

Information-Seeking Behavior and Uncertainty Reduction for Elections

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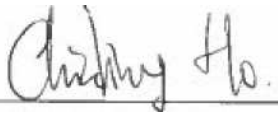
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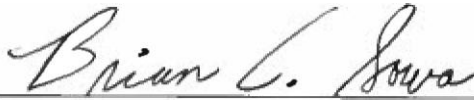
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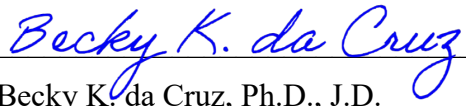
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Introduction

Individuals in the U.S. are experiencing a high level of anxiety when facing uncertain outcomes in elections (Tarsney, 2018). According to the uncertainty reduction theory, people will employ various information seeking strategies to gain as much information as possible to reduce the uncertainty they are experiencing. While prior literature (Berger & Kellermann, 1983; Burgoon et al., 2001; Ramirez et al., 2002) already established that people tend to use the following information seeking strategies: Interactive, Active, Extractive, and Passive, scholars have not examined how different strategies are being prioritized. Further, there is an inconsistency in findings (Afzal, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2017) on different racial groups' information seeking preferences.

Applying uncertainty reduction theory to analyze people's information seeking behavior can allow information providers to know the most effective ways to provide information in the context of elections; doing so might lead to higher voter turnout for elections. There is uncertainty when it comes to voting in government elections (Tarsney, 2018). Election uncertainty might be especially significant for underrepresented racial groups in the U.S. In fact, from 2018 to 2022, Latino eligible voters have increased by 4.7 million, making up 62% of the total growth in U.S. eligible voters (Natarajan & Im, 2022; Statista Research Department, 2022; UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative, 2021). Despite their increasing voting demographic, there has been a lack of studies on the demographics' preferred information seeking behavior for election information.

Reducing a considerable voting demographic's uncertainty toward election information can ensure a larger group of assured voters. Therefore, the current study examined how people prioritize existing information seeking strategies to reduce uncertainty about election matters,

along with how Latinos, the rising voting demographic, can, in turn, be best-served information regarding elections.

Literature Review

Uncertainty and Information Seeking

Uncertainty has been defined as multiple sentiments of tension, anxiety, and irritation that an individual could experience when one is in need of a specific piece of information (Brumfield, 2008; Kuhlthau, 1999). *Information-seeking* occurs when there is “a determination of an information need and the realization that there is insufficient knowledge to address that need” (Brumfield, 2008, p.365). Research (Brumfield, 2008; Burgoon et al., 2001; Ramirez et al., 2002) has found that individuals try to reduce uncertainty through information seeking strategies. Ultimately, uncertainty is what spurs the information seeking process (Kuhlthau, 1999). Kuhlthau (1999) claimed that:

“Uncertainty is a concept for information retrieval design that offers insight into the user's quest for a personal perspective within the process of information seeking, what I have called "*formulating a focus.*" (p.15)

Kuhlthau (1999) proposed that the presence of uncertainty is used to guide the information seeking process as individuals will be committed to managing their uncertainty to prioritize gathering the necessary information they need.

Previous literature (Berger & Kellermann, 1983; Burgoon et al., 2001; Ramirez et al., 2002) has established that individuals tend to use: Interactive, Active, Extractive, and Passive strategies for information seeking purposes. Interactive strategies involve direct interaction between the one communicating the information and the target, in which different strategies are employed to produce the desired information. An active approach involves information gathering

by interacting with other individuals without directly interacting with the target. Extractive strategies involve searching for information through means such as Usenet newsgroup communications, documents, and electronic postings. Lastly, passive information seeking strategies involve obtaining information about one focus through unobtrusive observation (Ramirez et al., 2002).

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) was developed to account for the introductory interaction between strangers. Berger and Calabrese (1975) characterized uncertainty as the many alternatives individuals face in their encounter with strangers and uncertainty as the process of subsequently explaining the other's behavior. Overall, Berger and Calabrese (1975) view uncertainty as a process of prediction and explanation. Berger and Calabrese's (1975) posited that the level of information-seeking behavior increases with increased levels of uncertainty and vice versa.

