

# Which specific meme formats or viral moments (e.g., 'Trump in the Bullring', 'Biden vs. DeSantis' memes) from the 2024 cycle successfully translated into measurable voter turnout increases, and what were the estimated percentages for those shifts?

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## Executive Summary

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No specific meme formats or viral moments from the 2024 U.S. election cycle successfully translated into measurable voter turnout increases, and no estimated percentage-point shifts for such increases have been quantified by research [3, 12]. While memes, particularly when augmented by AI, significantly boosted digital engagement and virality, and some viral moments correlated with surges in voter registrations among young people, experts indicate that memes primarily reinforce existing partisan sentiments rather than persuading new voters or directly driving ballot casting [2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10]. Campaigns continued to prioritize traditional get-out-the-vote methods, which yield more direct and measurable outcomes for turnout [1, 3].

## Key Findings

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### No Quantifiable Turnout Increases Attributable to Memes

Research from the 2024 U.S. election cycle does not provide direct evidence linking specific meme formats or viral moments to measurable voter turnout increases, nor does it offer estimated percentage-point shifts for such impacts [3, 12]. Experts emphasize that establishing a measurable increase requires causal evidence that isolates meme exposure from broader election enthusiasm and traditional get-out-the-vote efforts [3, 10]. Studies, such as one analyzing the "kamala is brat" meme, explicitly excluded quantifying the meme's impact on the final election outcome [11].

### Memos Primarily Reinforce Existing Partisan Sentiments

Memos primarily function as reinforcement tools, mobilizing already-activated partisans by resonating with existing viewpoints and group consensus, rather than converting

unengaged non-voters or persuading undecided voters [2, 3, 9]. While memes can lower psychological barriers to politics and spark initial civic engagement among historically unengaged demographics, particularly young adults, it remains difficult to determine how much of this viral reinforcement directly converts into measurable voter turnout increases [5, 10].

## **High Engagement and Registration Surges Did Not Translate to Quantified Turnout**

Among the dominant 2024 meme formats, such as "Kamala is brat," "Dark Brandon," and "Project Coconut," none established a direct, quantified empirical link to voter mobilization [3, 12]. However, some viral moments did correlate with significant engagement and voter registration activity. Following the "kamala IS brat" tweet, Vote.org recorded a surge of nearly 40,000 new voter registrations in 48 hours, growing to over 100,000 nationally, with nearly 85% of these new registrants being under 35 [8, 9]. A CNN survey also showed an 11-point improvement for Kamala Harris over Joe Biden, with her leading Donald Trump by 4 points among registered voters aged 18-34 [14]. Despite these engagement and registration metrics, a study on online campaign content concluded that political memes had no significant effect on actual political participation among young adults in the 2024 election [13].

## **AI-Augmented Memes Boosted Engagement but Not Turnout**

The 2024 election marked the first U.S. presidential cycle with widespread use of sophisticated generative AI for creating memes, establishing AI integration as a unique variable [4]. Combining AI-generated content with meme formats created a synergistic effect that significantly increased digital engagement and virality [4, 5]. For instance, on X, GIFs generated the highest engagement (11.41%) and favorability (9.78%) among meme types [8]. However, this increased digital engagement did not translate into a quantifiable turnout increase over the previous cycle; overall eligible voter turnout in 2024 was 63.7%, which was lower than the 66.6% recorded in 2020 [6].

## **Youth Turnout Not Primarily Driven by Memes**

Youth voter turnout (ages 18-29) reached an estimated 47% in the 2024 general election [2]. While memes energized existing partisans and served as a low-friction entry point to political interest for young adults, direct evidence linking specific meme formats to

measurable turnout increases for this demographic is unavailable [3, 12]. Less than half of voters aged 18 to 24 participated [7]. Experts note that memes primarily reinforce the views of individuals who already share similar sentiments rather than persuading undecided voters or directly converting non-voters [2, 3, 9, 10].

## **Campaigns Prioritized Traditional Get-Out-The-Vote Methods**

Despite the high digital engagement generated by memes, campaigns continued to prioritize traditional get-out-the-vote (GOTV) methods, such as postcard mailings, because these methods yield more measurable outcomes like voter registration and financial donations [1, 3]. This suggests that while memes played a supplementary role in energizing campaigns and engaging audiences, they were not considered the primary driver for converting engagement into actual ballot casting.

## **Lack of Specific Demographic, Swing State, and Cost Data**

The available research lacks specific breakdowns of the causal impact of viral memes by demographic segment (e.g., Gen Z, Millennials, suburban women) in key swing states (PA, MI, WI, AZ, GA) [3, 12]. No specific percentage-point shifts in turnout or vote share attributable to digital virality versus organic enthusiasm were measured [11]. Similarly, the research does not provide specific costs or resource allocations for meme strategies used by campaigns, making it impossible to compare these expenditures to traditional GOTV efforts [3, 5, 9, 10].

## **Implications**

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The findings suggest that while memes are powerful tools for digital engagement, identity formation, and potentially voter registration, their direct causal impact on measurable voter turnout increases in the 2024 U.S. election cycle remains unquantified. For campaigns, this implies that meme strategies are effective for reinforcing existing support and generating online buzz, but they should not be viewed as a substitute for traditional, data-driven get-out-the-vote operations that have a more established link to ballot casting. Future research needs to develop more robust methodologies to isolate the causal effect of specific digital content on voting behavior, moving beyond correlation with engagement metrics to direct turnout attribution.

## Limitations and Caveats

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The primary limitation of this analysis is the absence of direct causal evidence and quantified percentage-point shifts linking specific meme formats to voter turnout increases in the 2024 U.S. election cycle [3, 12]. The available research largely focuses on engagement metrics, virality, and voter registration surges, which do not directly equate to actual ballot casting [3, 10]. Isolating the impact of memes from broader election enthusiasm, traditional GOTV efforts, and other political factors remains a significant methodological challenge [3, 10]. Furthermore, specific demographic and geographic breakdowns of meme impact, as well as financial costs associated with meme strategies, are not available in the reviewed findings.

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