

# The Youth Vote Lives Online:

The Impact of Online Influencers  
on Voter Engagement

WHEN WE ALL VOTE

**VOTE**

**LAB**

[Full Report Available Here](#)

# Introduction

There is a growing body of research exploring the impact that social media influencers have on voter engagement. Civic Nation's Vote Lab, in partnership with *When We All Vote*, set out to add to the existing literature by conducting a field experiment among Instagram influencers in the lead-up to the 2022 midterm elections.

We recruited Instagram influencers using the *Lionize* platform and randomly assigned influencers to one of two messages which they were asked to incorporate into an Instagram story. Both messages encouraged viewers to register to vote, but each identifies a separate reason for the importance of voting.



# Research Questions

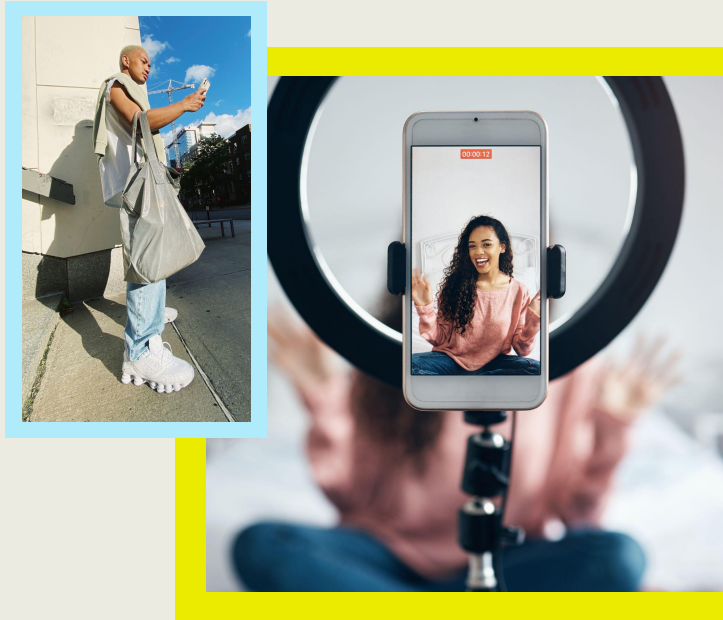
Our work set out to explore two primary questions of interest:



1. Does a certain kind of message elicit higher levels of engagement and voter registration?
2. Does the effect on voter engagement differ between low-follower (micro) and high-follower (macro) influencers?



# Main Findings



Influencers have promising potential to persuade prospective voters within their online communities.

We see evidence that micro-influencers (with < 30,000 followers) elicit significantly higher rates of engagement-per-follower than macro-influencers.

Content involving personal stories or those that fuse voting encouragement into the online community's interests generate more engagement.



