

## Citizenship and Voting in an Election Year

November 2000

### Purpose

The purpose of this survey was to determine the focus and level of interest in political issues as well as the percentage of undergraduates who voted in the recent election.

### Implications/Highlights

Students were interested in national issues (49%) and candidates (67%), relying on newspapers, TV, and online sources for information. A majority (81%) had registered to vote. Most had registered 'at home' (79%) rather than 'at PSU' (21%). Of those registered to vote, 70% said they had voted in the recent election.

### Participation Rate

N = 887 (61%) agreed to participate

N = 561 (39%) did not agree to participate

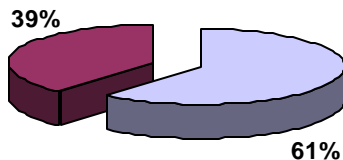


Figure 1. Participation rate

### Findings

A majority of those over 18 had registered to vote. Most registered at home rather than at PSU.

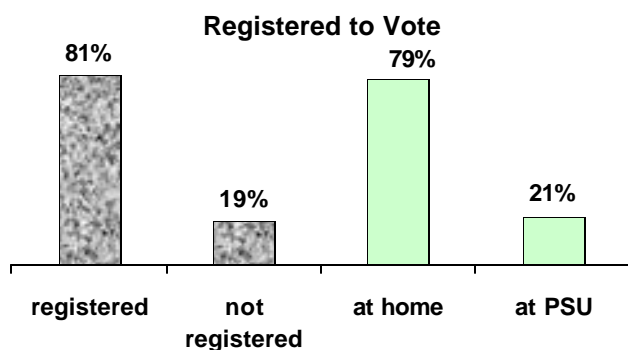


Figure 2. A majority of students had registered to vote

More of the non-minority students (91%) than of the minority students (45%) had registered to vote.\*

Students enrolled in Information Technology, Liberal Arts, Communication, and Sciences were more likely to have registered to vote.\*

Statistically significant at the .05\* level

Of those who were registered, 70% overall said they had voted in the recent election. More students with higher grades tended to vote.

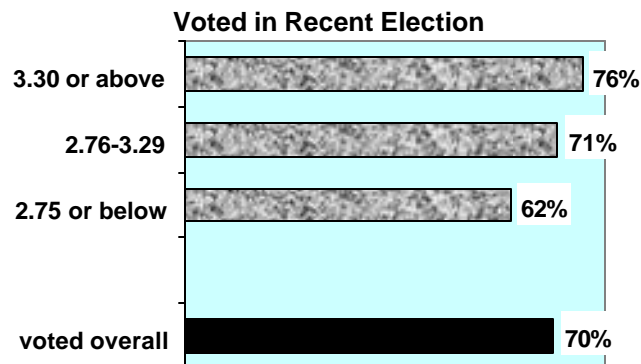


Figure 3. More than two-thirds of those registered voted in the recent election

Students were asked how aware they were of various sources of information on how to register, get an absentee ballot, or cast a vote.

### How to Register or Vote

- 77% MTV's Rock the Vote
- 68% Choose or Lose
- 33% WWF Voter Registration
- 27% USG Voter Registration
- 23% PSU Education Link/Voter Registration

Students reported being more informed about national rather than state or local issues and candidates.

### Informed About Issues & Candidates

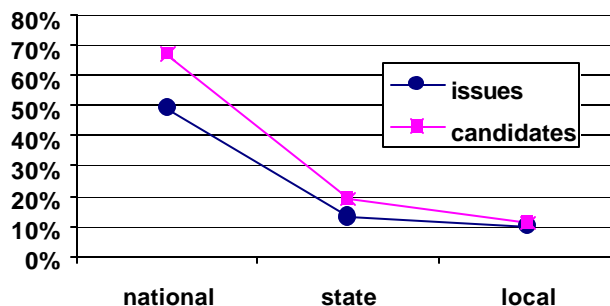


Figure 4. Students felt more informed about national issues and candidates

For further information, please contact Dr. Betty Moore at the Student Affairs Research and Assessment Office.

315 Grange, University Park, PA 16802, (814) 863-1809, blm1@psu.edu



Student Affairs

Students were asked what sources they used for information on campaign issues and candidates.

**Sources of Information About Campaign**

33%	newspapers	4%	friends
33%	TV	3%	magazines
18%	online resources	2%	radio
5%	family	1%	student leaders

Minority students reported feeling less informed about issues and candidates\* and were less likely to use online sources of information.\*

Two-thirds or more said they were interested in specific issues such as: education (82%), abortion (70%), gun control (67%), the environment (64%) and student aid packages (62%).

There were differences between men and women in the level of interest in specific issues.

