

## How young people choose their news impacts how they participate in politics

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Today's news media landscape consists of more choices than ever before. How young people go about selecting the news they consume in this environment of "information overload" may make a difference in

the way they participate in politics, according to new research by a sociology doctoral student at the University of Arizona.

Sam Scovill, who will present the research on Saturday at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, was interested in three primary ways [young people](#), ages 15-25, select what [news](#) they consume:

1. They rely on conventional news sources, such as newspapers and broadcast news in either their traditional or online formats. Scovill refers to this as "elite-selected" media, in which a publisher or producer is choosing which news is presented in mainstream media.
2. They get their news primarily through social networking sites, like Facebook and Twitter. Scovill refers to this as socially selected news.
3. They select their news content themselves by actively and critically seeking information on topics that interest them from online-only sources, like YouTube or blogs. They might also subscribe to news updates from those sources.

Scovill looked at how the three different news selection methods impacted young people's engagement in political activities in the following categories: voting, political activism and political campaigning.

Scovill found that study participants age 18 or older who consumed elite-selected media were the most likely to say they voted in the last election, while study participants who intentionally sought out, or self-selected, their media were the most likely to participate in political activism or campaigning.

Getting news from [social media](#) did not have a significant impact on political participation in any of the categories examined, although

consumers of news on social media were, unsurprisingly, likely to have "liked" a political candidate on Facebook.

Scovill's findings are based on an analysis of the first wave of data from the Youth Participatory Politics dataset, which includes survey responses from a nationally representative sample of 2,920 respondents. The surveying was conducted in 2011 by Knowledge Networks on behalf of Mills College.

While news consumption among young people in the dataset was generally low overall, how they selected their news still proved to make a difference in their political engagement, especially for those who self-selected their news media—which influenced political participation in every category but voting.

Those who self-selected their news were also the most likely to participate in "high-cost" activism and campaigning activities—or those that involve more time, resources or risk of things like judgment by their peers, Scovill said. For example, they were more likely to attend a meeting or a rally for a candidate or issue, or to donate money to a campaign. They also were more likely to sign an online petition or attend a youth political event or protest.

"The overarching pattern was that people who are self-selecting and being intentional about their news consumption are also engaging in these more high-cost forms of activity," Scovill said. "That intentional process matters, whereas news on social media or elite-selected news media are coming through the choices of others who decide what is important to post on Facebook or what is important to go on the front page of the New York Times."

Scovill chose to focus on young people's political engagement not only because teens and young adults are just beginning, or are on the

precipice of beginning political participation as adults, but also because young people, as digital natives, have grown up with so many more choices of how to consume news than previous generations.

"Young people have grown up around this, so they have unique news consumption habits and unique skills in navigating the internet and social media and news [media](#) online, but they also are inundated with information," Scovill said. "How we choose news is a lot more complicated than it ever has been, and it might actually impact how people are engaging, so we need to be thinking critically about how those [news media](#) have implications for the actions that people decide on."

Scovill plans to continue researching young people's political engagement and how it differs from that of generations past, as well how young people's personal identity formation contributes to their political engagement.

"I'm particularly interested in Millennials and Generation Z because they get such a bad rap," Scovill said. "People do a lot of negative talk about them being disengaged and not caring, and while it's true that voting numbers are down, people are engaging differently. Young people are using new forms of activism, like signing petitions online or doing their own crowdsourcing online and raising funds for things that matter to them, in ways that older generations might not be."

Provided by University of Arizona

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