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ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

ELECTORAL PREFERENCES OF YOUTH VOTERS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

¹Sara Arslanagić , ²Marina Mitrović 

¹International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

²International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sara Arslanagić, International Burch University, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. E-mail: sara.arslanagic13@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Understanding electoral decisions in voters are crucial, especially for parties that are rising and want to attract more voters. This study is focused on researching how different means of communication with political candidates as well as their education level, have a considerable impact on electoral preferences on youth voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through literature review on what determines electoral preferences of youth voters, interest group survey and analysis of the electoral indicators and official data resources, this research attempts to explain what influences youth voters to vote in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is shown that depending on what type the political campaign is and what it is trying to portray, it will have an influence on youth voters. Presidential elections and local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina take place every four years. Through this research, data from BiH 2015 presidential and 2020 local elections were used to answer the research question.

Keywords: Electoral preferences, Education level, Youth voters, turnout, Bosnia and Herzegovina elections



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INTRODUCTION

To elect and to be elected is part of any democratic process, which gives the right to citizens to decide on the future of a country, so decisions taken on the day of elections by voters are significant. Voters always have a decision to make based on a few candidates that are offered on the ballot, but where does their decision come from and what it is based on is the most important thing. Considering that we live in the 21st century, new platforms and ways of doing political campaigns are possible, and political parties are allowed to connect with potential voters throughout the world. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter give them the ability to publish everyday activities to connect with their voters as well as potential voters. Ways of communication such as Gmail and Hotmail provide them the ability to send a message with just one click creating a faster and more efficient way than sending letters by mail. Another way of communicating with voters and connecting with them is through the means of pamphlets as well as standing on the streets and directly interacting with them. This essay will analyze what best influences youth voters, meaning which way of communication influences their decisions when making electoral choices.

Presidential elections and local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina take place every four years. In 2012, during the local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3 149 280 people had the right to vote, only 1 779 718 or 56,51% had voted. Out of the total voter turnout, only 21.73% were below the age of 30, or in other words, the youth. 1 415 832 or 78.27% of voters were above the age of 30. Out of the total number of voters, 877 088 or 49,28% were female, while 902 630 or 50,72% were male (IZBORNI POKAZATELJI 2002-2014. godina, 2015). This statistical information shows that the general turnout is low compared to other countries in Europe, but compared to the region, it is relatively the same, which indicates that only 56% of the overall population is deciding on the future of the state. Considering that over the years, more of the youth are given the ability to vote after reaching the age of 18, this can be shown through statistical results conducted by the "Centralna Izborna Komisija BiH" (Central Election Commission BiH), showing that in total there are 673,400 voters under the age of thirty and with the right to vote, whereas out of the total only 363.886 went out to vote. According to the election statistics of 2020 elections, 559.176 youth voters had the chance to vote. When we say youth voters by law this is people between the age of eighteen to thirty one. Out of the total youth voters number, a total of 287.641 of

them actually voted. That means that youth voter turnout was 51.44% which is the first time that the youth voter turnout percentage was this high (Izborni pokazatelj 2020. godina, 2021). This shows that youth voter turnout is rising, which means that political parties are using different methods to reach their voters and engage them. There is always room for improvement and this is what we will analyze.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers, throughout time, have made a correlation between education and voter turnout. The research focused on specifically youth voters have still not been conducted; therefore, the following research will allow us to understand what generally influences voters and to see if these same strategies have the same influence on youth voters, which will be the focus of this research paper. It has been shown through research that people with higher education have a higher propensity to vote than general voters (Chevalier & Doyle, 2012). This shows that through education, people's general knowledge is improved, leading to the observation that they are more aware of the political system and voting process. Education provides people with the basis for understanding the situation around them (Dautbašić & Bećirović, 2022; Mašić et al., 2020; Sinanović & Bećirović, 2016). It can be said that this makes students more politically active. The influence of education on voters has been a topic since the mid-nineteenth century, dating back to when John Stuart Mill had suggested a voting system in which voters were to be required a basic level of education in order to be eligible to vote, and that voters were grouped in order of the level of education (Bhue et al., 2014) This can be considered to be unjust and unfair what John Stuart Mill proposed because it creates a way of grouping within the society.