The Uncertainty Reduction Theory has provided a mechanism to account for how people may respond to uncertainty through making adjustments to combat the discomfort one feels due to the lack of information (Kuhlthau, 1999; Son et al., 2019). According to the theory, the uncertainty one experiences will prompt one to seek information to reduce one's uncertainty (Kuhlthau, 1999; Son et al., 2019). However, only certain information can be used toward uncertainty reduction. When the provided information is irrelevant or familiar to the individual, the information is incapable of reducing their level of uncertainty (Artandi, 1973) and will motivate people to use innovative methods to complete their tasks (Shin & Kim, 2022).

Prior literature (Boyle et al., 2004; Peng & Huang, 2020; Perraulta & Silk, 2016; Shin & Kim, 2022) yielded some evidence on how personality, emotions, and media usage can influence the level of uncertainty people felt and their motivation to seek information. Proactive personality

was found to moderate the positive effects of role ambiguity, which is a form of uncertainty, in an organizational setting; those individuals are more likely to seek information, in this case advice, from their colleagues to accomplish their tasks (Shin & Kim, 2022). Negative emotions are consistently found to spur information seeking behavior (Boyle et al., 2004; Peng & Huang, 2020) because of the risk perception that was invoked, which in turn led to the need for uncertainty reduction (Peng & Huang, 2020). Uncertainty reduction and motivation to seek information are contingent on the type of media that is used. Video biography reduces uncertainty more than traditional text biography (Perraulta & Silk, 2016). Efforts to learn is positively associated with different media like newspapers, internet use and television (Boyle et al., 2004).

As shown, scholars (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Goldsmith, 2001; Sharabi, 2021; Shin & Kim, 2022), consider the presence of uncertainty an essential part of the human experience and managing uncertainty a fundamental response. While literature in the past had examined various factors that contribute to information seeking and uncertainty reduction, there was a dearth of studies on how individuals manage the uncertainty they are experiencing which stems from a lack of information regarding elections and how they prioritize their use of different information seeking strategies, especially on seeking election related information.

Information-Seeking During Elections

Scholars suggest that voters are guided by emotions when cognitively processing information on political candidates and campaigns (Marcus, 2000). Similarly, voters engage in information seeking under the influence of emotions. Information-seeking behavior results from anxiety, and other emotions, stemmed from the uncertainty individuals experience (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019).

Political science researchers (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019; Marcus, 2000) have also found a correlation between emotions and political behavior. Between two voters, where one experiences negative emotions, such as anger, and the other experiences positive emotions, they can have two distinct perceptions of the political setting (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019). Whereas the voter feeling negative emotions is more likely to perceive threats and problems in the political landscape, the voter experiencing positive emotions may perceive it to be satisfactory (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019). Individuals that felt anger were also more likely to seek and share information from various sources (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019). Hoewe and Parrott's (2019) results are consistent with the previous findings in that information seeking can be influenced by emotions.

Emotion is a critical factor in the information seeking process because voters who are overwhelmed by emotion are more likely to seek and share information (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019; Marcus, 2000). When people become emotional, they tend to rely on extractive information seeking strategies to obtain information (Hoewe & Parrott, 2019). Thus, the more crucial it is for non-partisan election organizations to understand how voters seek general impartial information. The current study looks at voters' information seeking behavior, without emotions being a primary motive.

Existing Political Outreach Methods

Social media's impact on offline behavior has already been widely recognized (Jones et al., 2017; Lu & Lee, 2022). An extensive study (Jones et al., 2017) on the influence of social media during the 2010 U.S. Congressional Election revealed the direct influence on about 60,000 voters after researchers sent 61 million Facebook users random "get-out-the-vote" messages, which included 6 million users who were registered to vote. Other than the individuals who were directly

influenced, an additional 280,000 people were indirectly influenced by their friends who shared the “get-out-the-vote” message designed for the study on social media (Jones et al., 2017).

Although the Pew Research Center (2018) found that 42% of Americans in 2018 said they publicly shared on social media their support for a political campaign in the past five years, social media is not always politicians’ most used platform. During the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign season, campaign professionals shared the complications of “utilizing the wide range of social media platforms strategically and effectively” (Bode & Vrage, 2018, p. 3). Moreover, Bode & Vrage (2018) recommend that candidates use a platform that best suits their personality and the timing of the campaign. As shown, using social media to inform voters can be challenging to implement and thrive properly. When a social media post is disseminated, it strongly indicates that the message holds some value (Lu & Lee, 2022; Son et al., 2019).

