

The Salience of Analyzing and Collecting Undergraduate Civic Attitudes in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

College campuses have a considerable impact on shaping their student voters and the civic fabric of their community. As youth voter turnout becomes increasingly uncertain and lower than among other demographics, institutions may need to consider using data collection methods to better align with the civic needs of their students (Herre, 2024). This study analyzes how universities can effectively identify and address unknown civic engagement gaps unique to their campuses that contribute to low youth voter turnout.

To investigate this, the research team conducted a survey experiment meant to collect data that can provide important context to answer these questions. This survey provided data on four key areas of voter behavior and civic engagement. This experimental question tested whether informing 50% of total respondents about the location of the available polling locations at the start of the survey would increase their intention to vote on campus in the future. Results

showed that even after this information was provided, the majority of students said that they were unlikely to do so. Based on this and other data, this study concludes that there may be a need to: increase the dissemination of key polling information between faculty and students, heighten awareness of professional and recreational civic engagement opportunities, combat lowered awareness of and interest in local candidates, increase encouragement to contact representatives, and finally sponsor dialogue to address the increasing distrust of government structures and lowered confidence in the security of elections.

Keywords: college civic engagement, voter behavior assessment, student civic research, youth voter dialogue, the University of Texas at Dallas.

Introduction

Many universities lack a consistent means of collecting civic attitudes, and this may result in opportunities to resolve existing gaps being overlooked, misguided, or poorly constructed. This study defines civic engagement as the readiness of voters, the initiative to join in volunteer work, the ability and willingness to publicly express civic attitudes, and finally, proclivity to establish thriving communities. Colleges can take steps to nurture and protect civic engagement, and this objective can be achieved through the execution of annual research surveys that collect data on the following areas: raw voter behavior, voter knowledge, institutional support, and student civic interest. Conducting in-house data collection may also be instrumental in fueling any research and student engagement opportunities within relevant departments. This paper outlines how this testing of four key areas of civic engagement- raw voter behavior, voter

knowledge, institutional support, and civic interest at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) was conducted by the UTD Civic Coalition research team, who are the authors of this project and analysis. These findings indicate how this premier undergraduate study was able to collect this essential data, and ultimately, note areas in which the institution is successful in achieving these objectives and in need of improvement.

Background

The history of civic engagement within higher educational institutions in Texas, the lack of research development in this topic at UTD, and recent legislation aiming to introduce roadblocks for young voters is what set into motion the need to assess the current state of this university's civic fabric, and ultimately the launch of this study/survey model. In terms of history, the path to securing voting rights and accessibility for college students in the United States is marked with cornerstone legal decisions, challenges to the definition of what constitutes a voter, and student-led efforts to maintain civic engagement beyond the polls.

The impetus for legal change was rooted in the demands of young voters who highlighted the contradiction in being drafted for service in the Vietnam War at the age of 18, while simultaneously being denied the right to vote (Cain, 2024). This rising tension then began as a specific extension of the Voting Rights Act via the 26th Amendment, which was ratified in 1971. The Amendment lowered the voting age to 18, prohibiting the federal and state governments from denying the right to vote to citizens 18 years or older based on their age. When new violations of this newly established amendment occurred, it was again the efforts of these same

civically minded students who then demanded suffrage that safeguarded the power and accessibility of the polls (Cain, 2024). It was at Prairie View A&M University (a university then predominantly consisting of black and low-income population of students) that the first and only legal case entitled *Symm. v. United States* (1979), addressed a violation regarding how the residence of a voter impacts their right to the polls located on campus (Millhiser, 2020). Students at Prairie View A&M University filed suit claiming that they were being denied voting rights because they wished to vote at their home campus despite not technically being residents of Prairie View, Texas (Zinn Education Project, n.d.).

The Supreme Court found that efforts at the local level to deny, suppress, or violate college students ages 18 and above based on ZIP code directly violated what was enshrined in the 26th Amendment and therefore were unconstitutional. Later attempts to create similar “proof of domicile” laws (circa 2017) have subsequently been struck down, but an even more pernicious trend of legislation seems to have been recently emerging into view (Frost, 2024). Notable instances of this trend aimed at university polling locations in Texas first ignited in 2019 at the University of Houston-Tillotson, which is a historically black college (Nguyen, 2022). That year, a bill was filed that would end temporary sites and mandated the costlier option of keeping polling locations open for the entire early-voting period, arguing that the former allowed for the “selective harvesting of targeted voters” (Nguyen, 2022). Since many temporary early-voting locations were located on this campus and a multitude of others in Texas, challenges were launched that this bill suppressed students’ voting access (Nguyen, 2022). The bill was able to pass and thus dissolved these accessible temporary voting sites for students that were in that area

(Nguyen, 2022). In 2025, three equally concerning attempts to redefine and quell civic engagement have also been brought back into circulation after being struck down by the Texas government in its first appearance. HB 3144 targets sections 43.031(a) and (e) of the Texas Election Code and explicitly calls for banning campus-based polling sites unless operations are suspended (Ahmad, 2025). Additionally, the bill clarifies that a “public building” refers to structures owned or controlled by the state or political subdivisions (Isaac, 2025). This would not only prevent voting at public universities, but also at primary public schools depending on the variations of operational hours (Ahmad, 2025). The proposed poll closures could impact more than 60,000 voters, disproportionately affecting Black and Hispanic voters (Ahmad, 2025).

Finally, in 2021, state legislators imposed a ban on lessons and curriculum involving “direct communication” between high school students and their federal, state, or local officials (Lehrer-Small, 2023). According to the 2024 Texas Statutes Education Code Title 2 - Public Education Sec. 28.002, Clause (B), K-12 educators can no longer encourage students to get involved in the political process without potentially being reported for violating this law (Lehrer-Small, 2023). This clipping of civic engagement in early schooling could not only damage the civic health of incoming college students but also inspire similar legislation to take effect in the higher education space (Lehrer-Small, 2023).

These attempts to discourage communication between legislators and their young constituents, redefine public expressions of student opinion, effectively close on-campus polling locations, and arbitrarily realign crucial curriculum and pedagogy in higher education may have

a negative impact on the civic profile of college students in Texas (Alonso, 2024). This potential reality increases the need for Texas universities to not only protect the voting rights of their students but also to establish a stronger fabric of a civic culture that provides students with the tools needed to become effective communicators and mobilizers of their civic needs (Alonso, 2024). This culture would allow its students to mirror and then ultimately exceed the engagement, influence, and insight of their predecessors when advocating for their own modern-day concerns. The civic needs of students, however, cannot be assumed without investing in the collection of this key data via a survey/study model.

Literature Review

This section details the existing scholarly research regarding similar studies conducted in public universities. It seems that there is a very apparent lack of research at the academic level, specifically the collection and analysis of student civic attitudes at public universities. Some concerns arise over what this gap will mean, particularly in the face of legislative efforts to decrease student civic dialogue and remove campus polling. This drives the intention of this study, which is to ideally initiate conversation surrounding this problem and encourage the creation of similar studies at other campuses across the United States.

Lack of Existing Research on Civic Attitudes of College Students

The existing body of literature on civic engagement within college and university settings predominantly emphasizes voter engagement initiatives, turnout rates, and the broader impact of civic education. Scholarly research in this area frequently explores the effectiveness of

registration drives, peer-to-peer outreach programs, and the role of institutional support in promoting student participation in elections. These studies collectively underscore the significance of structured efforts to enhance civic participation among young adults in higher education.

In contrast, there is a notable scarcity of research that provides a comprehensive analysis of the methodologies employed to survey young voters on college campuses. While the literature is also rich in nationwide discussions of voter engagement strategies, relatively few studies delve into the specifics of survey design, implementation, and the overall efficacy of these approaches to stimulate conversations about voter attitudes; how student communities perceive voting in relation to affecting change; and the civic support they receive (or the lack thereof) from the university.

Among the most prominent resources in this field are the National Study of Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) and the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University. NSLVE compiles institutional voting data from colleges and universities nationwide, providing valuable insights into student voting patterns; however, it does not focus on the methodological aspects of surveying young voters (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2021). Similarly, CIRCLE publishes extensive reports on youth voting trends and engagement and yet offers limited details regarding campus-specific survey strategies (Tufts University, 2022).

Peer-reviewed articles addressing survey research with college students tend to concentrate on general challenges, such as nonresponse and sampling bias, rather than on innovative or tailored approaches for campus-based surveys (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2021). As a result, while the literature provides substantial data on youth voter participation and engagement, it lacks in-depth analysis of the specific methodologies used to survey this population within higher education contexts (Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2021). This gap highlights the need for further research, both within UTD and on the national level, focused on the development and evaluation of effective survey strategies to accurately capture the civic engagement experiences of college students.

Experimental Design and Methodology

This initiative was first devised with the support of the Student Government at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD). The project commenced with a core team of four student senators who developed the survey's functional framework and devised an outreach strategy. Using a sample size calculation algorithm, an expected 380 student responses were needed to create a representative sample size. This is based on a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a population size of 29,886 undergraduate students. The duration of the survey development and acquisition of responses lasted from October through April 2025, and the final yield was 480 responses, thus meeting the needed sample size. Faculty member input was utilized from the School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences at UTD, as faculty members were willing to help maintain methodological rigor and limit bias. These academic collaborators

provided iterative feedback on successive drafts of the survey, offered critical insights to refine question phrasing, eliminated potential partisan bias, and suggested modifications to enhance the survey's comprehensiveness. The content of the survey itself, including questions and other conceptual details, was sourced and selected from the American National Elections Study database.

Institutional Review and Compliance

The survey was submitted for review to the University of Texas at Dallas Office of Human Subject Protections (OHSP) to ensure compliance with ethical research standards. Following multiple rounds of revisions, which were guided by feedback from UTD faculty members, the project received formal approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on December 12th, 2024.

Civic Attitudes Qualtrics Survey Structure

The finalized survey, titled 2024–2025 UTD Civic Coalition Undergraduate: Civic Life Survey, was administered via Qualtrics and yielded a total of 480 valid responses. Microsoft Qualtrics was selected as the survey platform due to its robust analytical capabilities and institutional accessibility through UTD's student resources. The survey was distributed through a Qualtrics link and a Qualtrics QR code.

