

STUDENT VOTING

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FOCUS

Voting is the civic duty of citizens of the United States, and is a fundamental part of the political process. However, due to the hectic schedules and responsibilities people have on a daily basis, it can be difficult to take the time to vote out of one's day. This is especially an issue for college students in particular, due to the stresses of classes, jobs and extracurriculars taking up an immense amount of time. Many college students are invested in political happenings, however the voter turnout for young voters has a large potential for increase. Through this research, we want to gauge some of the major obstacles within the voting process that college students are faced with, and how best to address them in an effective manner.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the greatest barriers that students experience in being informed and active voters?
2. What kind of information resource might we design in an effort to increase the number of students who vote

DATA COLLECTION

In order to construct a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to entry in the voting process for college students, we will be conducting data collection focused on understanding how the voting process fits into the busy college student lifestyle. Through a combination of conducting individual interviews and collecting survey response data, we will be able to gain a more complete understanding of the motivations college students have to vote, and the obstacles they are facing in doing so.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

The research our group will be conducting focuses on the experiences of first-time college voters within the voting process. In order to gain insight that will be productive in our analysis, we will adhere to these guidelines:

1. Recruited participants will be University of Michigan students. The busy lifestyle of college students will allow us to gauge the efficiency of student resources for voting information, as well as allowing us to take into consideration some of the obstacles students face throughout the process itself.
2. Our questions will be focused on gaining largely qualitative information pertaining to the experiences participants have throughout the voting process. They will address the ways in which people gain information about voting (procedural information, polling places, registration times, etc.), how the voting

process fits into their schedule, and the sacrifices they've had to make with their time to be able to participate in voting.

3. To analyze this data, we will look for overall trends in participant reports, and look specifically for areas in which large amounts of participants seem to have similar experiences. For example, if large numbers of students have had to skip class in order to vote, that is something we will take into consideration during the analysis process. Finding larger trends within the data will allow us to focus our effort in addressing overall obstacles, and looking for inefficiencies in the voting process.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Our interviewing process will allow us to gain insight into the perspectives of a myriad of people from different backgrounds that attend the University of Michigan. Our goal is to maximise our ability to get a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles that students face incorporating the voting process into their daily lives, and how effective the information resources that are currently being used are in conveying important voting information to this demographic. We want to be able to construct a larger story of how important voting is to college students, and how easy it is for them to be able to incorporate it into a busy schedule.

SURVEY PROCESS

After conducting interviews, we will follow up with continued data collection utilizing surveys. This will allow for a greater understanding regarding the obstacles first time college voters face, and a less intimate approach to gathering information. Through the analysis of interview data, we found that there were many different obstacles that students faced in the voting process, particularly with a more recent spike in interest in mail-in voting. However, these issues were more commonly expressed among first-time voters rather than individuals who had voted before. The interview process allowed us to get a broader understanding of how voting fits into the lives of college students, and this survey will allow us to dive deeper into the specific barriers to voting that exist for first time college voters.

SURVEY PROCEDURE

The survey implementation will focus on narrowing down the demographic of respondents to these particular categories:

- First-time voters, ensuring that they haven't voted prior to the 2020 presidential election.
- They are of voting age, respondents must be 18 years of age or older.
- Currently enrolled in a university, ensuring that respondents are college students.

These screening questions will allow us to ensure that the makeup of respondents is reflective of the demographic the survey is trying to reach. From there, collecting understanding of voting motivations, obstacles individuals face in the voting process, and where they gather their voting information from will allow us to manifest a more comprehensive picture of the experiences of first-time college voters. These are further detailed in the survey guide.

DATA ANALYSIS

The objective of our survey was to gather data regarding the obstacles that first-time voters faced in particular voting methods in the 2020 presidential election. With the immense increase in popularity of vote-by-mail, we were particularly interested in where people were getting their information on the process, and what some of the barriers to entry were for individual voters. Our screening questions ensured that the respondents were voting for the first time, and were above the age of 18.