Aside from social media, studies (Geurkink et al., 2022; Green & Smith, 2003; Lu & Lee, 2022) have also shown the paramount roles that other factors can contribute to people’s election information-seeking behavior. Jones et al. (2017) demonstrated how acquaintances could be influential and provide election information on social media platforms. Additionally, individuals’ electoral participation and civic engagement can be influenced by blandishments from family members, political parties, work environment and social networks (Geurkink et al., 2022; Green & Smith, 2003; Lu & Lee, 2022).

In addition, voters rely on other outlets when gathering election-related information. The most common outreach approach during elections is canvassing. Canvassing usually entails door-to-door campaigning for a political candidate or concern to distribute important information and mobilize constituencies (Griffard, 2020). Canvassing is an interesting political communication method that provides a more personalized view of politics through face-to-face conversations. It

is also claimed to have “a critical role in building the political power of marginalized communities” (Griffard, 2020, p.171). In an experiment conducted in a 1998 midterm election, Gerber and Green (2000) found that canvassing increased voter turnout rates from about 44% to 53%. (Gerber & Green, 2000; Green & Smith, 2003). Prior studies (Gerber & Green, 2000; Griffard, 2020; Green & Smith, 2003) demonstrate that constituents that are reached out through canvassing are more likely to vote.

As indicated above, uncertainty reduction is recognized as an underlying reason to seek information (Kuhlthau, 1999; Son et al., 2019). With the knowledge that individuals can avoid uncertainty by relying on “environments that are formal, structured, and familiar” (Brumfield, 2008, p.366), the current study will try to reconcile the various information seeking strategies that individuals practice by more systematically categorizing the information outlets such so that officials and organizations may identify the most suitable outlets to adapt for election campaigns.

Despite the plentiful amount of prior literature on the Uncertainty Reduction Theory within interpersonal communication, a limited amount of literature looks at the role of uncertainty reduction and information-seeking within general election information. As mentioned, experiencing uncertainty and the desire to manage it through information-seeking is a general human experience applicable to everyone, regardless of their culture. However, an analysis of preferred information-seeking methods to manage uncertainty is absent. The current study intends to establish how people prioritize existing information-seeking strategies to reduce their uncertainty about election matters and learn about Latino’s preferred information-seeking strategies.

Therefore, the research questions for the current study were formulated as follows:

R1: How do people prioritize existing information seeking strategies to reduce uncertainty about election matters?

R2: Is the information seeking strategy different for Latinos?

Method

This study surveyed participants regarding their information-seeking behavior for election information. The survey looked at the methods that participants use when seeking information on the kind of election occurring, early voting dates, the official voting day, who the candidates are, and the candidates' agenda. Participants were asked to share what channels they use to access this information and to show how much they trust these channels from the least preferred to most preferred to use, from 1 (least preferred) to 100 (most preferred). The smaller the number, the less likely they are to opt for it when trying to find out more about the election. The available channels range from multiple social media platforms to traditional media platforms, canvassers, and attending candidates' rallies. The survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) department at Valdosta State University (see Appendix A for the IRB Approval Form).

Participants

Participants were recruited from Valdosta State University and other individuals across Georgia. Students participated in the study in exchange for extra credit points. Participants were asked to provide feedback regarding their information gathering habits for different election information, such as the kind of election, early voting dates, the official voting day, who the candidates are, and the candidates' agenda through the survey. Each participant received a link to a survey that randomly assigned participants to one of the five topics. Participants were

randomly assigned to one of the five surveys, which had already been configured using Qualtrics.

Participants were asked to self-report their age as a continuous variable. They were also asked to report their sex. Participants were asked to report their race by choosing from the following list: “Black or African American,” “White,” “Hispanic or Latino,” “Asian / Pacific Islander,” “Native American or American Indian,” and “Other.” In the current study, Hispanics and Latinos are interchangeable due to participants possibly identifying as both or unaware of the difference. The data collected from participants was anonymous and will be confidentially kept for up to three years.

A total of 73 participants who were recruited through convenience sampling responded. After removing 18 disqualified records, 55 records were used for actual data analyses. The following was the racial makeup of the study’s participants: 28 Hispanics or Latinos, 17 White, eight Black or African Americans, one Native American, and one Asian or Pacific Islander. The study had 36 females and 19 males. The mean age of participants was 26.50.

