



CAWG Snapshot of Student Experiences

POLITICS, ELECTIONS & VOTING

University of Maryland

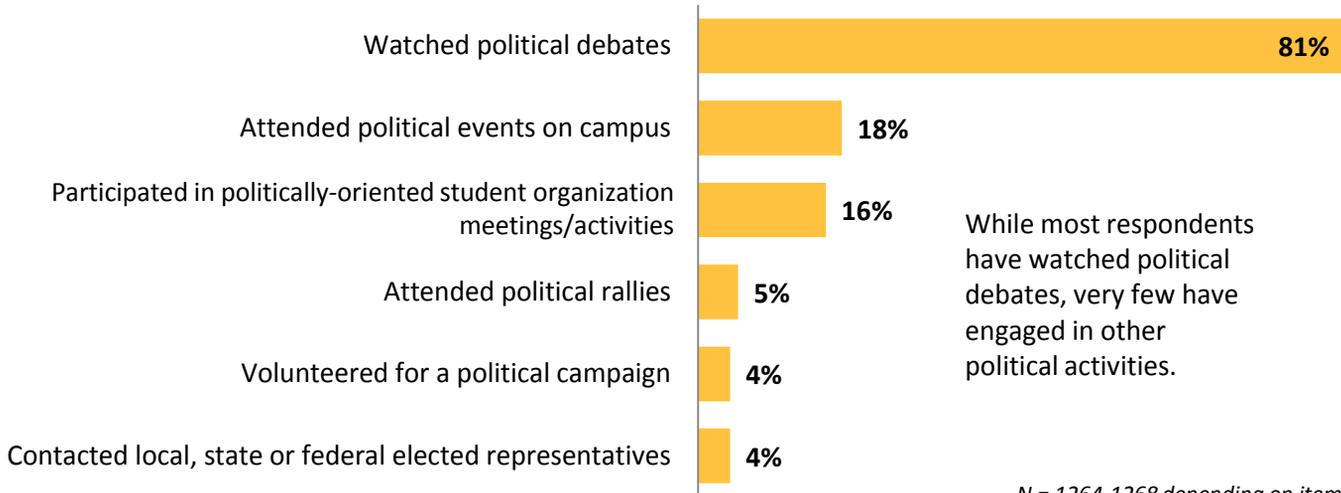
2014 – Issue 5, October

This Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Snapshot reports findings on freshman students' perceptions surrounding the 2012 presidential election. The data included in this Snapshot represent results from the Beginning Student Survey (BSS), an annual survey administered by the CAWG Beginnings subgroup. Freshmen complete the survey approximately 8-10 weeks into the fall semester during class sessions in courses such as ENGL 101 and UNIV 100, among others. For the BSS 2012, out of **3,490** first-time, full-time freshmen, **1,455 (42%)** completed the survey. International students and students who would have been under 18 years of age as of November 06, 2012 (Election Day) were then excluded from our analyses, as they were ineligible to vote.

Of the **1,270** respondents included in analyses (**36%** of first-time, full-time freshmen), **58%** were White; **14%** were Black or African American; **14%** were Asian; **10%** were Hispanic; **4%** were Two or More Races; and **1%** were Other including American Indian and Hawaiian. Additionally, **48%** were female and **52%** were male. The data below represent only the responses of survey respondents, not all UMD freshmen; therefore, use caution when generalizing.

Learning about the 2012 Election

Percentage of freshmen that reported engaging in these activities

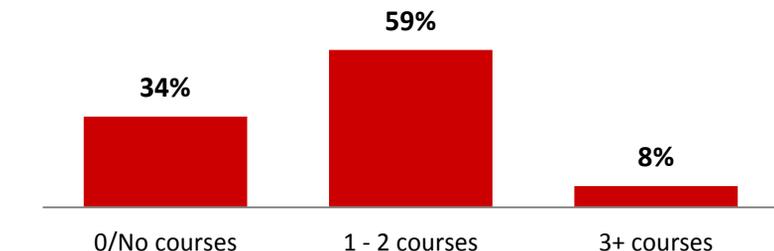


Question to Consider

How do we encourage civic engagement, especially among those who plan to vote?