After accessing the survey, respondents are first asked to review and participate in an informed consent form, which was designed to ensure that all participants clearly understood the

objectives of the study and the intended use of the data collected. All questions were forced-response based, with certain questions including an “I am unsure”, “I don’t know”, or “I choose not to respond” if it was appropriate to avoid answering.

Analysis of Treatment and Control Group

One of the primary objectives was to test the knowledge that students had regarding on-campus polling locations. Coding elements were included to randomly assign 50% of respondents with a brief informational slide about the upcoming election cycle and campus polling locations. These specific participants were encouraged to retain this logistical information for the subsequent question, which would then test whether the respondents had read and retained the information about the active polling locations on campus. The control group was encouraged to retain this information for a subsequent question, testing whether the respondents read and retained the information about campus polling locations (Figures 3-5). The correct corresponding locations were the Callier Center, designated for Collin County registered voters, and the Visitors Atrium, designated for Dallas County registered voters. The other 50% of the respondents were not presented with this preview and were asked to respond to the same question, testing their pre-existing polling location knowledge.

Prize Survey Qualtrics Structure

In addition to our main survey gauging civic engagement, there was a second Qualtrics form that students could access upon completion of the primary survey. They were informed that

this opportunity was purely voluntary, and that the randomized prize drawing was associated with the Civic Life Survey. All appropriate data privacy guidelines were followed to ensure that email addresses that were collected to contact winners would be appropriately stored. Students who completed the survey and submitted valid verification (e.g., a screenshot) were entered into a randomized prize drawing, designed to encourage participation while maintaining ethical standards. Our research group (as senators) formulated, argued for, and gained majority support to pass an allocation to finance these prizes. There were four prizes: 1) Sony WHCH520 Bluetooth Wireless Headphones with Microphone, 2) Stanley the Quencher H2.O FlowState 40oz Bottle, 3) Fujifilm Instax Mini 11 Instant Camera, and 4) Rocketbook Core Reusable [BC1] Spiral Notebook. UTD Student Government provided an allocation for \$225.28 to buy prizes.

Participant Screening and Demographics Data Collection

The Civic Life Survey narrowed in on a specific focus group of students: undergraduate students. Additionally, there was a series of demographic questions meant to contextualize participant responses and collect relevant data points such as each respondent's year, major, and academic school within the university.

Questions 7- 10 served as a screening mechanism, asking respondents to indicate their academic status with the options: "Yes, I am an undergraduate student" or "No, I am a graduate student." Participants who identified as graduate students were excluded from the survey via a Qualtrics feature that would automatically end the survey, as the study was designed to focus

exclusively on the undergraduate population. Consequently, all subsequent data reflect responses from undergraduate students only.

Promotion Strategy and Survey Dispersal

Three main promotion strategies were utilized to ensure that a wide variety of undergraduate students were given the opportunity to interact with the survey model: mass email outreach, in-person classroom visits, and flyers/physical materials.

Mass Outreach Email Dispersal

Mass outreach in a four-pronged approach was used to formally launch the survey product to all undergraduate students at the campus: classroom visits, physical flyers accompanied by QR codes, university-wide emails, and finally social media and/or word of mouth. In collaborating with the UTD Student Media department, a launch date was approved for an email to be sent to approximately 30,000 undergraduate students. The effort was successful in that the randomization element was met by targeting all undergraduate students in the data pool. Because all four of the survey outreach methods linked to the same QR code and flyer that was used, the Qualtrics database cannot identify which clicks came from students viewing the link from the mass email, the in-person classroom visits, posts/messages made via social media, or the physical flyer outreach approach. Although the exact impact of the mass email cannot be quantified, this approach was a successful medium to reach the undergraduate population at large.

Classroom Outreach and Faculty Engagement

The primary method used for ensuring a representative sample of the undergraduate population was through in-class presentations. These class visits were structured by compiling a comprehensive database of faculty contacts, course offerings, classroom locations, and classroom meeting times. Outreach emails were sent to instructors across all academic schools, with a particular emphasis on those teaching core curriculum courses such as College Algebra, State and Local Government, and many others to ensure exposure to students from diverse academic backgrounds.

To organize and simplify this email outreach process for undergraduate deans and other university faculty, an internal database was created with which professors to email, what courses those professors taught, where these classrooms were located, and what time these classes were held. A joint effort was made to email a variety of professors from each of the academic schools. In total, nine academic deans and dozens of professors were contacted via email, with varying rates of response. Outside of this method, verbal communication was also facilitated with professors and faculty possessing pre-existing rapport with the students designing the survey, which encouraged further dispersal of the project. When emailing professors, those who taught core curriculum classes were considered the highest priority, as these classes would include students from all academic schools and therefore have a larger, more randomized subset of students from different disciplines. Each email to academic professors or school faculty emphasized the nonpartisan nature of the project, its IRB approval, and the survey's faculty

sponsorship and support. The faculty members were informed that the survey aimed to collect data on undergraduate students' voting behaviors, political knowledge, and civic attitudes, and that it was the first initiative of its kind at the university. All email outreach proposed that professors allow members from the research team to deliver a brief five-minute in-class presentation. During the presentation, the survey would be introduced, and a promotional poster with the QR code would be displayed. Faculty and students alike were assured that participation was both voluntary and anonymous, and that the research team would remain present throughout the allotted time to address any logistical concerns.

Faculty Response. Faculty responses to email outreach varied in enthusiasm and subsequent measures taken to promote the project. Many instructors, particularly those affiliated with the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences, expressed appreciation for the initiative, recognizing its relevance to their academic disciplines and its potential contribution to civic education. These professors frequently dedicated time at the beginning or end of class to emphasize the importance of the project and the value of each student's contribution. This collective enthusiasm fostered a positive and motivating environment, making it clear these professors recognized the broader significance of the data being collected. Other professors expressed initial reservations due to the political nature of the topic but were generally reassured upon learning that the survey was purely non-partisan, did not solicit political identification or views, and instead focused on civic awareness. A subset of faculty opted to share the survey via their course homepage through announcements on E-Learning, rather than allocating in-class

time. In cases of non-response, the research team followed up with additional emails or in-person visits to initiate the conversation.

Effectiveness of Classroom Visits. Classroom visits proved to be the most effective method for increasing survey participation. However, several factors influenced the success of this method, including class attendance policies, class sizes, and the course professor's support. Courses with mandatory attendance yielded higher response rates due to more students being present during the class visit. In contrast, large lecture courses such as State and Local Government and American National Government with optional attendance often had lower in-class turnout, and thus, a lower response rate. Regarding class size, smaller classes containing 20 to 60 students could prove more conducive to engagement. The research team's observation was that students were more likely to participate after observing their peers completing the survey. Finally, professors who endorsed the initiative during class often enhanced its credibility and positively influenced student participation through that support.

Other motivations that contributed to successful participation included the prize component offered to every respondent, which may have positively contributed to students choosing to respond. The response rate was also strengthened by having one representative out of the four research team members there to introduce, explain, and oversee the completion of the survey. When this survey is replicated in future iterations, the response collection phase shall occur earlier than in this first version, as some professors lacked the time in their late-semester curriculum to allow for a class visit, or fewer students were regularly attending their classes late

into the academic term. Had the class visits begun earlier in the semester, a greater number of responses might have been collected.

In summary, classroom presentations resulted in a tremendous increase in responses proportional to class size for courses with diverse student enrollment, engaged faculty, and mandatory attendance policies. These conditions maximized both the reach and the representativeness of the survey sample.

Physical Flyer/Promotional Material Outreach

Physical flyers were likewise employed to share the survey initiative. The flyers were the size of a standard 8 x 11-inch paper sheet and were designed to display the university branding. The flyers were pre-approved by the Institutional Review Board and the UTD Student Government body before being displayed. On the flyers, a brief explanation of the project was included, as well as a QR code and a short set of instructions for the survey. Lastly, information on the prize component of the survey was shown on the flyer through the inclusion of visual aids for each of the four prizes.

Ideally, these flyers would reach a sizable and heterogeneous population that accurately represents the total undergraduate student body. To achieve this, flyers were comprehensively posted across campus to cover high-traffic areas and entice as many students of different disciplines as possible. Typically, posters would be placed on hallway bulletin boards or taped to walls, tables, or doors that experienced a high amount of student traffic. Inside each building, there were around three to five posters placed, although this figure increased or decreased

depending on the size of the building. Flyers were placed across campus in hotspot advertising locations, such as the Student Union, the Eugene McDermott Library, the Green Hall, and approximately 13 other areas. By covering so much of the UTD campus, students from nearly all majors are likely to see the flyers and have the added chance to partake in the survey, making this the most theoretically representative means of promotion available.

The success of the flyers (specifically those posted at these locations) is plausible but less certain, in comparison to that of the in-person classroom visits. The number of flyers posted around campus, paired with the indiscriminate coverage across so many campus buildings, means that thousands of students should have been exposed to the flyers. The QR code that was used during classroom visits was the same as the QR code on the flyers posted across campus, so determining precisely how many students exclusively scanned the physical flyers to access the survey is not possible. However, if this rate of interaction with the flyers was in fact low, a few hypotheses come into view. Firstly, this may be because students are less likely to trust the validity of the survey and prize after merely reading about it on one of these posted flyers without a professor or fellow student there to vouch for its legitimacy. Another explanation could be an over-saturation of flyers across campus that hinders flyer efficacy. Nearly every student organization, faculty opportunity, and research project has its own flyers. In a university the size of UTD, this will mean hundreds of different flyers competing for space and attention. Students may lack the time to focus on all the numerous flyers around campus.

Findings and Analysis

After the survey response collection concluded from late April to early May, the synthesis of the final response pool and the creation of a visual report to display the results of the study began. Based on the initial rationale that was used to decide what survey questions and data points should be tested, coupled with the results of those tests, the data was divided into four categories of understanding: raw voter behavior, voter knowledge, institutional support, and student civic interest.

Raw Voter Behavior

What does the data show about whether the student voted, when they voted, and how they consider voting in the larger fabric of their life? As shown in Table 1, in response to the question asking how likely students were to vote on campus next cycle, 38% of students (184 students) answered “not likely”, 29.1% (140 students) answered somewhat likely, and 32.5% (156 students) answered very likely.

