

AN EVALUATION OF WELL-BEING IN COLLEGE VOTERS  
DURING ELECTION CYCLES

By

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This thesis explores the intricate relationship between presidential elections and their effects on voter engagement and political involvement, focusing on the well-being of college students—a demographic often overlooked in electoral impact studies. By employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates existing research with an in-depth case study at the University of Oregon, this work seeks to uncover how presidential elections affect young voters' political engagement and psychological well-being. Through this research it is transparent that college students experience adverse impacts on their well-being, leading to a call for action. There is a strong desire amount students on college campuses for administration and programs to become more geared towards providing support to meet their specific needs throughout election cycles. As the 2024 presidential election approaches, this thesis highlights a pressing issue and proposes supportive measures tailored to assist University of Oregon students in navigating the challenges of election-related stress. With hopes to contribute valuable insight and potential solutions to enhance student resilience and participation in the democratic process.

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## Table of Contents

Figures.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Research Questions.....	8
Study Overview.....	9
Overview of Voter Behavior and Political Participation.....	9
Significance of Presidential Elections on Youth Engagement.....	9
Purpose of Study.....	10
Preview of Study.....	11
Literature Review.....	13
Methods.....	24
Survey & Case Study Approach.....	27
Participants.....	27
Data Collection.....	27
Statistical and Qualitative Analysis.....	28
Results.....	29
Discussion.....	36
Conclusion.....	44
Appendices.....	47
References.....	52

## List of Figures

FIGURE 1: Gender & Political Preference.....	29
FIGURE 2: Stress Levels.....	30
FIGURE 3: Presidential Outcome Impact.....	32
FIGURE 4: Social Media Exposure.....	33
FIGURE 5: Mental Health Resources.....	35
FIGURE 6: Coping Strategies.....	35

## Introduction

Every four years, on the first Tuesday of November, the United States of America holds the Presidential Election. Across the country, people plan to modify their daily lives to stand in line and participate in a signature privilege of American democracy: casting their ballot for the next executive branch leader. Democracy hopes that through this process, the majority's voice will be reflected through the next four years. College campuses provide a unique environment for new voters to engage in political discourse and advocacy. Students can explore their beliefs through discourse, from clubs to funding forums to protests, many for the first time.

Multiple studies concentrate on organizations or communities that show clear signs of stress and negative mental health impacts in American voters during election years.<sup>1</sup> Stress is defined as “as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation.”<sup>2</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that there were adverse psychological effects on students during the pandemic. At the crossroads of the selection of literature is a gap exploring the lived experience of college students who navigated the pandemic and the presidential cycle. Specifically, if so, how is their well-being affected, and what strategies and resources served as buffers to increased levels of stress and anxiety that resulted from the conditions? The term well-being dates back thousands of years, with complex indigenous understandings through the ancient Greeks.”<sup>3</sup> Even so, there is no universal definition of well-being, but many scholars across disciplines

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<sup>1</sup> Suzuki, S., Hoyt, L. T., Yazdani, N., Kornbluh, M., Hope, E. C., Hagan, M. J., Cohen, A. K., & Ballard, P. J. (2023). Trajectories of sociopolitical stress during the 2020 United States presidential election season: Associations with psychological well-being, civic action, and social identities. *Comprehensive psychoneuroendocrinology*, *16*, 100218. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpnec.2023.100218>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. Stress. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>

<sup>3</sup> Jarden, A., & Roache, A. (2023). What Is Wellbeing?. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *20*(6), 5006. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20065006>

continue to search for one. For this research, the working definition of well-being will be “well-being is a state of positive feelings and meeting full potential in the world. It can be measured subjectively and objectively.”<sup>4</sup> This study relies on a mixed method of inquiry to reveal the lived experience of undergraduate students at the University of Oregon during the 2020 presidential election.

The findings of the current study corroborate the body of research that suggests that there is an increased level of stress and anxiety related to the election cycle in more than 70% of the respondents and a reliance on nature and social connection as buffers to the stress.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, students were unlikely to access university support for mental health. The findings of this study should be used to generate awareness of this phenomenon on college campuses and in the design of meaningful resources to help support students’ mental health through future election cycles. With the insight gained from this study, universities are empowered to continue to foster a climate that promotes political engagement while growing to protect the mental well-being of their student body. This study on the University of Oregon aims to shed light on these psychological impacts, contributing to a broader understanding of how electoral politics intersects with mental health, particularly in higher education. Doing so underscores the need for comprehensive support systems that address the unique challenges college students face during election years, to create a more resilient and engaged community for the future.

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<sup>4</sup> Simons, G., & Baldwin, D. S. (2021). A critical review of the definition of 'wellbeing' for doctors and their patients in a post Covid-19 era. *The International journal of social psychiatry*, 67(8), 984–991. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207640211032259>

<sup>5</sup> Cartwright, B. D. S., White, M. P., & Clitherow, T. J. (2018). Nearby Nature 'Buffers' the Effect of Low Social Connectedness on Adult Subjective Wellbeing over the Last 7 Days. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15(6), 1238. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15061238>

## *Research Questions*

1. What are the key factors that contribute to or hinder political engagement among college students during presidential election cycles?
2. How do presidential elections impact the emotional well-being of college students?
3. What role does social media play in the students lived experience during a presidential election from the perspective of involvement and psychological well-being?
4. What coping strategies do students rely upon to buffer from the impact of election related stress?



## Study Overview

### *Overview of Voter Behavior and Political Participation Among College Students*

Throughout US History, college campuses have been central to the political process and progress.<sup>6</sup> A growing sense of social responsibility, political identity, and activism characterize the age and developmental stage of college students. However, despite these conditions of engagement, voter turnout among young people, particularly college students, remains inconsistent.<sup>7</sup> Factors influencing this occurrence include but are not limited to a lack of trust in political institutions; feelings of disenfranchisement; logistical barriers to voting, and a perceived lack of relevant political knowledge.<sup>8</sup> In addition to voting, college students' political participation extends to political discussion, engagement with political clubs and organizations, protests and rallies, and social media as a platform for political expression and activism.<sup>9</sup> The college environment provides access to diverse viewpoints and a wealth of informational resources which are crucial in shaping students' political identity.