In India, a study was conducted to examine the effect of education on voting preferences; the study was done using voting records from the Election Commission of India (Bhue et al., 2014). The reason India was being examined is that it provides the best circumstances, first being the world's largest democracy having in total more voter turnout than in the United States, or the United Kingdom, and second, free and fair elections are held every five years (Bhue et al., 2014). The study conducted looked at various sections, do they choose better candidates, does corruption play a role as well as criminal records, does the candidates' wealth matter, does gender play a role. Their results showed that educated voters differ in choices when it spe-

cifically came to corrupt candidates and candidates that had criminal records; in those cases, educated voters did not vote for those candidates, whereas general voters did. When it came to the topic of gender, both general voters and educated preferred women candidates (Bhuc et al., 2014). When taking into account all aspects researched, the researchers proved that education does influence voter preferences.

In Denmark, a study was conducted that focused on whether political campaigns have an impact on voters (Hansen, 2008). Their results in 2007 showed that 47% of the voters decided during the three weeks of political campaigning what party they support (Hansen, 2008). In order to see the effect of political campaigns, they divided their research into six hypotheses, two that stood out are Civic Engaging and Memory Based Models, which were focused on voters in general. Their hypothesis for civic engagement is that political efficacy increases during the campaign and their hypothesis for the memory-based models is that the political campaign affects the voters as a function of their predisposition, political awareness, and political knowledge (Hansen, 2008). In their analyses, they confirmed the previous statement that education influences voter preferences. They also, with their hypothesis, show that campaigns do influence voter choices, as their statistical data showed that too. The memory-Based Model showed that when a message is portrayed by a political party, voters tend to fit in that message and allocate it in their predisposition, which still shows that a political campaign does indeed have a significant impact on voters.

Another study was done by two professors Macintosh and Tambouris (2009), in Copenhagen in 2009, and they focused their research on the use of Facebook in the Danish national election campaign in 2007. In their research, they asked two questions: What communication tools and channels do social network users use to interact with politicians, and what benefits do they expect? Does the political orientation of the candidate with whom interaction is sought to make a difference in the use of social networks by users? In order to answer their questions, they conducted an online survey that was oriented about the two candidates running for the office of Prime Minister. Two major candidates for the seat of Prime Minister in the 2007 Danish National Election were Ms. Helle Thorning-Schmidt and Mr. Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Both used Facebook as part of their campaign. In the survey, they picked 210 Facebook friends of both candidates and asked

each candidate three sets of questions:

- a. What is your relation to the knowledge of the candidate?
- b. Which digital communication do you have with the candidate?
- c. Which benefit do you expect to get from linking with the candidate? (Macintosh and Tambouris, 2009).

When it comes to the first question, from the survey results, they found out that 54% of respondents knew their candidates through a political party, 40% through Facebook only, and the rest 6% knew their candidate in another way. The second question shows that 57% of respondents digitally communicate with their candidates by Facebook, 13% of them by mail or skype, and 30% do not use digital communication to communicate with candidates. On the third question, 45% responded that they expect increased knowledge about their policy from linking with the candidate, 29% responded they expect visibility on the internet, 16% expect social prestige, and only 9% expect to influence their policy (Macintosh and Tambouris, 2009). When analyzing their research and considering that we live in a world where mass media is dominant, that the internet is available, we can see that Facebook indeed does influence voters and their opinions.

On the other hand, a study conducted in Croatia by a professor from the University of Zagreb was based on the role of television debates as a tool of campaigns for presidential elections in Croatia in 2005. In this study, he did the survey questioning 600 respondents who watched at least 2 or 3 TV debates during the campaign. In the survey, there were three questions: those questions asked simple questions such as why they watch television debates, what bothered them when they watched the candidates, and what was the impact on their choice of voting (Skoko, 2005). The results showed that generally, voters watched debates in order to increase their knowledge about those candidates and to inform themselves about their programs. The results showed that the majority were bothered by the behavior of the candidates in the studio. Whereas, when it came to the results of the impact on their choice, the majority answered that their preference and choice did not change (Skoko, 2005). This shows that political campaigns, such as television debates, do not change electoral preferences.

