

Politics on Campus: How Social Hierarchy and Individual Background Affect Political Behavior

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Abstract

Today's college students are our future potential political leaders, and this research aims to identify voting, political participation, and leadership trends among them. With this information we can discover the political traits that this demographic finds desirable in an elected leader, and conceptualize what our future society may look like based on social and political issues that this generation feels passionate about. A survey was sent to 2,000 randomly selected University of Wisconsin-Stout students. Multiple-choice and write-in questions were used to gather the political opinions and participation behaviors of the respondents. It was found that specific demographic characteristics are often related to a set of political ideas and opinions. Where one is placed within the social hierarchy has an effect on views of political leaders, level of political participation, and perception of potential future leadership roles.

Keywords: political leaders, participation, students

Introduction

The presidential race of 2016 was marked by severe political polarization, anti-establishment rhetoric, and passionate protests. It was one for the history books, with a very experienced female democratic candidate, a self-proclaimed democratic-socialist, a businessman without political experience, and another candidate backed by the far-right Christian community. With all the issues faced during the race—women's rights, climate change, the rise of ISIS, the LGBTQ+ movements, and shootings that have sparked gun control controversy once again—all eyes were on the contenders as they competed for the White House.

The race also cast light onto previously overlooked realities in our political system. With anti-establishment candidates at the forefront of the election, a spike in personal monetary donations, and the rise of political riots and protests, it is important to look at our political system with a critical eye. Now, in the wake of presidential turmoil, is the time to look at political

trends in a way that helps develop a greater understanding of political leadership and voter behavior.

Important questions, such as who is most likely to become a leader in our political system, who is most likely to vote and be involved politically, and how our system of politics affects specific populations, can be asked. This study was designed to better understand the political opinions and behaviors of students at University of Wisconsin-Stout. Specifically, the goal was to gather information on the students' political engagement, their ideas regarding an optimal political leader, and their perception of their own leadership qualities. The research can show how college students interact with politics, leadership, and government, and may provide insight into what government and leadership will look like in the future.

Literature: Voting and Leadership Behaviors

The dichotomy between the Democratic and Republican parties surfaced frequently throughout the literature. Sheldon and Nichols (2009) explain that the Republican Party often emphasizes extrinsic values such as wealth, popularity, and image, while the Democratic Party often relies on intrinsic values such as helping and supporting others to attract voters. Haidt (2008) outlines the differences between the parties based on five moral foundations: harm/care (compassion for others), fairness and reciprocity (how others are treated), in-group loyalty (coming together as one unit for a certain cause), authority or respect (social hierarchy or deference), and purity/sanctity (obtaining virtue through certain practices). Haidt (2008) makes the argument that an individual's support for a given political party is a direct indicator of character trait differences, guided by how the individual ranks these moral foundations in levels of importance. Those who identify as Democrat tend to place importance on caring and fairness, while those who label themselves Republican often find loyalty, authority and respect, and purity to be of importance. While Haidt (2008) adamantly reiterates that neither viewpoint is inherently wrong nor right, he does point out that those in lower ranks of society, such as women and racial and ethnic minorities, will steer away from conservative ideologies due to the traditional hierarchies that undermine their freedoms and autonomy.

Related to Haidt's (2008) theory, Winter (2010) explores how political parties have become gendered, as voters tend to associate masculinity with the Republican Party and femininity with the Democratic

Party. Winter (2010) states that their findings "suggest that even when gender is not explicitly at play, citizens' ideas about masculinity and femininity may nevertheless shape political evaluations more broadly than we might otherwise expect" (p. 588). When individuals think or hear about a political party, they may automatically apply gendered characteristics to that party's ideological framework. The gender categorizations continue. Winter (2010) claims that voters "associate masculinity with politics and leadership. The very idea of a political or public realm is constructed in contrast with the private, and the public/private duality is deeply gendered, with the public sphere traditionally associated explicitly with men" (p. 590). According to some scholars, then, both the political parties and the very essence of leadership are intertwined with gendered notions.