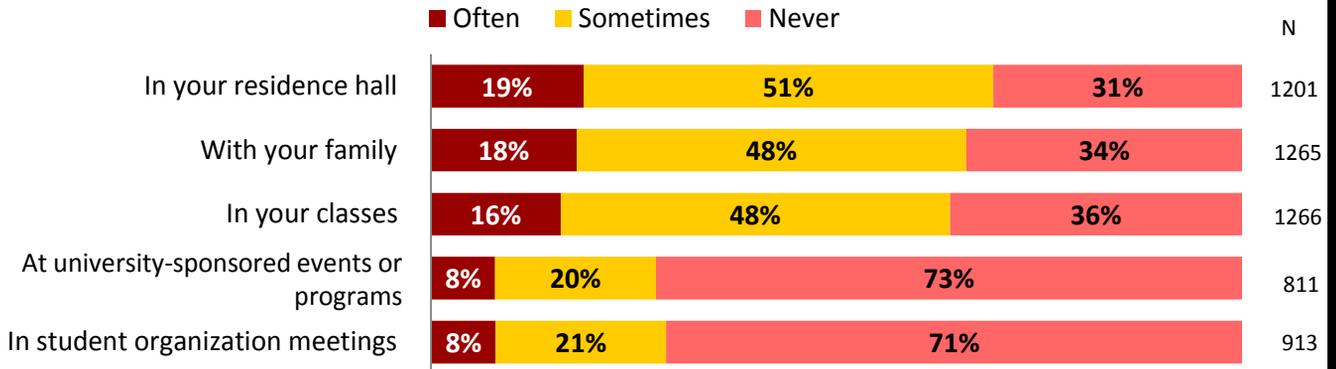


Number of Fall 2012 courses in which students discussed November U.S. elections



While **one-third (34%)** of respondents did not discuss the elections in any course, **two-thirds** reported discussing the November 2012 U.S. elections in at least one course.

Frequency of engagement in political discussions (in person or electronically)



NOTE: Students who selected N/A for *university-sponsored events* or *student organization meetings* were excluded from those analyses.

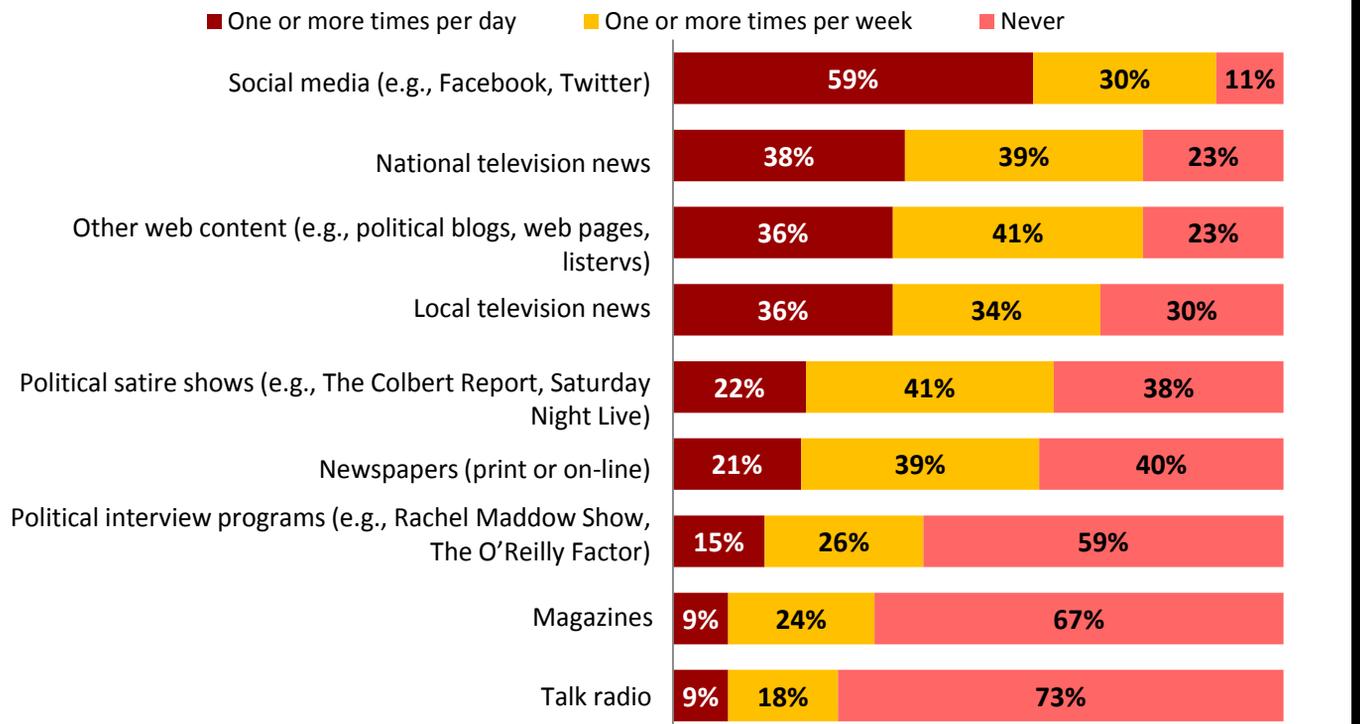
- Students were more likely to discuss these issues in their residence hall, with their family, and in their classes, all of which are seemingly more personal environments than campus events and meetings.

