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Civic Engagement in Battleground States

A Senior Honors Thesis

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for Graduation in the College Honors Program

By

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Introduction

There are many different ways to view the impact of living in a political battleground state. One can look at vote choice, civic engagement levels, advertising effects, or political engagement levels. All of these factors, plus many more contribute to the battleground effect. The battleground effect, as we call it, is the result of exposure to massive amounts of political media and influence from campaigns during presidential elections. Most recent data from the 2012 presidential election shows just how expensive presidential races have become, and also how selective. For the 2012 election, Barack Obama spent \$348,025,700 on advertisements. Mitt Romney spent \$167,371,150. Obama ran 560,475 ads and Romney ran 249,114. Large amounts of time and money were spent on these campaign advertisements, but they were not equally distributed around the country. Thirty two states saw zero ads and zero dollars spent. Of the 18 states that did get campaign attention, only seven had over 20 million dollars total spent on them (Election Center 2012).

Advertising is a major way in which battleground states differ from safe states. This phenomenon began in 1992 with Bill Clinton's campaign. Clinton's campaign managers took a different route when purchasing advertising slots; they chose to purchase in local media markets as opposed to national networks. This strategy worked, and most presidential campaigns since then have followed a similar approach. This allows campaigns to target specific localities, while not including those they have already safely won over or have no chance of winning over (Lipsitz). This has evolved into the current situation we have today, where some voters will not see a single presidential ad, while others see them every commercial break.

Swing states, without a doubt, are important to elections and central to campaigns. Presidential candidates are spending more money and time than ever in these few states that have been determined battlegrounds. So the real question is; what is happening to the residents of these battleground states? Surely their lives must be impacted in some way by the highly political environments they live in. So far, scholarly research is undecided on whether the intense campaigning done in battleground states has a strong impact on voters within these states. All we know for sure is that citizens in battleground states are exposed to higher levels of political advertising and candidate attention. A resident of New York, or any safe state, might often hear their fellow citizen's claim that their vote doesn't matter. It would seem that living in a battleground state might result in drastically different perspectives of citizens. More specifically, the levels of civic engagement and feelings of efficacy within battlegrounds may be very different than those in non-battleground states. The definition of civic engagement that best exemplifies the question at hand is:

Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. (American Psychological Association)

From this definition, one can see that there are many different ways for a citizen to be civically engaged. Civic engagement can be an individual action, or it can mean belonging to a larger group. For this research, the way a citizen chooses to be civically engaged is not important. The basic question is to see if they are doing it at a higher or lower rate based on how contested their state is in presidential elections. Using results from the 2008 Census Bureau Survey- Civic Engagement Supplement it is possible to compare whether civic engagement levels differ between battleground and safe states. The questions from this survey examined a wide range of civic engagement activities, such as voting, contacting a public official, boycotting, and being

involved in community or civic associations. Respondents come from New York and California, two safe states, and Virginia and Ohio, two swing states.

Literature Review

Scholarly research has been done in many areas of civic engagement and their relation to battleground states. With the massive amounts of attention battleground states get in elections, it is no surprise that many before us have studied the consequences of living in these states. Scholars have studied a broad range of campaign actions, including advertising, political discussion, and the consequences they can have on residents of battleground states, such as impacting their vote choices and levels of participation.

Advertising

Negative advertising has taken over in politics. In the 2012 presidential election in Ohio 87% of ads ran by Obama and 88% of ads ran by Romney were negative in character (Election Center 2012). Since almost all of the advertisements are run in battleground states, what effect does this negativity have on swing state voters? Ansolabehere, Iyenger, Simon and Valentino (1994) concluded negative advertising demobilized the electorate. The authors showed negative and positive ads to voters, and then recorded whether they felt more or less likely to vote after watching the ads. Their study showed that after watching the negative ad, their subjects reported being less likely to want to vote. The decline in voter turnout over the past 50 years may be due to the increasing negativity in national campaigns.

In contrast, Wattenberg and Briens (1999) found that there was “no evidence of turnout disadvantage for those who recollected negative presidential campaign advertising” (p 891). Data they used from the NES survey actually showed negative ads increasing turnout in the 1992 election, but not in the 1996 election. This may show that negative advertising has a fairly neutral effect, not always helping to increase turnout, but not decreasing it either.