Gendering of political parties directly affects who gets into political leadership and what traits those leaders embody. Leadership roles have been consistently defined by masculine individuals and traits throughout the course of both United States and world history. As Winter (2010) states, ". . . the concept of leadership and the political realm itself both carry symbolically male connotations. Perhaps because of this, since the early republic presidential candidates and their campaign have often emphasized their own masculine credentials and tried to undermine those of their opponents" (p. 593). Laufer-Ukeles (2009) states that, "Male leadership is the model we have since, historically, men have been leaders" (p. 499). Since, historically, leadership roles have been consistently defined by masculine individuals, when one tries to acquire a leadership role, emphasis on masculine traits acts in their favor. Voters see those traits as synonymous with leadership, while feminine traits have been historically aligned with weakness and inefficiency. Females, therefore, have a difficult time getting into political leadership, only made slightly easier if they purposefully balance their perceived femininity with masculine traits as a way to gain favor with voters. This gendering of politics and leadership creates an imbalance in representation throughout our political system.

Many scholars discuss the topic of voting and how individuals decide which candidate to vote for. Literature on voting usually takes one of two directions: voters are irrational and ignorant in that they do not gather all necessary information to make informed decisions, or that voters make decisions based, partially or wholly, on their demographics. Caplan (2007), a proponent of the irrational voter theory, argues that "The central idea is that voters are worse than ignorant; they are, in a word, irrational- and vote accordingly" (p. 2). He then states that "the price of ideological loyalty is close to zero. So we should expect people to 'sate' their demand for

political delusions, to believe whatever makes them feel best. After all, it's free" (p. 18). Although Caplan's ideas may seem harsh, they do hold truth in that voters do not always elect leaders who look out for society's best interest. Rather, a voter may choose a candidate that lines up with one important ideological issue, ignoring other factors that should be considered when choosing a political leader. Butler (2012) adds to this theory, explaining that voters do not want to take the time and effort to become informed on candidates, and therefore vote with an irrationally low level of information (p. 33), often just voting for or against one of the two major political parties. Individuals with minimal information often disregard how the candidate will affect society as a whole and instead focus on political affiliation or a select few ideological criteria, leading to lack of cohesion and productive elections (Butler, 2012).

Cutler (2002), however, argues that it is not totally irrational to vote with minimal information on the candidates. Cutler notes that voters can guess the expected utility of a candidate based on sociodemographic characteristics. Individuals can decide who the best candidate is for them simply based on if that candidate looks like them. The perception of shared experiences based on demographics can act as a tool for voters, especially if they do not have access to candidate information. Wallace Abduk-Khaliq, Czuchry, and Sia (2009) points out that if there is an African-American candidate, the African American population votes overwhelmingly for that candidate, especially if they are part of the Democratic Party. Cutler (2002) simply states that "Women are more likely than men to vote for female candidates" (p. 467). Thus, while some theories argue that voters are irrational and lack information, others note that voting for a candidate based on simplistic and widely available information, such as demographics, is not necessarily irrational voting behavior.

Other literature discusses political participation beyond voting. Butler (2012) makes the point that those with distinct political interests will be more involved, stating "In the struggle between interests, small groups with sharply focused interests have more influence in decision-making than much larger groups with more diffused concerns" (p. 16). The groups who have specific needs that are not being met by the government may "have a powerful, direct incentive to raise funds and campaign strongly for the project" (Butler, 2012, p. 28). The social, political, and economic needs of marginalized or underrepresented people are often ignored by a political system that is run by those who are white, male, and heteronormative, giving the marginalized reason to be heavily involved in movements that affect their daily lives. In other words, unmet needs may incite hyperactivity in the

political realm by the underrepresented, as voters, volunteers, and donor. Ditonto, Hamilton, and Redlawsk (2013) point out that women become more involved politically as female candidates make their way into elections, as a female leader may protect their rights and interests more so than a male candidate. Combining the various theories and concepts of different scholars, a series of hypotheses can be made regarding political parties, leadership, and activism.

Hypotheses

Based on the literature regarding how social hierarchy affects leadership, voting, and activism, various hypotheses are drawn for this research:

- **The gendering of ideologies between the two political parties.**
- The parties will be seen as taking on masculine or feminine characteristics
- **Underrepresented groups may be highly present in political activism, volunteering, and voting. Overrepresented groups will be less involved in political activism and volunteering. The overrepresented will participate in voting as it is relatively easy and usually requires minimal effort.**
- Underrepresented groups likely have needs not being met by the current government, and will have to organize together to influence politics in a way that benefits their cause. The overrepresented groups' needs and rights are already being adhered to.
- Those who are part of an underrepresented group will not be heavily involved in political leadership positions.
- Ideas of leadership have been formed around whiteness, masculinity, and heteronormativity, making it difficult for anyone who does not fit those categories to reach a place of government office.
- **If a controversial issue affects the individual directly (example: a woman being directly affected by changes in reproductive rights laws), they will be less likely to compromise. Those in an overrepresented group will be more likely to be involved in leadership roles, as they may be more willing to compromise.**