Along with measuring attitudes toward voting, one of the key questions asked in the survey was "What was your biggest obstacle in voting this election?". The responses reflected our anticipation that the increase in popularity of mail-in-ballots came with uncertainties as well, as it was designated as the largest voting obstacle by our respondents. With attitudes towards voting in this election being overwhelmingly

marked “nervous” as well, this is likely a reflection of an unfamiliarity with this voting procedure.

Below, we analyze responses to each question based on the answers we received from respondents.

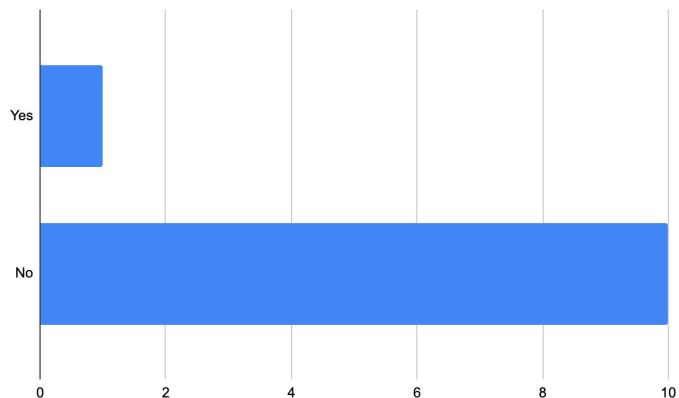
What is your age?

The respondents were all of voting age, with the massive majority of them being between the ages of 20 and 21.

This is interesting as the majority of these first time voters had been of voting age since the age of 18, but this was still their first time voting.

Are you currently involved in any campus organizations related to politics?

The respondents were largely not actively involved in political activism/advocacy on campus within student organizations.



Our demographic of respondents are a bit more distant from direct political action on campus, although this isn't very reflective on what they might participate in outside of school.

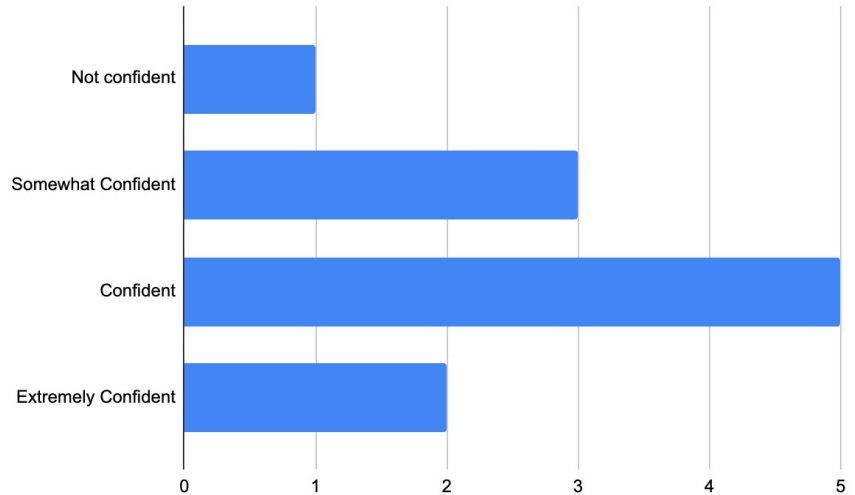
Where do you attend school?

All of our respondents were University of Michigan students, and so the entirety of our survey respondents attend a large public university. They all likely have the same access to the voting resources that the university provides.

How confident do you feel you understand the process for registering to vote online?

The majority of our respondents were fairly comfortable with the process of registering to vote online.

Although there was an outlier in our results, we can see that this particular demographic of younger college students are more likely to better understand the online voter registration process.