To conclude, according to research already conducted, political campaigns do have an impact on electoral preferences. Depending on what type the political campaign is and what it is trying to portray, they will have an influence. In cases such as Croatia, the sample questioned, watched television debates to inform themselves, yet their preference did not change, despite the dissatisfaction. In contrast, other researchers proved that education had an impact on electoral preferences, making a correlation between education and electoral choices. Unfortunately, as mentioned in the beginning, no research was conducted using youth voters specifically, but this research paper will try and research what influences youth voters to vote in BiH.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied in this article was both qualitative and quantitative. The literature review on what determines electoral preferences of youth voters, interest group survey with fourteen questions (62 participants) and analysis of the electoral indicators and official data mostly from Central Election Commission Bosnia and Herzegovina. The aim of our study is to understand the electoral preferences of youth voters in BiH and to further familiarize the youth about their possibilities in electoral choices and using the means of communication to connect and understand political candidates. The research question that is investigated is whether different means of communication with different political candidates and their educational level have an impact on electoral preferences among youth voters. This research hypothesizes that different means of communication with political candidates as well as their education level, have a considerable impact on electoral preferences on youth voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

To research the effectiveness of different means of direct contact on electoral preferences, it is necessary to define what and who we will measure. To begin, we must first define the critical element of this research: electoral choices, in democratic system elections, are held every four or five years for citizens to choose their representative or representatives in the government. Every citizen has a right to vote for his/her choice. Who they are going to choose is their electoral choice. When it comes to youth voters, there are few schools of thought on that subject. Some experts are claiming that youth is considered to be from the age of eighteen to the age of twenty-five, while others are stating that the youth is from the age of eighteen to the age of thirty-five, in Bosnia and Herzegovina youth voters are considered to be citizens between the ages of

eighteen, once they are of legal age, and thirty (IZBORNJI POKAZATELJI 2002-2014. godina, 2015). If we take education as a variable, it impacts the level of understanding of a voter. There is a difference between educated voters and regular voters. Educated voters are considered to be more curious about the candidate's campaign program as they have achieved a certain level of education, such as finishing high school degrees and University. Whereas regular voters have a minimum level of education, which is a completed elementary school, as these are the cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federacija Bosne i Hercegovine, 2019). Therefore, we can measure the degree of education and its influence on electoral choices by collecting data of numerous choices amongst youth-educated and regular voters in order to distinguish whether or not it does correlate with electoral choices.

PARTICIPANTS

There were 62 participants of which 61,3% were female. 85,5% of the participants were in the age group of 18-30 where as the rest were 30 and above, our participants in the majority had a high school diploma and the second most frequent educational level was a bachelor's degree. Participants' descriptions can be seen in the table below.

Table 1:
Frequency Table of Participants' Descriptions

		Frequency	Percent
GENDER	Female	38	61,3
	Male	24	38,7
AGE	18-30	53	85,5
	30 and above	9	14,5
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	Bachelors	21	33,9
	Elementary school	1	1,6
	High school	32	51,6
	Master	7	11,3
	PhD	1	1,6
	Total	62	100,0

Measures

Methodology applied in this research relies on collecting and analyzing data. Through this research we used several different types of instruments for data collection like: questionnaire, structured observation and data and document content analysis. Data are defined as values, numbers and information and subsequently formed into conclusions. Further, data are collected from website of Central Electoral Commission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, observing election indicators for the period covered by the research (2015 and 2020 local and presidential elections in BiH). The base of our research was a questionnaire designed to obtain participants perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, interests and opinions towards the electoral choices. We used the combination of Likert scale, semantic differential and interrogative construction method in the questionnaire. The scientific goal of the research is reflected in the analysis of how youth voters' decisions have been created.

Procedures

The survey was distributed to youth voters around Bosnia and Herzegovina. The researchers provided the participants with a brief explanation about the research as well as Likert - type questions as well as other types of questions. Participants were asked to carefully read each question and answer as truthfully as possible. It was important to highlight to the participants that their responses were anonymous and that this questionnaire was on a voluntary basis..

Data Analysis

To analyze the data gathered it was necessary to firstly screen the data. After that was done, SPSS was used to look into and create frequency tables for each question and also make correlations between variables. Data was also analyzed in a way to show the percentage of each answer to each question to show what was the most frequently chosen answer. In more detail results will be shown in the section below.