**Interest in Issues by Gender**

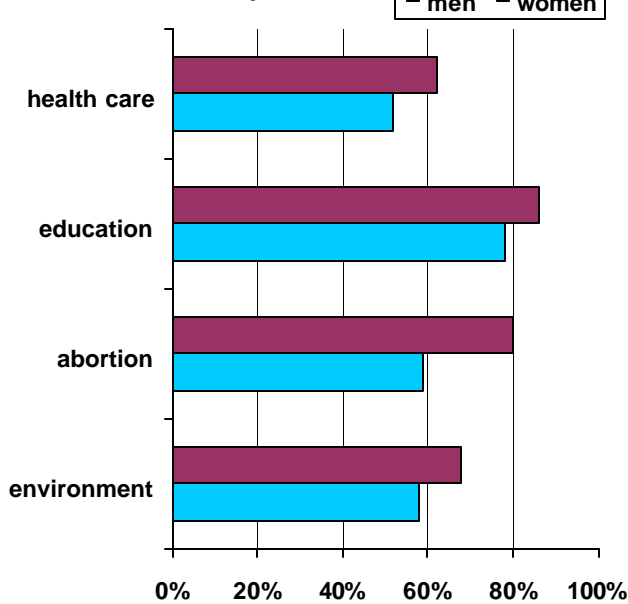


Figure 5. Women were more interested than men in health care, abortion, education, and environment issues

Two-fifths (42%) of the students said they were interested in politics. Those who indicated being "interested" responded differently to almost all the questions on the survey and were more likely to be registered\* and to have voted\* than those "not interested in politics." They were also more likely to have participated in politics by working for a candidate,\* a political party,\* a political interest group,\* or a community effort to register voters.\*

participated by working:	interested in politics	not interested in politics
for a candidate	19%	3%
for a party	16%	2%
for an interest group	13%	4%
to register voters	17%	2%

The survey covered factors that students felt encouraged people to vote or discouraged people from voting.

**Factors That Encourage Voting**

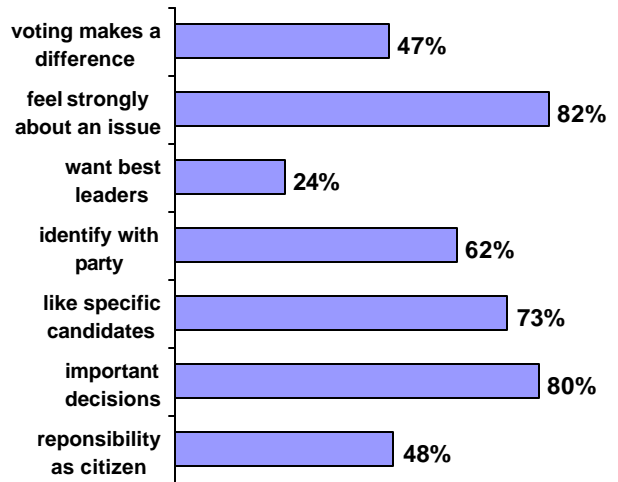


Figure 6. Feeling strongly about an issue was cited by most students as a factor that encourages voting

Factors that discourage people from voting are lack of interest in politics, dislike of candidates, and feeling that politics are corrupt. About a third of students felt that other factors that acted as obstacles include: not knowing how to register or where to vote, forgetting about elections, being at school and not at home, time problems, and feeling that politicians aren't interested in undergraduates.

**Factors that Discourage Voting**

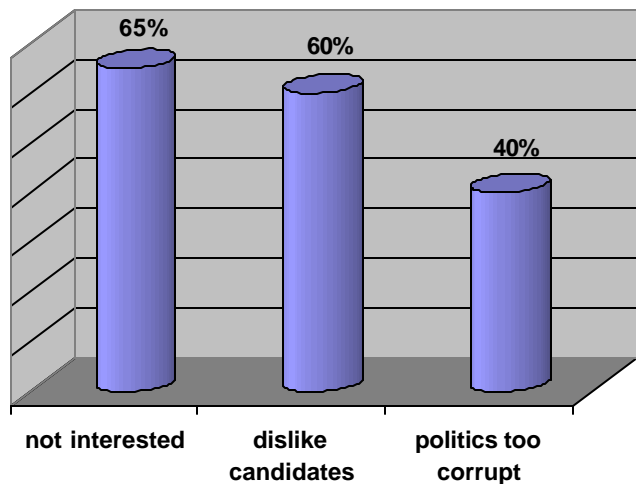


Figure 7. Factors that discourage voting included lack of interest in politics, disliking candidates, and thinking that politics are corrupt

Almost all students felt that people would be more likely to vote if they could register and vote on line and if absentee ballots were easier to get.

**More Likely to Vote**

95%	could register and vote online
92%	absentee ballots were easier to get

\*Statistically significant at the .05 level.