Table 1

Likelihood of on-campus voting in the next election cycle

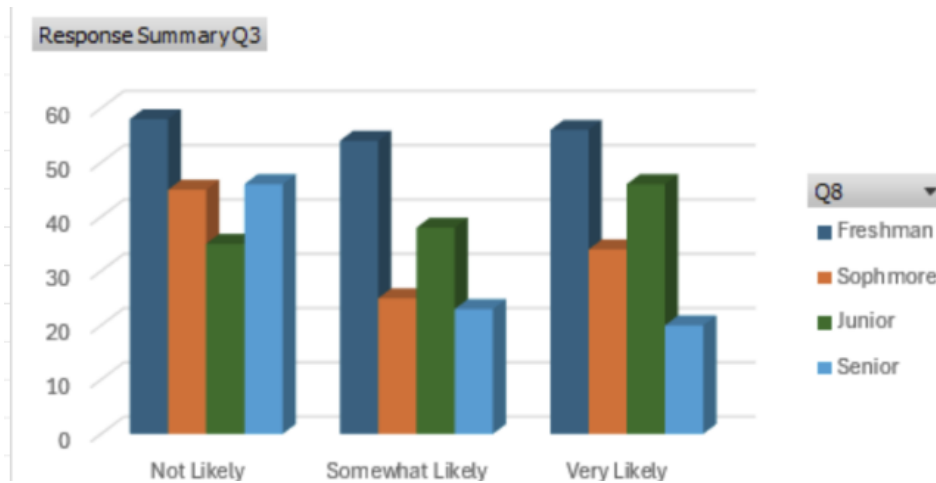
Response Summary Q3	Undergraduate Year				
How likely are you to vote on campus during the next election cycle?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Not Likely	58	45	35	46	184
Somewhat Likely	54	25	38	23	140
Very Likely	56	34	46	20	156
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q3. How likely are you to vote on campus during the next election cycle?

As a slightly higher percentage of students responded that they were unlikely to vote on campus, it may be of importance to parse why these students indicated this answer (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Likelihood of on-campus voting in the next election cycle

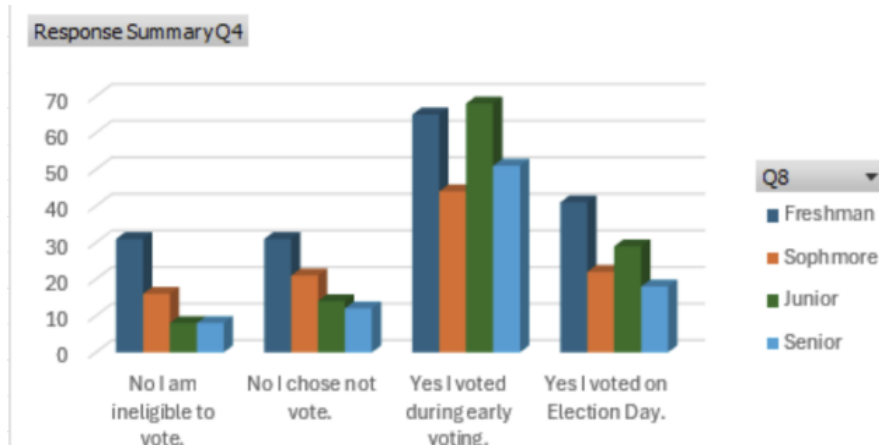


Q3. How likely are you to vote on campus during the next election cycle?

Even though 50% of respondents were given the information on where to vote on campus, why is it that more students still responded that they were unlikely to do so? This may indicate a clear discrepancy in the likelihood for students to vote on campus, and future iterations of the survey should be tailored to determine why this is the case. As shown in Table 2, in response to the question if the student voted from any point between the early voting period or on Election Day (October 21st – November 1st), 13.15% (63 students) stated they were ineligible to vote, 16.28% (78 students) stated that they chose not to vote, 47.5% voted during early voting (228 students), and 22.96% (110 students) voted on Election Day.

Figure 2

Voter Turnout amongst Undergraduates



Q4. Did you vote at any point from October 21st to November 1st (Early Voting) or on November 5th (Election Day)?

Table 2

Voter Turnout amongst Undergraduates

Response Summary Q4	Undergraduate Year				
Did you vote at any point from October 21 st to November 1 st (Early Voting) or on November 5th (Election Day)?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
No, I am ineligible to vote.	31	16	8	8	63
No, I chose not to vote.	31	21	14	12	78
Yes, I voted during early voting.	65	44	68	51	228

Yes, I voted on Election Day.	41	22	29	18	110
Grand Total	168	103	119	89	479

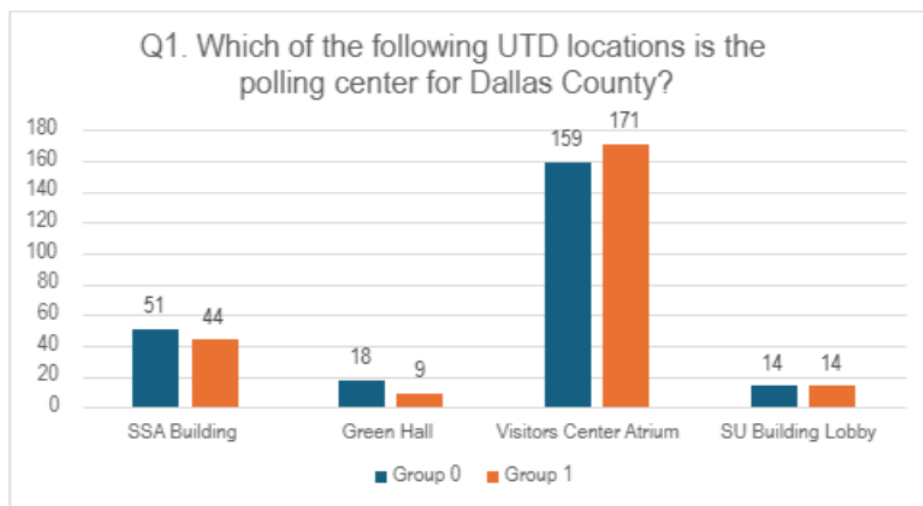
Q4. Did you vote at any point from October 21st to November 1st (Early Voting) or on November 5th (Election Day)?

Survey questions also included comparison of an experimental and control group to analyze differences in voter knowledge and student response. Coding elements were included to randomly assign 50% of respondents with a brief informational slide (Group 1, reference legend in Figures 3-5) about the upcoming election cycle and campus polling locations (Figures 3-5). The experimental group (Group 1) was encouraged to retain this information for a subsequent question that tested whether the respondents read and retained the information about campus polling locations (Figures 3-5). The other 50% of the respondents (Group 0) were not presented with this preview and were asked to respond to the same question, testing their pre-existing polling location knowledge. When comparing the results of the control group (Group 0) and the experimental group (Group 1), there was an increase in the number of students who correctly identified their polling location for their respective county in Figure 3 and Figure 4. When looking at the group distribution in Figure 5, although all experimental group respondents were given information on respective polling centers, 69.32% of the experimental group (Group 1) were still uninterested in voting on campus (Figure 5). This discrepancy between knowledge of

polling locations and lack of interest may indicate that there is another unidentified or detracting factor that is keeping knowledgeable voters from using campus voting resources.

Figure 3

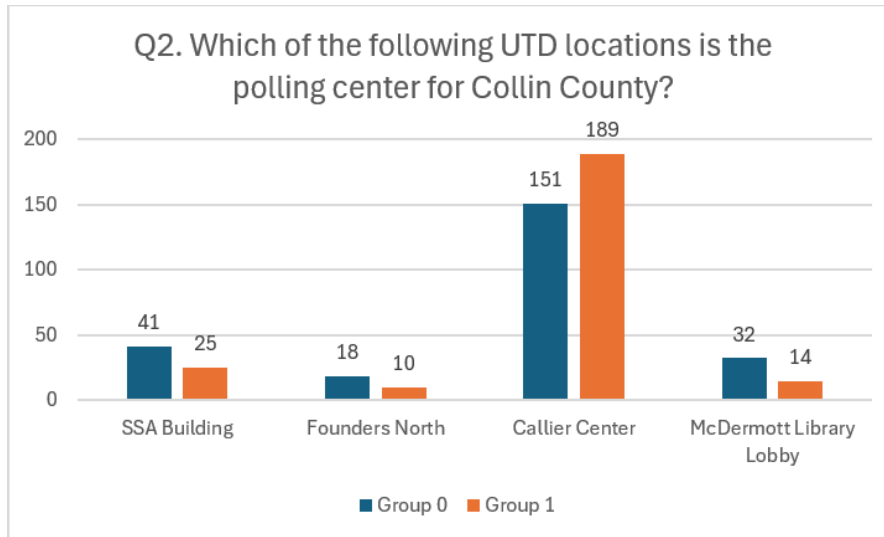
Randomization Component on 50% of respondents for Q1



Q1. Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Dallas County? (Overview of two control groups)

Figure 4

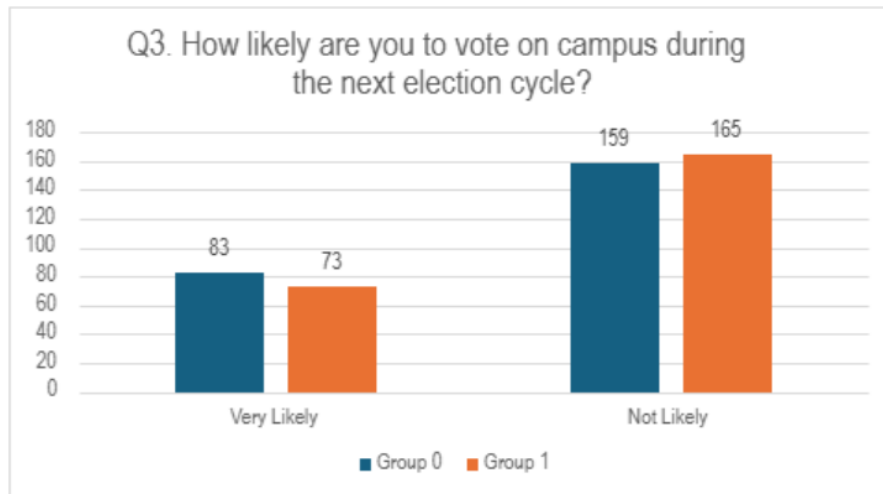
Randomization Component on 50% of respondents for Q2



Q2. Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Collin County? (Overview of two control groups)