Question to Consider

How can UMD create more opportunities, and safe spaces, for people to engage in political dialogue?



Sources for US election news and frequency in a typical week



N = 1261-1265 depending on item

- While the most popular source of news about the November US election came from social media, **more than one-third** of respondents also reported getting daily information from national and local news, as well as the web.
- Talk radio, magazines, and political interview programs were the least popular sources for news, with the majority of respondents never getting news from these sources.

Voting Interest and Behavior

| | Yes | No | Unsure |
|---|-----|-----|--------|
| Are you registered to vote in the November U.S. election? | 83% | 15% | 3% |
| In general, do you think an individual's vote matters? | 82% | 18% | -- |
| Have you voted/do you plan to vote in the November U.S. election? | 78% | 14% | 9% |
| Are you registered to vote in the state of Maryland? | 66% | 34% | -- |
| Since coming to UMD, have you sought out opportunities to increase your knowledge on issues surrounding the November U.S. election? | 62% | 38% | -- |
| Do you identify with a particular political party? | 57% | 43% | -- |
| Did you register to vote in the November U.S. election through a campus registration drive? | 26% | 74% | -- |

N = 1258 – 1267; Note: "Unsure" was only an answer option for two questions.

- **One-quarter (26%)** of students registered to vote through a campus registration drive.
- **Eighty-two percent** reported an individual's vote matters and **two-thirds (62%)** sought out opportunities to increase knowledge on issues surrounding the election.
- There were some group differences that emerged when further analyses were done for sex and race.
 - More women than men planned to vote, registered through a campus drive, thought an individual's vote mattered, and identified with a political party.
 - More consistent trends were seen for African American respondents than other races. More than expected planned to vote, registered to vote in MD, thought an individual's vote mattered, and identified with a political party.
 - Fewer Asian Americans than expected reported planning to vote, identifying with a particular political party, and seeking out opportunities to increase their knowledge about the election.
 - No consistent trends emerged for White or Hispanic respondents.

Question to Consider

A majority of students reported seeking opportunities to increase their knowledge of election issues. How can UMD provide more avenues for students to gather information?



