



# When They Decide to Vote: Factors Behind Voting Decisions

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## Introduction

While many explanatory variables have been used to understand why voters choose a specific candidate, there is a gap in research examining how these factors relate to *when* voters make their decisions in relation to Election Day. Some voters enter the election cycle with a firm stance on who they will vote for, while others remain undecided until later in the cycle. This research project aims to understand voter behavior and the variables that shape the decision-making process timeline.

## Hypothesis

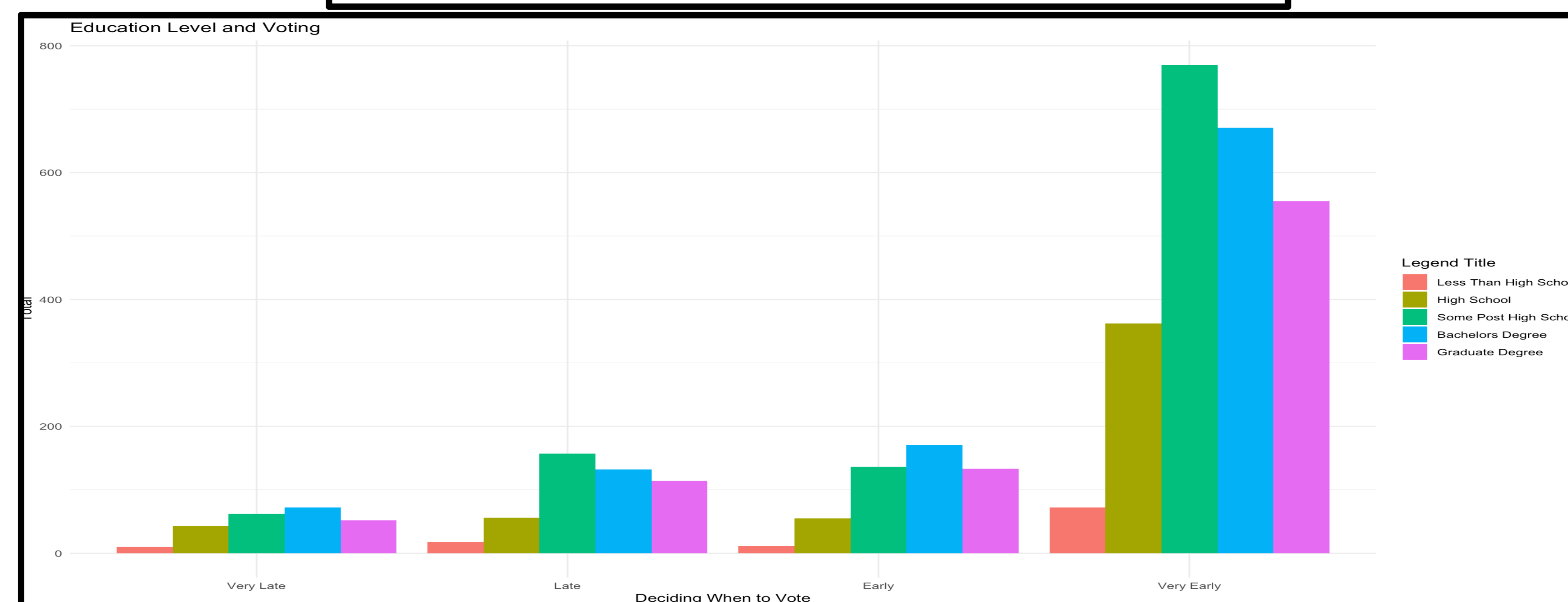
In a comparison of U.S. citizens, those who have attended higher education institutions than those who have not are more likely to decide earlier who to vote for in U.S. Presidential elections.