### *Significance of Presidential Elections on Youth Engagement*

Presidential elections profoundly impact political engagement levels among all population segments, including college students. These elections often serve as moments for

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<sup>6</sup> The Global Perspective Institute, Inc. (GPI, Inc.) and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). (n.d.). A crucible moment: College learning and democracy's future. <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/college-learning-democracys-future/crucible-moment.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Symonds, A. (2020, October 8). Why Don't Young People Vote, and What Can Be Done About It? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/08/upshot/youth-voting-2020-election.html>

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, Roy Edward III, "The impact of age, education, political knowledge and political context on voter turnout" (2011). UNLV Theses, Dissertations, Professional Papers, and Capstones. 1400. <http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/3310658>

<sup>9</sup> Alodat AM, Al-Qora'n LF, Abu Hamoud M. Social Media Platforms and Political Participation: A Study of Jordanian Youth Engagement. *Social Sciences*. 2023; 12(7):402. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12070402>

political awakening and mobilization among young voters, driven by the heightened visibility of political issues, the polarizing nature of elections, and outreach efforts.

The significance of presidential elections in influencing youth engagement cannot be overemphasized. These electoral cycles offer opportunities for colleges and universities to urge their students, encouraging voter registration and turnout, and foster a deeper understanding of the democratic process and critical issues at stake. However, at the same time, these campuses can be quiet polarizing. The intense political climate surrounding presidential elections can also contribute to stress, affecting students' psychological well-being and overall campus climate.

### *Purpose of Study*

This study investigates the relationship between presidential election cycles impact voter behavior, political participation, and the well-being of college students at the University of Oregon. By focusing on this specific institution, the University of Oregon, the research seeks to uncover the various ways in which electoral politics intersect with the unique socio-political environment of a college campus. Several core objectives help guide the study:

1. To evaluate the degree of political engagement among college students throughout presidential election cycles, examining both traditional forms of participation, such as voting and campaign involvement, and more informal activities, like political discussions and social media engagement.
2. To investigate what factors, make college students more likely to participate in politics including the role of the university environment, the impact of peer networks, and the effectiveness of campus-based voter outreach and education initiatives. On top of this what are some factors, or rather stressors make college students less likely to vote.

3. To assess how college students are affected emotionally and psychologically by presidential elections. Specifically focusing on understanding how the electoral process and election cycle affects students' stress levels, sense of political efficacy, and overall well-being.

By completing these goals, the study contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of college engagement in election cycles, offers implications for policymakers and educators seeking to strengthen democratic participation and support the well-being of young voters.

### *Preview of the Study*

Throughout the research, there were multiple key findings by using two different methods: a literature review and a case study. A large aspect highlighted was the psychological impact of presidential elections and political engagement. The University of Oregon case study indicates that a considerable proportion of the student population had high stress levels during the presidential election season, which showed up as a variety of psychological symptoms. The tense political climate and worries about the future of American democracy were directly linked to a negative effect on their well-being. As a result of their dedication to their civic duties, several students demonstrated a noteworthy level of political participation, actively searching out information and participating in political discussions and actions. The survey also reveals that, even though students used various coping mechanisms, including seeking support from their social networks, the election caused a sense of divisiveness on campus. A small percentage of students participated in activism, implying that it provided a platform for issues about the upcoming election.

Unlike previous data collected regarding presidential elections, this exploration investigates the effects on college students, who comprise a significant proportion of voter turnout in the United States. This research explores how students look for comfort, including doing digital detoxes, using social media, and spending time in nature. Surprisingly, the study reveals a paradox: students seldom used university mental health facilities, even though they were aware of their stress levels. This suggests a disconnect between the availability of support services and their actual use. The study includes innovative solutions and programs for college campuses to implement to meet the needs and challenges highlighted by the University of Oregon students.

Although previous studies have examined the effects of election stress on a national scale, there is still a substantial hole in data within our comprehension of how these dynamics mainly influence the mental health of college-age persons. National research conducted on various college campuses might offer priceless insights into this. Extensive research of this kind would enable a comparative examination of how different elements—like political allegiances, ideological preferences, geographic regions, and the distinction between public and private educational establishments—might affect the well-being of students in election years. This more thorough approach would provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the consequences of election stress on young adults in educational settings and enhance our awareness of the subtle ways in which it appears in various higher education situations.

## Literature Review

The current body of research is broad and reveals very limited insights related to student well-being; however, does provide general connections about well-being and presidential elections. Additionally, there is some research that reflects on the conditions of different demographic's mental health, post pandemic, including minorities and the elderly across the United States. At the intersection of these sources are the questions explored within this research project and they help to reveal how these pivotal events influence the political engagement and psychological well-being of young adults in academic environments.

Mukhopadhyay's study, "Elections have (health) consequences: Depression, anxiety, and the 2020 presidential election," utilizes the 2020 Household Pulse Survey (HPS) to dissect the nuanced ways in which the political climate, especially during contentious election cycles, can amplify stress, anxiety, and depression across the American demographic. The Household Pulse Survey is an online survey conducted by the United States Census Bureau that is designed to collect data on the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other issues, ranging from topics such as food security, housing, education, as well as physical and mental health.

This study reveals escalated symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety and depression during the period leading up to the election and a subsequent albeit decrease post-election, which serves to underline the profound impact political phenomena can exert on individual well-being.<sup>10</sup> This dynamic is particularly noticeable against the backdrop of the 2020 election, characterized by its unparalleled divisiveness, the overarching shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, and heightened

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<sup>10</sup> Mukhopadhyay, Sankar. Elections have (health) consequences: Depression, anxiety, and the 2020 presidential election, *Economics & Human Biology*, Volume 47,2022,101191,ISSN 1570-677X, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ehb.2022.101191>.

social unrest. The study performed tests and analyses to rule out other explanations for the observed stress patterns, such as possible rises in COVID-19 cases or advancements in vaccination research. By using these tests, it was possible to verify that the changes in anxiety and sadness were indeed related to the election season and not only to other outside variables.<sup>11</sup> The marked uptick in mental health challenges surrounding the election period, juxtaposed with the already elevated stress levels attributed to the pandemic, emphasizes the heightened influence of political uncertainty and societal upheavals on well-being.

Mukhopadhyay's methodical approach of capitalizing on high-frequency, nationally representative HPS data affords a jarring week-to-week analysis of mental health trends, shedding light not only on the immediate ramifications of the election cycle but also on the persistent nature of election-related stress and its broader implications for healthcare systems.<sup>12</sup> The observed increase in mental health consultations and prescription medication usage is evidence to this.