RESULTS

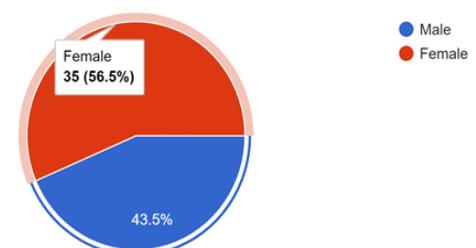
This research paper is a combination of two purposes because it is researching something that has not been researched in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is what influences youth voters to vote in Bosnia and Herzegovina, second, we are attempt-

ing to explain what influences youth voters to vote. The population and sampling in this research are all people between the ages of eighteen to thirty, with different ranges of education, both male and female, an amount ideal for this research would be fifty to a hundred people. An ideal research method would be an experiment, in which the population would be from several cities in BiH, with different backgrounds. A part of the experiment would be showing some television debates and interviews to our sample and seeing how that influences their voting. Lastly, we would create a Facebook group with a limited amount of sampled population, and post different types of posts of candidates. After all, three parts were conducted and fake elections would be organized to see how the sampled population would vote. Of course, education as one variable would be looked at when analyzing the results of the experiment. We believe that through this experiment, we could genuinely analyze what influences youth voters to vote. When it comes to unobtrusive research, we believe it is not the best way to conduct our research since we are researching something relatively new, there is no existing statistical data or historical data. Unobtrusive research is studying social behavior without affecting it (Babbie, 2014). We want to research social behavior by affecting it, which is quite the opposite. Because of the time restraint and budget restraint, we decided to conduct evaluation research, by using questionnaires to conduct our research. Through these questionnaires, the purpose is to evaluate what influences youth voters to vote in BiH. We believed that this is the best way to conduct our research, keeping our sampled population anonymous, gaining their trust, and finishing promptly.

The research consists of a questionnaire with fourteen questions. We expected to have fifty responses but managed to collect sixty two. The questions were short and easy to answer. Below you will find the questions and the data analysis. First three questions are explained under the section participants, ad we will continue with:

Figure 1:
Gender preferences

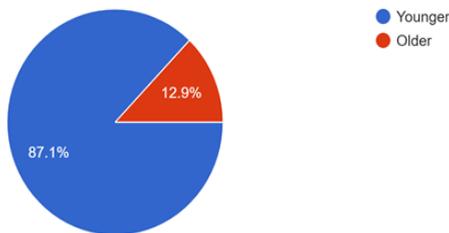
Do you prefer male or female political candidates?
62 responses



Here we tried to understand whether a male or female candidate had influence on one's choice. We can see that the majority of respondents preferred female candidates. Another mistake was not providing an option of "no preference"

Figure 2:
Age preferences

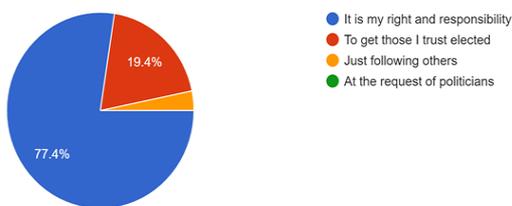
Do you prefer younger or older political candidates?
62 responses



Where as in this question, we can see that respondents preferred younger political candidates. Here we also could have provided an option "no preference" because some may not take into account one's age when deciding who to vote for.

Figure 3:
Reason for Voting

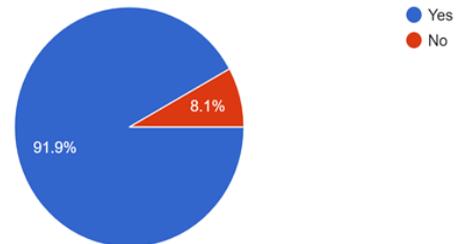
Why do you vote?
62 responses



With this question, we wanted to see the motivation of our sampled population. The majority believe that it is their right and responsibility to vote. Interestingly, no one said that it was at a request of a politician.

Figure 4:
Leader preferences

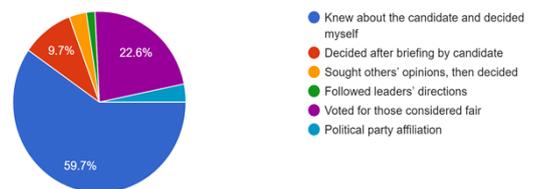
You like to see a new face as a leader?
62 responses



Here we tried to analyze whether our sampled population would rather see a new face as a leader, or do they prefer the current ones, and the majority agreed to see a new face.

