-to-face mobilization tactics were equally effective among college students in increasing knowledge, issue salience, and intended behavioral change (Hooghe et al. 2010). However, this study was limited to one form of behavior (donations) and was not able to examine the effects of recruitment on actual behavior in a naturalistic setting. Currently, it is unclear whether Internet-based requests are more or less effective than face-to-face or other traditional approaches for motivating youth political participation.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to better understand the implications of the increasingly pervasive presence of digital media in the civic and political lives of young people. We approach this through an empirical examination of the ways in which young people's participation with digital media might influence their pathways to (or away from) civic and political participation. Given the evidence that young people are typically less likely to be recruited overall, the recommendation of the use of new media to recruit this group, and the relative paucity of research on whether and how Internet recruitment efforts reach young people and are effective for increasing youth civic and political activity, we focus on two sets of research questions:

1. Is Internet recruitment more common than other forms of recruitment among youth?
 - a. Is the Internet more likely to be the mechanism for recruitment into some kinds of activities than others?
2. To what extent does the recruitment of young adults predict their civic and political behavior?
 - a. Is Internet recruitment effective?
 - b. Is Internet recruitment more or less effective than face-to-face or other traditional recruitment strategies?
 - c. Is Internet recruitment more effective for some types of activities than others?

Methods

Sample

This study draws on a two-wave panel of survey data from a sample of $N = 436$ California youth aged approximately 16–17 years during the first wave of data collection (which took place between 2005 and 2007) and approximately 19–22 years during the second wave of data collection (which took place after the 2008 presidential election). This sample was derived from a larger cross-sectional survey of youth civic engagement and civic education among 5,505 high school juniors and seniors from 21 schools across California that was conducted in the springs of 2005, 2006, and 2007. Although they were not proportionally representative of California, the schools were purposively selected to ensure a diverse range of demographic and academic characteristics. From this sample, approximately 1,305 (28%) individuals agreed to be contacted again and 436 (33% of the recruitment pool and 8% of the total pool) participated in the follow-up survey.

We examined individuals in the original sample and in the sample of those who took the survey in 2009. We found some differences between the samples on the basis of gender, political interest, and GPA but no differences in digital media participation. As seen in Table 1, the resulting samples referred to in this study were racially diverse, had a higher proportion of female than male participants (62% vs. 38%), and were composed of individuals who were likely to enroll in a four-year college (86%). Participants in these samples were also slightly more likely to be interested in politics. While a national sample would be preferable, we have no reason to believe that *relationships* between variables would differ in the broader population after controlling for demographic variables that differ between the samples. We do, however, believe that the descriptions of the distribution of youth experience with recruitment (discussed in Finding 1) should be interpreted with caution.

Measures

Recruitment. During wave 2 of data collection only (2009), participants were asked to report whether in the last 12 months they had received requests to participate in four different activities.

These activities include:

- *Issue Request.* In the past 12 months, have you received any requests directed at you personally to take some active role in a local, public, or political issue?
- *Campaign Request.* In the past 12 months, have you received any requests directed at you personally to take part in campaign work or make a campaign contribution?
- *Request to Contact Elected Officials.* In the past 12 months, have you received any requests directed at you personally to contact an elected official?

- *Request to Protest.* In the past 12 months, have you received any requests directed at you personally to take part in a protest, march, or demonstration?

Additionally, participants were asked to report the primary form in which these requests were made and to choose one option from a list including in person, through the Internet (including chat, IM, e-mail, etc.), by phone, by mail, during a meeting, and “other.” These categories were collapsed into three variables of interest for this study: *Internet, in person (in person, meeting),* and *other (phone, mail).*

Civic and Political Behaviors. Participants answered a series of questions about their participation in varied civic and political activities that were drawn from previous studies of youth civic engagement. All activities were asked in the context of the frequency of the activity in the past 12 months. These included:

- *Civic Participation* (collected at Time 1 and Time 2), which was measured in terms of three different civic activities: volunteering in the community, helping to raise money for a charitable cause, and working together informally with a group or an individual to help solve a problem in the community. Responses were averaged to create a single scale of civic participation (Chronbach’s $\alpha = .73$).
- *Political Action and Expression*, which included engagement in (a) trying to change a policy or law at any political level, (b) protest or demonstration, or (c) trying to change a school policy or school rule. Responses were averaged to create a single scale of civic participation (Chronbach’s $\alpha = .69$).
- *Campaign Activity* (collected at Time 2 only), which included (a) trying to persuade others to vote a certain way for a candidate or issue, (b) wearing campaign buttons or

putting bumper stickers on a car or a political sign in a window or yard, and (c) donating money to a candidate, political party, or organization. Responses were averaged to create a single scale of campaign activity (Chronbach's $\alpha = .61$).

