

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS: LOCALIZING FACEBOOK'S INFLUENCE ON ELECTION RESULTS.

LAUREN H. LOYLESS AND JAMES R. HARRINGTON
(2020 STUDY IN PROGRESS)

www.laurenloyless.com



MOTIVATION & RELEVANCY



Bond elections for Texas independent school districts (ISD's) are the seeds for new growth. School bond elections allow for capital improvement needs such as campus renovations for overcrowded classrooms or a new facility all together. However, a bond is not only for improvement and expansion in schools but also within communities as a whole. Such quality updates may indeed spur further growth for new local entities. To adequately inform constituents on an upcoming bond election, school districts perceive that leveraging social media platforms, like Facebook, will lead to the intended results of passing the bond. This study seeks to evaluate how social media engagement with official Facebook postings from Texas ISD social accounts impacted November 2018 and May 2019 bond elections for public school districts in Texas.

Research problem: To advocate the passage of the bond, school districts leverage social media platforms like Facebook.

Why is this a problem? It is theorized that an increase in social media engagement could negate bond passage; bonds which pass with a higher percentage have less social media engagement. School administrators turn towards Facebook to emphasize the necessity of passing a bond election, whereby Facebook engagement may alternatively evoke detrimental election results.

HYPOTHESES



- H1: Competitive school bond elections produce an increase in social media engagement**
- H2: Metropolitan districts have an increased rate in Facebook engagement**
- H3: Districts with a higher percentage of minority students tend to have less of a chance at passing a bond**

METHODOLOGY



- To test the theory that bonds which pass have less social media engagement and are hence less competitive, data from the November 6, 2018 and May 4, 2019 bond elections has since been gathered from **97 Texas independent school districts** who aimed to pass **102 bonds** in which **22.5% of bonds were defeated**.
- Initially, data from the May 2019 bond election was examined. After further review of preliminary findings, it was decided that the study would be strengthened with a more generous sample size provided by bond election data from the November 2018 election.
- Data Sources:** Bond election data was collected through the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts and the Texas Bond Review Board.
- Multiple linear regression analysis of variables**
- Independent variables (IV):** The IV's for this research inquiry incorporated the collection of Facebook post feedback reactions, post engagement rates, feedback rates, frequency of posts, tone of a post, bond purpose, and bond amount.
- Dependent variable (DV):** The bond's passage.

Applying the Texas Education Agency (TEA) 2019 Accountability (A-F) Ratings and the 2018-19 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR) for each district included in the sample, the following **controls** were accounted for: ethnicity (African American, Hispanic, White (comparison), American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, two or more races), economically disadvantaged (free and reduced lunch), TEA A-F Accountability Ratings, and district-wide enrollment counts. Voter counts (for and against the bond) and the gap of years from 2013-2019 bond elections were controlled for both the November 2018 and May 2019 election cycles. 2010 Census data was used to further control for the population of senior citizens 65+ within the district's county and geographical classification in which the district resides (metropolitan, micropolitan, urban clusters, and rural).

Coding: Several of the IV's used to assess Facebook engagement were coded through existing practices of social media computations such as post frequency counts, evaluating engagement metrics through the count of likes, or aggregating feedback rates through the number of comments. Several unique models of analysis were additionally implemented for this study. The tone of a post's content was broken down into numerical counts, whereas 1=informative 2=neutral, and 3=influential. Overall feedback reactions (the comprehensive collection of comments on posts) were similarly allocated a numeric identifier; 1=indifferent, 2=positive, 3=negative, and 4=mixed. A conventional numeric count of 1 for yes (passed) and 0 for no (defeated) signified bond passage analysis. TEA accountability ratings, assigned to districts to measure state-wide performance, are generally understood in public education in syllabary expressions of A-F. However, to streamline statistical values in this study, the exact numerical value from TEA, for example, a rating of 79 or 94, was pulled for each of the districts.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS



The following findings are the **preliminary results** of the first analysis of the May 2019 bond election data. It is important to note that the next steps will include the incorporation of November 2018 data, reshaping and adding to the results below.

- The rate at which stakeholders are engaging with posts on social media significantly impacts bond passage. ($p = .006$)
- Districts with higher Asian and African American populations are more likely to pass a bond.

LIMITATIONS



- Data showing whether the bond included a tax increase would have made this study significantly stronger. This data was not made available when collecting through the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts or the Texas Bond Review Board.
- The method of data collection is subjective in nature due to a nonexistent algorithm for coding and analysis.
- The study's external validity will be much improved with the added November 2018 data.**

NEXT STEPS



Additional research is desired to evaluate effectiveness further. Although this significant correlation was discovered with May 2019 bond data, it is crucial to bear in mind that such evidence is generalized and contextually dependent. Realistically, this study does not address or discover everything as it had endeavored. Yet, the present correlation in a moderate sampling indicates a fruitful future for new undertakings. **The paper is a building block for future scholars and researchers to grow and improve upon as the political realm of social media continues to unfold. The next steps for this study will include adding in the November 2018 bond election data with a goal of sourcing the tax increase data. [Click here to access references.](#)**