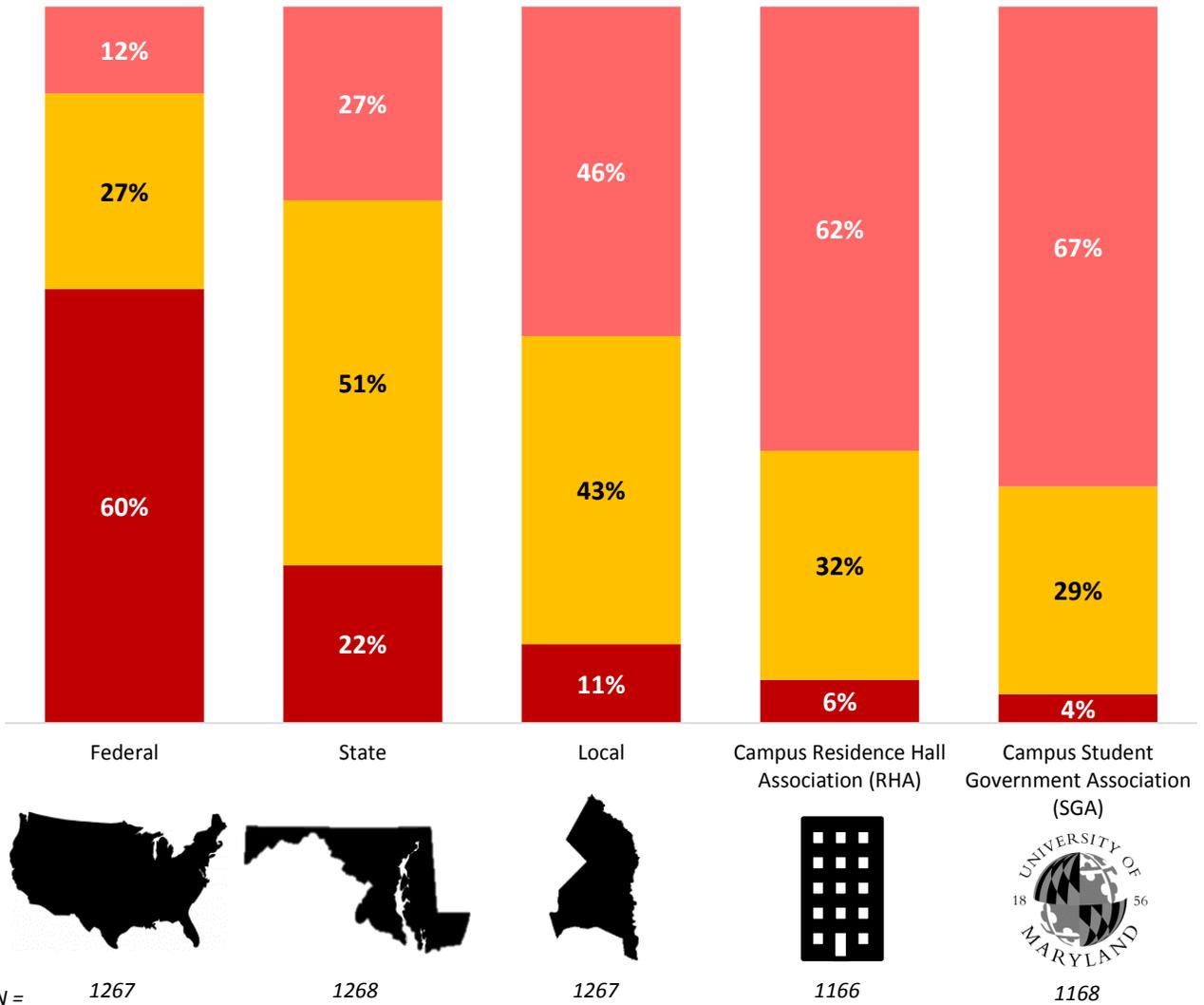
Demographic Differences Explained

Differences (tested with chi square analyses) are reported where the responses across the demographic categories (e.g., male and female) are significantly different than expected relative to the overall response pattern. For example, if 70% of all respondents agreed with a statement, we would expect 70% of both males and females to agree, if sex were not a factor. However, if we found a significant difference with only 65% of males agreeing, then we would report that "fewer males than expected" agreed with the item.

The American Indian/Native Hawaiian, Unknown, and Foreign racial/ethnic/citizenship groups were not included in this report due to small sample sizes that make statistical analyses unreliable.

Degree of interest in elections

■ Very interested ■ Somewhat interested ■ Not interested



Note: Students who selected N/A for RHA and SGA were excluded from the count of those items.