Figure 5:
Decision Making

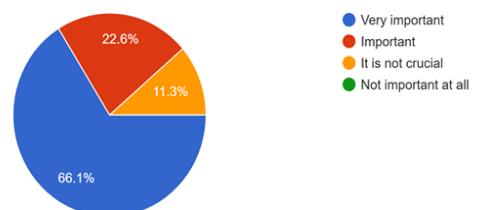
How do you decide which candidate(s) to vote for?
62 responses



Here we tried to understand what methods they use in order to decide which candidate they want to vote for. In this question, respondents were able to choose one answer. The main checked answer was that they knew the candidate and decided by themselves. The second most frequently checked answer was that they chose those ones that they considered was fair.

Figure 6:
Importance of Educational Level

How important is the educational level of the potential candidate you are voting for?
62 responses

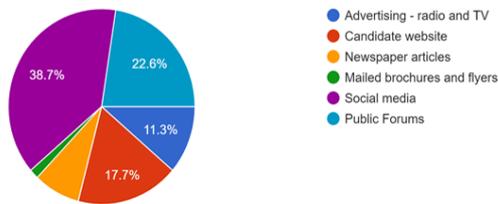


With this question, we wanted to see the respondents' opinions on the level of education of political candidates. The most frequent answer was "very important" and interestingly "not important at all" was not chosen by any respondents.

Figure 7:
Informing about a candidate

What do you feel is the best way to inform yourself about a candidate?

62 responses

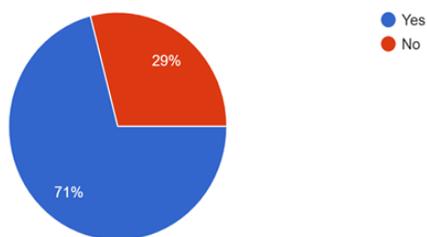


The most frequent way of informing was through social media. The second most chosen answer was going to public forums. With this question we wanted to see if the respondents directly go and inform themselves about political candidates.

Figure 8:
Importance of direct contact with candidates

Is it important to have direct contact with candidates?

62 responses

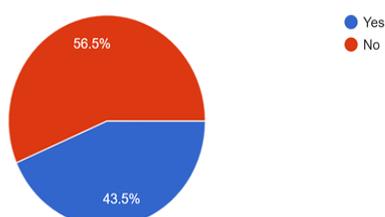


Here we can see that the majority of respondents believe that it is in fact important to have direct contact with political candidates.

Figure 9:
Public Forum

Do you go to public forums on specific topics that interest you?

62 responses

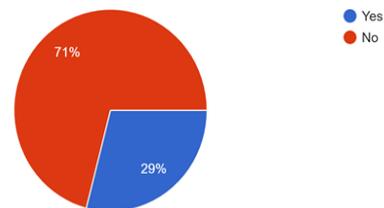


Here we can see that respondents in majority do not go to public forums on specific topics. The difference between is not drastical but still it exists.

Figure 10:
The ethnic identity

Is the ethnic identity important in deciding which candidate to vote for?

62 responses

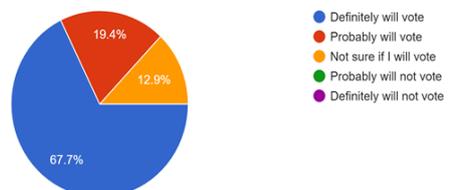


With question 13, we wanted to see whether ethnic identity had an influence on voters' choices. Here we can see that the majority said that ethnic identity was not important to them when deciding for a political candidate.

Figure 11:
Voting in the upcoming elections

How likely is it that you will vote in the upcoming elections?

62 responses



Our last question was to see whether the respondents will go and use their right to vote in the 2022 elections. Here we can conclude that the majority said they will vote and it is important to highlight that no respondent answered that they won't.