- *Civic Group Membership* (collected at Time 2 only). For this activity, participants were asked how many organizations (including civic organizations, charities, social groups, political groups, ethnic organizations, etc.) they belonged to or donated money to.
- *Political Group Membership* (collected at Time 2 only). For this activity, participants were asked how many of the groups to which they belonged were politically active (e.g., discussed politics, took stands on political issues, tried to influence government actions)?
- *Voting* (collected at Time 1 and Time 2) was measured at Time 1 as the intention to vote (single item) and at Time 2 by asking whether the participant voted in the 2008 election.

Demographic and Control Variables. The primary mode of control in this study was the lagged dependent variable, when available, and the level of engagement in a related activity at Time 1 when the exact lagged dependent variable was not available. While gender, ethnic identity, and race were available and have been found to be related to civic commitment and civic and political engagement (Burns et al. 2001; Marcelo et al. 2007), these effects should be accounted for by prior levels of engagement.

Additionally, we controlled for Time 1 political interest, which may have led youth to seek out opportunities for civic and political engagement that were unavailable to them at Time 1. We also controlled for four-year college attendance, out of the recognition that college attendance may provide opportunities for engagement that could not be accounted for by initial levels of activity.

Insert Table 1 about here

Analytic Strategy. To examine the prevalence of Internet versus other forms of recruitment within our sample of youth (RQ1), we relied primarily on descriptive statistics followed by Chi-Square tests of statistical significance. To examine the effectiveness of recruitment overall and Internet recruitment, we relied on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and binary logistic regression (for the dichotomous outcome variable of voting) with controls for the Time 1 lagged dependent variable or a substitute indicator of Time 1 level of activity.

Findings

Youth Experiences with Recruitment via the Internet versus Other Methods.

As seen in Table 2 and Figure 1, the majority of recruitment requests that youth in our sample received were communicated via the Internet. This is consistent with the findings of Schlozman et al. (2010). However, the tendency for youth to be recruited via the Internet was more pronounced for some forms of participation than others. For example, there were significant differences by format between the numbers of requests to address an issue ($\chi^2(2) = 14.4, p < .001$), contact an official ($\chi^2(2) = 9.52, p < .01$), and take part in a protest ($\chi^2(2) = 16.44, p < .001$). The strongest differences were found for requests to participate in addressing a social or political issue, with youth reporting higher numbers of requests via the Internet than face to face ($\chi^2(1) = 7.4, p < .01$) or through other formats ($\chi^2(1) = 11.9, p < .001$). On the other hand, there were no significant differences by format for requests to take part in campaign-related activities ($\chi^2(2) = 3.17, p > .10$). Youth were also more likely to receive requests to

contact an official via the Internet than face to face ($\chi^2(1) = 14.4, p < .01$) and to participate in protests via the Internet than other methods ($\chi^2(1) = 16.6, p < .001$).

Insert Table 2 & Figure 1 Here

Relationship between Recruitment and Levels of Civic and Political Activity

We first tested the general effect of recruitment on participation, using OLS regression controlling for the Time 1 lagged dependent variable. This analysis replicated, within a youth sample, the well-established findings of studies of recruitment in broad age ranges of adults, that recruitment is an important factor in promoting political participation. As seen in Table 3, the total number of requests (e.g., number of activities) a participant experienced was significantly related to the participant's levels of engagement in political action and expression ($\beta = .33, p < .001$), campaign activity ($\beta = .34, p < .001$), membership in civic organizations ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), and membership in political organizations ($\beta = .35, p < .001$). Adding the number of requests to the model accounted for an additional 7%–13% of the explained variance in these outcomes beyond what was predicted by demographic variables and prior levels of engagement.

Recruitment was also significantly related to voting ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.23, p < .05$), though the added explanatory value was lower than it was for other outcomes. Interestingly, recruitment was not significantly related to civic activity. Because three of the four indicators of recruitment primarily targeted political activity, the question was raised as to whether the targeted nature of recruitment was important to the kinds of activity in which youth engage. On the one hand, one may argue that requests for participation serve as a gateway into a range of civic and political activities. On the other hand, it is possible that requests for involvement in one form of activity

stop there or lead youth to pursue a specific model of civic and political engagement (e.g., voluntarism or campaign-related activity or protest politics).

