

CAWG SNAPSHOT OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES POLITICS, ELECTIONS & VOTING

University of Maryland

2016– Issue 3, October

This Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Snapshot reports findings on junior and senior students' perceptions of voting. The data included represent results from the University of Maryland Student Survey (UMSS), an annual survey administered by the Cawg Assessing Campus Experiences Subgroup (ACES). Respondents complete the survey during the spring semester in Professional Writing courses.

A total of 1,775 (54%) of the 3,268 juniors and seniors enrolled in Professional Writing courses during the spring 2016 semester completed the survey.

Race/Ethnicity	
White: U.S.	53%
Asian: U.S.	16%
Black or African American: U.S.	12%
Hispanic: U.S.	10%
Foreign	4%
Two or More Races: U.S.	4%
Unknown: U.S.	1%
Other, incl. American Indian and Hawaiian: U.S.	<1%

Gender	
Male	53%
Female	47%

The demographic breakdown of respondents is representative of the university as a whole. The data represent only the responses of survey respondents, not all UMD students; therefore, use caution when generalizing. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

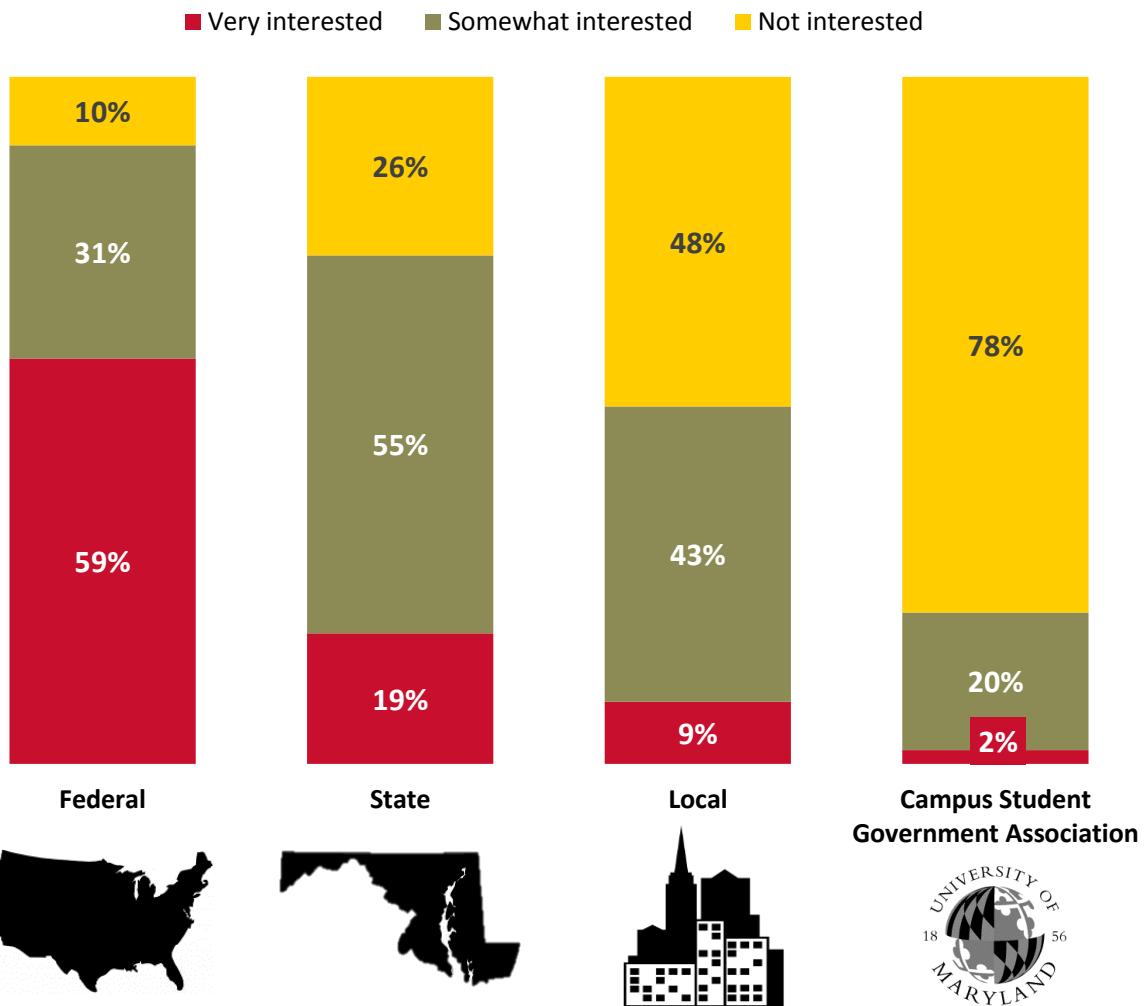
The Beginnings subgroup of Cawg administered a similar survey in 2012. The Snapshot report is available at: www.irpa.umd.edu/CAWG/Reports/2014/Snapshot_oct14.pdf

