

# Why are young adults less politically involved?

## The role of political value and expectancy

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### Introduction

Research and surveys have repeatedly shown that age is positively related to political participation (e.g., Highton & Wolfinger, 2001). In this research we draw on the expectancy-value theoretical framework (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) to analyze the relationship between age and political participation. We conceptualize the decision to participate in political activities as a means to pursue a goal of political influence. We therefore expect that political participation would be a function of the *value* an individual attaches to this goal and his or her *expectancy* about the likelihood to attain it. Since previous research suggested that political value and expectancy are lower among young adults (e.g., Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Glasford, 2008), we hypothesized that both political value and political expectancy would mediate the positive relationship between age and political participation.

### Political Value and Expectancy Scales (V-E scales)

Value items	Self-efficacy items
I am interested in politics	I consider myself well-qualified to participate in important political activities
It is important for me to influence political decisions	I have a good understanding of the important political issues that face our country
I am interested in the work of political leaders	I can fulfill the tasks of public office in a very good manner
I feel the need to be a part of events that take place in the political realm	I believe that I am very well informed about the political system
Influencing the nature of the political system today will be useful for me in the future	Political involvement is an effective way for people to influence the political system
Political involvement is an important part of my identity	Protests influence governmental policy
Participating in political activities is important for making me feel that I contribute to society	When citizens exert extended pressure on politicians it often leads to desired outcomes
Politics fascinates me	Ultimately, [American] citizens determine how the country will be run no matter who holds office at the time
The more I am politically active, the better our society will be	[American] citizens can advance important social and political issues
	Ordinary [American] citizens have many ways to influence political decisions

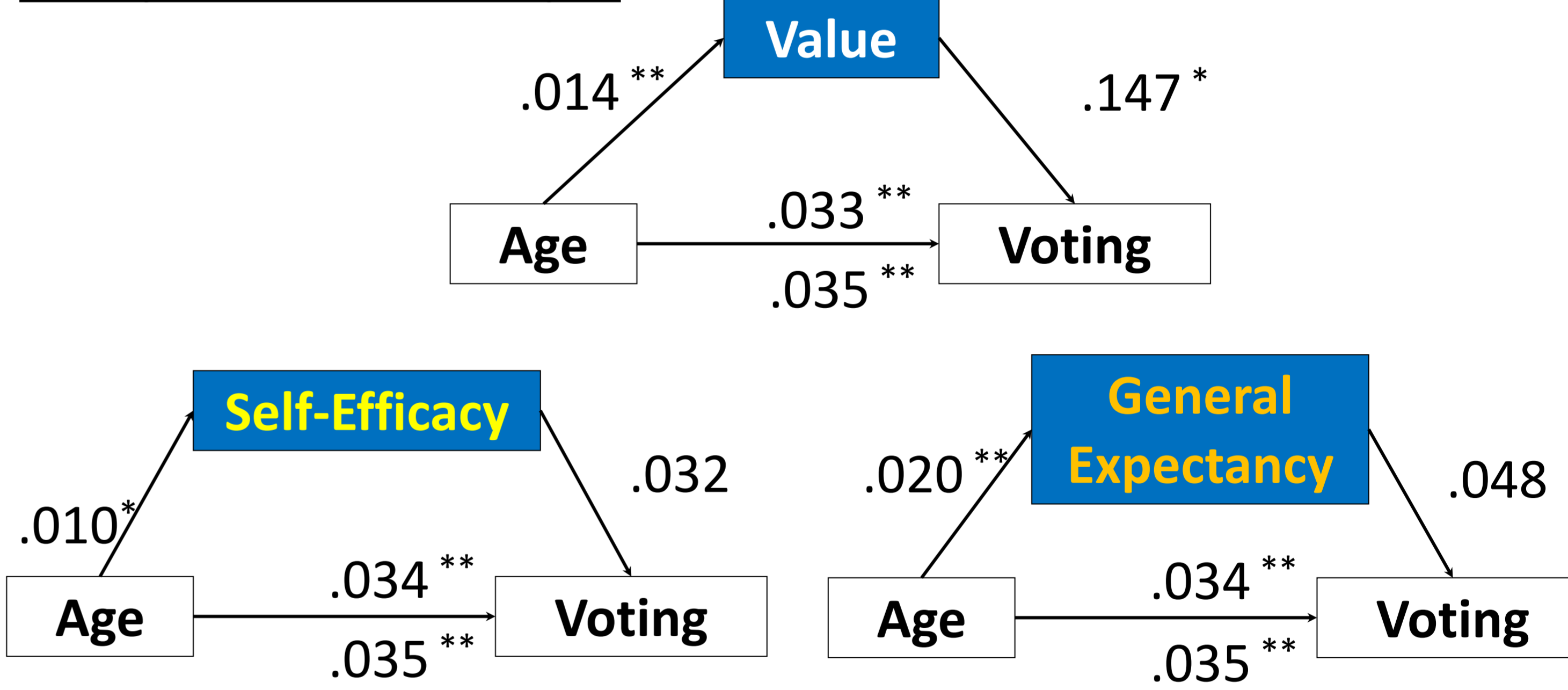
**References**  
 Abramson, P. R. & Aldrich, J. H. (1982). The decline of electoral participation in America. *American Political Science Review*, 76, 502–521.  
 Eccles, J. S. & Wigfield, A. (2002). Motivational beliefs, values, and goals. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53, 109-132.  
 Glasford, D. (2008). Predicting voting behavior of young adults: The importance of information, motivation, and behavioral skills. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 38, 2648-2672.  
 Highton, B. & Wolfinger, R. E. (2001). The first seven years of the political life cycle. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45, 202–209.