Insert Table 3 Here

To consider these possibilities, the next set of analyses presented here examined whether the relationship between recruitment and civic and political engagement varied depending on the extent to which the request content matched the outcome behavior closely. As seen in Table 4, when recruitment requests were broken out and entered into the analysis as separate indicators, forms of recruitment that were most closely aligned with the outcome variable were more likely to be significant predictors of activity. For example, the only kinds of requests that predicted civic activity and civic organization membership were requests to take an active role in addressing a social issue ($\beta = .22, p < .001$ for both). Requests to address a social issue and requests to protest significantly predicted political action and expression ($\beta = .19, p < .001$ and $\beta = .14, p < .05$, respectively); these included such behaviors as trying to change law or policy and protesting. Campaign activity was most strongly predicted by campaign requests ($\beta = .18, p < .001$) but was also predicted by requests to participate in a protest, rally, or demonstration ($\beta = .13, p < .05$). It is possible that the youth surveyed interpreted this question to include political rallies.

Interestingly, the one form of recruitment that significantly predicted voting was requests to address a social issue ($\text{Exp}(B) = 1.23, p < .05$).

Relationship between Internet Recruitment and Levels of Civic and Political Activity

In order to test the influence of Internet recruitment on civic and political activity, all four forms of recruitment were broken out by whether the request was made *in person*, via *the Internet*, or through *other methods* (meeting, mail, phone, or other) and entered into the model. Mean levels of activity by recruitment type are presented in Table 5. In the first set of analyses, Internet recruitment was compared with no recruitment while controlling for other forms of recruitment (see Table 6). This allowed us to examine the effectiveness between specific forms of recruitment and civic and political behavior while controlling for the possibility that being recruited for one type of activity is correlated with being recruited for many activities.

As seen in Table 6, the relationship between Internet recruitment and levels of civic and political activity suggest that Internet recruitment is effective in promoting civic and political activity, but the relationship varied by the content of the request and the kind of activity. For example, the relationship between recruitment to address a social issue and civic activity (described in the previous section) held for Internet-based recruitment ($\beta = .13, p < .05$). This was also true for the relationship between recruitment to address as social issue and membership in civic organizations: for this, Internet-based recruitment was a positive predictor ($\beta = .15, p < .05$).

For other relationships, Internet-based recruitment was effective for some kinds of recruitment content but not for others. For example, the relationship between issue-based recruitment and political action and expression held for Internet recruitment ($\beta = .15, p < .05$), but for the relationship between protest recruitment and political action and expression only face-

to-face and other requests were significant ($\beta = .13, p < .05$ for both). Similarly, the relationship between campaign recruitment and campaign activity was significant for Internet-based recruitment ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) but the relationship between protest recruitment and campaign activity was not. Finally, Internet-based recruitment did not significantly predict membership in political organizations or voting.

While the previous analyses provided information about the effectiveness of Internet recruitment relative to no recruitment, the question remains as to whether Internet recruitment is more or less effective than face-to-face or other formats of recruitment. To examine this question, we replicated the analyses described above, setting face-to-face and other types of recruitment as the reference values to enable comparison of Internet recruitment with each. These analyses provided no significant differences between Internet recruitment and face-to-face or other forms of recruitment.

Insert Tables 5 and 6 Here

Limitations

Perhaps the most noteworthy limitation of this study is the reliance on a small, voluntary sample of youth. While the initial sampling strategy—surveying entire classrooms of youth—suggests against youth opting into the study on the basis of interest in civic and political engagement, the follow-up study did rely on youth having volunteered their contact information and completing the survey at Time 2. This limitation is particularly important for our ability to generalize about rates of recruitment in that individuals this sample may be more interested in civic and political engagement and thus are more likely to be recruited. While we have no reason

to believe that the youth in our sample are more or less likely to be recruited via the Internet versus face to face versus other means, it would be helpful to replicate this study with a nationally representative sample. We believe that our finding that youth are more likely to be recruited via the Internet than other means is supported by Schlozman et al.'s (2010) similar finding in a national sample of youth and adults.

Discussion/Implications

We began this paper with questions about the prevalence and effectiveness of recruitment in general and of Internet-based recruitment of youth. Considering the prominent role that online technologies play in the lives of young people, as well as in recent elections and other forms of civic and political engagement, it seems critical to develop a better understanding of how online mobilization efforts reach and influence the activities of the newest generation of political participants. Bearing in mind the limitations of our sample and design, we offer cautious conclusions about the role of the Internet in forming and shaping pathways to youth civic and political participation.

The Internet is a common medium for recruitment among youth, and it is important to understand the effectiveness of this strategy. Our first finding, that young people in our sample were more likely to be recruited via the Internet than other methods, aligns with Schlozman et al.'s (2010) findings in a study of a national sample of youth. This gives us confidence that this finding is not simply an artifact of our small, voluntary sample. If youth are more likely to be contacted via the Internet because of the cost-effectiveness of the strategy but the strategy is not effective, then reliance on the Internet will do little to address the challenge of supporting youth

civic and political engagement. On the other hand, if this strategy is effective, then the cost-effective strategy of Internet recruitment can play an important role in increasing youth representation in the public sphere.