The study uses the Uncertainty Navigation Model (UNM), which provides a crucial framework for unpacking the mechanisms through which election-induced stress materializes. The Uncertainty Navigation Model (UNM) is a theoretical concept that identifies how people handle the tension and worry that comes with being in an unclear circumstance, like waiting for significant results or news. The emphasis on uncertainty as a primary source of distress resonates deeply with the context of the 2020 election, where extended electoral disputes and societal polarization heightened feelings of uncertainty and helplessness among a broad swath of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

American public. However, the research needs to be revised and further investigated.

Establishing conclusive causation to the levels of stress and depression is challenging since there is no suitable control group, and the Household Pulse Survey does not provide information on respondents' political affiliation or even personal voting activity. These factors make data interpretation more difficult to understand.

Despite these constraints, Mukhopadhyay's findings strongly advocate for the tangible health measures for political climates, particularly during contentious electoral periods. It accentuates the imperative need for public health officials and policymakers to heed the mental health aftermath of political events and devise strategies to alleviate these impacts.<sup>13</sup> This could encompass public education initiatives geared towards promoting effective coping strategies or enhancing accessibility and readiness of mental health services to meet increased demands during electoral periods.

Moreover, Mukhopadhyay's research enriches the understanding by emphasizing the necessity for continued inquiry into the correlation among political events, societal dynamics, and public health. Future research endeavors could enhance this field of investigation by integrating more detailed data on political participation and affiliations and by delving into the long-term mental health ramifications of election-induced stress. Grasping these complex interactions is pivotal for cultivating societies ready to navigate the vicissitudes of political transitions without compromising the well-being of their constituents. This highlights the critical

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

need for multidisciplinary approaches in addressing the wellness of young adults in the political and societal context.

The American Psychological Association's "Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis" report paints a clear picture of the heightened stress levels across the United States, a situation greatly intensified by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The survey discusses the pandemic along with pre-existing stressors for Americans, including economic downturns, racial tensions, and political discourse. These all contribute to an emerging national mental health crisis with potentially enduring repercussions. The sense of uncertainty and the heightened nature of these stressors are significantly impacting Americans' mental and physical well-being. The survey reveals that an overwhelming majority of participants view the pandemic as a primary source of stress, with a significant portion reporting escalated stress levels.<sup>14</sup> This response extends beyond the immediate turmoil caused by the pandemic, reflecting more profound anxieties concerning the nation's future.

The spotlight on Generation Z within the report is particularly noteworthy. This group comprises both teenagers and young adults and is reportedly encountering unparalleled stress and depression levels. The profound uncertainty of the future is especially alarming considering their critical developmental phase and stress levels surpassing those of older age groups. Addressing these mental health issues is urgent to avert a more severe mental health crisis. The persistence of previous stressors, such as healthcare challenges, climate change, and societal issues like mass shootings and racial discrimination, continues to exert pressure on the American population. The intricate overlay of these stress factors, further complicated by the pandemic's ramifications,

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<sup>14</sup> American Psychological Association (2020). Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis



points to complex challenges that necessitate comprehensive solutions. Moreover, the report reveals the pressing need for readily accessible mental health services, especially for at-risk groups like Generation Z and individuals grappling with significant financial or employment uncertainties. The increase in negative behaviors and emotional responses warrants the critical need for coping and resilience strategies.

The American Psychological Association’s “Stress in America™ 2020” reports that stress heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic across the United States, which holds significant implications for college voters. Furthermore, findings revealed that in 2020, nearly 80% of adults view the pandemic as a significant source of stress, with two-thirds reporting increased stress levels overall.<sup>15</sup> Even in 2023, 50% of adults still reported being stressed; and for ages 18-24 specifically, “mental health as a stressor was the highest at 72%, which also was the highest among all age cohorts,” (American Psychological Association 3). This ubiquitous stress, compounded by concerns about the nation’s future, economic instability, racial tensions, and political unrest, contributes to a national mental health crisis. Notably, the report emphasizes the pronounced impact on Generation Z, including college-aged individuals, who report unprecedented stress and depression levels.<sup>16</sup> These findings suggest that college voters are navigating complex developmental transitions, academic pressures, and the added strain of a polarized political climate, particularly in election years. The combined effect of these stressors can significantly influence mental well-being and political engagement, reiterating the need for

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<sup>15</sup> American Psychological Association (2020). Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

targeted support to ensure well-being and active participation in the democratic process amidst these challenges.

Hans J. G. Hassell and Jaime E. Settle's study, "The Differential Effects of Stress on Voter Turnout," sheds light on the role of stress in electoral behavior and lays a foundation about the broader implications for democratic engagement among younger populations. Hassell and Settle highlight that the differential response to stress among voters suggests that political participation is not merely a matter of civic duty, rather it is deeply connected to an individual's psychological well-being and life experiences (Hassell and Settle, 2017, p. 535). These findings showcase the need for educational institutions and policymakers to consider the unique stressors that politically charged atmospheres like election years present college students during their pivotal years of political identity formation.

When individuals feel stress, they are less likely to participate in presidential elections, impacting the integrity of the election process. This barrier is particularly concerning in the context of college campuses where diverse student bodies may already face deterrents to political engagement. From lack of information to feelings of disenfranchisement. The research suggests that interventions designed to mitigate stress and foster supportive political engagement could be critical in enhancing voter turnout among this group. Stress management workshops, political discussion forums that encourage respectful dialogue, and initiatives to simplify the voting process could all contribute to a more engaged and informed student electorate. Hassell and Settle's findings invite further exploration into the types of stressors that most significantly impact political participation (Hassell and Settle, 2017, p. 547). Understanding these dynamics can help in tailoring initiatives that address general stress and specific issues that may

disproportionately affect certain populations, including college students. Incorporating these insights into campus programs and policies could lead to a more inclusive political environment among college students. This will, in turn, foster a generation of resilient, informed, and engaged voters--the study serves as a crucial step toward recognizing and addressing the complexity between psychological well-being and political participation, with implications extending beyond academia's confines into the broader fabric of democratic society.