### Method

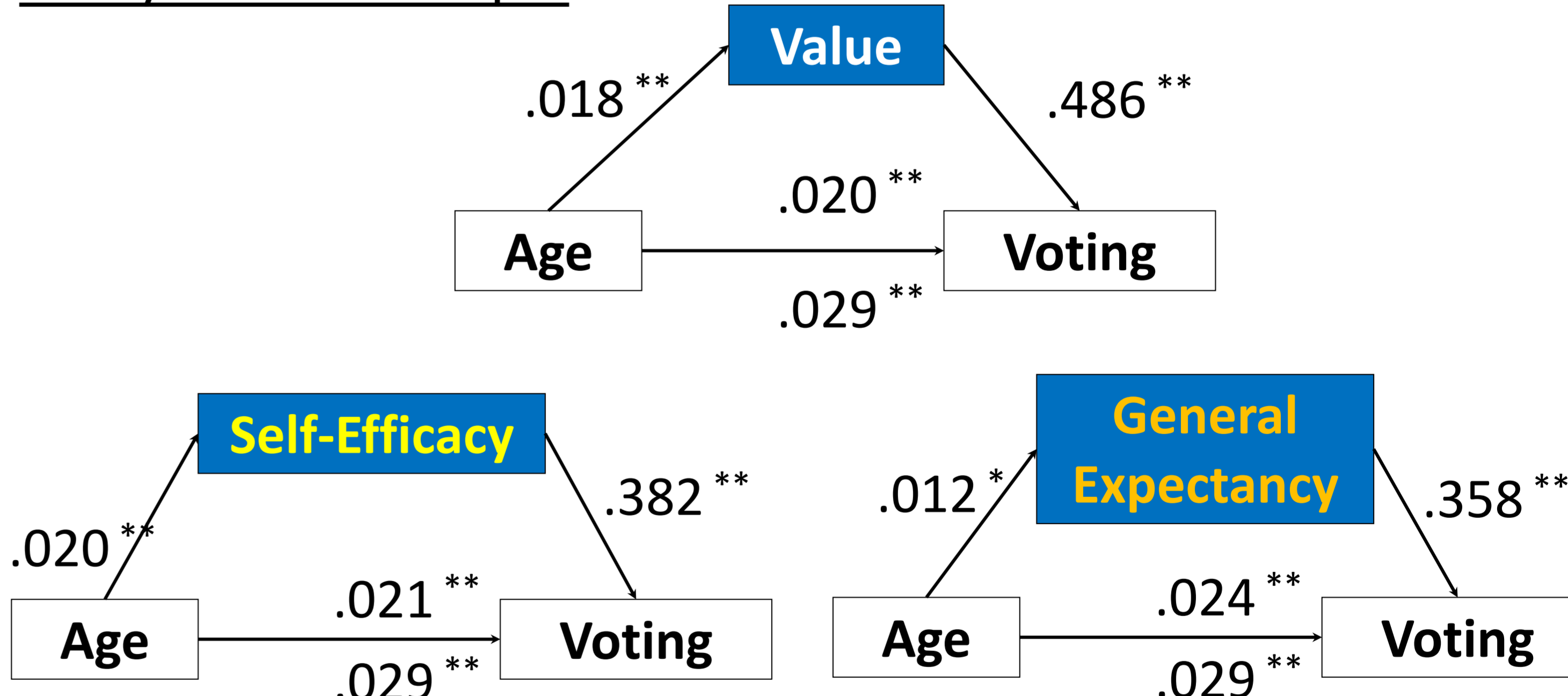
**Study 1 – National representative Israeli sample**  
 N = 503 (300 women), % minorities: 14.5% (Arabs)  
**Age range:** 18-89  
**V-E scales** (alphas = .87 to .93)  
**Voting** – “Did you vote in the last national election?” (0 = No, 1 = Yes)  
**Study 2 – U.S. MTurk sample**  
 N = 505 (240 women), % minorities: 24.8%  
**Age range:** 18-76  
**V-E scales** (alphas = .89 to .95)  
**Voting Intentions:** “How likely or unlikely are you to vote in the upcoming Presidential national election?” (1-7)

### Results

#### Study 1 – Israeli sample



#### Study 2 – U.S. sample



### Discussion

In two studies from two different nations we found that political value and expectations influenced voting intentions and behavior. Value mediated the positive relationship between age and political participation in both samples whereas expectancy mediated this relationship in the U.S. sample alone. These findings suggest that value and expectancies partly explain lower turnout of young adults, and that value may drive this effect more strongly. The different pattern of results in the two samples may be attributed to unique aspects of each context and culture. Alternatively, while current expectancies may motivate future intentions to vote, their relationship with past voting behavior is more complex because election results might have changed one’s expectancy to attain political influence.