Recruitment in general, and Internet-based recruitment specifically, appears to be effective for some but not all spheres of activity. The match between the recruitment request and the kind of activity being targeted matters. In our sample, recruitment was a significant predictor of civic and political behavior even after controlling for prior levels of engagement. However, the variation in the relationship between recruitment and activity by the content of the request (issue, campaign, contact official, protest) can be interpreted in a couple of ways. First, it appears that the match between the content of the request and the kind of activity being requested matters. For example, requests to be politically active may not result on overall increases in levels of engagement. Second, this finding appears to be particularly true for recruitment that relates to electoral activities. While issue- and protest-based requests were related to varied outcomes, campaign-related requests and requests to contact officials were related only to the activities to which they were most closely connected. Perhaps most interestingly, issue-based requests were related to voting while requests related to electoral activities (e.g., campaign and contact officials) were not. This is particularly noteworthy in light of Green's (2004) finding that voter mobilization (in person and via phone) was effective only for youth who had already intended to vote and his suggestion that voter mobilization efforts focus on already-engaged youth to enhance the cost-effectiveness of recruitment. Our findings suggest that appealing to youth concerns about social issues and justice may play an important role in motivating a range of

activities, including voting, and thus may have implications for the messaging of voter mobilization drives.

While young people are generally assumed to be a low-yield group to target for mobilization, in our sample, requests for recruitment appeared to be an important factor in determining participation. This finding does not necessarily imply that recruitment will be equally effective for all young people: our sample included youth who were responsive to our survey and were thus potentially more recruitable. However, it does fit fairly well with the findings of studies of the influence of recruitment on participation (Verba et al. 1995; Abramson and Claggett 2001), and it suggests that recruitment can be effective even with very young adults.

Given the high proportion of requests that happened in our sample via the Internet, we were interested in the effectiveness of such requests. Schlozman et al. (2010) concluded that the increased likelihood of youth to be recruited at all from Internet-based recruiting is an indicator of greater equality of opportunity for youth. However, this conclusion is supported only if Internet-based recruitment is equally effective to other methods.

In this area, our hypothesis was non-directional. The findings regarding the effects of Internet use in general on civic and political participation have been mixed (see Bimber, 2001; Jennings and Zeitner 2003; Weber et al. 2003). However, none of those studies looked at requests for participation directly and none focused on the effectiveness for young people specifically. On one hand, findings such as those of Gerber and Green (2000), that face-to-face recruitment efforts were the only effective method, cast doubt that Internet-based recruitment is effective and suggest that while it is common for young people to be recruited in this way, this method may not be effective. On the other hand, many scholars point out that for upcoming generations, Internet communication may not be face to face but is more personal and interactive

than other forms of mediated communication (phone, mail, television; Jenkin, et al, 2009) and, given the disproportionate use by young people, may be a more appropriate means of reaching them and increasing their overall opportunities for participation (Delli Carpini 2000).

In our sample, we found that Internet recruitment was a positive significant predictor of a variety of civic and political activities, suggesting that efforts to recruit and engage youth can be worthwhile and cost-effective. On the other hand, Internet-based recruitment was not uniformly effective across activities. Of particular note are the findings that Internet-based requests were not related to voting or political organizational membership and effective forms of protest requests tended to be made face to face or through other means. We did not ask directly about requests to vote. However, our results suggest the need for more attention paid to the effectiveness of Internet -based recruitment on voting before relying on such methods to recruit youth. The finding that Internet-based protest requests were not related to any of the outcomes we measured bears further consideration as well. It may be that protest politics are inherently more compelling to youth when drawing on local, face-to-face relationships. It may also be that in our sample, the youth who were more likely to be recruited to protest were less wired than youth in general, in which case Internet-based recruitment within this group would understandably be less effective.

Conclusion and the Next Steps for Research

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between young people's online lives and the role that recruitment plays in their civic and political participation. Our main conclusion is that the Internet is a major medium of recruitment for youth and that it can be effective in promoting activity, but close attention must be paid to when and how it is effective.

Given our findings above, several remaining questions are of particular interest. The first is whether the effectiveness of Internet recruitment would be similar in a large and nationally representative sample of youth. Our sample was limited to youth who are volunteers and thus potentially more responsive to this topic. As national studies of youth civic engagement begin to take into account Internet communication and participation, we think that testing the effectiveness of Internet recruitment for youth, who are clearly most likely to receive requests in this format, should be a priority.