This research on advertising is relevant to the current research because the residents in battleground states are exposed to much more advertising for the presidential elections than those in safe states. For example, in the 2012 election, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney’s campaign spent over \$150 million in campaign advertising in Ohio and Virginia combined. They each spent a total of zero dollars in New York and California (Election Center 2012). In trying to understand the effects of living in a battleground state, it is necessary to understand the different election experiences felt by those in battleground states, compared to the experience had by those in safe states.

Political Discussion and Involvement

One would think that those living in states where the election is so competitive would be more likely to discuss politics with their family and friends. “There is a positive relationship between how much we talk about politics and current events and how much we participate in civic activities” (Klofstad, p 180) This study showed that civically relevant discussions among peers helps those taking part in the discussion become interested in being more involved and civically engaged. The expectation in this research is that living in a battleground state would cause people to talk more about politics due to the effects of intense “in your face” campaigning.

However, some argue that battleground state residents are no more likely than safe state residents to be motivated to be politically engaged. For campaigns, “the expectation is that exposure to candidate messages prompts interest, which is then channeled into information gains and political action” (Wolak p. 360). However, in her study Wolak (2006) found that this is not always true. She observed that residents of battleground states recognize that they have more exposure to campaigns. They are aware of the mass advertisements and contacts from political groups; however this does not motivate them to become more involved. There was only a small correlation between advertisement and campaign action, but mostly the amount of campaign action has to do with the partisan nature of the state, not the campaign efforts of the presidential candidates.

This result is challenged by a study focusing on low income voters in battleground and non-battleground states. The research showed that those living in battleground states did in fact have higher levels of political interest and higher engagement levels than those in safe states. The study showed that campaign involvement is 7 to 8 points higher in low income battleground state voters than in similar voters in safe states (Gimpel, Kaufmann, Pearson-Merkowitz). It seems that the differences in between low income voters would be starker than between voters of higher incomes. Low income voters would typically live in urban areas. Urban areas are easier for campaigns to canvas because people and houses are more condensed so they can reach more people in less time. Even though this study did focus on low income voters, it still highlights the positive effect intense campaigns can have on the residents of battleground states. The results are still valid, but they might be more diluted in a random sample that includes a greater mix of socioeconomic groups. Those in higher socio economic groups may be less effected by

canvassing and get out the vote efforts because they are more likely to already be registered to vote and have a party affiliation.

Vote Choice:

Living in a battleground state has also been shown to effect vote choice. A 2009 study showed that living in a battleground state can activate certain factors in the voters of those states. The activated factors were race and ideology in the 1988 presidential election and presidential evaluation and partisanship in the 1992 presidential election. The study attributed the activation of these factors to the messages produced by the campaigns during those years. They concluded that the intense campaigning in battleground states does affect vote choice by activating decision making factors and influencing what people consider the most when casting their ballot. Voters in safe states are not subject to high intensity campaigning, so the messages of the campaigns do not seem to activate these factors in their vote choices (Mclurg and Holbrooke).

If living in a battleground impacts vote choice, than the campaign must be reaching viewers through advertisements or other means. If the campaign message is being absorbed by the citizens, then living in a battleground could affect the likelihood to vote or encourage people to be more involved. Thus, where one lives during an election becomes relevant to the extent that residents choose to become civically engaged.

Group Participation:

Another component of civic engagement that is relevant for research are the levels of group participation. In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Robert Putnam argues that Americans have become disengaged from all types of political involvement. Americans are also less likely

to belong to civic associations. He draws a connection between civic and political organizations, saying that lack of participation in both of these areas is bad for democracy and shows we have lost social capital. Americans no longer get together to discuss social problems, and are too disengaged from these problems to make a difference in fixing them.

Russell Dalton (2006) strenuously argues against Putnam's theory. He argues that Americans are not becoming uninvolved and disengaged, but rather becoming involved in different ways than in the past. He argues that individuals have opted out of the duty based forms of citizenship than Putnam references. Instead, current involvement reflects direct and individual forms of participation, such as volunteering, as opposed to being involved in an official party organization. Dalton also mentions that we are more likely to directly contact a public official, an individualized form of action. A question chosen for this research specifically asks about contacting a public official, so this was especially relevant to this study. These questions were picked with the expectation of finding some differences between the types or levels of participation in battleground and non-battleground states.