The connection between voting, civic engagement, and overall well-being, as highlighted in the exploration of U.S. Elections and their impact on Americans, offers profound insights into the intricate relationship between democratic participation and individual and community health. The Sharecare Community Well-Being Index (CWBI) notably demonstrates that higher voter turnout correlates with enhanced well-being metrics, such as financial stability, healthcare access, and the strength of social bonds.<sup>17</sup> This association suggests that voting extends beyond fulfilling a democratic duty; it inherently contributes to a sense of empowerment and collective purpose among the populace. Although there is a positive correlation that is observed, it does not necessarily mean that voting directly causes improved well-being; it is possible that within communities with higher rates of well-being, they are more likely to engage in civic activities because they have the time and resources. However, it is also possible that voting in a democracy contributes to a sense of belonging and agency, which improves well-being. More research should be done to observe the various factors and distinguish whether high well-being leads to increased voting or if voting contributes to better well-being within communities.

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<sup>17</sup> Community Well-Being Index, S. (2023, February 7). *U.S. elections: Voting affects well-being among Americans*. <https://well-beingindex.sharecare.com/u-s-elections-voting-affects-well-being-among-americans/>

The challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic shed new light on the barriers to voting, particularly affecting those with lower educational qualification. Additionally, it introduced concerns about health risks associated with traditional in-person voting, which brought forth modernization into the voting process. These developments highlight the urgency for innovative approaches to protect and boost the electoral process. Nobody should be going through, nor should they be not voting because their safety or health was compromised. The pivot towards alternative voting methods, such as mail-in ballots, and implementing safety protocols at polling sites represent crucial steps forward. Just as important is the need to dismantle systemic barriers that inhibit equitable voter participation, and ultimately increase voter turnout.

Amid these challenges, the surge in political activism among younger generations and facilitations by social media's pervasive influence signals a shifting commitment landscape. This wave of activism harbors the potential for fostering a more engaged society where community participation significantly contributes to community well-being. The critical role of voting as a civic responsibility and a cornerstone of individual and communal health becomes evident. Navigating the complexities of the current global health crisis and its ramifications on the democratic process calls for a concerted effort to cultivate a culture of engagement. Such a culture not only ensures that the democratic process is accessible and safe for all participants but also reinforces the foundational link between public participation and the holistic well-being of society. The future of democracy is young voters, those who are 18, who are voting for the first time on a college campus are more likely to engage with politics and thus political discourse if they are in a safe and comfortable environment.

The compelling insights from David R. Williams and Morgan M. Medlock’s article “Health Effects of Dramatic Societal Events — Ramifications of the Recent Presidential Election,” provides clarity about the interconnection between political climate and health. Election campaigns and their outcomes ripple through the fabric of society, influencing the collective psyche and individual health outcomes.<sup>18</sup> This analysis is particularly noteworthy when considering the unique context of college campuses, where the convergence of developmental transitions and political engagement creates a potent environment for such effects.

Williams and Medlock’s work further reveals that political events act as double-edged swords, capable of both uplifting marginalized communities through representation and alternatively instilling widespread stress, anxiety, and fear due to increased societal polarization and racial hostility. This dichotomy highlights the complex interplay between societal events and individual well-being, emphasizing the need for a healthcare model that excels past traditional boundaries to encompass individuals’ socio-political stressors.

The positive impacts of political campaigns on those who are voiceless focus on the potential for inclusive political processes to foster psychological well-being and community healing, as seen in historical elections involving Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, the adverse health outcomes tied to divisive political climates call attention to the urgent need for healthcare systems to adopt a more holistic approach, especially within educational institutions like colleges. This approach should provide medical care and address the

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<sup>18</sup> Williams, D. R., & Medlock, M. M. (2017). Health Effects of Dramatic Societal Events—Ramifications of the Recent Presidential Election. *New England Journal of Medicine* , 376 (23), 2295-2299.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

larger socio-political context affecting students' lives. Incorporating this broader perspective into college campus health services requires strategies that recognize and mitigate the effects of political and social unrest on student well-being. At best, college campuses should be an environment where students can safely express concerns about societal stressors and access support to address them. Williams and Medlock's paper delves into the critical need for institutions to adapt and respond to the evolving health landscape shaped by political events. However, the aim of this paper is to further delve into the niche aspect of college voter's well-being during election years.

The study "How has the presidential election affected young Americans?" by DeJonckheere, Fisher, and Chang adds meaning to the discussion of the emotional and physical toll that political events have on young Americans. It focuses on the effects of the 2016 presidential election season on young people ages 14 to 24. By collecting data based off of text message replies collected at three critical junctures—pre-election, post-election, and four months post-election—this study identifies a recurring theme of emotional stress among young people.<sup>20</sup> The results show a persistent sensation of fear, dissatisfaction, and anxiety, with white and female individuals reporting much greater levels of negative emotional reactions.<sup>21</sup> The fact that these emotions lingered long after the election highlights a serious public health issue and highlights the need for more investigation into the long-term impacts of political developments on the mental and physical well-being of the younger population. These revelations are consistent with the compelling stories from the University of Oregon, where students' mental health is significantly impacted by the heated political atmosphere surrounding presidential

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<sup>20</sup> DeJonckheere, M., Fisher, A. & Chang, T. How has the presidential election affected young Americans?. *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health* **12**, 8 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-018-0214-7>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

elections. This further supports the complex relationship between political environments and college students' mental health before, during, and after elections. The gap in their data is specially looking at college voters and investigating both political participation and well-being, which is where, the case study done as a part of this study fills in that hole.

## Methods

This thesis employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the psychological impact of presidential elections on college voter behavior, political participation, and well-being. The first method being a literature review, examine previous data about mental well-being in the United States along with investigating the effects of presidential elections. Additionally, this thesis employs a case study for the second method. For the case study, I utilized a Qualtrics online survey to gather data from the University of Oregon students with first-hand experience. During the process, I gathered information at The University of Oregon by making barcodes and sharing the survey on social media, displaying them in our student union, encouraging friends and peers to complete the form, and speaking with over 200 individuals. 53 University of Oregon students, representing a range of political parties, gender identities, and presidential election nominees, completed the form, each contributing their distinct perspectives. I asked them 13 questions on their feelings and experiences throughout the election year; 5 were scaled, while the other questions were free response, encouraging participants to think about their answers. The scaled questions provide an organized framework for research, which made it possible to pinpoint recurring patterns and validate the central hypothesis—that students experience major stress during election years, reflecting more significant national tendencies. Meanwhile, the students’ open-ended answers provided a glimpse into their experiences and illuminated how the election year affected their well-being. The wide range of responses demonstrates the inclusive character of the study and significantly contributed to our comprehension of the extent of well-being issues and providing context for the emotional climate of election year.