Second, an important analysis that we were not able to conduct given our relatively small sample was whether the effectiveness of Internet recruitment varies by the source of the request. In prior studies of traditional recruitment, requests by friends and family have been shown to be more effective than requests from strangers (Verba et al. 1995). It is unclear whether this dynamic plays out on the Internet as well. We did not have sufficient sample size to test these relationships in this study, but an important consideration in the design of future studies would be to understand when and how Internet recruitment is effective (or not). Additionally, as “Internet” formats expand to include a wider array of platforms, it becomes more important to understand which platforms are more likely to reach youth and do so effectively. In our study, “the Internet” included a variety of platforms but did not distinguish.

Finally, more research is needed to understand how variations in the ways in which young people spend time online may facilitate or hinder civic and political participation. Untangling the effects of Internet use on civic and political behavior is a complicated enterprise. Initial studies in this area treated Internet use as a uniform activity, asking whether Internet access or use of the Internet predicts political behavior. Generally speaking, these studies find mixed effects. Some research suggests “that participation on the Internet exerts a positive

influence on political participation” (Weber et al. 2003, p. 39) and on indicators of civic engagement (Jennings and Zeitner 2003). Others have found no effect after controlling for SES (Bimber, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Given the mixed findings and the tremendous growth in the variety of activities and kinds of interactions that have occurred on the Internet in the past 5–10 years, political scientists have begun to ask questions about how different kinds of Internet experiences might influence political behavior (Shah et al. 2005; Authors, Under Review).

We began this paper by drawing on Verba et al.’s (1995) civic voluntarism model, focusing our attention specifically on the recruitment aspect of the model. However, a number of questions remain that must be answered in order to fully understand the role of networked technologies in supporting youth pathways to civic and political participation. For example, Verba et al. identify not only the attitudes, skills, and opportunities that support engagement, they also suggest that these individual attributes and opportunities are primarily fostered through participation in civic institutions (work, church, clubs, etc.). There is an emerging body of empirical work attempting to define online or networked counterparts to these social networks and identify when they promote youth civic engagement (Jenkins, et al. 2009; Authors, under review). As more and more of online life is mediated through networked technologies, variations in what it means to be online become more pronounced. Some activities may simply be personal, while others may be interactive or public in ways that have potential for connecting youth to civic and political life. If we want to fully understand youth pathways to participation, fleshing out this model and making the connections between what youth do online; which attitudes, skills, and opportunities these online activities offer; and the ultimate outcomes are all pieces of the puzzle that must be addressed.

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Table 1. Demographic and control variables for sample

	2008 Sample (<i>N</i> = 436)
	%/ or Mean (SD)
Race/ethnicity:	
White	28.4%
African American	3.4%
Hispanic	27.1%
Asian	26.8%
Other	14%
Not reported	.2%
Female	62%
Educational achievement:	
Four-year college student	86%
Parental involvement (1-5)	3.19 (1.12)
Mother is a college graduate	36%
Political attitudes (1–5):	
Conservatism	2.82 (1.08)
Wave 1 political interest	3.75 (1.17)
Wave 2 political interest	3.91 (1.04)

Table 2. Participants' exposure to recruitment requests by activity and medium

	Participants receiving requests		Requests by medium (% of total for each category)					
			In person		Internet		Other	
	Count	% total sample	Count	%	Count	%	N	%
<i>Recruitment for:</i>								
Local public or political issue	161	37%	46	29%	76	47%	39	24%
Campaign work/contribution	137	32%	26	20%	52	41%	49	39%
Contact elected official	90	21%	18	20%	42	47%	30	33%
Protest	162	37%	56	35%	74	46%	32	30%
	Count	% total sample	N	% total sample	N	% total sample	N	% total sample
At least one Request	263	61%	146	34%	244	56%	150	35%
Mean (SD) number of requests	1.26 (1.32)							

Figure 1.