Methodology

The major research question of this study is whether civic engagement levels are higher among residents of political battleground states than those in safe states. To answer this question, responses from the 2008 Census Bureau Survey were used. Specifically, questions from the Civic Engagement supplement to this survey were particularly helpful. This survey was important in many different ways. First, it was conducted during a presidential election year. Using a survey from a presidential election year is crucial to this analysis. Election years spark

the intense campaign environments that create the battleground atmosphere. The campaigning environment, or lack thereof, will be fresh in the minds of the respondents.

Another way this survey is particularly useful for this research is because it asks very specific and clear questions about civic engagement. The questions chosen for this research analysis are:

1. How Often Does Respondent Discuss Politics with Family and Friends
2. Nonelectoral Participation: Contacted or Visited a Public Official?
3. Nonelectoral Participation: Bought or Boycotted a Product or Service
4. Group Participation: School Group, Neighborhood or Community Organization
5. Group Participation: Service or Civic Association
6. Did Respondent Vote in November 4, 2008 Election?
7. (If Registered) What was MAIN Reason Respondent Did Not Vote?
8. (If Not Registered) What was MAIN Reason Why Not?

These questions cover the wide range of ways respondents may choose to be civically engaged. This allows them to show their engagement in many different forms, and provides for more complete information on civic engagement levels. If the question simply asked “Do you believe you are civically engaged?” it would be hard to study the results. This helps control for the various definitions and interpretations of civic engagement. By studying the multiple forms of civic engagement, this research hopes to look for an overall trend in civic engagement levels of all types between battleground and non- battleground states.

In order to maintain a reasonable sample size, it was decided that the study would encompass two battleground states and two safe states. The battleground states are Ohio and Virginia. The safe states chosen are New York and California. Looking at the final results from the 2008 presidential race, one can see that these states fit into their respective categories for this research. In New York, President Obama beat Senator McCain 63% to 36%, in California

Obama won with similar results, 61% to 37%. Obama clearly won these two safe states by sweeping margins. However, in Ohio, President Obama only beat Senator McCain 52% to 47%. In Virginia the numbers were similar, 53% for Obama and 47% for McCain (CNN Election Center 2008). These results show why Ohio and Virginia were chosen as battleground states. Obama won in all four of the states used in this research, but how close the results were determines how the states are classified.

In order to best use the Census Bureau Civic Engagement Supplement, some of the answers had to be computed and compressed. Responses from some of the selected questions were combined in broader but still connected categories. This technique was used for two questions. For the question “(If Not Registered) What was MAIN Reason Why Not?” the responses “Not eligible to vote” and “Other reason” were classified as missing variables and removed from the data set. The responses “Did not meet registration deadlines” and “Did not know where or how to register” were categorized as “Registration Law Challenges” in the final data set. The responses “Did not meet residency requirements”, “Permanent illness or disability”, and “Difficulty with English” were classified as “Individual challenges” in the final data analysis. The last category, renamed as “Low Efficacy” included the responses “Not interested in the election or not involved in politics” and “My vote would not make a difference”.

The question “(If Registered) What was MAIN Reason Respondent Did Not Vote?” also needed its responses to be condensed into broader categories. The responses “Illness or disability (own or family’s)”, “Out of town or away from home” and “Forgot to vote (or send in absentee ballot)” were classified as “Individual problems” for this research. “Not interested, felt like my vote wouldn’t make a difference” and “Didn’t like candidates or campaign issues” were classified as “Low Efficacy”. Five different responses were clumped into the category

“Inconvenience”, this included “Too busy, conflicting work or school schedule”, “Transportation Problems”, “Registration Problems”, “Bad Weather Conditions” and “Inconvenient Hours, polling places or lines too long”. The response “Other” was categorized as missing, and those responses were removed from the data set.

For the purpose of this research, combining and recoding responses was very helpful. Broader categories helped highlight overall trends within the states, and provide with a clearer picture of the actual political climate within the states. Also, eliminating the responses such as “Other” helped to keep essentially meaningless responses out of the main data set.

Once all questions and responses were correctly coded, cross tabulation was used to compare responses from the four chosen states. In order to determine statistical significance, a chi square test was run. Original responses from some questions and the recoded responses from others were used to test the hypothesis of this research.