Measures

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire evaluating their responses on a Web-based survey. A series of questions were used to assess individuals' use of the following information seeking strategies (Ramirez et al., 2002): Interactive, Active, Extractive, and Passive strategies. Respondents were prompted to answer the following statements: “Please tell us which of the following would you use to find out more about the kind of election.”; “which of the following would you use to find out more about (2) early voting dates”; “which of the following would you use to find out more about (3) the official voting day”; “which of the following would you use to find out more about (4) who the candidates are”; and “which of the following would

you use to find out more about (5) the agenda for each candidate”. Participants were asked to respond by ranking their choices from the least preferred to most preferred to use, from 1 (less preferred) to 100 (more preferred), by entering the numbers next to the provided options.

The current study examined people’s use of different information seeking strategies, as listed below:

Interactive strategies (I) involve direct interaction between the one communicating the information and the target. Methods that fall under this strategy are:

Speak to candidates (I)

Attend the candidate’s debates (I)

Ask candidate questions at panels (I)

Interact with candidate on any social media sites (I)

Active strategy (A) involves information gathering by interacting with other individuals without directly interacting with the target; Methods that fall under this category are:

Attend candidates rallies (A)

Become a member of an activist group (A)

Go to the election office (A)

Extractive (E) strategies involve searching for information through means such as Usenet newsgroup communications, documents, and electronic postings. Methods that fall under this category are:

Looking up information on Facebook (E)

Twitter (E)

Instagram (E)

Traditional paper newspaper (E)

Online newspaper publications (E)

News (E)

Passive information-seeking strategies (P) involve obtaining information about one focus through unobtrusive observation. Methods that fall under this category are:

Discussion forum (P)

Podcast (P)

YouTube (P)

Friends (P)

Family members (P)

Canvassers (People distributing information about elections and candidates) (P)

Reference friends' posts on Facebook (P)

Participants were then asked to rank the following statements, to assess their attitude toward various outlets, using a 7-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 7 being Strongly Agree.

The following statements were presented to measure their attitude about the outcome of preferred information-seeking behavior:

I am satisfied with the information I found through the options I selected above;

I trust friends and family members over private and public organizations for electoral information;

I am eager to learn more information about elections;

I wish election information was easier to access;

The following statements were presented to measure their feeling of uncertainty with preferred information-seeking behavior:

I am always feeling uncertain about using the correct sources in order to stay fully informed about the election;

I am not sure if the information I have gathered will help me decide how to vote in the upcoming election.

The main subject term in all six statements were changed to match each of the five conditions, depending on the condition the participants were assigned to one of the following: (E) general election information, (EV) early voting dates, (VD) the official voting day, (C) who the candidates are, and (CA) each candidate's agenda.

Results

Based on the mean values of different individuals' preferences, participants' preferences are in this order, from the most preferred (100) to the least (1), after obtaining the average:

1. Friends (M = 49), [Passive]
2. Online newspaper publications (M = 47), [Extractive], News (M = 47), [Extractive]
3. Family members (M = 45), [Passive]
4. Instagram (M = 44), [Extractive]
5. Twitter (M = 43), [Extractive], Looking up information on Facebook (M = 43), [Extractive]
6. YouTube (M = 41), [Passive]
7. Canvassers (People distributing information about elections and candidates) (M = 38), [Passive]
8. Traditional paper newspaper (M = 37), [Extractive]
9. Podcast (M = 36), [Passive]
10. Discussion forum (M = 35), [Passive]

11. Attend the candidate's debates (M = 34), [Interactive]
12. Attend candidates rallies (M = 34), [Active]
13. Speak to candidates (M = 33), [Interactive], Go to the election's office (M = 33), [Active], Reference friends' posts on Facebook (M = 33), [Passive]
14. Become a member of an activist group (M = 32), [Active]
15. Ask candidate questions at panels (M = 30), [Interactive]
16. Interact with candidate on any social media sites (M = 29), [Interactive].

There were, initially, 20 methods listed. Some methods shared the same level of preference.

The results showed that the top five most preferred strategies consisted of a mix of passive and extractive information seeking methods. Getting information from friends topped the list (M = 49), followed by getting information from online newspaper publications (M = 47) and news sources (M = 47), family members (M = 45), and Instagram (M = 44).