Methods

A survey containing 32 questions divided into four separate sections (demographics, ideal political leadership, political participation tendencies, and the individual's perceived leadership characteristics) was used for data collection. The questions were mostly multiple choice, with one ranking and

one asking for participants to check all that applied. Most questions included an optional text box so participants could write thoughts they had about the given question. While it was made clear that the survey was not mandatory, it was marketed as a way for students to explain their political opinions without judgement or fear of repercussions.

The survey was emailed to 2,000 randomly selected students; 220 completed the survey (11% response rate). Males provided a majority of responses at 56.4% (128), females at 39.2% (89), and 1.3% (3) refrained from answering. Most participants were in the age range of 18-22, making up 60.8% (138) of the responses. The participants were relatively evenly distributed across year in school, with roughly 20% of the respondents in each category. The respondents were predominately Caucasian at 89.4% (203), with 1.3% (3) African American/Black, and 3.5% (8) Pacific Islander/Asian. Native American, Hispanic/Latino, Arab/Middle Eastern, and Refrain from Answer all holding 0.4% (1) individually.

Most people categorized themselves as Democrat, 38.3% (87), or Republican, 26.9% (61), with 5.7% (13) Libertarian. Many said that they were unsure of their party, 11.5% (25), and others wrote in answers that were not listed, including Progressive, Independent, Socialist, Green, and Independent Conservative. See Table 1 for complete demographic breakdown.

		N=220	%
Sex	Male	128	56.4
	Female	89	39.2
	Refrain	3	1.3
Age	18-22	138	60.8
	23-32	44	19.4
	33-42	17	7.5
	43-52	10	4.4
	53+	8	3.5
Year	Freshman	41	18.1
	Sophomore	47	20.7
	Junior	48	21.1
	Senior	45	19.8
	Five +	39	17.2
Race	Caucasian	203	89.4
	African American/Black	3	1.3
	Pacific Islander/Asian	8	3.5
	Other/Refrain	4	1.6
Party	Democrat	87	38.3
	Republican	61	26.9
	Libertarian	13	5.7
	Unsure	25	11.5

Table 1 Complete Demographics

Data Analysis

Answers were analyzed to show relationships between demographics, behaviors, and values, while the write-in answers gave insight into general core values and prevalent ideas. Few respondents identifies as a member of a racial or ethnic minority or as a transgender or non-binary gender. Because of this lack of diversity, the categories of 'underrepresented groups' and 'overrepresented groups' were divided along the lines of sex, where females acted as the underrepresented group and males acted as the overrepresented groups. This division can give general insight into how social hierarchies affect political involvement.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Gendered Politics

The gendering of political parties was analyzed using binary logistic regression. Females were more than twice as likely as males to label themselves as Democrats (sig. 0.004). Participants were also asked to rank a set of eleven political leader traits in order from most to least important according to their own opinion. The traits list consisted of three feminine/Democratic traits (*caring, values fairness and equality, respects diversity*), three neutral traits (*honest, highly educated with at least a bachelor's degree, ethical*), and five masculine/Republican traits (*tough on crime, authoritative, has proud religious affiliation, loyal to group, and embraces tradition*). While the traits are not inherently masculine or feminine, many of the traits were chosen due to their historical gendered connotations that were discussed earlier in the paper. Analyzing how groups organized the traits was carried out through ordinal regression. Democrats were less likely to place the *authoritative trait* (sig. 0.00), *loyal trait* (sig. 0.033), and *religious trait* (sig. 0.001) in their top five leadership traits, when compared to Republicans. Democrats were over ten times more likely to place the *values fairness/equality trait* in their top five (sig. 0.0005), and twice as likely to put the *caring trait* in the top five (sig. 0.037). These tendencies of trait ranking between the political parties insinuate a gendered ideology of the parties. The average rankings of leadership traits according to sex and political party can be seen in tables (2) and (3).