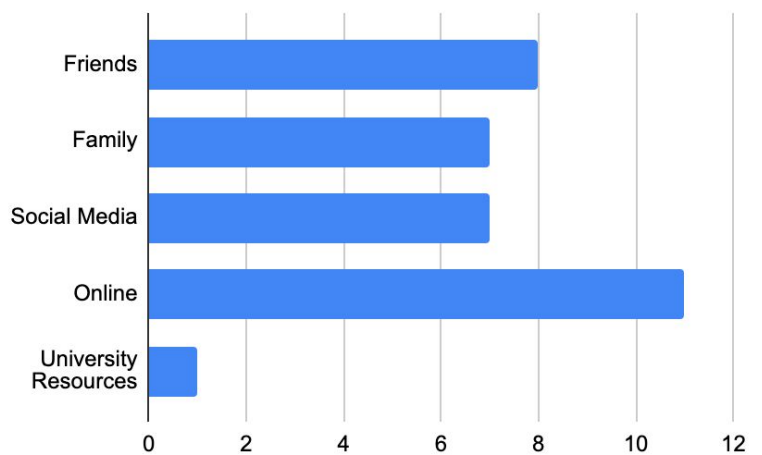
Have you used the internet to learn more about the current presidential candidates' platforms?

All of our respondents have used the internet to research political candidates. This is to be expected, as all of our respondents intended to vote in the 2020 presidential election. With technology at our fingertips, it's fairly easy to quickly find candidate information.

Which methods do you typically use to gain general information about voting?

All of our respondents used a variety of resources to gather information on the voting process.

What was interesting about the responses was that very few cited receiving information from university resources. This marks a

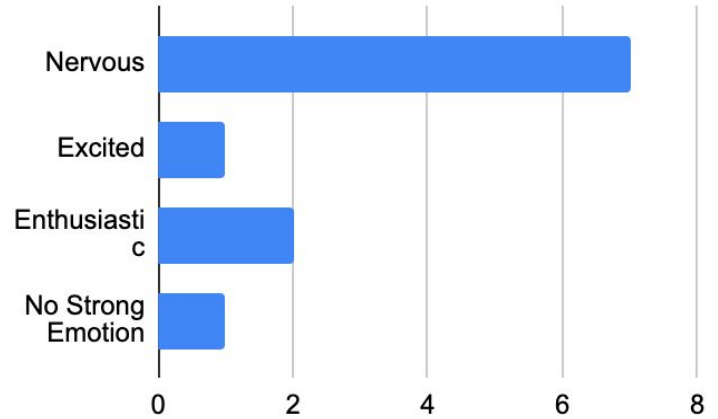


potential point of improvement for UM to send out more voting information before an election cycle.

What are your main attitudes towards voting this next election?

A major indication of our survey respondents regarding their attitude towards voting this election was a sense of nervousness.

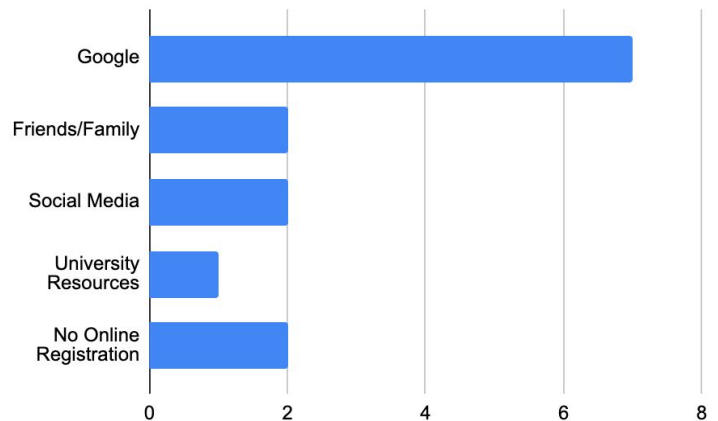
This has likely quite a bit to do with the polarized political climate going into the election and the political desperation of voters. It's also possible that the bureaucracy of the voting process and other obstacles people are facing could increase election-related stress.



If you registered to vote online, how did you figure out the process for it?

Many of those that registered online used a variety of resources in order to understand the process.

These results show that young potential voters are open to a variety of different resources in understanding the voting process, emphasizing the importance of keeping people informed through a variety of mediums.



How often do you discuss voting with your peers?