Figure 5

Randomization Component on 50% of respondents

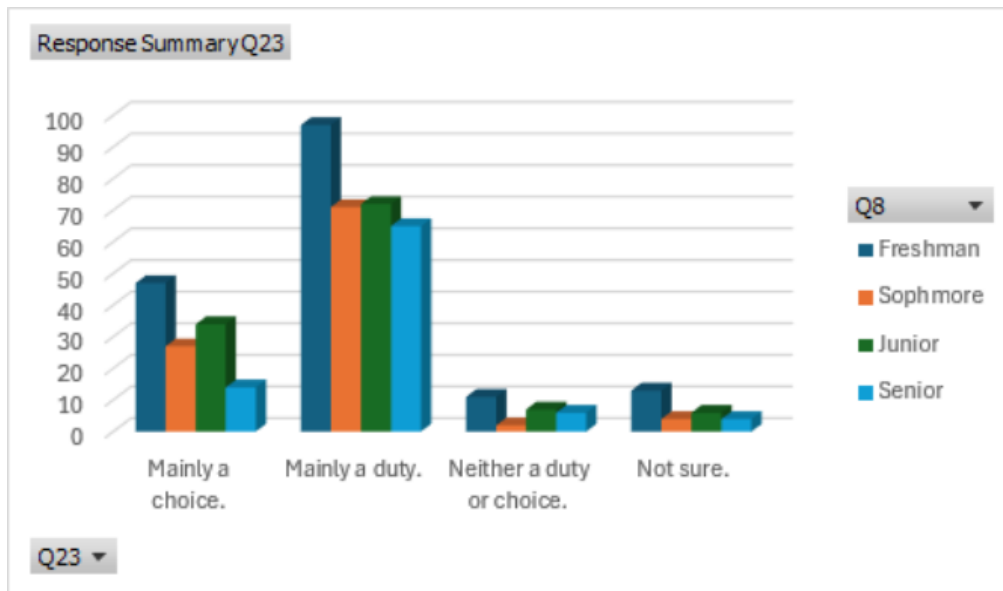


Q3. How likely are you to vote on campus during the next election cycle? (Overview of two control groups)

Finally, in this category, students were asked if they considered voting a duty or a choice. As shown in Table 3, 25.41% considered voting mainly a choice (122 respondents), 63.5% considered it mainly a duty (305 respondents), 5.41% considered it neither a duty nor a choice (26 respondents), and 5.62% (27 respondents) were not sure.

Figure 6

Voting as a duty or choice



Q23. Do (you) consider voting a duty or choice?

Table 3

Voting as a duty or choice

Response Summary Q23	Undergraduate Year				
Do (you) consider voting a duty or choice?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Mainly a choice.	47	27	34	14	122
Mainly a duty.	97	71	72	65	305

Neither a duty or choice.	11	2	7	6	26
Not sure.	13	4	6	4	27
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q23. Do (you) consider voting a duty or choice?

The response to this specific question is one of great interest, as it shows that most students who were polled in the study did find voting to be a duty that citizens should fulfill within the grander scheme of their community. This data point indicates that university efforts to further encourage and reinforce the importance of civic engagement may be successful amongst the group of students who responded in this manner.

Student Civic Interest

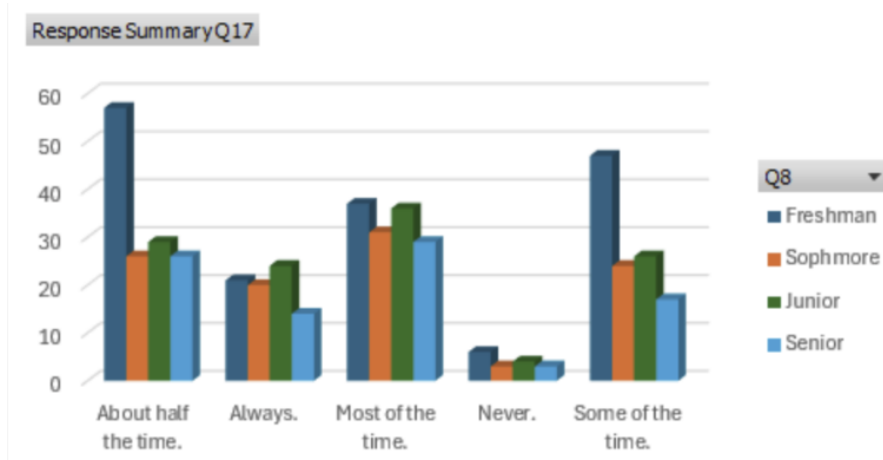
What does the data show about the following areas of interest: interest in voting, attention to political candidates/campaigns, student propensity to reach out to political candidates, interest in having candidates visit their campus, likelihood to discuss politics with family/friends, how students rate the responsiveness of government institutions to the needs of their constituents, and finally, how involved are students in volunteer efforts?

Engagement with Federal Politics

Survey responses indicate a substantial level of interest in federal politics among undergraduate students. Question 17 asked how frequently students follow information about federal politics and government. As shown in Table 4, most respondents reported they engaged with such content at least “about half the time” ($138+79+133 = 350$ or 72.92%). Only 16 students (approximately 3.33%) selected “Never”, suggesting that political disengagement with federal politics is relatively rare within the sample.

Figure 7

Consumption of Federal Political Information



Q17. How often do (you) follow information about federal politics and government?

Table 4

Consumption of Federal Political Information

Response Summary Q17	Undergraduate Year				
How often do you follow information about federal politics and government?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
About half the time.	57	26	29	26	138
Always.	21	20	24	14	79
Most of the time.	37	31	36	29	133
Never.	6	3	4	3	16
Some of the time.	47	24	26	17	114
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

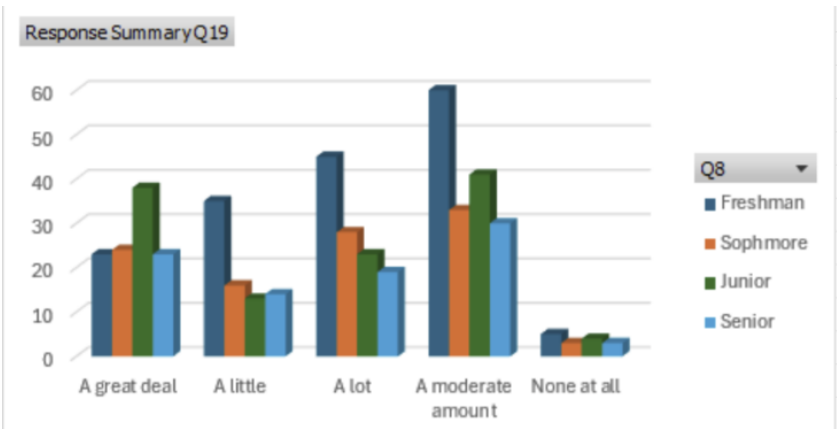
Q17. How often do (you) follow information about federal politics and government?

The trends of significant political engagement with federal politics are reinforced by responses to Question 19, which assessed attention to presidential campaign news. As shown in Table 5, the distribution of responses was left-skewed, with 80% of students ($164+115+108 = 387$ responses) indicating they followed presidential campaign news at least a moderate amount. These findings suggest that federal political discourse at the presidential level commands

significant attention among students. These positive trends could be potentially attributed to the prevalence of political content on social media and mainstream news platforms.

Figure 8

Attention to Presidential Campaigns



Q19. In this past election, how much attention did (you) pay to news about any "campaigns for President"?

Table 5

Attention to Presidential Campaigns

Response Summary Q19	Undergraduate Year				
In this past election, how much attention did (you) pay to news about any "campaigns for President"?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total

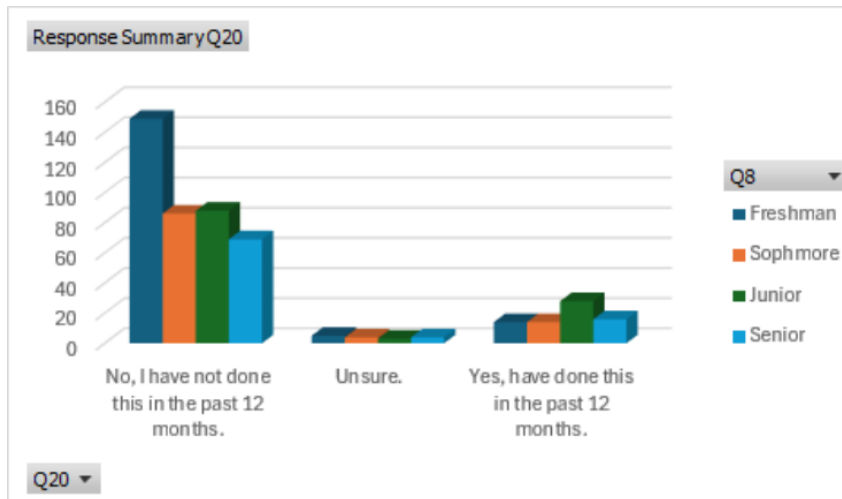
A great deal	23	24	38	23	108
A little	35	16	13	14	78
A lot	45	28	23	19	115
A moderate amount	60	33	41	30	164
None at all	5	3	4	3	15
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q19. In this past election, how much attention did (you) pay to news about any "campaigns for President"?

However, this interest does not appear to translate into direct political action. As shown in Table 6, Question 20 revealed that 81.67% of respondents (392 students) had never contacted a member of the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives, while 15.00% (72 students) reported having done so in the past 12 months.

Figure 9

Contacting Senator or Representative



Q20. During the past 12 months, have (you) contacted or tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives?