	Female	Male
1	Honesty	Honesty
2	Ethical	Ethical
3	Values Fairness/Equality	Caring
4	Respects Diversity	Values Fairness/Equality
5	Highly Educated	Highly Educated
6	Caring	Tough on Crime
7	Tough on Crime	Respects Diversity
8	Authoritative	Authoritative
9	Loyal to Group	Loyal to Group
10	Embraces Tradition	Embraces Tradition
11	Religious Affiliation	Religious Affiliation

Table 2 Important Leadership Traits in Order: Sex

	Democrat	Republican
1	Honesty	Honesty
2	Ethical	Ethical
3	Values Fairness/Equality	Authoritative
4	Respects Diversity	Tough on Crime
5	Highly Educated	Highly Educated
6	Caring	Values Fairness/Equality
7	Tough on Crime	Caring
8	Loyal to Group	Loyal to Group
9	Authoritative	Respects Diversity
10	Embraces Tradition	Religious Affiliation
11	Religious Affiliation	Embraces Tradition

Table 3 Important Leadership Traits in Order: Party

Social/Political Issue	Overall Frequency (n=220)	Female(n=89) /Male(n=128)		Democrat(n=87) /Republican(n=61)	
		F	M	D	R
Economic Growth	61.4% (135)	45%	71.8%	51%	77%
Protecting the Environment	53.6 (118)	57	49	69	26
Substance Legalization	24.5 (54)	19	28	31	15
Foreign Policy	45 (99)	31.5	55.5	39	57
Funding Education	61.4 (135)	66	57	75	46
Illegal Immigrant Removal	20 (44)	10	26.5	7	42.5
Gay/Non-Binary Rights	38.1 (84)	51.6	27	58.5	10
Fighting Racism	44.5 (98)	59.5	33.5	68	15
Gender Equality/Women's Rights	47.7 (105)	64	34	69	25
Protecting Reproductive Rights	35 (77)	48	25	52	13
Protecting Gun Rights	40 (88)	28	48	16	72
Limiting Government Power	36.8 (81)	23.5	45	23	64
Environmental Justice	40 (88)	49	32	55	13

Table 4 Important Social and Political Issues

Involvement and Activism

The question attachment to social and political issues was analyzed to understand the motivations behind activism and leadership. Binary logistic regressions indicate females were over two and half times more likely than males to see human rights issues in a broad sense, including gender equality, reproductive rights, fighting racism, and LGBTQ+ rights, as important (sig 0.001). Females were three and a half times more likely to see gender equality as important (sig 0.0005), and almost three times more likely to see reproductive rights as important (sig. 0.0005). They were also about half as likely to view non-human rights issues, including gun rights, foreign policy, and limiting the government, as important (sig 0.002). Finally, females were over twice as likely as males to view environmental justice as an important issue (sig. 0.008). Table (4) lists the complete analysis of social and political issues by sex and political party.

Regarding political participation, respondents were asked if they ever volunteered for or donated to a political campaign. Only 17.2% said that they had donated, and only 9.7% said that they had volunteered. Because of small reported participation in these activities, no statistically significant information regarding gender, race, and participation can be gained. In regards to voting, however, females were less likely than males to vote in federal and state elections (sig. 0.034). They may have also been less likely to vote in local elections, but the relationship was statistically insignificant (0.558). This finding provides some confirmation of the hypothesis that the overrepresented group will be involved in voting as it is easy and accessible to them.

Involvement in social and political issues may also be seen through the route of activism; participants were asked if they would label themselves as an activist. There was no significant relationship between gender and labeling oneself as an activist, meaning the hypothesis positively relating underrepresented groups to activist tendencies was not supported. The binary logistic regression results further showed that issues people found important were mostly unrelated to activism. The only significant relationship was between seeing LGBTQ+ rights as important and activism. People who valued LGBTQ+ rights were over five times more likely to label themselves as an activist than those who did not mark that issue as important (sig. 0.051). This may provide some support for the hypothesis in that those in the LGBTQ+ community or those with friends in that underrepresented community are more likely to be in positions of activism in an effort to meet the underrepresented peoples' needs. Finally, the respondents who were in an on-campus organization or club were almost 24 times more likely to label themselves as an activist than those not in clubs or organizations.

Leadership

Logistic regression indicated no relationship between political party affiliation and an individual believing that they would be a good political leader. Women were roughly half as likely as men to view themselves as good political leaders (sig. 0.027), partially confirming the hypothesis that those in underrepresented groups will not be in leadership positions or feel they cannot take up leadership positions. Those who labelled themselves as an activist were more likely to see themselves as a good political leader than those not labeling themselves as activists (sig. 0.004). Respondents in an on-campus organization or club were more likely to view themselves as a good political leader than those not involved (sig. 0.007). This may indicate either that those with leadership personalities are attracted to group organizations, or that being part of a group effort promotes feelings of leadership.