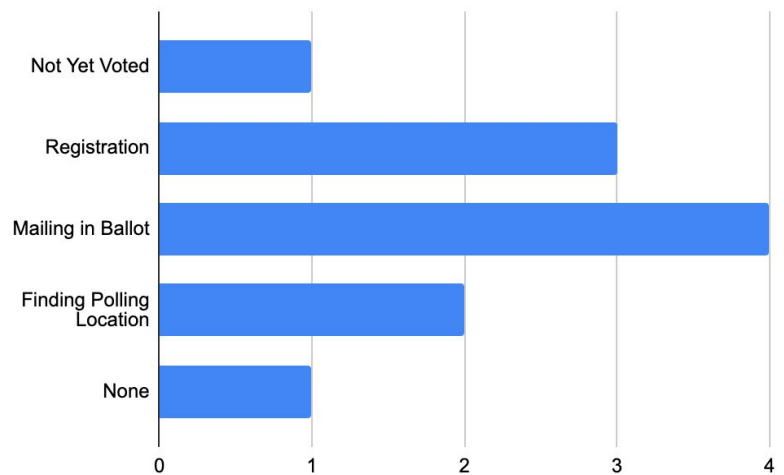


Our respondents frequently discussed the process of voting with their peers.

This is an interesting contrast to our results from earlier, suggesting that many of our respondents weren't necessarily politically involved. However, as mentioned, not being involved in a political organization isn't a major determinant of college students' political involvement.

What was your biggest obstacle in voting this election?

Finally, our respondents provided information regarding the largest obstacles they face in voting in the 2020 election. Although all of the things listed were chosen as points of concern, mailing in ballots presented the biggest challenge to new voters.



This draws attention to the importance, particularly in this moment during COVID-19, to provide comprehensive voter information on alternative voting processes in order to be effective in increasing voter turnout and making the process easier overall.

FINDINGS

Persona 1: Freshman First-Time Voter

About Jacob

“I’m interested in voting, but I’m not really sure how the process works”.

Jacob Smith is an 18 year old college freshman who is still adjusting to a change in scenery. With all of these newfound responsibilities an important election is coming up, and Jacob feels really invested in the process of voting. However, he has never voted before and isn’t sure where to start.



Behavioral Considerations

- Jacob is in a major life transition at the moment, and likely hasn’t quite adjusted his time management.
- Jacob isn’t a part of any political student organizations as of now, so it’s unsure how invested he is in politics.
- Hasn’t had the opportunity to fully explore campus resources that provide voting information.
- As a new student, voting likely isn’t near the top of his list of priorities.
- Needs to become more familiar with the voting process, and also convinced as to why voting is extremely important.

Goals

- Needs to be convinced in regard to why voting should be a huge priority.
- Wants quick, convenient information on voter registration and the voting process.
- Needs to complete the process without leaving campus.

Tasks

- Gain information about the voter registration process.
- Get registered to vote.
- Vote in the election.

Scenario 1 - Online Voter Registration	
Because Jacob lives on a college campus, there are several different resources that are available to him. Through his residence email list, he is provided with online registration information.	Importance: High Frequency: High

Scenario Steps	Comments	Outstanding Questions	Required Functionality
Jacob reads his email and finds a message about online voter registration for incoming students.	Focusing specifically on online registration allows for recipients to pursue the easiest, most convenient way to register online.	Can University residence halls send out voter registration information to students? Are there more effective ways to send out information to students than email?	Receive email with voter registration information.
Jacob follows the link to a website to input voter registration information with detailed instructions.	Website needs to be as straightforward and user-intuitive as possible in order to be as encouraging as possible to potential voters.	Are there improvements that can be made to make registration websites easier to navigate? How can we incentivize people to follow the link to register?	Email provides a link to a registration website.
Jacob completes the tasks and successfully registers to vote.	Process needs to be as timely as possible in order to ensure that people have the time to complete it.	Does the site confirm registration to the user to make sure they know their registration status? Does the confirmation also provide information on where the user is registered?	Registration process is easy and timely to navigate and confirms registration after completion.
Jacob is provided with information on his polling place when to vote.	This information should be provided immediately after registration with a calendar event, and also occasionally before voting begins.	Are users provided with adequate information on polling location/times? Are voters reminded of their polling place	Jacob is provided with a voting plan.