Table 6

Contacting Senator or Representative

Response Summary Q20	Undergraduate Year				
During the past 12 months, have (you) contacted or tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total

No, I have not done this in the past 12 months	149	86	88	69	392
Unsure	5	4	3	4	16
Yes, I have done this in the past 12 months	14	14	28	16	72
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

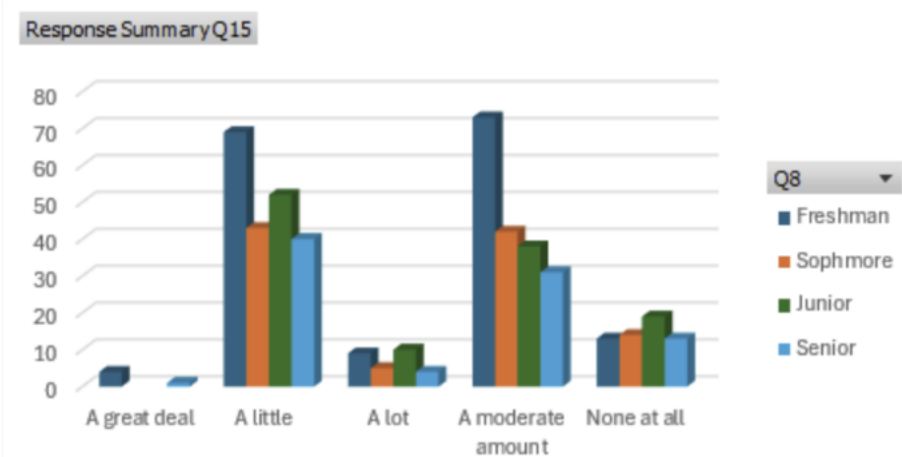
Q20. During the past 12 months, have (you) contacted or tried to contact a member of the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives?

Engagement with Local Government/Politics

Question 15 measures how much each respondent believes that state and local governments listen to and respond to their constituents. As shown in Table 7, based on the graph distribution, most responses clustered around “A little” (204 responses or 42.50%) and “A moderate amount” (184 responses or 38.33%). The cluster indicates that the general UTD student body possesses skepticism about the attentiveness of local and state legislators to constituent concerns.

Figure 10

Opinions on State and Local government



Q15. How much do (you) believe that the local/state government and its legislators listen to people?

Table 7

Opinions on State and Local government

Response Summary Q15	Undergraduate Year				
How much do (you) believe that the local/state government and its legislators listen to people?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
A great deal	4			1	5
A little	69	43	52	40	204

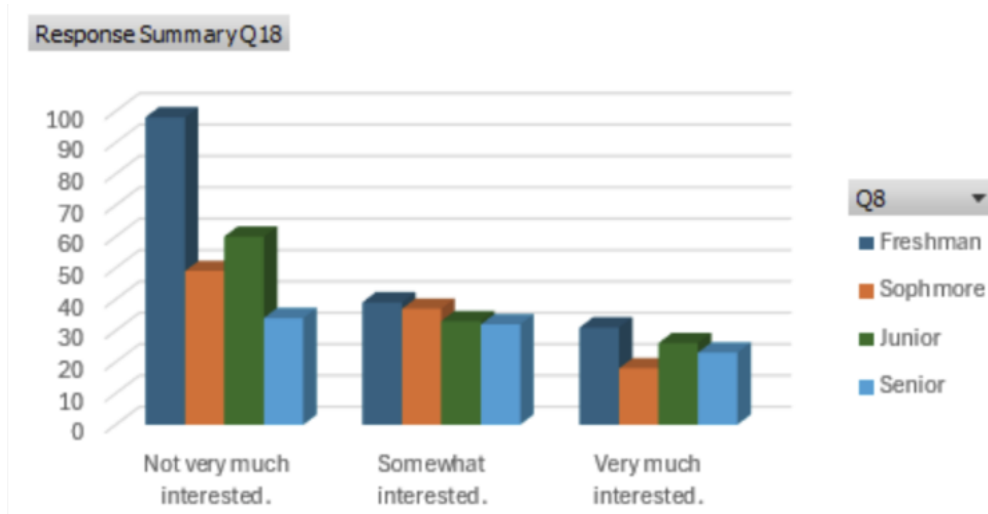
A lot	9	5	10	4	28
A moderate amount	73	42	38	31	184
None at all	13	14	19	13	59
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q15. How much do (you) believe that the local/state government and its legislators listen to people?

This perception may contribute to the relatively low interest in local political campaigns. Question 18 – listed under Table 8- centers on students’ consumption of local political information. 50.21% (241 responses) of respondents reported being “Not very much interested.” However, positive interest balanced this result with 29.38% indicating they are ‘Somewhat interested’ (141 responses) and 20.42% indicating they are ‘Very much interested’ (98 responses).

Figure 11

Engagement with local political campaigns



Q18. How interested have (you) been in local political campaigns this year?

Table 8

Engagement with local political campaigns

Response Summary Q18	Undergraduate Year				
How interested have (you) been in local political campaigns this year?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Not very much interested	98	49	60	34	241
Somewhat interested	39	37	33	32	141
Very much interested	31	18	26	23	98

Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480
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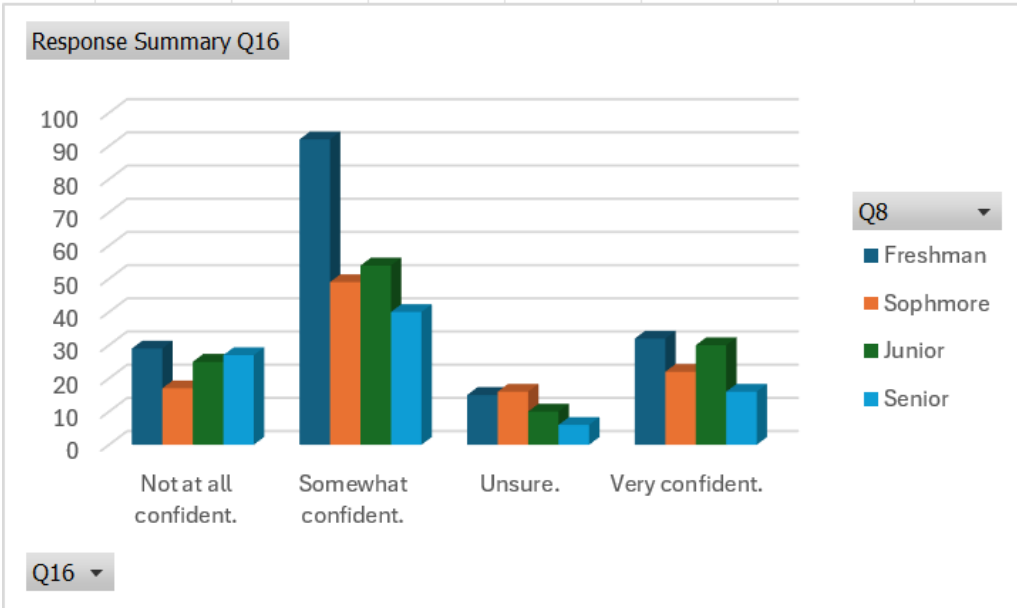
Q18. How interested have (you) been in local political campaigns this year?

Overall, these findings suggest that students are more attuned to federal political developments, and they may view local politics as less impactful or less visible. This difference could be partly due to lower media coverage, given the extremely publicized nature of the 2024 United States presidential election.

Question 16 in Figure 12 and Table 9 was included to test if students felt confident that U.S. elections conducted regardless of locality had integrity (being free, fair, and secure). This measure of reliability could be potentially related to and retested to measure how this confidence applies to the prior question that asked if students were likely to vote on campus. The result shows that 48.96% of students (235 responses) seemed to be “Somewhat”, but not very confident, in election integrity. 20.42% (98 responses) of respondents reported being “Not at all confident”, 9.79% indicated they are “Unsure” (47 responses), and 20.83% indicated they are “Very Confident” (100 responses). These results, if further investigated, could fuel strategy addressing vulnerabilities within on-campus voting that pertain to election integrity. This data could also underpin other voter education mediums that could provide more transparency about the voting process, what the process is at UTD, and assuage any concerns about future campus polling cycles.

Figure 12

Confidence in Election Integrity



Q16. How confident are you that American elections are free, fair, and secure?

Table 9

Confidence in Election Integrity

Response Summary Q16	Undergraduate Year				
How interested have (you) been in local political campaigns this year?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Not at all confident	29	17	25	27	98
Somewhat confident	92	49	54	40	235

Unsure	15	16	10	6	47
Very confident	32	22	30	16	100
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

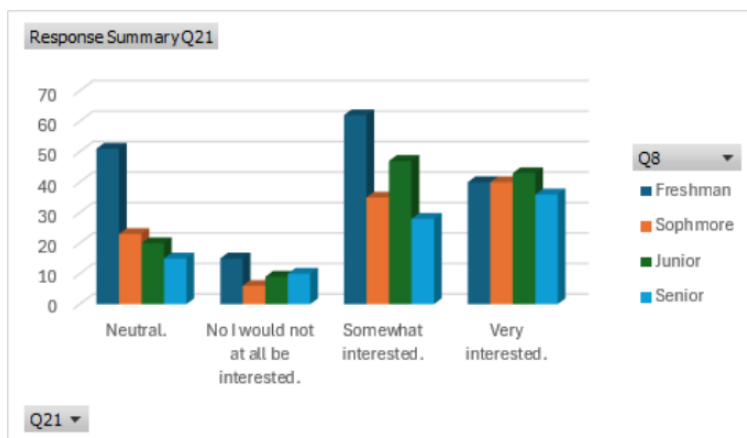
Q16. *How confident are you that American elections are free, fair, and secure?*

Attitudes Toward and Knowledge of Political Officials

Despite low levels of direct outreach to elected officials reflected by Q20 in Table 6, students expressed a strong interest in candidates' on-campus visits and presentations. As shown in Table 10, Question 21 revealed that 68.96% of respondents were either "Somewhat interested" or "Very interested" ($172 + 159 = 331$ responses or 68.96%) in having local or federal candidates visit UTD. This suggests that students may prefer structured, institutionally mediated forms of political engagement over individual outreach.

Figure 13

Student interest in politicians' visits to campus



Q21. How interested would you be in having local or federal candidates visit UTD to share more about their platform?

Table 10

Student interest in politicians' visits to campus

Response Summary Q21	Undergraduate Year				
How interested would you be in having local or federal candidates visit UTD to share more about their platform?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Neutral	51	23	20	15	109
No, I would not at all be interested	15	6	9	10	40
Somewhat interested	62	35	47	28	172
Very interested	40	40	43	36	159
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q21. How interested would you be in having local or federal candidates visit UTD to share more about their platform?