Among the passive strategies, referencing friends' posts on Facebook is the least preferred method under passive strategy (M = 33, SD = 24.60). Among the methods for interactive strategies, attending the candidate's debates (M = 34, SD = 37.85) was the most preferred while interacting with candidate on any social media sites (M = 29, SD = 36.32) was the least preferred. For the active strategies, attending the candidates' rallies (M = 34, SD = 31.33) was most preferred while becoming a member of an activist group (M = 32, SD = 31.39) was the least preferred. For extractive strategies, both getting information from online newspaper publications (M = 47, SD = 31.66) and news sources (M = 47, SD = 32.56) were the most preferred method. Notably traditional paper newspaper (M = 37, SD = 28.03) was the least preferred extractive method. Interestingly, the overall least preferred strategy was interacting with candidates on any social media sites (M = 29, SD = 36.32).

The current study showed that participants use passive and extractive information seeking strategies more often. Participants used passive strategies, such as their friends ($M = 49.00$, $SD = 29.27$) and extractive strategies, such as online newspaper publications ($M = 47$, $SD = 31.66$). Active and interactive information-seeking strategies are less common among participants. The most utilized interactive method was attending candidate's debates ($M = 34$, $SD = 37.85$), and for active methods, attending candidate's rallies ($M = 34$, $SD = 31.33$).

Participants were then asked to assess their attitude toward various information and media outlets, using a 7-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 7 being Strongly Agree.

The results indicated that, on average, people moderately agreed that they wished election information was easier to access ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.88$). People moderately agreed that they are eager to learn more information about elections. ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.71$). People slightly agreed with the statement that they were satisfied with the election information they found through the options they selected above ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.66$). People particularly felt neutral about trusting friends and family members over private and public organizations for election information ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 2.11$). On average, people felt neutral regarding their uncertainty, using the correct sources to stay fully informed about the election. ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 2.06$). People slightly disagreed that they were not sure if the information they had gathered would help them decide how to vote in the upcoming election ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.79$).

Over half of the individuals who participated in this study identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Having many Latino participants provides better insight to answer the second research question, which questioned if Latinos have preferred information-seeking strategies that are different from the other racial groups. The results indicated that there was no significant

difference between the use of different strategies across different races. The results obtained regarding people's preferences on prioritizing their information seeking strategies could be applicable universally, regardless of the racial groups.

Discussion

This study aims to understand how people prioritize information-seeking strategies when individuals search for election information, specifically, among the four identified-methods: Interactive, Active, Extractive, and Passive strategies (Ramirez et al., 2002). With results from this study, political organizations may be able to make more informed decisions when deciding what platform to use in order to share election information.

Results of the current study extended the literature on information seeking strategies, and the uncertainty reduction theory. While previous studies on information seeking strategies had only broadly categorized different methods of information seeking under four overarching umbrellas, the current study provided a way to assess how people prioritize information seeking strategies in the context of seeking election-related information. Results showed that passive and extractive strategies are more dominant than the other two strategies.

On average, people considerably preferred the passive information-seeking strategy of getting the information from friends ($M = 49$) over other methods. The next passive strategy was seeking information from family members ($M = 45$). Online newspaper publications ($M = 47$) and News ($M = 47$) are extractive strategies that followed friends as a highly preferred information seeking method. The top interactive information seeking strategy, which broke the passive and extractive lead in preferred methods, is seeking the information through attending the candidate's debate ($M = 34$). Interestingly, in the Pew Research Center (2018) study, 28% of Americans reported that they had attended a political rally in the past five years.

Prior literature (Bode & Vrage, 2018; Jones et al., 2017; Lu & Lee, 2022) on election information sources points to social media as influential. This study's results support prior studies suggesting that social media is a significant source. The use of social media platforms was identified as an extractive strategy. This study showed that Instagram ($M = 44$) is the most popular social media platform. Twitter ($M = 43$) and Facebook ($M = 43$) followed. On the other hand, the mean of the preferences for passive information seeking strategy that involved social media, namely YouTube ($M = 41$) and Reference friends' posts on Facebook ($M = 33$) were inconsistent.

Worthy of note was that the information seeking method of referencing friends' posts on Facebook pales when compared to the other methods that involve family and friends. On average, the passive method of information seeking from friends and family was ranked higher among all the provided methods. Seeking information from friends ($M = 49$) ranked the highest, and following in fourth place was seeking information from family members ($M = 45$).

Additionally, the findings in the current study resonate with Griffard's (2020) claim that canvassing is typically used among political candidates and organizations to distribute important information and mobilize constituencies. The results of the current study showed that, on average, people found canvassers ($M = 38$) to be the most preferred information seeking method among the methods that uniquely involve face-to-face interpersonal dialogue. These results shed light on the need to reinforce and improve political groups' investment in canvassing efforts.