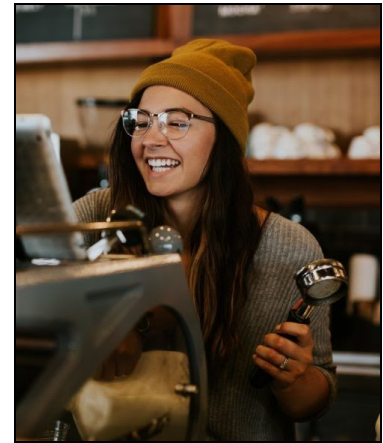
		before they vote?	
Jacob arrives at his election spot and votes in the election.	Streamlining needs to be a priority on campuses for busy college students.	Are there enough polling places? Are polling places individually efficient enough?	Jacob is able to quickly and painlessly vote in the election.

Persona 2: Working First-Time Voter

About Jenna

“I don’t have the time to vote.”

Jenna Stevens is a 20 year old college junior who has been in University for two years already, and in the midst of her third. In addition to her schoolwork, she is involved in student organizations. However, she has also been working through school in order to pay her tuition, and hasn’t had much free time throughout her college career.



Behavioral Considerations

- Voting isn’t a top priority for Jenna.
- Believes she doesn’t have time for the voting process due to her busy schedule, and hasn’t voted before.
- Is familiar with the college campus, and knows what resources are available.
- Has major time commitments and conflicts with both registering to vote and voting in person.

Goals

- Needs to be convinced why voting is important, and why she should take the time to do it.
- Wants to have free time, which is necessary for registering and voting.
- Process must be completed quickly and made as convenient as possible.

Tasks

- Be informed about political issues and why voting is important.
- Become familiar with the easy process of online registration.
- Register to vote.
- Vote in the election.

Scenario 2 - Convincing Individuals to vote	
Jenna is apprehensive about the free time she has to vote and isn't quite sure how important the election actually is.	Importance: High Frequency: Medium

Scenario Steps	Comments	Outstanding Questions	Required Functionality
Jenna is a part of a student org on campus that holds a workshop on being politically active and how to get engaged.	Student organizations and greek life encouraging active members to get politically engaged can be important for increasing young voter turnout.	Can Universities encourage student orgs to hold registration information workshops? How exactly can these workshops appeal to working students in particular?	Workshop encourages individuals to get registered.
Jenna researches the information from the workshop and finds that registration is much easier than she thought	Information on where to access online resources need to be provided in these workshops.	How can these workshops incentivize people to follow through with action. How easy is it to find online registration information?	Call to action incentivises the pursuit of registration information.
Jenna completes the tasks and successfully registers to vote.	Process needs to be efficient and quick so participants don't get discouraged.	Does the site confirm registration to the user to make sure they know their registration status? Does the confirmation also provide information on where the user is registered?	Registration process is easy and timely to navigate and confirms registration after completion.
Jenna is provided with information on his polling place when to vote.	This information should be provided immediately after registration with a calendar event, and also occasionally	Are users provided with adequate information on polling location/times?	Jacob is provided with a voting plan.

	before voting begins.	Are voters reminded of their polling place before they vote?	
Jenna arrives at her election spot and votes in the election.	Streamlining needs to be a priority on campuses for busy college students.	Are there enough polling places? Are polling places individually efficient enough?	Jacob is able to quickly and painlessly vote in the election.

LIMITATIONS

One bias that became immediately present to me was that all of our survey respondents were planning to vote in the 2020 election. There are many different political perspectives and obstacles in the voting process that can discourage people from voting. So, hearing from the perspective of people that have been disenfranchised by our current electoral system would be a really valuable demographic to reach, and our survey was unable to do that.