This finding contrasts sharply with the results of Question 20, as shown in Table 6, and may indicate that students are more likely to engage when opportunities are facilitated by trusted

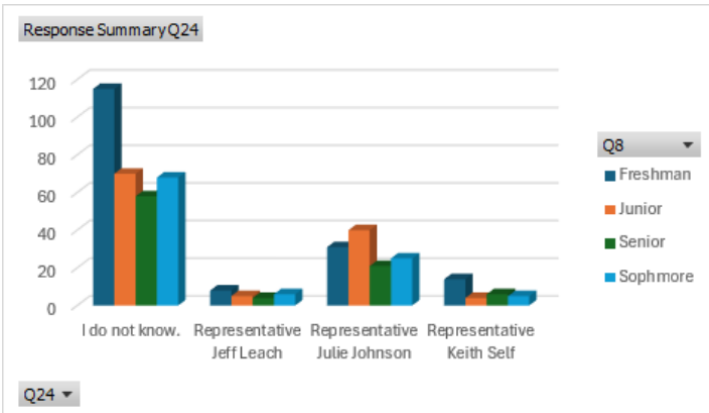
institutions or when they can participate collectively. Through a comparative evaluation of Q20 and Q21, the potential cause of the greater interest in candidate visits compared to a lack of direct outreach may not be attributed to a lack of interest in engaging with elected officials or in local and federal politics. Instead, it may be due to the lack of pre-existing individual student outreach to elected officials, or due to a disbelief in political efficacy that elected officials' priorities will not adjust based on one individual's call or email.

Anecdotal observations from low student turnout at events such as the Richardson Mayoral Debate and the Candidate Panel, which were hosted by UTD's Student Government, further support the idea that passive interest in politics does not always translate into active participation unless outreach to students is highly visible and accessible.

As shown in Table 11, Question 24 assessed students' knowledge of their congressional representation. Only 24.38% (117 responses) correctly identified Representative Julie Johnson as the current representative for Texas's 32nd Congressional District. In contrast, 64.79% (311) indicated they did not know who the representative for UTD was.

Figure 14

Students’ awareness of their Representative



Q24. Please select the current House Representative that serves The University of Texas at Dallas (32nd Congressional District).

Table 11

Students’ awareness of their Representative

Response Summary Q24	Undergraduate Year				
Please select the current House Representative that serves The University of Texas at Dallas (32nd Congressional District).	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
I do not know	115	70	58	68	311

Representative Jeff Leach	8	5	4	6	23
Representative Julie Johnson	31	40	21	25	117
Representative Keith Self	14	4	6	5	29
Grand Total	168	119	89	104	480

Q24. Please select the current House Representative that serves The University of Texas at Dallas (32nd Congressional District).

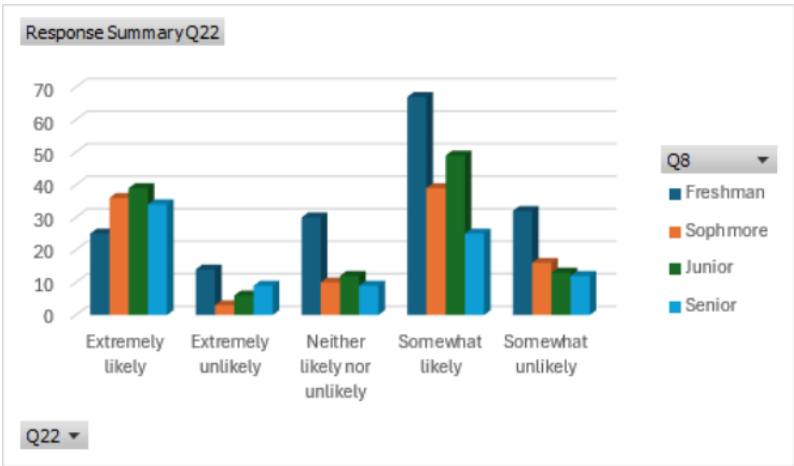
This knowledge gap may be partially explained by the university's commuter population, as students residing outside the district may not feel compelled to learn about its representation. Additionally, this knowledge gap may correlate with students' lesser levels of engagement with local political news, reflected in Q18, or limited outreach to elected officials, as indicated by Q20. Nonetheless, the data reflects a broader trend of limited awareness around local political figures.

Political Discussion

Under Table 12, Question 22 assessed students' likelihood of engaging in political discussions with family or friends. The distribution of responses was again left-skewed, indicating a strong preference toward engaging in political discussion in students' personal lives. A combined 65.42% of respondents reported being either somewhat likely (180 responses or 37.50%) or extremely likely (134 responses or 27.92%) to engage in such conversations.

Figure 15

Political discussions with family or friends



Q22. How likely are you to discuss politics with family or friends?

Table 12

Political discussions with family or friends

Response Summary Q22	Undergraduate Year				
How likely are you to discuss politics with family or friends?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Extremely likely	25	36	39	34	134
Extremely unlikely	14	3	6	9	32
Neither likely nor unlikely	30	10	12	9	61
Somewhat likely	67	39	49	25	180

Somewhat unlikely	32	16	13	12	73
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q22. How likely are you to discuss politics with family or friends?

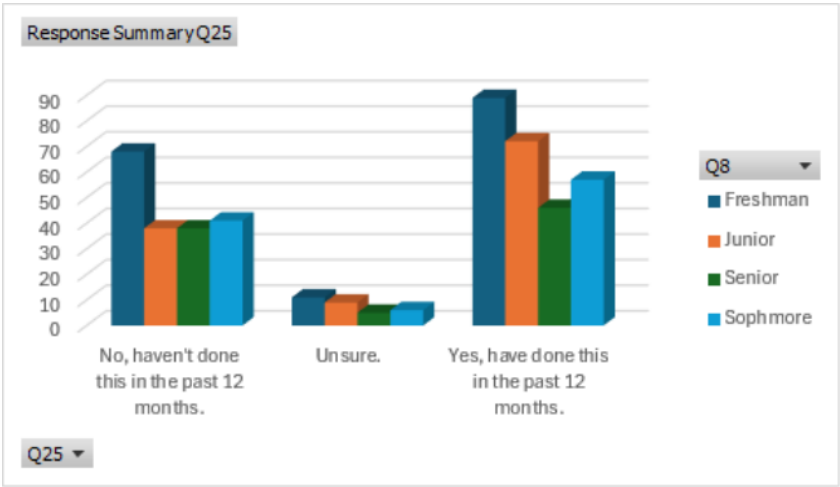
This tendency towards strong engagement in political discourse may be correlated with the broader political awareness observed in earlier sections of the survey. Students who frequently consume political news, particularly at the federal level, may be more inclined to process and interpret that information through interpersonal discussion. These conversations may be more relevant due to the result of the 2024 election and the change from the Biden administration's progressive political approach to the Trump administration's more conservative policies. The prevalence of political discourse among students suggests that civic engagement extends beyond formal participation and into the personal and familial spheres.

Volunteer Work

Under Table 13, Question 25 explored students' involvement in volunteer activities over the past twelve months. The purpose behind including this question is that the concept of civic engagement derives from community involvement, not just attention to local or federal politics and depth of political knowledge. This question serves as a measure of civic engagement beyond electoral participation or attitudes. Most respondents (264 responses or 55.00%) reported having engaged in volunteer work in the past year, while 38.54% (185 responses) indicated they had not.

Figure 16

Students' volunteer work



Q25. Were (you) able to devote any time to volunteer work in the last 12 months?

Table 13

Students' volunteer work

Response Summary Q25	Undergraduate Year				
Were (you) able to devote any time to volunteer work in the last 12 months?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
No, haven't done this in the past 12 months	68	38	38	41	185
Unsure	11	9	5	6	31

Yes, have done this in the past 12 months	89	72	46	57	264
Grand Total	168	119	89	104	480

Q25. Were (you) able to devote any time to volunteer work in the last 12 months?

This relatively high rate of volunteerism suggests a meaningful level of community involvement among the student body. However, some students in certain departments may participate in volunteer work not due to voluntary engagement but institutional requirements. The data for Q25 still reflects a significant degree of civic-mindedness amongst students. Volunteerism, as a form of civic engagement, complements the broader patterns of political interest and discourse observed in the survey.

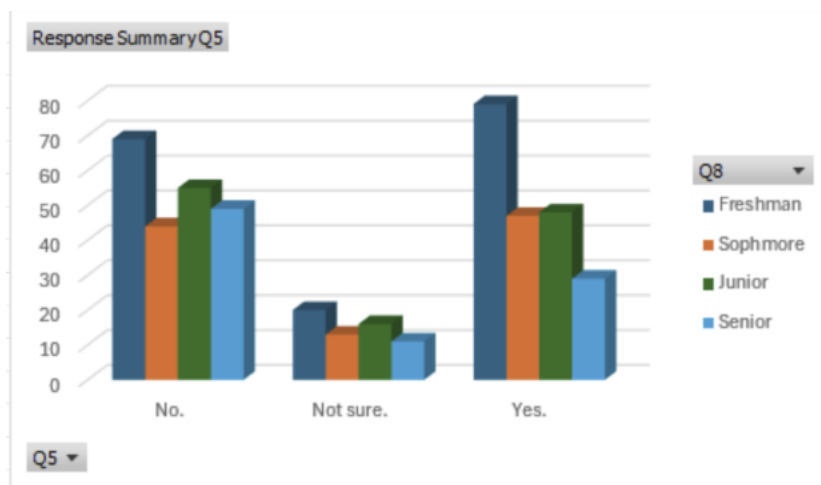
Existing Institutional Support and Interest

The data presented in this study depict an examination of institutional support for civic engagement at The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) and offer what these results could mean for other public universities across the nation. The university has thus far demonstrated a moderate commitment to increasing voter knowledge among its students. In Table 14, survey results indicate that while some professors actively share information about elections and polling locations, this practice is not consistent across all departments. 42.29% of students (203 students) reported that at least one professor shared information about elections or polling locations. A

slightly higher 45.21% (217 students) indicated that none of their professors did so. An additional 12.50% (60 students) were unsure whether such information was provided.

Figure 17

Occurrence of professors sharing election information



Q5. Have any of your professors shared information on elections and/or polling locations?