Timeline of 2016 Elections

- **2016:** This is a presidential election year. Additionally, 1/3 of the U.S. Senate, the entire U.S. House of Representatives, and many local government positions are up for election.
- **By Mid-March 2016:** Primaries and caucuses were held in 16 U.S. states and territories, with a dozen additional contests scheduled during the window when students were taking the UMSS 2016.
- **Mid-March 2016:** The UMSS 2016 was administered.
- **April 26, 2016:** The Maryland Primary Election was held. During the primary, voters registered in either the Democratic or Republican party could vote for their party's nominee for U.S. President, U.S. Senator, and local government positions.
- **November 8, 2016:** The U.S. Presidential Election will be held.

Interest and rationale for voting

Degree of interest in elections



n = 1,759-1,772, depending on item

- Nearly six out of ten (59%) respondents reported being very interested in federal elections. However, as elections become more local, respondents reported being less interested. This is evidenced by the low level of interest in state, local, and campus elections.
- The 2016 Student Government Association (SGA) election was not contested, and which may have contributed to lack of interest. Only 2% reported being very interested, and 20% reported being somewhat interested, in SGA elections (For more information, see The Diamondback article at www.dbknews.com/2016/04/21/katherine-swanson-umd-sga-president/).

Reasons for voting

	Yes	No	Unsure
In general, do you think an individual's vote matters?	82%	18%	—
Do you plan to vote in the November U.S. election?	76%	12%	12%
Are you registered to vote in the November U.S. election?	71%	20%	9%
Have you sought out opportunities to increase your knowledge on issues surrounding the November U.S. election?	70%	30%	—
Do you identify with a particular political party?	59%	41%	—
Did you register to vote through a campus registration drive?	7%	90%	3%

n = 1,763-1,774, depending on item. Note: "Unsure" was only an answer option for three questions.

- Seventy-one percent (71%) of respondents reported being registered to vote in the November U.S. election; 76% reported that they plan to vote.
- Seven percent (7%) of respondents have registered to vote through a campus drive.
- Eighty-two percent (82%) reported they think an individual's vote matters, though fewer than 20% of respondents reported that they were very interested in state, local, or campus elections, as noted on page two.

Most influential factor in decision to vote

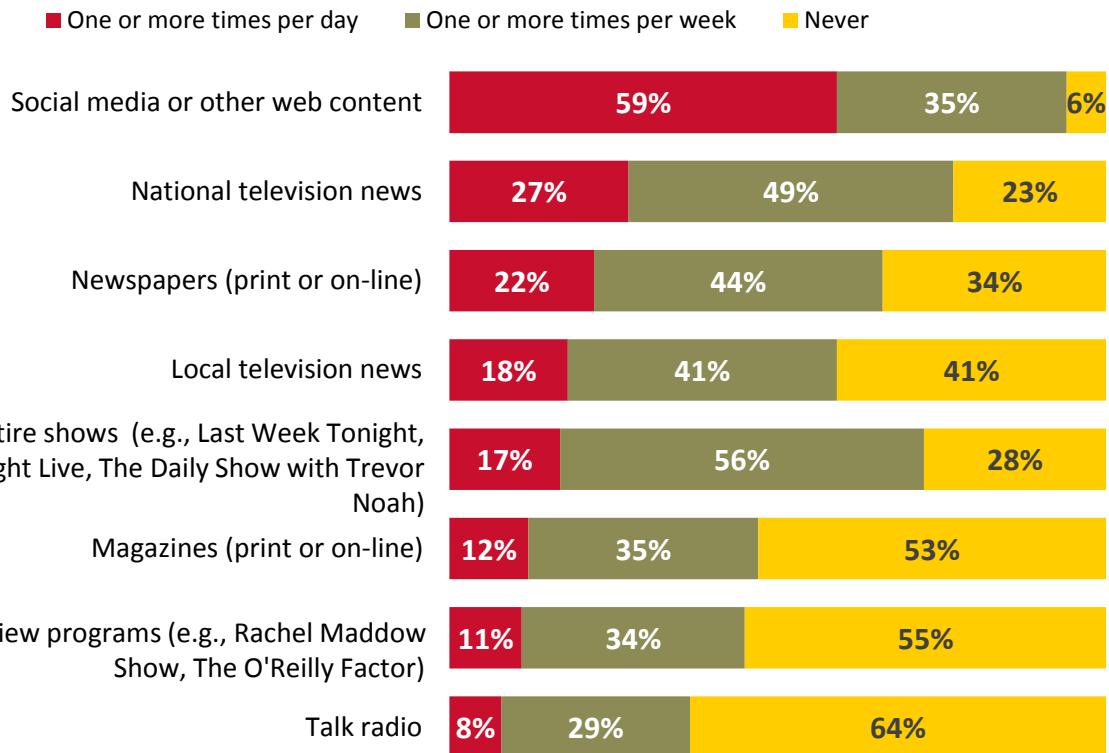
Reasons for voting	Percent
To support issues that matter to me	71%
My responsibility as a citizen	11%
To support a specific candidate	10%
To support my political party	4%
Other reason for voting	2%
The opinion of my family and friends	2%