The qualitative data deepens the understanding gained from statistical analysis of quantitative data and illuminates the complex emotional and cognitive landscapes navigated by college voters



during election periods. While the study was carefully crafted, inherent limitations exist, such as the potential biases intrinsic to self-reporting methodologies and the cross-sectional design's constraints in establishing causality. Additionally, the college environment's specific context and demographics may limit the findings' applicability.

On a scale of 1 to 10, survey participants were asked to score several elements of their experiences during the 2020 presidential election to offer a nuanced quantification. A value of "1" represents a minor or insignificant impact, influence, or degree of stress, while a value of "10" represents a severe or high level. Because of this range, participants can convey variations in their emotions or experiences, which enables a thorough analysis of the survey replies. The data analysis is also more precise using this scale, making it easier to spot trends and patterns in college voters' psychological well-being and political participation throughout the election season.

Free-response questions were employed to further draw upon personal election experiences, spotlight the importance of media influence, and recognize the existence of various coping strategies. These qualitative observations round out the quantitative data and provide a more thorough picture of the election's many effects. The poll provides a more comprehensive understanding of the election experience by combining numerical evaluations with personal narratives. This showcases the variety of emotional and cognitive reactions among students and offers a more profound framework for evaluating the numerical results.

The survey's multiple-choice questions that pertained to effectiveness or influence were designed to uncover how successful respondents' coping mechanisms were throughout the election season and the impact of media exposure on their mental health. Predefined response alternatives were provided in these questions to allow participants to classify their experiences within a systematic framework. This made it easier to quantify and compare data across survey respondents.

Options ranged from “Not effective at all” to “Extremely effective” for the question regarding coping strategy outcome. Using this measure, respondents could assess how well their strategies—such as exercising, reaching out to friends and family, or consuming media—worked to reduce stress and anxiety associated with the presidential election. The goal was to determine the most helpful approaches and suggest possible stress-reduction tactics in upcoming election situations.

Regarding the effect of media exposure, the options ranged from “No Influence” to “High Influence.” These questions aimed to ascertain how students’ emotional reactions to the election were influenced by the information they consume from news sources, social media sites, and other sources. The answers shed light on how much media narratives and participation increased or decreased stress associated with the election. It provides an insight into the media’s broader effects on voters’ political psychology and conduct in their college years.

This thesis allows for a more dynamic understanding of how electoral politics influence student populations over time. It also provides insights into the evolving nature of political discourse and its psychological implications on young voters. This approach enriches academic discussions on political psychology and student engagement and provides actionable insights for enhancing support systems and educational initiatives on college campuses. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of political participation and its effects, this thesis fosters a more politically active, informed, and resilient student body in the face of electoral dynamics.

Through stringent adherence to IRB guidelines and transparent communication with participants regarding the study’s objectives, procedures, and their rights, ethical integrity is a foundational pillar of this research. Informed consent is a prerequisite for participation, ensuring respondents are fully aware of the nature and scope of their involvement.

### *Survey and Case Study Approach*

This study employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates case study methodologies along with a literature review to explore the experiences and perspectives of University of Oregon students, along with a comparison to other demographics with previous data. The survey aims to gather quantitative data on various variables, including mental health and campus engagement and support the case study. To further add context to the case study the free response questions delve deeper into individual experiences and provide a qualitative understanding of the students' lives and challenges. This combined approach will enable a comprehensive analysis, capturing general trends within the United States along with nuanced personal experiences through the case studies.

### *Participants*

The pool of participants consists of University of Oregon students across various academic disciplines. Although all students are representative of the one college campus, the study still aims to include a diverse sample of participants in terms of gender, age, academic discipline, and year of study. There have been efforts will be made to ensure that the sample represents the broader student population to capture a wide range of student experiences and perspectives. Participants must be 18 or older as of November 2020, voted in the 2020 presidential election, and have been physical on the University of Oregon campus in 2020.

### *Data Collection*

Survey participation was pursued electronically through university email lists, social media platforms, and student groups in an effort to reach a broad and varied audience within the

University of Oregon community. Participation was voluntary, emphasizing confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest and open responses.

### *Statistical and Qualitative Analysis*

First, survey responses are analyzed using Qualtrics. Next, I created graphs in order to identify patterns and trends among the variables that emerged like stress, media concussion, and overall well-being. Descriptive statistics were first used to investigate different populations as a means to provide an overview of the data, while inferential statistics were used to test my hypotheses and explore relationships between variables.

For qualitative data from open-ended survey questions, thematic analysis will be conducted to identify key themes and insights. This involves identifying patterns and interpreting findings in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks from previous research. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data will offer a holistic view of the research questions, providing both breadth and depth in the analysis.

## Results

This University of Oregon case study provides valuable insights into student experiences during presidential election years. Results uncover the increase in students' stress levels, emphasizing the need for more comprehensive campus support systems for election season. These additional services are crucial for protecting students' mental and physical health throughout the election process. The respondents' demographic split may give insight into the variety of viewpoints present at this institution. Most participants expressed a wide range of political opinions, of whom, shown in Figure 1, 74% (39 respondents) identified as female and 26% (14 respondents) as male—96% of participants identified as Democratic, while 4% identified as Republican. Regarding the presidential candidates, 93% of voters supported Joe Biden, 4% voted for Donald Trump, and 2% voted for a third-party candidate. The political preferences of participants highlight the wide range of opinions and preferences within the campus community. The information provides a framework for comprehending the wider effects of election-related stress and the critical need for all-encompassing support systems designed to meet the difficulties associated with election years on college campuses.