- **Nearly two-thirds** of respondents were interested in federal elections. As elections become more local, however, students reported being less interested.
- Although **66%** of respondents were registered to vote in the state of Maryland, only **22%** were very interested in the state election. Another **51%** reported being somewhat interested.

Questions to Consider

- How do we encourage students to be more engaged at the campus level?
- How do we pique freshmen’s interest in campus elections, especially since over 90% of the incoming class lives in the residence halls?



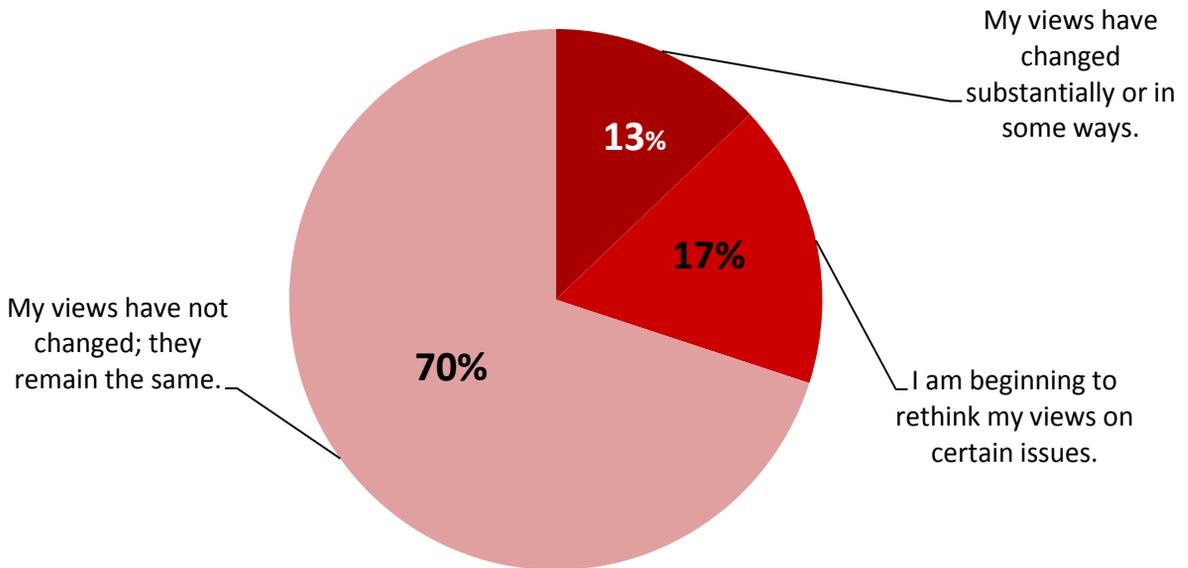
Most influential factor in decision to vote

| | |
|--|-----|
| To elect a candidate who shares my view on a specific issue that matters to me | 37% |
| My responsibility as a citizen | 24% |
| To vote for a specific candidate | 15% |
| To vote on referendums on the ballot (e.g., Maryland Same-Sex Marriage, DREAM Act) | 9% |
| To support my political party | 6% |
| The opinion of my family and friends | 2% |
| Everyone is expected to | 2% |
| Other | 4% |

N=1087

- Over **50%** of respondents indicated that voting for a *specific candidate* or a *candidate who shared their views* influenced their decision to vote. Almost a quarter reported that it was their *responsibility as a citizen*.
- Significant differences emerged for the two most influential factors in deciding whether or not to vote. More women than men chose the option to *elect a candidate who shared their views*. More men than women chose *responsibility as a citizen*. No significant differences emerged by race.

Have freshmen's political views changed since coming to UMD?



N=1267



The Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) regularly gathers and exchanges information about UMD student and alumni experiences. The group is charged with developing a campus "Culture of Evidence" in which data and assessment can inform campus decision making. Its three subgroups focus on freshman experiences, junior/senior student experiences, and retention and completion efforts. For more information, to view past reports, or to join a CAWG subgroup, please visit www.umd.edu/cawg.