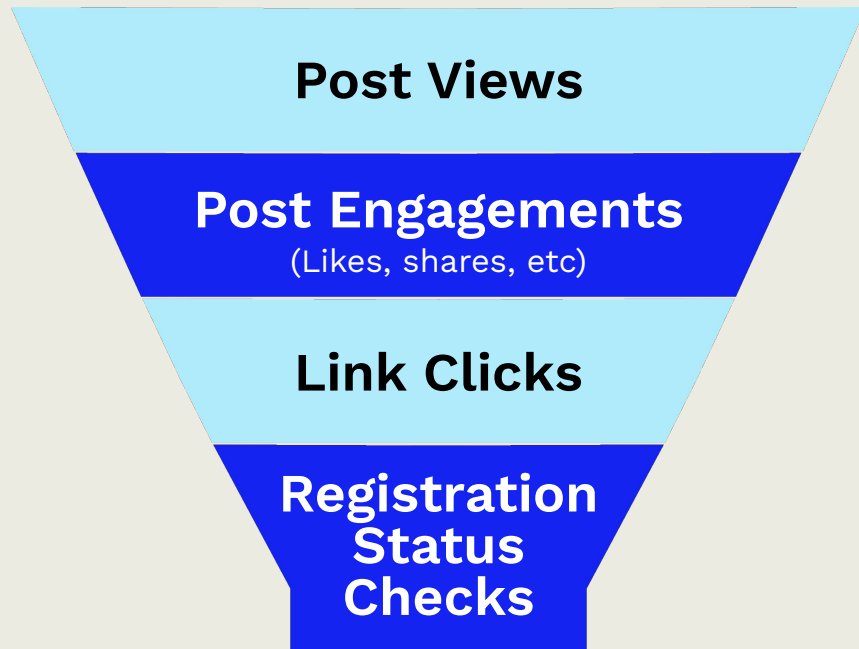
# Data

**Instagram data was collected by Lionize and included:**

- Story views
- Likes
- Comments
- Estimated reach
- Copies of all post content

**Each influencer also received an individualized hyperlink directing their followers to voter resources. This allowed us to track:**

- Link clicks
- Voter registration status checks
- Voter registrations



**VOTER  
REGISTRATION**



# Methodology: Message Selection

We began our inquiry with 5 messages that spanned a range of themes (including the economy, climate change, and state/local election importance) and a number of different tones (including hopeful, neutral, and negative).

To narrow our options to 2 finalists, we used *Grow Progress*, a rapid message testing platform, to perform head-to-head testing between the five potential messages.

The two top-performing messages which were then used in our influencer experiment:

## **Civic Engagement**

“Times are tough, and many of us feel like our vote doesn't matter, but that's not true. When we show up, make our voices heard and vote for our communities, we determine the future of our country. Make your voice count in these midterm elections. Check your voter registration status today - [weall.vote/votercheck](https://weall.vote/votercheck).”

## **Climate Action**

“The Inflation Reduction Act is the single largest climate investment in our nation's history. It wouldn't have been possible without the will of the people being heard - your voice did that! Let's continue demanding that our elected officials protect our future. Check your voter registration status today - [weall.vote/votercheck](https://weall.vote/votercheck).”



# Methodology: Influencer Selection

**Micro-influencer vs. Assigned Message**  
(Group Sizes)

|       | Civic Engagement | Climate Action |
|-------|------------------|----------------|
| Macro | 3                | 6              |
| Micro | 2                | 1              |

Influencers were recruited through *Lionize*. We posted a solicitation which included the language of both messages and explained that accepting the posting would mean being randomly assigned to a message. Each influencer was paid \$250.

Our final dataset included 12 influencer posts: 5 with the Civic Engagement message and 7 with the Climate Action message.

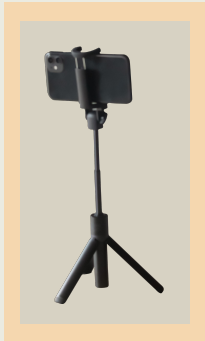
Influencers had a 0.5 probability of being assigned to each message. The uneven group sizes are a result of 2 influencers who dropped out after random assignment.

Influencers had between 20,000 and 150,000 followers. For the purposes of analysis, we relied on Lionize's definition of "micro-influencer" which classifies anyone with under 30,000 followers as micro.



# Methodology: Instagram Story

All influencers were asked to post a single Instagram Story which is viewable for 24 hours. Influencers were told that their story must:



- Use the assigned message language (either in text or narrated)
- Include their unique hyperlink directing followers to voting resources
- Be posted in advance of registration deadlines





# Results: Variable Definition

## Dependent Variables

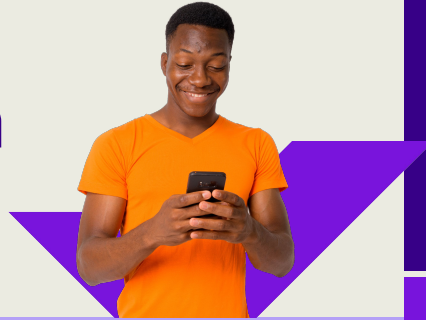
We measure success based on **engagement-per-follower (EPF)**. We define this metric as the number of clicks on an influencer's unique hyperlink per 10,000 followers within the 24-hour post window. To correct for right-skew, we take the log of this in our regression analysis.