Table 14

Occurrence of professors sharing election information

Response Summary Q5	Undergraduate Year				
Have any of your professors shared information on elections and/or polling locations?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
No	69	44	55	49	217
Not sure	20	13	16	11	60
Yes	79	47	48	29	203
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

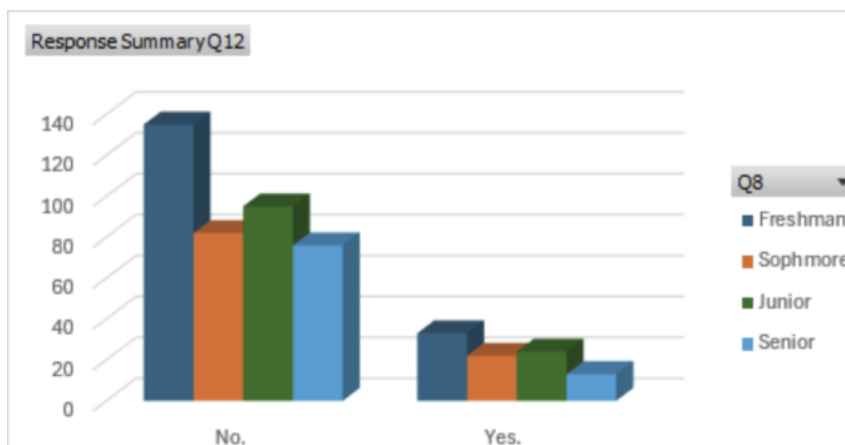
Q5. Have any of your professors shared information on elections and/or polling locations?

This distribution suggests that faculty-driven dissemination of civic resources is inconsistent across the university, leaving nearly half of the students without direct exposure from faculty to election-related information in their courses. The lack of a systematic approach may limit the reach and effectiveness of institutional civic engagement efforts. This data suggests that the dissemination of civic resources varies significantly and could benefit from a more systematic approach.

In terms of programming, efforts to stimulate creativity and innovation are being developed and do aim to succeed in their objectives. The Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL), launched by the School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences and modeled after the D.C. Archer Fellowship Program, allows students to complete public service internships in the Dallas-Fort Worth area while enrolling in two courses focused on civic engagement and policy creation. During the inception of this project, a collaboration with the ICL was established to create two questions on the survey product, testing the awareness of students regarding this program, as well as their potential interest in what the program offers. As shown in Table 15, awareness of the ICL remains relatively low, as only 19.17% (92 students) of respondents indicated they were aware of the ICL, while 80.83% (388 respondents) had not heard of the program.

Figure 18

Awareness of Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL)



Q12. “UTD EPPS department has started a new program called the Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL). Modeled on the Archer Fellowship, students in the ICL take two courses on civic engagement and policy creation while completing a public service internship in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.” Are you aware of this new initiative?

Table 15

Awareness of Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL)

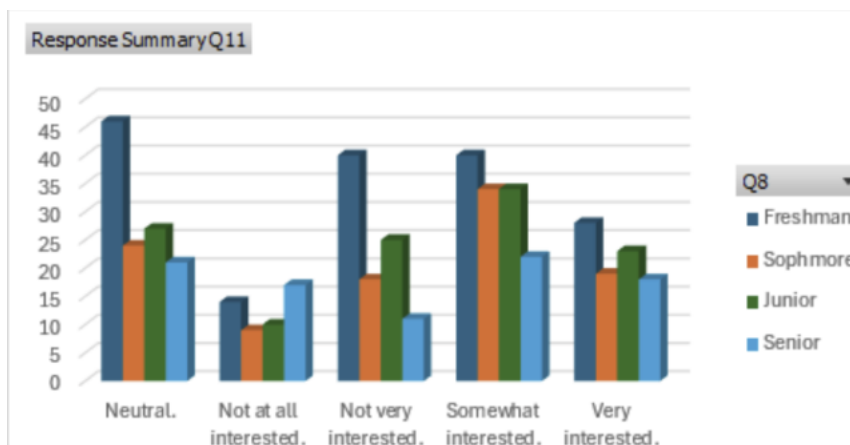
Response Summary Q12	Undergraduate Year				
Are you aware of UTD EPPS’s Initiative for Civic Leadership (CL)?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
No	135	82	95	76	388
Yes	33	22	24	13	92
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q12. “UTD EPPS department has started a new program called the Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL). Modeled on the Archer Fellowship, students in the ICL take two courses on civic engagement and policy creation while completing a public service internship in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.” Are you aware of this new initiative?

However, there is considerable enthusiasm for what this program provides, including internships related to public policy, government, and voter engagement. This may demonstrate a demand for experiential learning opportunities in these areas. In Table 16, about 35.42% (170 students) were “somewhat interested,” while 36.04% (173 students) were “not too interested.” As shown in Table 8, another 16.04% (77 students) were “not at all interested,” and only 12.50% (60 students) expressed that they were “very interested”.

Figure 19

Interest in governmental internships



Q11. How interested are you in university internships regarding public policy, government, voter engagement, or legislative affairs?

Table 16

Interest in governmental internships

Response Summary Q11	Undergraduate Year				
How interested are you in university internships regarding public policy, government, voter engagement, or legislative affairs?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Neutral	46	24	27	21	118
Not at all interested	14	9	10	17	50
Not very interested	40	18	25	11	94
Somewhat interested	40	34	34	22	130
Very interested	28	19	23	18	88
Grand Total	168	119	89	104	480

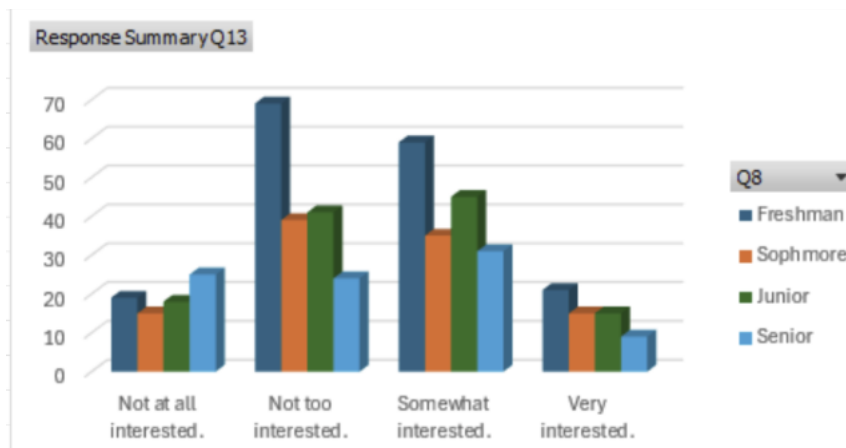
Q11. How interested are you in university internships regarding public policy, government, voter engagement, or legislative affairs?

This pattern suggests that, although direct enthusiasm for the ICL is limited, a sizable group with moderate interest exists, as shown in Table 17. 12.5% of respondents (60 students)

affirm they are “very interested” in the ICL program, while 35.42% state they are “somewhat interested”.

Figure 20

Interest in Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL)



Q13. “UTD EPPS department has started a new program called the Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL). Modeled on the Archer Program, students in the ICL take two courses on civic engagement and policy creation while completing a public service internship in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.” How interested would you be in applying and participating in this initiative?

Table 17

Awareness of Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL)

Response Summary Q13	Undergraduate Year				
How interested would you be in applying and participating in the ICL initiative?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Not at all interested	19	15	18	25	77
Not too interested	69	39	41	24	173
Somewhat interested	59	35	45	31	170
Very interested	21	15	15	9	60
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q13. "UTD EPPS department has started a new program called the Initiative for Civic Leadership (ICL). Modeled on the Archer Program, students in the ICL take two courses on civic engagement and policy creation while completing a public service internship in the Dallas-Fort Worth area." How interested would you be in applying and participating in this initiative?

If this lack of awareness for the ICL program is not promptly addressed, this interest may not be utilized for this specific program, and further civic engagement efforts may not be adequately supported or structured. If the university is to value the creation of a strong and

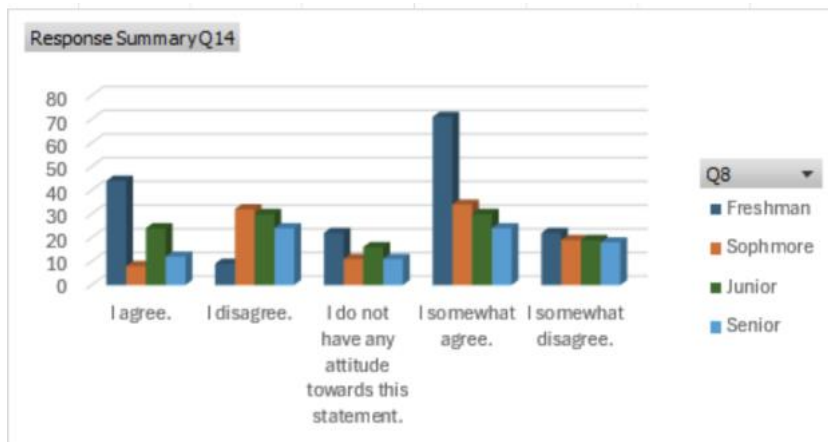
diverse civic fabric, centering advertising of programs like the ICL and the Archer Fellowship program primarily on students in select schools (such as the Honors College, EPPS College, or other social sciences schools at UTD) and not a wider net of students, may weaken that fabric and further increase the barriers impeding all from civic engagement.

Contrastingly, the university does provide basic voting accessibility by hosting polling stations on campus. However, many students indicated that they were unlikely to vote on campus in future elections, and a significant number reported having already participated in recent elections, either during early voting or on election day. These findings suggest that, based on the number of respondents polled, there seems to be a disconnect between students and the basic campus resources provided in terms of campus polling locations.

Finally, the data demonstrated how students perceived both institutional openness to politically diverse opinions and university investment in creating an environment conducive to civic engagement. As it stands, student perceptions regarding the university's investment in an open and fair environment for all political and civic opinions are divided. While 33.13% (78 students) "somewhat agree" and 18.33% (88 students) "agree" that the university is investing enough resources, 16.25% (78 students) "somewhat disagree" and 19.79% (95 students) "disagree." An additional 12.50% (60 students) reported no strong attitude toward the statement, as shown in Table 18.

Figure 21

Student opinions on the university's political impartiality



Q14. Rate your agreement with this statement: The university is investing enough of its resources into creating an environment that is open and fair to all political and civic opinions.

Table 18

Student opinions on the university's political impartiality

Response Summary Q14	Undergraduate Year				
The university is investing enough of its resources into creating an environment that is open and fair to all political and civic opinions.	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total

I agree	44	8	24	12	88
I disagree	9	32	30	24	95
I do not have any attitude towards this statement	22	11	16	11	60
I somewhat agree	71	34	30	24	159
I somewhat disagree	22	19	19	18	78
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q14. Rate your agreement with this statement: The university is investing enough of its resources into creating an environment that is open and fair to all political and civic opinions.