When participants were asked to reflect on the statements to assess their attitude toward various outlets, results showed that people moderately agreed that they wished election information was easier to access ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.88$) and that they are eager to learn more information about elections. ($M = 5.27$, $SD = 1.71$). These results indicated that current voters

desire more access to overall election information. The results also point organizations to the need to satiate voters' desire to have easier access to election information. Individuals are eager to find out more information about elections.

In regard to individuals' feelings of uncertainty, unlike what was predicted, people were only experiencing a moderate level of uncertainty with the process of seeking out more election-related information. For instance, people were aware that the information they had gathered would help them decide how to vote in the upcoming election.

Surprisingly, people indicated that they are neutral about trusting friends and family members over private and public organizations for election information and feeling uncertain about using the correct sources in order to stay fully informed about the election. This may indicate how indifferent they are or how this action was performed at a subliminal level when selecting information seeking strategies.

As mentioned previously, there is a lack of prior studies that attempt to account for the possibility of a difference among different racial groups' information seeking preferences (Nguyen et al., 2017). As noted in the current study, Latinos are a rising voting demographic that has been unaccounted for among certain politicians and information-providing efforts (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2021). This study intended to determine if there was a possibility that they were not best served by the information providing efforts due to different information-seeking behavior among different racial groups. The results of this study indicate that among the participants who identified themselves as Hispanic or Latinos and other participants who identified themselves as a different race, there was no significant difference in their information seeking preferences. Since there is no significant difference between different racial groups, the remaining results of this study should be more compelling for political organizations to use when

considering ways to strategically disseminate general election information. Ultimately, the prioritization of different information seeking strategies that the current study established could be utilized by organizations to reach voters of all racial groups. Political organizations could focus on maximizing their resources and efforts to use the most desirable information outlets (Most preferred: passive information-seeking strategy of getting the information from friends and seeking information from family members) and other methods, as indicated in the results obtained in the current study, regardless of the racial group they are attempting to reach. Organizations that intend to reach certain racial groups could address other factors, such as language accessibility, rather than focusing on what channel they use to distribute information.

Existing information-providing methods like social media, the influence of acquaintances and canvassing were brought forward by previous literature. Another contribution of the current study is to point future studies to further scrutinize different information outlets that had not been examined in the past. There is a dearth of studies regarding some of the methods that were ranked highly by participants in the current study. This study found that gathering election information from friends was the most preferred information-seeking method. However, it was difficult to find any prior studies that looked at how specifically friends are not just influential on voting decisions but also on being a primary source for general non-partisan election information, like the dates for early voting. It would be interesting if political organizations took an interest in providing the general public with comprehensive non-partisan election information. Thus, when individuals seek general election information, they can access verified and neutral information that will help them reduce their uncertainty.

Limitations and Future Studies

This study has some limitations that should be considered. First, the information participants provided may not be accurate due to memory decay overtime. Although there was a runoff election (December, 2022) at the time the survey was distributed, participants may not be able to recall as much details about the information seeking process as when they were voting in the general election in November, 2022. Second, the results might be influenced by spurious variables such as participants' inflicted personal bias and social desirability due to the current social-political conversation of information literacy and news source biases.

Third, there is sampling error due to the small sample size. In order to generalize the results to the voting population in the U.S., more information gathered from the participants would benefit election and political information sources to reach the majority of voters more strategically. Future studies should gather data from a larger sample size to more fully understand the preferences of Georgia voters.

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Appendix A:
IRB Approval Form



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04343-2022

Responsible Researcher(s): Stephania Ortez

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Chialing Ho

Project Title: *Information Seeking within Elections.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations, **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Upon completion of the research study, all collected data (e.g. transcripts, data set, name/email lists, etc.) must be securely maintained and accessible only by the researcher(s) for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*
- *Names must be kept in a separate file from pseudonyms and/or assigned identifiers.*
- *Opportunities to earn extra credit must be made available for those who did not participate. The opportunities must offer the same amount of credit and require the same amount of time & effort.*
- *Qualtrics settings must permit participants to skip questions and/or not provide an answer. Option to track IP addresses must be disabled.*

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth Ann Olphie 10.25.2022

Elizabeth Ann Olphie, IRB Administrator

*Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.*