## Literature Review

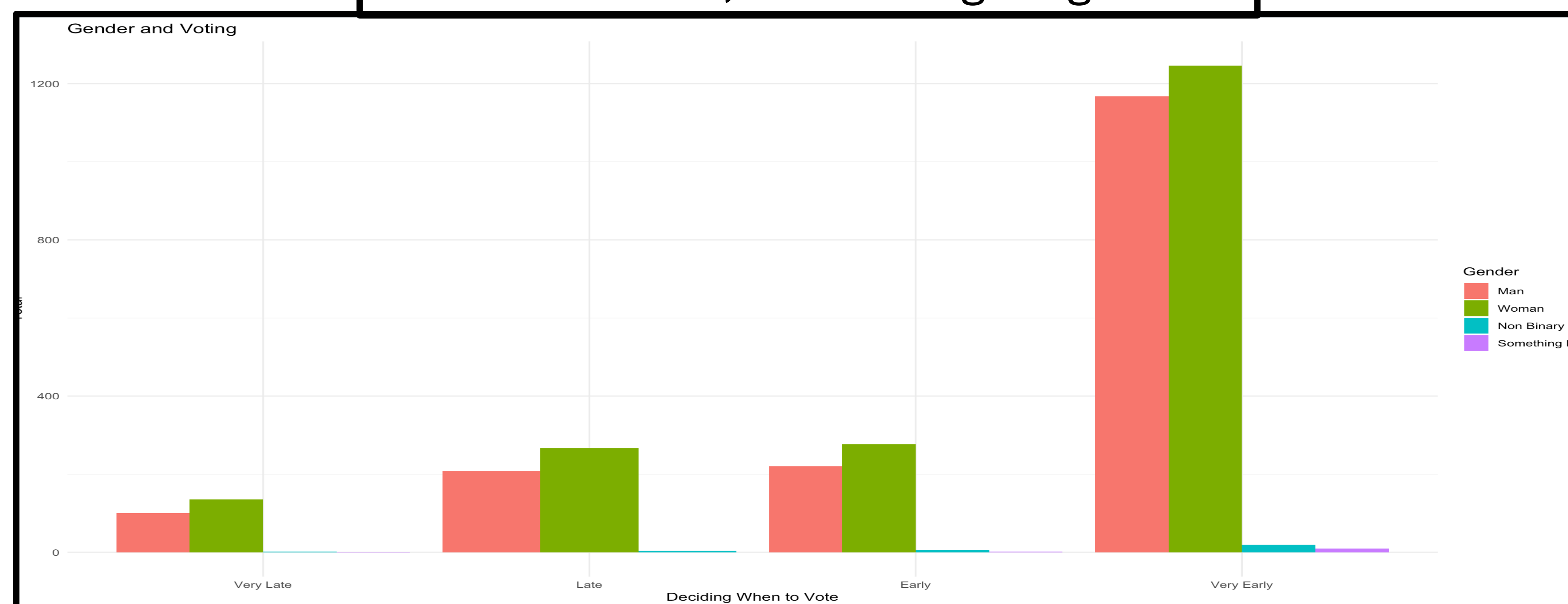
Focusing on the influence of media during election cycles, Lauren Feldman of Rutgers University explains how news coverage and social media can greatly influence how voters perceive candidates. Further arguing how current political discourse can discourage voter turnout and make elections seem like competitions. Depending on when voters see certain types of media, this can influence when they decide how they will cast their vote. Political Scientist, Yeaji Kim, discusses how the increase in educational attainment over the years has also caused an increase in voter turnout. Kim argues when people have had higher education individuals' sense of civic awareness also increases. However, this theory has a greater effect on Presidential elections than in midterm elections. Overall, there is a research gap regarding when people decide who they vote for, however, studies show education has a positive effect on voting.