Another important factor to take into consideration is how educated our respondent demographic was on the voting process. It's easy as college students at a fairly large, well-off university to take for granted the privileges we have in terms of understanding and participating in the voting process. There are many other demographics of potential voters that aren't afforded the same opportunities to comprehensively understand the voting process. Along with this, there are other states that have much more difficult voting processes than Michigan, and areas of immensely higher populations with fewer polling stations. This was certainly a factor that played into the responses we received, and something to take into consideration in the case of a broader study.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

In the pursuit of a more long-term goal of this project, we have now gathered the data on some of the biggest concerns and obstacles college students face in the voting process. By taking this information into consideration, we can then put it into action. Making resources more accessible on campus, streamlining voting procedures and making the process as inviting and intuitive as possible to first-time voters. By taking this next step, we can create a voting system that effectively works for as many people as we can, and turn out young voters on election day.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vOzwZYXhYCEG44kUuP1VIYC9UAQc55g1AWFc88SNBDI/edit?usp=sharing>

This interview guide details the script for the interview process, and provides an outline of the questions that are asked. This allows for the consistent conducting of interviews across the board.

Survey Design

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1upw98Cwf7jlrBKR7ESl6QsXak8YGk9knDqQXuFev3-0/edit?usp=sharing>

Below is the survey design, which includes a question grid that comprises the survey. This outline details how the questions will be asked, the available responses to survey takers, and the intent behind the implementation of each question. This allows for clarity in regard to how the questions are both answered by respondents and how they are interpreted in the analysis process.

Survey Objectives

- Understand what information is helpful for new college voters to find out how to vote.
- Understand the biggest struggles new college voters have in finding correct online resources.
- Identifying where college students get information about online voting.

10 Survey Questions

Questions	Instructions	Answers	Reasons
What is your age?	Select the answer that represents you.	18 or 19 20 or 21 22 or 23 Above 23	Want to see if a person's age has an impact on their voting activity and political interest.
Are you currently involved in any campus organizations related to politics?	Select the answer that most closely represents your involvement.	Yes No	Want to gain an understanding of the participant's interest in politics.
Where do you attend school?	Select the answer that most closely represents your school	Small Private University (under 5k undergrad) Small Public University (under 5k undergrad) Medium Private University (5k-20k) Medium Public University (5k-20k) Large Private University (over 20k) Larger Public University (over 20k)	Want to see if the responses to other questions correlate to where they go to school.
How confident do you feel you understand the process for registering to vote online?	Select the answer that most closely represents your confidence.	Not confident Somewhat confident Confident Extremely confident	Gauge participant's understanding of the process for registering to vote online and whether that affects their motivation to actually register and vote.
Have you used the internet to learn more about the current	Select your response.	Yes No	See if participant's have used the online resources to learn

presidential candidates' platforms?			about who they can vote for.
Which methods do you typically use to gain general information about voting?	Click all that apply	Friends Family Social Media Online University Resources Other	Want to gain an understanding of current methods participants use to find information.
What are your main attitudes towards voting this next election?	Select the answer that most closely represents your attitudes.	Nervous Excited Enthusiastic Sad Other: _____	Want to see the participant's level of interest and knowledge about voting
If you registered to vote online, how did you figure out the process for it?	Select all that apply.	Google / other search engine Friends / family Social Media University Resources Other: _____ I did not register to vote online	Want to which resources were most helpful to registered voters in learning about the online voting registration process
How often do you discuss voting with your peers?	Select the answer that most closely represents your experience.	Never. Somewhat often Often Fairly often Extremely often	Want to get a sense of individual political engagement with peers.
What was your biggest obstacle in voting this election?	Select the answer that most closely represents your experience.	Not yet voted Registration Mailing in Ballot Finding Polling location Other (please explain):	Want to understand which aspect of the voting process presents the largest obstacle to new voters.

Screening Questions

1. Have you voted before or in the 2016 election?
 2. Do you plan to vote in the 2020 election?
 3. Are you 18 and older?
 4. Are you currently enrolled in a university or college?
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Survey

<https://ows.io/qs/pcvsijq3>

The attached survey screens respondents, ensuring they are first-time college voters, and implements the survey process in accordance with the above survey design document.