n = 1,512. Note: This table excludes respondents who indicated they were ineligible to vote or do not plan to vote.

- Nearly three-fourths (71%) of respondents reported supporting issues that matter to them as the most influential reason to vote. Respondents selected this rather than their responsibility as a citizen (11%), to support a specific candidate (10%), or to support their political party (4%).

Media and engagement

Sources for U.S. election news and frequency in a typical week



n = 1,755-1,769, depending on item

- Social media or other web content is reported to be the most common source (59% reported using it least once per day) for news. However, this may include digital formats of newspaper and magazines that are also available through social media.
- In line with data from a 2012 survey of UMD freshmen, social media remains the dominant source for political news. Furthermore, respondents are engaging with social media in with similar frequency to 2012.

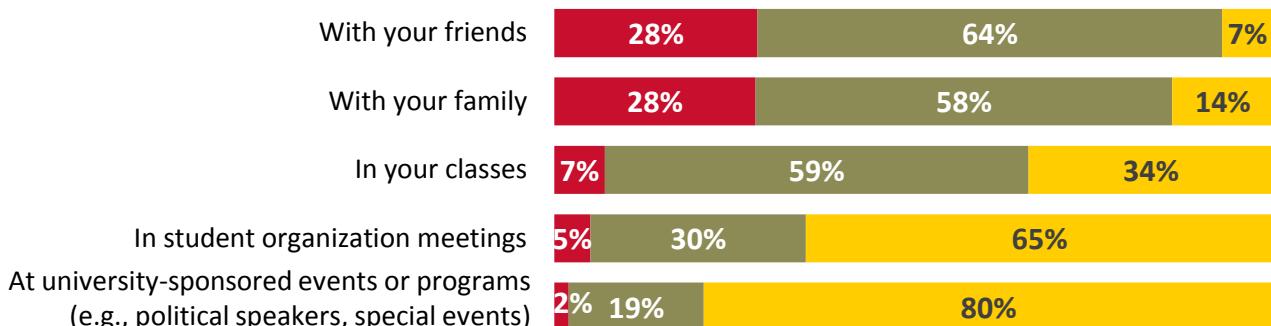
Question to Consider

Respondents are receiving news updates multiple times per day through multiple sources. To what extent does this influence their engagement with political discussions?