## Data Analysis

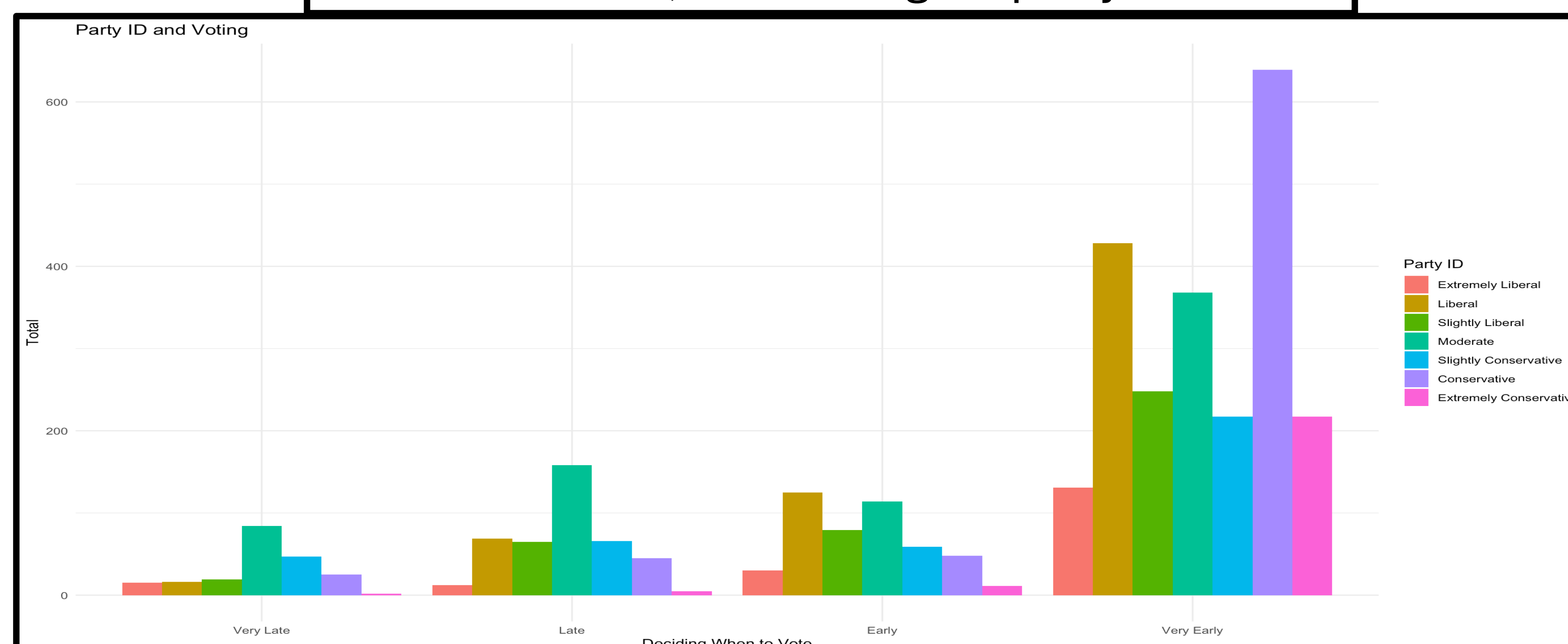
### Decision to vote, controlling for education



### Decision to vote, controlling for gender



### Decision to vote, controlling for party affiliation



## Variables

Voting timelines can be defined as: “Very Late” (0-2 weeks), “Late” (2-3 months), “Early” (4-5 months), “Very Early” (6+ months).  
Independent variable: education, gender, party ID  
Dependent variable: deciding when to vote

## Methods and Findings

This study was conducted using the R Studio coding software. This software allows the user to create two way and three-way crosstabs to view correlation between variables. The findings are displayed using graphs created in R Studio. The most significant finding was that there is a substantial percentage of voters who decide who they are going to vote for *very early* in the electoral cycle after controlling for variables.

## Conclusion

Although there was not a significant variation amongst the different control variables, this research presents a clear finding that most voters decide 6+ months before election day how they will cast their vote. Furthermore, this research shows that a Conservative woman who attended some post high school education would decide who she'd vote for the earliest in a general election. The next steps of this research would be to include media exposure, political interest, and including multiple election cycles.

## Works Cited

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Yeaji, K. (2023, May 28). *Absolutely Relative: How Education Shapes Voter Turnout in the United States.* National Library of Medicine

Igielnik, R. (2020, August 18). *Men and women in the U.S. continue to differ in voter turnout rate, party identification.* Pew Research Center