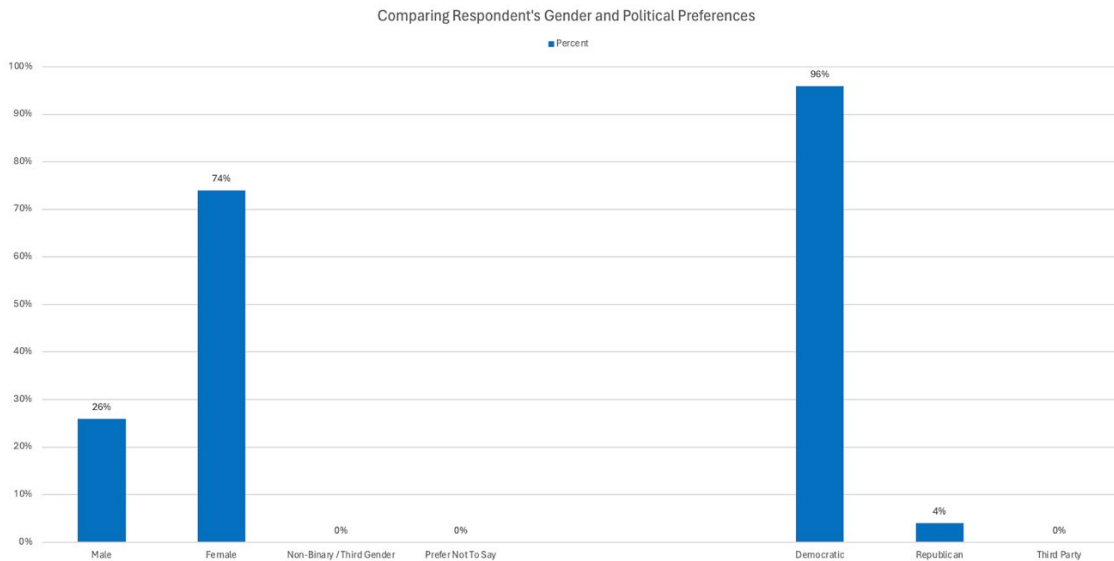


Figure 1: Gender & Political Preference

In Figure 2, students' perceived stress levels during the 2020 presidential primary election are displayed on a scale below. The x-axis represents the level of impact, with 1 indicating minimal impact while ten being the most severe, and the y-axis represents the percentage and number of respondents. With most students reporting greater stress levels, the distribution of answers shows a considerable skew towards higher stress. Remarkably, 47% of participants assessed their stress levels as 8-10, signifying extreme stress. A lower percentage—just 5% at level 1 and 3% at level 2—report minor stress compared to this high-stress indicator. These numbers highlight the tremendous pressure that young voters may face during election years, indicating the need for more robust support networks to assist students in navigating the psychological effects of such significant social events.

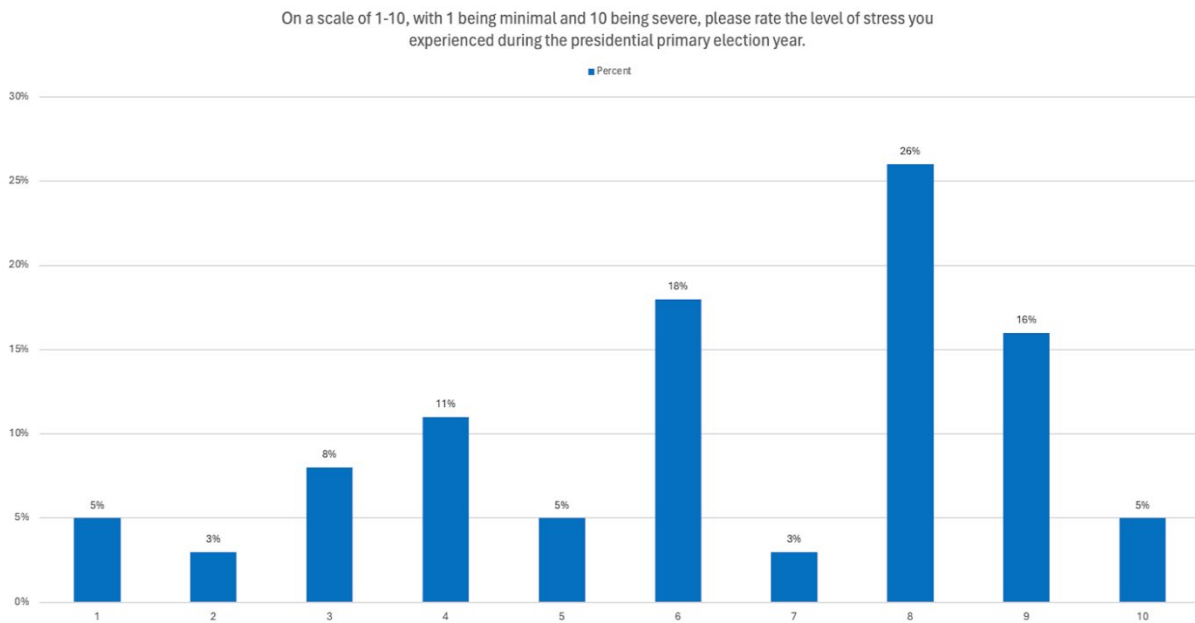


Figure 2: Stress Levels

The psychological effects of the presidential election result on first-time voters are graphically shown in Figure 3, which has the same axis criteria as Figure 2. According to the statistics, most respondents reported a significant influence on their mental health, with 29% of participants reporting a big impact and giving their experience a 7 out of 10. 50% of respondents reported extremely high effect, scoring between seven and ten. This shows that the election results significantly impacted a sizable section of the student body, which may have impacted their mental health and academic performance. On the other hand, the lower end of the scale has an equal distribution, with 5% of responses falling into each category 1 through 3, suggesting that a smaller percentage of students felt just a little impact from the election outcome. These comments demonstrate the divergent emotions throughout the student body, emphasizing the significance of providing focused assistance to those most impacted. The underlying trends of these percentages indicate a spectrum of feelings, from confusion to hopelessness to fear, reflecting the relationship between personal well-being and the political climate. On top of this data, the free response questions leave it unquestionable that there is a negative influence on student's well-being. Students who filled out the survey reflected that they were "stressed because of the uncertainty and the political polarization at face with the parties.... [as well as being] stressed of everyone else's reaction and tension in society,". Overall students "mental health declined during the election," and was an "overwhelming experience" because of the "information/misinformation about the election,". The "not knowing was the worst of it,".