- *Due to higher levels of contact and interaction with campaigns, individuals in battleground states will be more likely to be civically engaged than their safe state counterparts.*

Civic engagement, as exemplified by the questions selected, includes voting, and participating in different types of community groups.

Results

By examining at the data from the Census Bureau Survey- Civic Engagement Supplement, this research was looking to find strong differences between the two types of states, battleground and safe, in different areas of civic engagement. However, the results were inconsistent. In many areas, there were little to no differences between the two pairs of states.

Sometimes, the safe states actually outperformed the battleground states residents, with the latter being more engaged.¹ The results only played out as expected in one of the four categories of questions. These four categories are:

1. Political Conversation
2. Non-electoral Participation
3. Group Participation
4. Voting

Political Conversation

Only one question falls into the category “Political Conversation”. The question “How Often Does Respondent Discuss Politics with Family and Friends” is a straight forward way of judging the amount of political chatter going on among citizens. The results from this question can be seen in Figure 1. From this analysis, it is worth mentioning that New Yorkers have the highest percentage of respondents that discuss politics on a daily basis. New Yorkers barely come in second, by less than 1%, to Virginians for discussing politics a few times a week. Also notable, Ohioans actually scored the lowest in regular discussion of politics, putting up the lowest percentages in both the daily and weekly responses. In this response, there were no strong differences observed between the safe states and the swing states.

¹ In order to show the results in more detail, the charts depict the state’s individual data. When the states are grouped into safe or battleground categories, the analysis results are essentially the same.

Figure 1: How Often Does Respondent Discuss Politics with Family and Friends

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Basically every day	320 11.0%	494 8.5%	157 7.4%	119 8.6%
A few times a week	524 18.0%	980 16.8%	332 15.7%	261 18.8%
A few times a month	602 20.7%	1180 20.2%	424 20.0%	302 21.8%
Once a month	440 15.1%	980 16.8%	432 20.4%	228 16.5%
Not at all	1028 35.3%	2210 37.8%	773 36.5%	475 34.3%
Total	2914 100.0%	12261 100.0%	2118 100.0%	1385 100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008

*p-value significant at the .05 level

Non-Electoral Participation

This category contains two questions. “Contacted or Visited a Public Official” and “Bought or Boycotted a Product or Service” (shown in Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The results from these questions again showed inconsistent and unexpected results compared to the original hypothesis. Falling in line with the hypothesis, Ohioans were the most likely to contact or visit a public official. However, the other battleground state was the least likely to do such. Similarly, those in Ohio are most likely to have bought or boycotted a product or service, but respondents in Virginia are least likely to have done such. These results show no consistent differences between the safe and swing states. Based on these results, this research cannot conclude that respondents within battleground states are more likely to engage in non-electoral types of civic engagement.

Figure 2.1: Non-electoral Participation: Contacted or Visited a Public Official?

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Yes	293	570	274	129
	9.8%	9.5%	12.3%	8.6%
No	2706	5426	1956	1366
	90.2%	90.5%	87.7%	91.4%
Total	2999	5996	2230	1495
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008
*p-value significant at the .05 level

Figure 2.2: Non-electoral Participation: Bought or Boycotted a Product or Service

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Yes	309	701	263	127
	10.3%	11.7%	11.9%	8.5%
No	2686	5278	1956	1367
	89.7%	88.3%	88.1%	91.5%
Total	2995	5979	2216	1494
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008
*p-value significant at the .05 level

Group Participation

For this category, respondents were asked if they participated in different types of community groups. Figure 3.1 shows levels of participation of respondents in school groups, neighborhood or community organizations. In this type of group participation, those in both Ohio (15.2%) and Virginia (15.9%) showed higher levels of engagement compared to those residing in New York (12.8%) and California (14.5%).

Figure 3.2 shows group participation levels among respondents in Service or Civic Associations. This question could include volunteering for campaigns or political parties. This more directly links it to the political side of civic engagement. Ohioans and Virginians again show

higher levels of participation, at 8.8% and 8.2%. New Yorkers and Californians were significantly lower at 6.4% and 4.9%. Based on these findings, this research can conclude that residents of battleground states are more likely to be active in school groups, community organizations and service or civic organizations. This positive correlation between group participation and battleground state residency is evidence of higher levels of civic engagement within the battleground states.