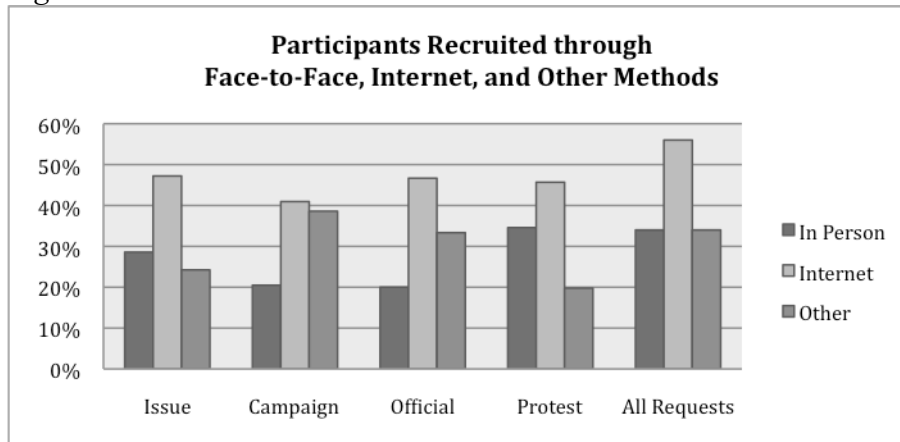


Table 3. Influence of recruitment on civic and political participation

	Model 1				Model 2			
	B	SE B	β	Sig.	B	SE B	β	Sig.
Civic activity								
Civic activity, T1	0.41	0.06	0.34	***	0.41	0.06	0.34	***
Political interest, T1	0.04	0.03	0.07		0.04	0.03	0.06	
College	0.31	0.10	0.15	**	0.30	0.10	0.15	**
Recruitment scale					0.01	0.03	0.02	
R^2	.17***				.17***			
Political action and expression								
Political action and expression, T1	0.37	0.05	0.39	***	0.33	0.05	0.34	***
Political interest, T1	0.04	0.03	0.07		0.00	0.03	0.00	
College	0.14	0.09	0.08		0.12	0.08	0.07	
Recruitment scale					0.15	0.02	0.33	***
R^2	.18***				.28***			
Campaign activity								
Political action and expression, T1	0.21	0.05	0.24	***	0.17	0.05	0.19	***
Intent to vote, T1	0.04	0.03	0.07		0.03	0.03	0.06	
Political interest, T1	0.04	0.03	0.09		0.01	0.03	0.02	
College	0.02	0.09	0.01		-0.01	0.08	0.00	
Recruitment scale					0.13	0.02	0.34	***
R^2	.08***				.20***			

Table 3 (continued). Influence of recruitment on civic and political participation

Civic organization membership									
Civic activity, T1	0.48	0.12	0.22	***	0.49	0.12	0.22	***	
Political interest, T1	-0.06	0.06	-0.06		-0.13	0.06	-0.12	*	
College	0.39	0.20	0.11	^	0.35	0.20	0.10	^	
Recruitment scale					0.24	0.05	0.27	***	
R^2	.05***				.12***				
Observed	323				323				
Political organization membership									
Political action and expression, T1	0.33	0.08	0.24	***	0.26	0.07	0.19	***	
Political interest, T1	0.08	0.04	0.11	^	0.02	0.04	0.03		
College	-0.04	0.15	-0.01		-0.06	0.13	-0.02		
Recruitment scale					0.24	0.03	0.38	***	
R^2	.08***				.21***				
Voted									
	B	SE B	Exp(B)	Sig.	B	SE B	Exp(B)	Sig.	
Intent to vote, T1	.67	.13	1.95	***	0.66	0.13	1.94	***	
Political interest, T1	0.16	0.11	1.18		0.12	0.11	1.12		
College	1.20	0.31	3.33	***	1.13	0.31	3.10	***	
Recruitment scale					0.21	0.10	1.23	*	
R^2	0.22***				0.23***				

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4. Relationship between recruitment and civic and political outcomes, by topic

	B	SE B	β	Sig.
Civic activity				
Civic activity, T1	0.15	0.06	0.14	*
Political Interest, T1	0.06	0.03	0.11	^
College	0.36	0.11	0.18	***
Recruitment				
Issue	0.19	0.09	0.14	*
Campaign	-0.13	0.09	-0.09	
Contact Official	-0.07	0.10	-0.05	
Protest	-0.03	0.08	-0.02	
R^2	.10***			
Political action and expression				
Political action and expression, T1	0.33	0.05	0.34	***
Political interest, T1	0.00	0.03	0.01	
College	0.10	0.09	0.06	
Recruitment				
Issue	0.22	0.07	0.19	***
Campaign	0.04	0.07	0.03	
Contact official	0.14	0.08	0.10	^
Protest	0.17	0.07	0.14	*
R^2	.29***			
Campaign activity				
Political action and expression, T1	0.16	0.05	0.19	***
Political interest, T1	0.02	0.02	0.05	
College	0.01	0.08	0.01	
Recruitment				
Issue	0.08	0.07	0.07	
Campaign	0.21	0.07	0.18	**
Contact official	0.10	0.07	0.08	
Protest	0.15	0.06	0.13	*
R^2	.20***			

Table 4 (continued). Relationship between recruitment and civic and political outcomes, by topic