## Independent Variables

To answer our two research questions, our regressions use two variables: one indicating if an influencer was assigned the climate message and one indicating if an influencer has fewer than 30,000 influencers (a micro-influencer)



# Results: Regression Analysis



**The Joint Regression** suggests that posts by micro-influencers are associated with higher average EPFs, holding message constant.

Dependent variable:

## Log Link Clicks per 10K Followers

|                                      | Joint<br>(1)        | Micro-influencer<br>(2) | Message<br>(3)      |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Message Assigned:<br/>Climate</b> | -1.437<br>(0.896)   |                         | -2.096*<br>(1.06)   |
| <b>Micro-influencer</b>              | 2.564**<br>(1.020)  | 3.043**<br>(1.049)      |                     |
| <b>Constant</b>                      | 0.171<br>(0.771)    | -0.787<br>(0.525)       | 1.197<br>(0.810)    |
| <b>Observations</b>                  | 12                  | 12                      | 12                  |
| <b>R<sup>2</sup></b>                 | 0.578               | 0.457                   | 0.281               |
| <b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>        | 0.484               | 0.403                   | 0.209               |
| <b>Residual Std. Error</b>           | 1.463 (df = 9)      | 1.574 (df = 10)         | 1.811 (df = 10)     |
| <b>F Statistic</b>                   | 6.152** (df = 2; 9) | 8.412** (df = 1; 10)    | 3.907* (df = 1; 10) |

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

**The Micro-influencer Regression** confirms our finding that having an audience with fewer than 30,000 followers remains a significant predictor of EPF at the 95%-threshold.

**The Message Regression** (aka the A/B test) shows some evidence that the Climate Message was associated with reduced EPF, but removing outliers eliminates this significance, so we should interpret this result with caution.



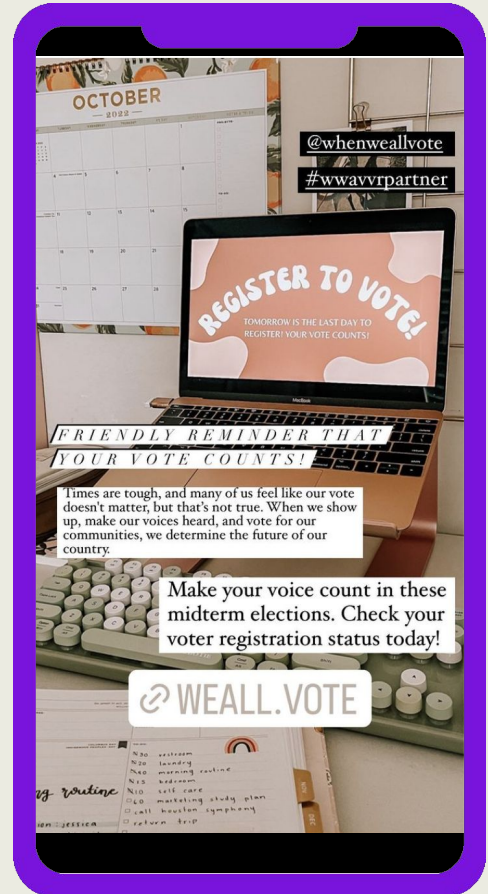
# Results: Qualitative

## What Made a Post Successful?

The highest performing post was a conversational, direct-to-camera video that included our message as well as anecdotal improvisations about the influencer's own voting experiences. The success of this post may be attributable to the content's direct, relatable format and use of personal stories.

The influencer with the second-highest EPF found success by linking voting to the interests of their community. This influencer has crafted a community of followers around the art of journaling. They posted a still image (right) that matched the aesthetic of their overall account, down to even the small details like the warm, orange filter.

By contrast, some of the less successful posts used automated voice-overs that read our message from a text box.



# Limitations



- Limited sample size (n=12)
- Success is measured by link clicks rather than registrations
- Definitions of “micro-influencer” vary across the industry and our results are not robust to different specifications & platforms



# Partners



To streamline the influencer recruitment and data collection processes, we partnered with [Lionize](#), an online influencer management agency.

To conduct our initial round of head-to-head message testing, we partnered with [Grow Progress](#), an online, rapid message testing platform.



# Thank you!

## Contact us:

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