Covariate	Exp(B)	Significance (P-Value)
Democrat/Republican	0.906	0.807
Female/Male	0.45	0.027*
Activist/non-Activist	4.73	0.004**
Organization and Club/No Involvement	2.50	0.007*
Limiting Government Important/Not Important	2.178	0.072
Reproductive Right Important/Not Important	0.384	0.039*
LGBTQ+ Rights Important/Not Important	2.70	0.078
Non-Human Rights Important/Not Important	1.865	0.108
Human Rights Important/Not Important	0.905	0.771

Table 5 Binary logistic regressions of what affects feelings of being a good political leader

* significant at $p < 0.05$; ** significant at $p < 0.005$

Test group first, reference group second, $n = 220$

Compromise

The final hypothesis is that the ability to compromise would enable one to work their way into leadership, as they could make adjustments to their political agenda in order to appeal to the largest amount of voters. Respondents were asked if they would compromise on an issue very important to them if it meant getting elected. The relationship between accepting compromise and sex was miniscule and not statistically significant (0.648). There were also no significant relationships between social and political issues people found important and their willingness to compromise. Although Democrats were more likely than Republicans to compromise on certain issues, the relationship was not significant (0.627). Overall, 64.7% of females and 61.2% of males said that they would not be willing to compromise. These findings do not support the hypothesis that those in underrepresented groups would be less willing to compromise based on their closeness to controversial issues.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Of the 220 individuals who took the survey, 84 % used the write-in option at least once. The average number of times those individuals opted to respond to a write-in option was 7.5 times out of 15 opportunities. While there were a wide variety of responses and opinions relayed, definite themes emerged from the participants' thoughts and beliefs.

In regards to the question on ideal political leadership traits, openness and transparency (54), ethical (14), integrity (11), and values equality (10) were the most prominent written-in responses. Least desirable traits of a political leader included dishonesty (27), highly religious (25), corruption and greed (18), and judgmental and closemindedness (11). When discussing voting and volunteering for a campaign, many individuals said that they did not participate because it would make no difference due to the money and power in elections (32). Many also said that voting is necessary to make one's opinion heard (19). Similarly, when discussing if one's voice will be heard through calling and sending letters to government officials, many said that the officials do not care unless there is money attached (22) or because there are too many letters and calls for one to matter (39). Some respondents pointed out that direct contact is the most important resource in telling

officials what a community needs (18).

The respondents were asked if they felt they had the qualities to make a good political leader. Many who they did have political leadership qualities cited previous leadership experience (11), ability to listen and communicate (7), and honesty (9). Those indicating a lack of leadership traits mentioned that they simply did not like politics and did not want government authority (22). When asked what political or social issue they would focus on if they ever ran for office, respondents noted education (22), equal and reproductive rights (20), economic growth (16), sustainability and environmental issues (25), and gun rights (12). As far as compromising on those issues, many respondents thought that it was pointless or wrong (51) to compromise on important issues. However, others noted that there was a time and place for compromise (31).

While not fitting neatly within the bounds of the hypothesis, the write-in responses provide information that offers a glimpse into the thought-processes and feelings of some students. While the quantitative data indicate that some groups feel more strongly about leadership, political issues, and activism than others, the write-ins provided an overall feeling that many people are disappointed by the current government and political systems. Regardless of belonging to an overrepresented or underrepresented group, many students point out that they are misunderstood and not heard by government leaders and the 'other' political party.

Limitations

While the response rate was acceptable at 11%, some groups (racial/ethnic minorities and transgender and non-binary gender individuals) were too small to gather any information from. The underrepresented and overrepresented groups, therefore, were confined to female and male.

It must be pointed out that some of the questions were self-reportative. The participants were asked if *they thought* they would be a good political leader, and if they would *label themselves* as an activist. The self-reported data shows how the respondents see themselves after reflecting on the political systems and political leadership surrounding them. Understanding how people think of themselves can explain how certain groups of people become leaders, activists, or any other number of roles in a self-fulfilling prophetic fashion.

It may also be noted that this study is not representative of a generalized population. The study took place in the Midwest at a small state university, with a majority white campus population. The study is representative of this specific population, but results cannot be applied to a larger general population.