Civic organization				
Political action and expression, T1	0.22	0.11	0.11	*
Political interest, T1	-0.11	0.06	-0.11	^
College	0.44	0.20	0.12	*
Recruitment				
Issue	0.55	0.16	0.22	***
Campaign	0.23	0.17	0.09	
Contact official	-0.07	0.18	-0.02	
Protest	0.12	0.16	0.05	
R^2	.11***			
Political organization				
Political action and expression, T1	0.29	0.08	0.21	***
Political interest, T1	0.02	0.04	0.02	
College	-0.07	0.14	-0.03	
Recruitment				
Issue	0.32	0.11	0.18	**
Campaign	0.23	0.11	0.13	*
Contact official	0.34	0.12	0.17	**
Protest	0.06	0.10	0.03	
R^2	.22***			
	B	SE B	Exp(B)	Sig.
Voted				
Intent to vote, T1	0.68	0.13	1.96	***
Political interest, T1	0.13	0.11	1.14	
College	1.09	0.31	2.96	***
Recruitment				
Issue	0.69	0.30	2.00	*
Campaign	-0.21	0.31	0.81	
Contact official	0.15	0.35	1.16	
Protest	0.18	0.27	1.19	
R^2	.24***			

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 5. Mean levels of participation by experiences with recruitment.

Issue request	None		Face to Face		Internet		Other	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Civic activity, T1	2.67	0.50	2.82	0.43	2.67	0.50	2.59	0.58
Civic activity, T2	2.34	0.69	2.80	0.35	2.61	0.57	2.40	0.77
Political action and expression, T1	1.53	0.58	1.76	0.70	1.67	0.62	1.48	0.55
Political action and expression, T2	1.36	0.49	1.92	0.74	1.73	0.59	1.67	0.68
Campaign participation	1.76	0.51	2.11	0.63	2.02	0.49	2.03	0.55
Civic organization membership	2.10	1.14	2.76	1.25	2.81	1.23	3.10	1.27
Political organization membership	1.26	0.50	2.24	1.26	1.92	1.08	1.97	1.20
Voted	0.63	0.48	0.79	0.42	0.80	0.40	0.80	0.41
Campaign request	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Civic activity, T1	2.66	0.49	2.78	0.50	2.81	0.36	2.59	0.61
Civic activity, T2	2.41	0.68	2.68	0.48	2.60	0.60	2.37	0.66
Political action and expression, T1	1.50	0.57	1.83	0.67	1.80	0.67	1.68	0.61
Political action and expression, T2	1.40	0.52	1.89	0.75	1.81	0.62	1.70	0.66
Campaign participation	1.74	0.49	2.23	0.60	2.21	0.49	2.06	0.57
Civic organization membership	2.20	1.17	2.96	1.20	2.79	1.34	2.74	1.29
Political organization membership	1.37	0.65	2.11	1.23	1.95	1.20	1.93	1.21
Voted	0.65	0.48	0.82	0.39	0.87	0.34	0.71	0.46
Contact official	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Civic activity, T1	2.71	0.46	2.38	0.74	2.63	0.56	2.65	0.56
Civic activity, T2	2.43	0.68	2.79	0.38	2.56	0.52	2.31	0.64
Political action and expression, T1	1.57	0.59	1.81	0.70	1.61	0.62	1.53	0.71
Political action and expression, T2	1.44	0.55	1.95	0.70	1.75	0.65	1.85	0.74
Campaign participation	1.81	0.53	2.12	0.53	2.04	0.56	2.18	0.52
Civic organization membership	2.30	1.20	2.43	1.16	2.82	1.19	2.83	1.58
Political organization membership	1.43	0.75	2.33	1.07	1.82	1.10	2.27	1.52
Voted	0.67	0.47	0.85	0.38	0.85	0.36	0.67	0.48
Protest	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Civic activity, T1	2.66	0.50	2.85	0.42	2.59	0.54	2.73	0.41
Civic activity, T2	2.38	0.69	2.67	0.51	2.47	0.64	2.50	0.62
Political action and expression, T1	1.45	0.55	1.82	0.62	1.69	0.61	1.95	0.72
Political action and expression, T2	1.34	0.47	1.92	0.70	1.64	0.62	2.02	0.62
Campaign participation	1.73	0.48	2.17	0.58	2.05	0.52	2.13	0.62
Civic organization membership	2.19	1.17	2.71	1.32	2.80	1.27	2.64	1.22
Political organization membership	1.33	0.58	2.00	1.22	1.89	1.17	1.96	1.15
Voted	0.65	0.48	0.83	0.38	0.81	0.40	0.57	0.50

Table 6. Effect of Internet versus no recruitment on civic and political outcomes, by topic