Figure 3.1: Group Participation: School Group, Neighborhood or Community Organization

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Yes	383 12.8%	871 14.5%	339 15.2%	238 15.9%
No	2612 87.2%	5130 85.5%	1885 84.8%	1262 84.1%
Total	2995 100.0%	6001 100.0%	2224 100.0%	1500 100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008

*p-value significant at the .05 level

Group Participation: Service or Civic Association

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Yes	191 6.4%	293 4.9%	195 8.8%	123 8.2%
No	2803 93.6%	5703 95.1%	2025 91.2%	1374 91.8%
Total	2994 100.0%	5996 100.0%	2220 100.0%	1497 100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008

*p-value significant at the .05 level

Voting

The final category of questions has to do with the most basic form of civic engagement, voting. For this research, rates of voting were measured, as well as the reason why respondents

either chose not to vote, or chose not to register to vote. In this category, I expected to see the strongest differences. National campaigns spend massive resources of “get out the vote” programs in the closer battleground states. However, based on our findings it seems as though these efforts have little effect on how many people come out to the polls. Figure 4.1 shows how many respondents voted in the 2008 election. California, a safe state, actually had the highest percentage of respondents turning out at the polls, 58.4%. Virginia had the lowest at 52.9%.

Figure 4.1: Did Respondent Vote in November 4, 2008 Election?

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Yes	1728 53.1%	3422 58.4%	1308 54.0%	845 52.9%
No	1526 46.9%	2440 41.6%	1113 46.0%	751 47.1%
Total	3254 100.0%	5862 100.0%	2421 100.0%	1596 100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008
*p-value significant at the .05 level

Looking deeper into the reasons respondents choose not to vote, I originally expected to see those in safe states feel a lower sense of efficacy. However, it seems that Virginia’s respondents were mostly like to show a lack of efficacy, and answer that they either felt their vote did not matter or that they did not like the campaign issues (33.2%). Ohioans fared slightly better in this area, with only 27.9%. Inconvenience as a reason for not getting to the polls was actually slightly more prevalent in both Ohio and Virginia residents than in the safe states residents. These results can be seen in Figure 4.2. While inconvenience may have to do with local laws, it could also show that get out the vote efforts in the battleground states are not serving their purpose in reducing the cost of voting and making citizens more aware of the benefits.

Figure 4.2: (If Registered) What was MAIN Reason Respondent Did Not Vote?

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Individual Problems	200 31.2%	283 36.0%	145 30.1%	101 26.9%
Low Efficacy	200 31.2%	202 25.7%	134 27.9%	125 33.2%
Inconvenience	242 37.7%	302 38.4%	202 42.0%	150 39.9%
Total	642 100.0%	787 100.0%	481 100.0%	376 100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008

*p-value significant at the .05 level

Another area researched was why a respondent would choose not to register to vote.

These results are shown in Figure 4.3. Lack of efficacy is once again highest among Virginians at 71.4% but also high among Ohioans at 68.4%. These numbers were slightly higher than those in the safe states. The results show that residents of safe states are actually less likely to register to vote because they feel as though their vote does not matter or they do not care about the election. Overall, the responses from the three voting questions show no strong correlations between likelihood of voting, or to believe ones vote counts based on living in a battleground states. This contradicts the common misperception that people in safe states are more likely to skip the polls because they feel as if their vote does not matter.

Figure 4.3: (If Not Registered) What was MAIN Reason Why Not?

	New York	California	Ohio	Virginia
Registration	94	273	72	31
Law Challenges	17.2%	25.2%	18.5%	16.1%
Individual Problems	93 17.0%	198 18.2%	51 13.1%	24 12.5%
Low Efficacy	361 65.9%	614 56.6%	266 68.4%	137 71.4%
Total	548 100.0%	1085 100.0%	389 100.0%	192 100.0%

Source: Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2008

*p-value significant at the .05 level

Conclusion

By using the Census Bureau Survey Civic Engagement Supplement, this research was expecting to find notable differences between safe states such as New York and California and battleground states like Ohio and Virginia in terms of civic engagement levels. The nature of presidential campaigns has turned the focus towards the battleground states. The Electoral College system encourages candidates to focus their time and resources into specific areas, and there is no doubt they do so disproportionately toward battleground states (Panagopoulos). Wolak describes the battleground environment quite succinctly:

For residents of battleground states, the drive to work reveals campaign yard signs, billboards, and bumper stickers. Around the water cooler at work, conversation is likely to turn to campaign news. Dinner that night is likely to be interrupted by calls from parties seeking volunteers or donations, campaign messages from interest groups, and queries from campaign pollsters. Evening television watching is interspersed with campaign spots. On the local news, headlines feature the latest visit to the area from the presidential candidates (2006)

One would expect that this massive information overload would cause citizens of those states to become more engaged and involved. However, this research has found results conflicting with this idea. In the area of voting, swing states residents were not significantly more likely to vote than safe state residents. The swing states residents who chose not to vote or to register to vote actually listed low levels of efficacy as a reason for not participating at higher levels than safe state nonvoters. People from the battleground states also did not show higher frequencies of talking about politics with their families or friends. According to Wolak's findings, citizens of battleground states are aware of their levels of exposure to campaigns. They report seeing higher numbers of television ads and having more contact with political groups. However, this research, similar to Wolak's, finds that this neither increases participation, interest or social discussions of politics. My explanation for these results could be referred to as the white noise effect. The

residents of battleground states are overexposed to campaign information, so much so that they actually start to tune it out. They become immune to the effects the advertising is supposed to have. In a recent study, it was concluded that a large volume of negative advertisements can increase attention to the campaign by a maximum of 15%. However, a greater proportion of negative advertisements compared to positive ones can actually decrease attention to the campaign by 10%. When people are exposed to mass amounts of information, they are more likely to remember negative parts. Campaign ads try to utilize this by sending out negative messages. The study concludes that even though people will remember the messages of these ads, they will also remember the negativity that goes along with them, and that this has an overall negative effect on the voter (Stevens p. 440, qtd. in Macdonald). This residual negative feeling could be the reason behind the white noise effect, and why levels of voting and political discussion remain low in battleground states.

Other areas of civic engagement showed inconsistent results. In the non-electoral participation category, Ohio showed higher levels than all states. However, Virginia showed no differences from the safe states. This results in an inconsistent finding. For this I blame local differences within the two battleground states. While boycotting is a form of civic engagement, it is not closely linked with national campaign experiences. A boycott typically happens on a more local level, dealing with a problem in a smaller vicinity. Contacting or visiting a public official is another form of civic engagement classified as non-electoral participation. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures a "public official" is "[o]ne who holds or is invested with a public office; a person elected or appointed to carry out some portion of a government's sovereign powers" (National Conference of State Legislatures). I originally believed that attention from national campaigns would increase attention to other levels of politics, therefore

increase contact from citizen to local officials. However, this shows that levels of interest in more local politics are not dependent on interest levels shown to the states by national campaigns.

In the category of group participation, the battleground states excelled compared to the safe states. Respondents in Ohio and Virginia were both more likely to participate in school groups, community groups and service or civic associations. This category covers a wide range of groups, such as parent-teacher associations, volunteer organizations such as Circle K or Lions Club, as well as political organizations. The differences were stronger when it came to service and civic organizations. This could be due to the increased opportunities people have to be involved during intense presidential campaigns, such as volunteering for political parties, the candidates' campaigns, or issue groups that are involved in the election.

There is still much to explore in the area of civic engagement in connection to battleground states. This study produced inconsistent results in trying to decide whether being in a battleground helped increase citizen engagement. For further research, I would suggest increasing the sample size. If possible, it would be helpful to compare more battleground states to safe states. In the category of nonelectoral participation, Ohio and Virginia proved to rank very differently. It is tough to know which one is a better representation of a battleground state without having more states to compare. Changing the states would also be a way to alter this research and gain new conclusions. If this was to be done again, it would likely be helpful to pick states more in the same region to try and control for local factors. For example, one could exchange California for Pennsylvania and Virginia for North Carolina. Expanding the study to cover different election years could also prove useful in determining overall trends. Also, switching the focus from battleground states to early primary states would be interesting. These

states are the first to be exposed to the presidential campaigns. This could help determine if early involvement leads to higher levels of interest and engagement, as opposed to massive media bombardment in the final months of the campaign.

This research uncovered some slight differences between safe states and battleground states. However, it overwhelmingly showed that the attempts to engage and interest voters in battleground states have seemingly failed. Hopefully with further research, the battleground effect will be more fully understood. This information could help change the nature of national campaigns.

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