Discussion and Conclusion

The theory of gendered political parties seemed to be represented in this research. Democrats did put the traits of a leader that have feminine connotations—fairness and equality and caring—on the top of their list significantly more often than Republicans. And Republicans put the traits with masculine connotations—authoritative, loyal, and religious affiliation—in their top five more often than Democrats. However, it is unclear as to whether people listed the traits in this fashion because people of those political parties generally find those traits to be more important and the party is essentially built off of those traits, or if the parties are just assumed to be associated with those gendered traits. Women were significantly more likely to be a part of the Democratic Party, as Haidt (2008) notes to be the tendency. It is possible that the high concentration of women in the Democratic Party perpetuates the gendered views of the parties.

This study revealed that leadership is marked by masculinity. Females were half as likely as males to view themselves as a good political leader. While females found issues such as reproductive rights and gender equality to be important, issues that often incite feelings of frustration or need for change, they were still less likely than males to see themselves as making a good political leader. According to Laufer-Ukeles (2009), females are still being deterred from leadership positions because of the historical synonymy that has been created between maleness and leadership. Thus, women should be empowered to use their knowledge and experiences in the form of leadership, rather than being forced into the preexisting notion of masculine leadership (Laufer-Ukeles 2009). To achieve equality in leadership and to be representative of the actual population, we need to overcome the limitations of male leadership and the ideas that only masculine characteristics are suited for leadership.

The issues that individuals found to be important did not have a significant effect on feelings of being a good political leader, further solidifying the dichotomy of sex in leadership. Social and political issues did not motivate leadership. Feelings of being an activist did relate to feelings that one is a good political leader. Those who labelled themselves as an activist were over four and a half times more likely to see themselves as a good political leader. Those who were in on-campus clubs or organizations were almost 24 times more likely to label themselves as an activist than those not involved. Thus, there may be a relationship between feelings of leadership, the activist label, and being involved on-campus. The direction of the relationship is uncertain, however. It is unclear whether those who are in organizations view themselves as activists and therefore see themselves

as becoming good leaders, or if those who see themselves as good leaders are the ones to get involved in on-campus organizations and clubs through activist ideals. Despite the uncertainty in that triangular relationship, it is clear that sex has no significant relationship in feelings of activism or levels of on-campus involvement, but it consistently plays a role in feelings of being a good political leader.

There was no support for the theory that those in an underrepresented group would be more involved in political participation and activism than the overrepresented. The underrepresented group was less likely to vote, and there was no significant relationship between labelling oneself an activist, being in an on-campus organization or club, and sex. It should be noted that results may have differed if there were greater levels of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. While the study shows the political behaviors of overrepresented and underrepresented groups in regards to female and male, it cannot predict the behaviors of other groups.

Finally, there were possible relationships within this research that could not be verified through statistical analysis. Many political participation relationships that are commonplace in major research, such as passion towards a social issue leading an individual to an activist lifestyle, were not significant in this research. Niemi and Hanmer (2010) offer an explanation for these lack of answers, noting that college is a transitional phase in which students often do not fit into commonly analyzed categories used in voter turnout models. Huddy (2001) further notes that student's social identities are fluid. The huge transitions that college students go through may partially explain the lack of significant relationships found in this research.

However, two things resonated very clearly throughout the responses. First, the individuals who took the survey really cared about discussing politics and government. Although it is possible that those who care about politics took the survey and those who did not care opted out, there were still more responses, more write-ins, and more passion than could have been expected. Second, respondents were upset. They consistently cited animosity toward a corrupt government, politicians that are owned by big businesses, the party divide, and feeling like the leaders do not listen to their constituents. The write-in responses reflected that individuals felt their voices were not being heard over the chaos of the 'other side' and that big money was the most important concern for most politicians. This might also explain the lack of political participation and activism found among participants.

The presidential election of 2016 has raised some serious questions regarding leadership, activism, and voter trends. The turmoil that surrounds the campaigns and elections of 2016 force us to look deeper into what social

and political issues are deemed important, how people decipher the best political leader for themselves, and how individuals become activists and leaders in our current political landscape. As potential future leaders and social actors, college students can and should be studied to better understand the trajectory of government and politics. Future research should delve deeper into how the election of 2016 has affected young peoples' perceptions of politics, how young individuals are purposefully becoming activists and leaders, and what students hope to see in the future of politics and government.

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