	B	SE B	β	Sig.
Civic activity				
Civic activity, T1	0.40	0.06	0.34	***
Political interest, T1	0.03	0.03	0.06	
College	0.26	0.10	0.13	*
Issue				
Face to face	0.20	0.13	0.09	
Internet	0.22	0.11	0.13	*
Other	-0.02	0.13	-0.01	
Campaign				
Face to face	0.03	0.14	0.01	
Internet	-0.09	0.12	-0.05	
Other	-0.19	0.12	-0.09	
Official				
Face to face	0.21	0.17	0.07	
Internet	-0.06	0.13	-0.03	
Other	-0.10	0.13	-0.04	
Protest				
Face to face	-0.01	0.11	-0.01	
Internet	-0.05	0.10	-0.03	
Other	-0.08	0.14	-0.03	
R^2	.17***			
Political action and expression				
Political action and expression, T1	0.31	0.05	0.32	***
Political interest, T1	0.01	0.03	0.02	
College	0.11	0.09	0.06	
Issue				
Face to face	0.26	0.11	0.14	*
Internet	0.23	0.09	0.15	*
Other	0.14	0.11	0.07	
Campaign				
Face to face	0.11	0.12	0.05	
Internet	0.07	0.10	0.04	
Other	0.01	0.10	0.00	
Official				
Face to face	0.24	0.14	0.09	^
Internet	0.08	0.11	0.04	
Other	0.15	0.11	0.07	
Protest				
Face to face	0.23	0.10	0.13	*
Internet	0.07	0.09	0.04	
Other	0.29	0.12	0.13	*
R^2	.30***			

Table 6 (cont'd). Effect of Internet versus no recruitment on civic and political outcomes, by topic

Campaign activity				
Political action and expression, T1	0.16	0.05	0.19	***
Intent to vote, T1	0.04	0.03	0.07	
Political interest, T1	0.01	0.03	0.03	
College	0.00	0.08	0.00	
Issue				
Face to face	0.11	0.10	0.06	
Internet	0.07	0.09	0.05	
Other	0.11	0.10	0.06	
Campaign				
Face to face	0.32	0.11	0.17	**
Internet	0.22	0.10	0.14	*
Other	0.07	0.10	0.04	
Official				
Face to face	0.05	0.13	0.02	
Internet	-0.02	0.11	-0.01	
Other	0.23	0.11	0.12	*
Protest				
Face to face	0.13	0.09	0.08	
Internet	0.16	0.08	0.11	^
Other	0.11	0.12	0.05	
R^2	.18***			
Civic organization				
Civic activity, T1	0.49	0.12	0.22	***
Political interest, T1	-0.13	0.06	-0.13	*
College	0.34	0.20	0.09	^
Issue				
Face to face	0.16	0.25	0.04	
Internet	0.48	0.21	0.15	*
Other	0.84	0.24	0.20	***
Campaign				
Face to face	0.19	0.27	0.04	
Internet	0.22	0.24	0.06	
Other	0.30	0.24	0.07	
Official				
Face to face	0.02	0.33	0.00	
Internet	0.19	0.26	0.04	
Other	-0.06	0.26	-0.01	
Protest				
Face to face	0.25	0.22	0.07	
Internet	0.14	0.20	0.04	
Other	0.07	0.27	0.01	
R^2	.11***			

Table 6 (cont'd). Effect of Internet versus no recruitment on civic and political outcomes, by topic

Political organization				
Political action and expression, T1	0.29	0.08	0.21	***
Political interest, T1	0.02	0.04	0.02	
College	-0.06	0.14	-0.02	
Issue				
Face to face	0.48	0.17	0.17	**
Internet	0.26	0.14	0.12	^
Other	0.26	0.16	0.09	
Campaign				
Face to face	0.00	0.19	0.00	
Internet	0.28	0.16	0.11	^
Other	0.33	0.16	0.12	*
Official				
Face to face	0.47	0.22	0.12	*
Internet	0.26	0.17	0.09	
Other	0.41	0.18	0.13	*
Protest				
Face to face	0.14	0.15	0.05	
Internet	0.05	0.13	0.02	
Other	-0.03	0.19	-0.01	
R^2	0.23			
Voted				
Intent to vote, T1	0.72	0.13	2.05	***
Political interest, T1	0.10	0.11	1.11	
College	1.03	0.32	2.81	***
Issue				
Face to face	0.87	0.52	2.39	^
Internet	0.31	0.41	1.36	
Other	0.89	0.48	2.45	^
Campaign				
Face to face	-0.77	0.52	0.46	
Internet	0.47	0.50	1.60	
Other	-0.41	0.42	0.67	
Official				
Face to face	0.57	0.81	1.76	
Internet	0.25	0.53	1.28	
Other	-0.01	0.50	0.99	
Protest				
Face to face	0.69	0.44	2.00	
Internet	0.33	0.38	1.39	
Other	-0.47	0.45	0.63	

* p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001