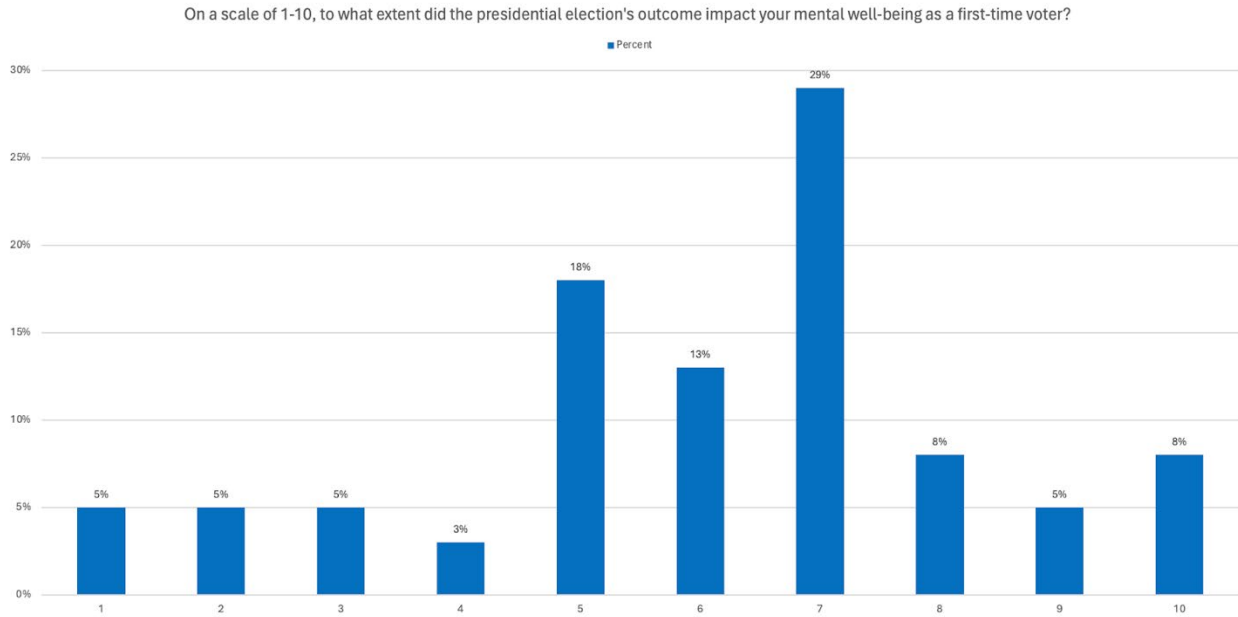


Figure 3: Presidential Outcome Impact

Figure 4 offers valuable information about how media exposure and social media use affected students' mental health throughout the election year. A student revealed in the survey stating that "it felt like the world around me was exploding, every time I opened up the News app on my phone. Every day brought about a new headline sensationalizing, or emphasizing the fact that quotations this event is truly unprecedented, quotations and how 2020 would determine the outcome of not just the next four years but the remaining 40 or 400 years of America. The language used in these articles was very draining and I was often fatigued from hearing the same all or nothing messages. It was also overwhelming as an 18-year-old, entering the world of politics and wondering what hell-scape I had just inherited". This response is why this data is so important to collect. Media exposure has a negative impact on well-being year-round, but it is clear it does so much more during presidential elections. According to the data, 29% of participants reported feeling highly influenced by media exposure, indicating that the information they ingested on these platforms substantially impacted their mental well-being. Another 45% of respondents felt that the influence was average,



which moderately affected their well-being. On the other hand, 16% of participants said they had no effect, which suggests that these people were either less exposed to or less impacted by election-related media stories and social media conversations. A smaller percentage (10%) felt the impact was minimal. The findings highlight the significant impact that media, particularly social media, may have on the mental health of young voters, especially during an election year, as it is known for heated political rhetoric and extensive media coverage. Students even responded to the free response question regarding media exposure by stating “the media is one of the worst parts of politics,” and that it even in some cases “exacerbated hopelessness”. Even those who would go on social media hoping to get away from the atmosphere on campus were met with “media that greatly impacted [their] mental health]”. The numbers and responses show how important it is to provide political newcomers with mental health and media literacy tools so they can make sense of the endless amount of information and abundance of opinions online.

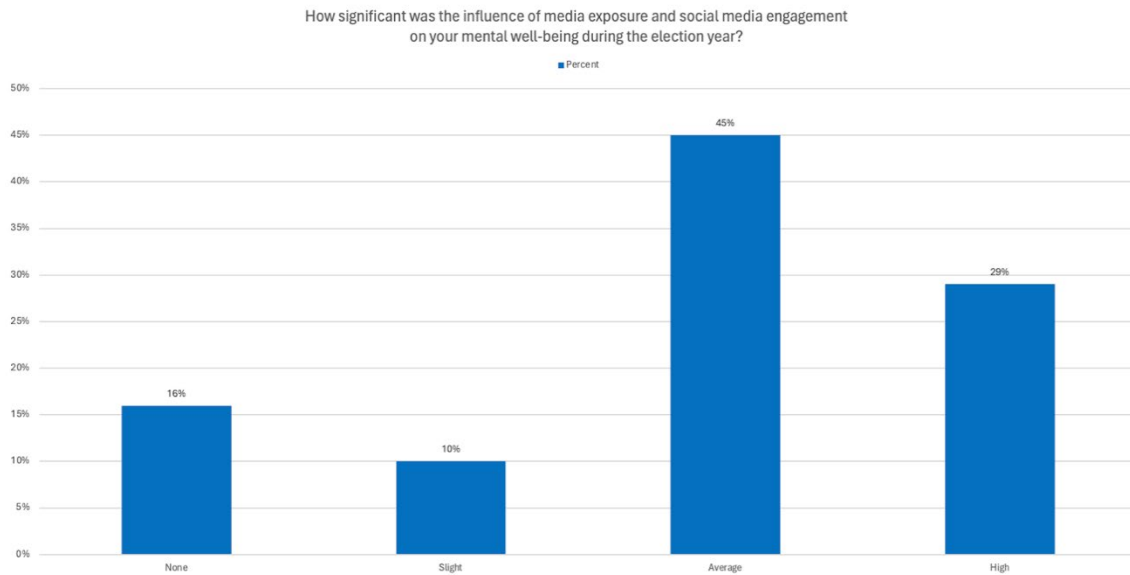


Figure 4: Social Media Exposure

Figures 5 and 6, when compared, tell a powerful story about the availability—or lack thereof—of mental health support networks on college campuses throughout election seasons. Students strongly agree that mental health resources should be available during election seasons, as seen in Figure 5, which measures this sentiment. Approximately 62% of respondents think providing services and support networks to college students to address their mental health needs during these potentially turbulent periods is either “very important” or “extremely important.”