This spread of responses indicates a moderate level of satisfaction that's undermined by significant skepticism. The nearly even split between agreement and disagreement attests to a need for the university to further assess and address student concerns about inclusivity and institutional support for civic diversity.

In summary, the university would benefit from enhancing the consistency of information dissemination regarding civic resources and increasing awareness of available opportunities for engagement. Where the university most needs to fortify its efforts in improving general civic awareness is increasing communication between faculty and students on relevant civic engagement opportunities (such as the ICL). Additionally, the university may need to

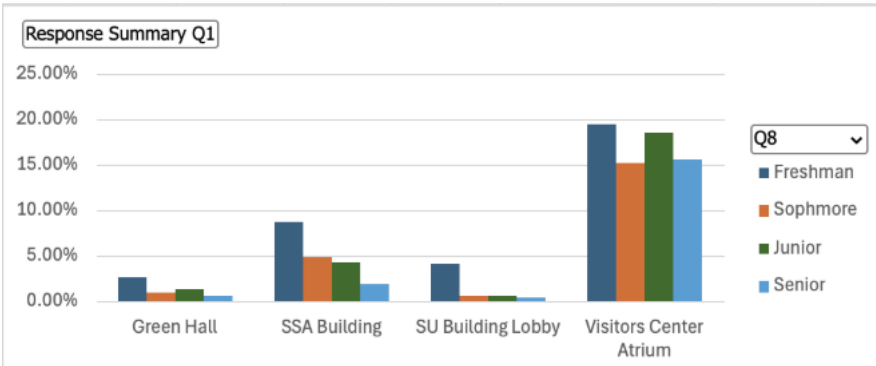
concentrate on efforts to increase genuine civic dialogue. Through doing so, it may possibly widen the avenues of such communication and confidently innovate new points of civic engagement by continuing to test the awareness and rate of civic satisfaction among UTD students both at and beyond the polls. In future iterations of this survey product, questions to test and collect specific data on when, where, and how UTD students feel about engaging in public civic activity, the quality and variety of courses relevant to civic engagement, and whether their university well equips them as voters would prove insightful.

Voter Knowledge

What does the data show about voter knowledge, which includes awareness about the location of polls, who the current candidates are, and their involvement in local and federal politics? The area where students were the most overwhelmingly knowledgeable was on campus polling locations. At UTD, the Dallas County voting location is at the Visitors Center Atrium, while the Collin County voting location is at the Callier Center. Almost three-fourths of students answered correctly for both campus polling centers, regardless of what year or school they belonged to, as shown in Tables 19 and 20.

Figure 22

Voter Knowledge Bar Chart (Dallas County)



Q1. Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Dallas County?

Table 19

Voter Knowledge Bar Chart (Dallas County)

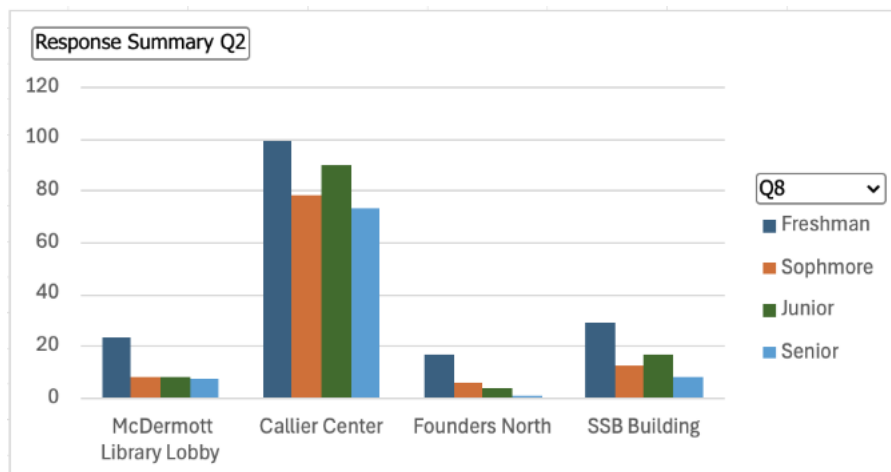
Response Summary Q1	Undergraduate Year				
Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Dallas County?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
Green Hall	2.71%	1.04%	1.25%	0.63%	5.63%
SSA Building	8.75%	4.79%	4.38%	1.88%	19.79%
SU Building Lobby	4.17%	0.63%	0.63%	0.42%	5.83%

Visitors Center Atrium	19.38%	15.21%	18.54%	15.63%	68.75%
Grand Total	35%	21.67%	24.79%	18.54%	100.00%

Q1. Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Dallas County?

Figure 23

Voter Knowledge Bar Chart (Collin County)



Q2. Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Collin County?

Table 20

Voter Knowledge Bar Chart (Collin County)

Response Summary Q14	Undergraduate Year				
Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Collin County?	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grand Total
McDermott Library Lobby	23	8	8	7	46
Callier Center	99	78	90	73	340
Founders North	17	6	4	1	28
SSB Building	29	12	17	8	66
Grand Total	168	104	119	89	480

Q2. Which of the following UTD locations is the polling center for Collin County?

Despite this clear trend, students were equally divided as to how likely they were to vote on campus in future elections. While most students answered correctly for campus polling locations, this was not the case when asked about their local representative, as shown in Table 11. Most students answered, “I do not know,” and about a fourth answered correctly that the local representative was Julie Johnson. This corresponds with approximately half of the students answering that they are not interested in local politics, and an additional fourth of students responding they were “somewhat interested,” as demonstrated in Table 8. Furthermore, when

asked how much they believe state and local governments listen to the people, the most common response from students was “A little,” and the second most common response was “A moderate amount” (Table 7). This data represents a clear disinterest and disillusionment surrounding local politics amongst UTD students. The majority are unable to identify their own local representative, and most admit that they are uninterested in local politics in general. Under Table 10, when respondents were asked how interested they would be in having local or federal candidates visit UTD to share their platform, the results went in a different direction. Over a fourth of students remarked that they would be “very interested,” and the majority of students reported being “somewhat interested.” Very few students said they were “not at all interested,” with the remaining students simply being neutral. This data suggests that students are not opposed to learning about politics, and in fact demonstrates a willingness to learn about local campaigns.

On questions centered around the federal government, UTD students are more likely to report being interested or knowledgeable than on questions about state or local government. Under Table 8, for example, when asked if they’d been interested in local political campaigns in the past year, a significant majority said not very much. Whereas when asked if they had followed federal politics, the responses were mostly split between “most of the time,” “about half the time,” and “some of the time,” with very few saying never, as shown in Table 4. When comparing these responses across categories, such as a school within UTD or what year the students identify as, there is no noticeable change in the pattern of the responses. For the most part, regardless of demographic subcategories within the population (such as year, major, etc.),

students still answer questions fairly the same way across the board. By evaluating this data, a few key suggestions have become clear. UTD students' voter knowledge is not especially informed, particularly on a state and local level. However, most students say they voted in early voting or on Election Day last November, and an overwhelming majority could identify the polling locations on campus. The contrasting nature of these two statistics demonstrates that just because students lack voter knowledge does not mean they are closed off to educating themselves and participating in the voting process. UTD and other public universities that have civic weaknesses substantiated by data should capitalize on this willingness to learn by investing in more programs to educate and spread wider awareness of local politics, not just in isolated departments or interactions, but across the breadth of the university.

Barriers to Entry in Executing Experiment

Since the inception of this project as an idea in August 2024, numerous institutional barriers were recognized that either inhibited or delayed the progression of this project. Firstly, as this was the first-ever student-led initiative made to collect data on student civic attitudes, the existing information about creating a research endeavor like this was only pertinent to higher-level faculty and academic professors. As this is a project orbiting around humanities and the social sciences, the existing student-led research opportunities that were tailored to supporting STEM projects (such as UTDesign Capstone) did not apply. Three out of the four team members on this project are students within the School of Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences, and at the time, the department lacked any clearly visible or accessible programs to help conduct,

develop, or encourage this survey project. As such, the team needed to conduct its own interactions with faculty to gain support. The process of interacting with the Institutional Review Board and obtaining approval was arduous, not only because of the unexpectedly lengthy process and wait time, but also because of the uncertainty and lack of existing guidance on how to accomplish the data collection desired. From start to finish, the process of interacting with and untangling these very rigid institutional barriers lasted from August 2024 until January 2025. Had it not been for this unnecessarily prolonged period of conversation between the faculty and the student research team, the data collection phase could have been initiated much earlier than the mid-Spring 2025 start date. After persevering through this process, the consensus is that if these pathways to conducting certified research are not clearly outlined, encouraged by faculty, and enshrined in a student research mentoring program that interacts with all schools of study (not just STEM-oriented departments), students may find it extremely difficult to spearhead similar university-level research projects. This glaring vulnerability is, in and of itself, another contributing factor in the assessment that the university has room for improvement regarding student-led initiatives to research civic engagement. If other universities with a similar makeup to UTD also lack a similar ease of entrance for students from different disciplines to engage in civic research, that aspect of their civic fabric might also be impacted, thereby limiting student involvement.

Conclusion

As efforts to remove campus polling and redefine civic engagement on college campuses are being set into motion across the United States, university leadership is faced with a new reality and a fresh set of questions. Has enough been done to facilitate the civic fabric of this campus? Do students feel well represented and well equipped as young voters? Has the institution launched new avenues to provide civic engagement opportunities for students to become involved in both their communities and in their career paths? How can one encourage dialogue regarding civic engagement in a way that reaches across academic and community lines?

When tailoring efforts to address the civic needs of UTD students, it is not enough to extrapolate answers to these questions. Instead, collecting data as this team has in this study may result in a broader, clearer, and more well-informed picture. Although the university seems to accomplish the basic level of accessibility in the form of having functioning polling locations and students reporting a moderate level of general satisfaction, much more can be done to improve the communication of vital information regarding not just elections, but other points of engagement for student involvement as well. The behind-the-scenes creation of this study alone underscores the institutional barriers existing for non-STEM students in creating projects that analyze specific behavior of their campus. If these barriers are left unaddressed, vital opportunities for budding researchers to engage in civically focused efforts may be stunted. Similar studies would prove equally illuminating if conducted at universities across the nation. If

similar results are produced, then the above recommendations may be applicable in correcting those vulnerabilities, granted that the unique compositions of the student population and the most sensible methods of outreach to address said vulnerabilities are considered.

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