Frequency of engagement in political discussions

■ Often ■ Sometimes/Rarely ■ Never



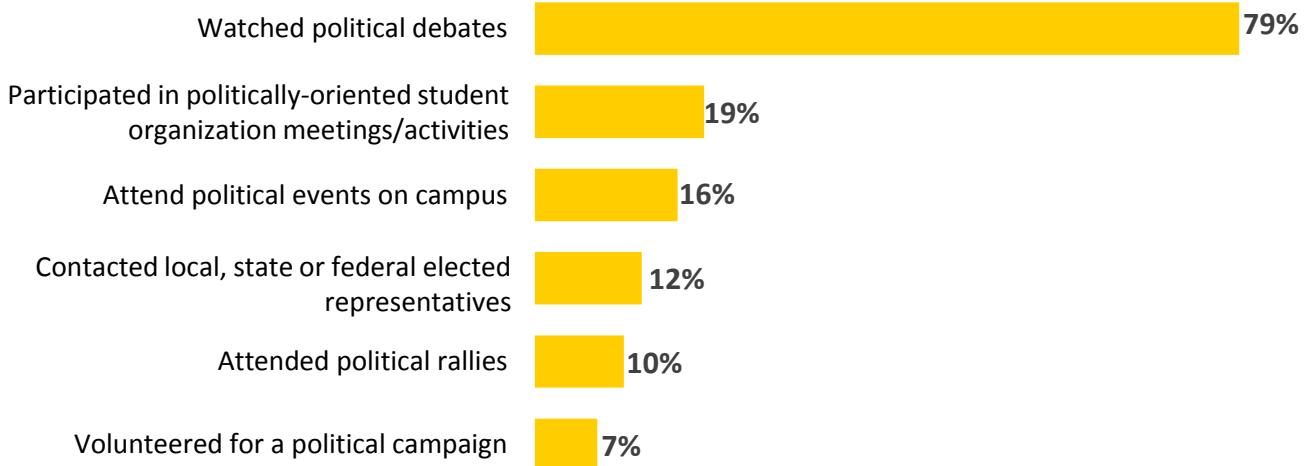
n = 1,771-1,774, depending on item

- Respondents were more likely to discuss political issues with their friends, family, and in their classes, all of which are seemingly more personal environments than meetings and campus events.

Question to consider

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

Types of engagement



n = 1,769-1,773, depending on item

- While more than three-quarters of respondents (79%) have watched political debates, fewer engaged in other political activities.

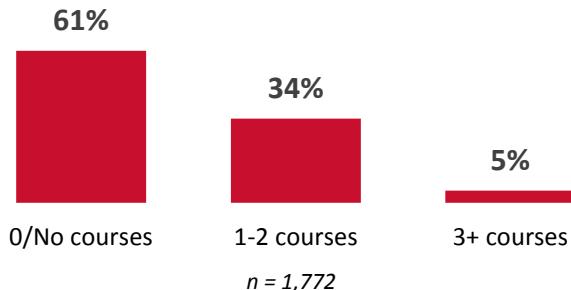
Question to consider

One goal of UMD is to effectively engage students, faculty, and staff with the surrounding world. What is the role of the university in encouraging student political involvement? How can we get students to be more involved and better informed about the political process?



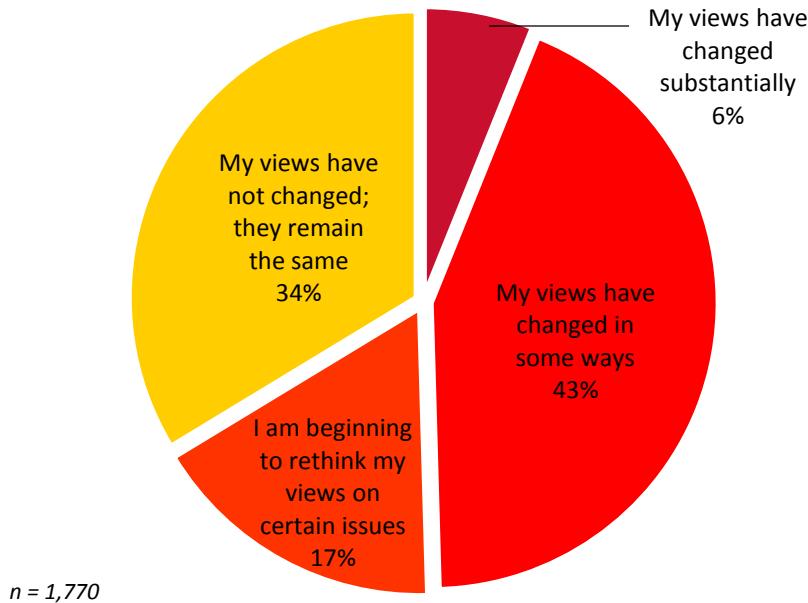
Campus Experiences

Spring 2016 courses in which students discussed November 2016 U.S. elections



Differences arise when comparing this table to the one on the top of page 5 (frequency of engagement in political discussions). More than two-thirds have had political discussions in their classes overall (66%). When asked specifically about conversations in Spring 2016 courses, only 39% reported discussing the November 2016 election.

Political views since beginning college



- Forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents indicated that their views have changed substantially (6%) or in some ways (43%) since beginning college.
- In contrast, a study of freshmen in Fall 2012 found that 13% of respondents' views had changed substantially or in some ways within the first 8-10 weeks of starting at UMD.

Questions to consider

- What factors in the college experience might have contributed to students' changing political views?
- Is this election categorically different from other previous elections? How might that influence student responses?



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.