Through our SPSS analysis we concluded that 55,5% of women respondents have a high school degree. We also found that 69.8% of youth voters (18-30) will definitely vote in the upcoming elections. Another finding is that 69.8% of youth voters (18-30) responded that ethnic identity was not important to them when deciding for which candidate to vote for. What can be seen throughout the results is that the hypothesis that was set was proven to be correct. It can be noticed that participants in fact do care about whether political candi-

dates have an educational degree and which one it is. This shows that youth voters are more prone to vote for those participants with a high education degree. When it comes to different means of communication between youth voters and political candidates it can be seen that youth voters want to have some sort of communication, whether that is through public forums or through the internet, we can assume that youth voters feel noticed and represented if they can express their opinions to their political candidates and when they do so that they are more likely to vote for those candidates that provide various platforms for them to do so. Therefore we can conclude that youth voters like to have a one on one communication with their potential candidates as well as that the educational level of candidates dictates for who they will vote for to represent them and their beliefs at different levels of the political system.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Like in the previous section, where we have introduced results from different researches throughout time (from India and Denmark) and where researchers have made a correlation between education and voter turnout, this paper also has shown significant influence of the voter's education level on their decisions and electoral choices. The research conducted supports research results from previous conducted research mentioned in the literature review, which will briefly be addressed throughout the discussion. Generally, it has been shown that higher education leads to higher voter turnout and influences them by believing that their decision and opinion is important in creating a political environment. It can be concluded that higher education also leads to higher social and self awareness (Bećirović & Akbarov, 2015; Yaman & Bećirović, 2016), as well as political and social responsibility. On the other hand, during their voting decisions, young voters have shown preferences toward political candidates with higher education levels. Ethnic identity, for the very same university educated group of participants in this research questionnaire, not only is not a decisive factor but it is not a factor almost at all. Interaction with political candidates through different means of communication (social networks or open public debates) on the other hand tends to be a crucial factor for young voters. In the era of social networks, it is imposed as logical that this way of communication with candidates is the favorite of young voters, and the results proved that fact. When taking into account the research conducted in Copenhagen we can see that there is a correlation between these two types of

research done (Macintosh and Tambouris, 2009). Both respondents in BiH and Copenhagen in the majority agreed that the use of social media is a tool used to contact and learn more about the political candidate. On the other hand, it can be noted that like in the research conducted in India, education in both the respondents and in political campaigns make a big impact in electoral preferences (Bhue et al., 2014). Meaning that the higher the educational level the higher the chances are that respondents will choose a candidate with a higher education level because it is believed that they are more likely to not be involved in corrupt ideas. On the other hand, respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not engage a lot with their candidates or learn about their candidates through television. This shows that those in Croatia use television debates to learn more about their candidates' opinions and beliefs and in BiH that is not the case even though a small percentage of them do. The research conducted in Denmark shows that both education and political campaigns have an influence on electoral preferences, therefore it can be concluded that the research conducted in BiH also proves that both education and other means of communication affect electoral preferences in youth voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Hansen, 2008).

Our hypothesis stated that education and different means of direct contact with voters do have an influence on youth voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact, education significantly impacts willingness to communicate (Rizvić & Bećirović, 2017). We conducted two types of research, one which would show that the independent variable, which is election, has different means of direct contact with youth voters. This experiment would have been conducted in different cities of the country with visual aids, considering the time restraint and budget needed to conduct this, we did not proceed to examine the influence of this independent variable. In order to prove that the independent variable education has an influence, we made a questionnaire, which we enclosed above. The results showed that education does have great influence on youth voters and what they would preferably choose as their candidate or political party.

If we were to get the chance to develop this research further, we would fix the questionnaire and get more responses, as well as perform our experiment. A limitation in our research and suggestion for further research would be to ask in the questionnaire from where in BiH our respondents are, which we believe was one of our biggest mistakes in the overall questionnaire. If the research

were done as planned, it would have supported our overall research paper and logically supported our hypothesis, as we believe that a questionnaire and experiment were the two critical elements into truly understanding whether education and political campaigns have an influence on youth voters in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, out of the respondents that answered the questions to our questionnaire, we can see that according to them, education does have an influence, that those with higher education pay attention and inform themselves about candidates and political parties. Another relationship we found during our analysis of the data was that most of our respondents that were under the age of 30, preferred to be informed through social media. This relationship might have been useful to go more in depth with and analyze whether social media was one of the factors that guide young voters' preference.

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