Figure 6, on the other hand, presents additional insight into how mental health resources are used. The disconnect lies here; most students did not use campus services or seek treatment for their mental health issues during an election year; some students attributed this to not knowing about these resources. The following comment from a student best shows this gap: “I would have liked to use some support, but I was not aware of what was available to me.” Universities should address this communication barrier considering the disparity between the underutilization of mental health services (as indicated by Figure 6) and the acknowledged need for resources (as demonstrated by Figure 5). Based on the findings, it appears that although students recognize the need for mental health care, particularly during stressful occasions like elections, educational institutions may not be giving enough accessible alternatives or sufficient information about the services available to them. Overall, the survey free response questions helped further illuminate how people cope with the stress and anxiety of significant societal events like a presidential election. Students ranged from “talking about it,” “going on walks and listening to music,” and even for some “watching the debates and looking at polls,” in order to stay informed helped them cope with the anxiety of the election. While there were common themes such as physical activities and seeking support from others, the challenge of being able to escape from the reality of the election remained a persistent issue. Colleges must assist in

ensuring students are successful and provide easy access to tools for success—including resources during election years to help with student well-being.

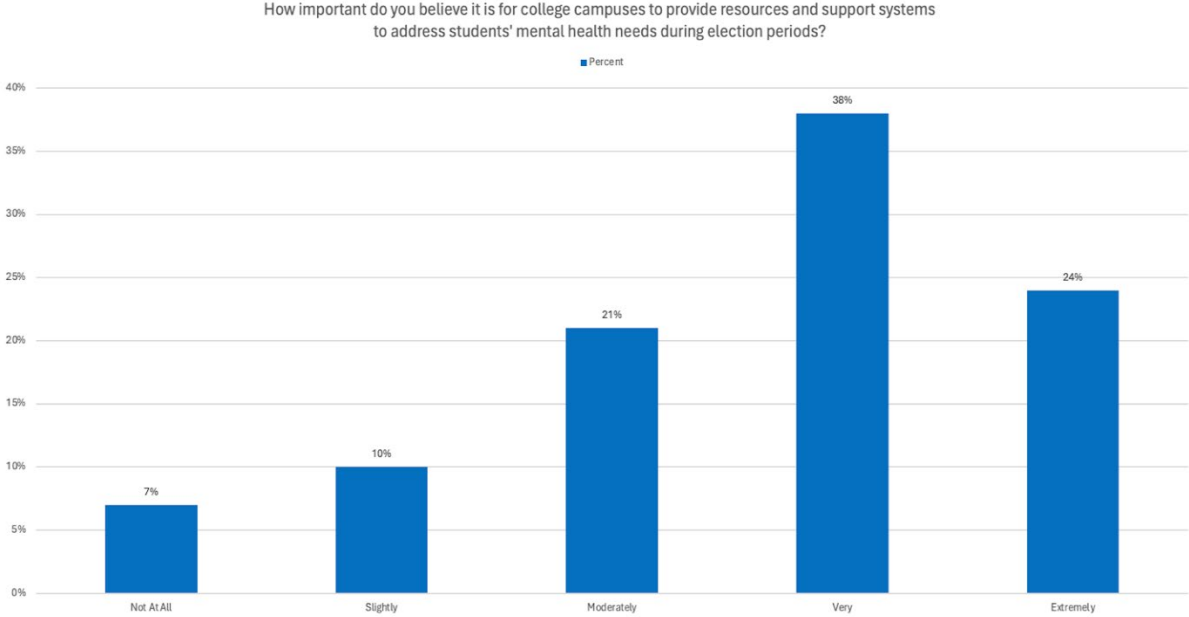


Figure 5: Mental Health Resources

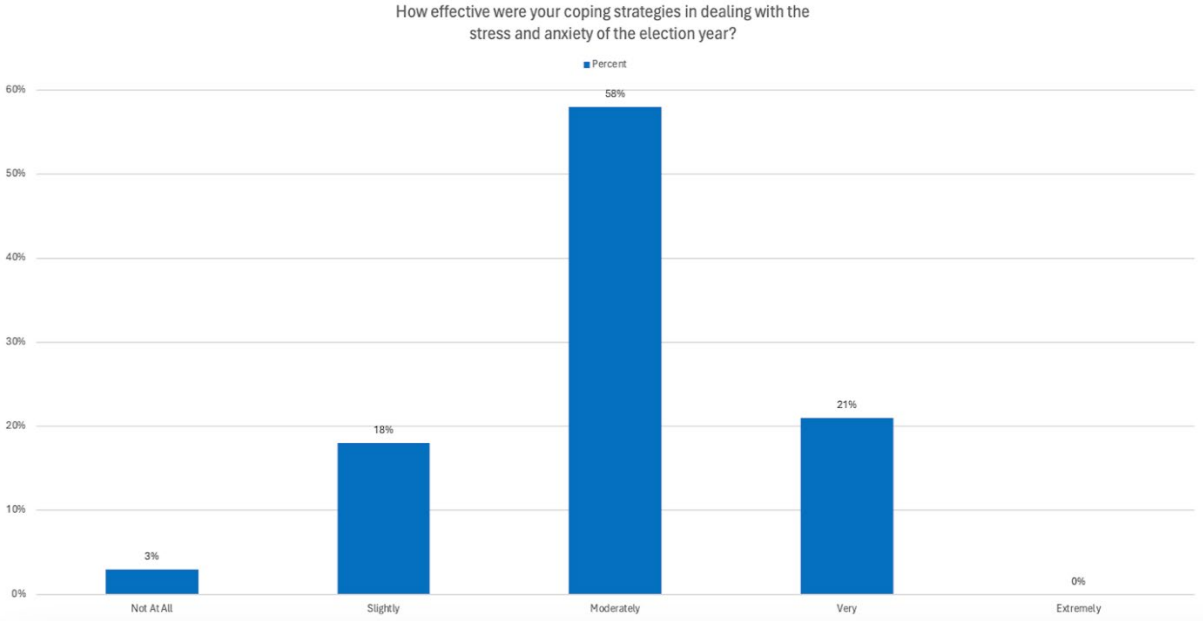


Figure 6: Coping Strategies

## Discussion

The responses from the survey on coping mechanisms during the 2020 presidential election revealed a wide array of stress and anxiety management strategies. Many respondents found comfort in nature and physical activities, whether walking, hiking, or working out. These activities provided a physical outlet for stress and a temporary escape from the widespread election discourse. Many participants also leaned on social connections, finding solace in spending time with friends and family or conversing with peers who shared similar beliefs. This social support acted as a buffer, helping individuals process emotions and feel less isolated in their experiences. However, the constant presence of politics in discussions, even in social settings, emphasized the challenge of completely disengaging from the election's stressors. Digital detoxes emerged as another prevalent theme, with several respondents consciously limiting their social media usage or taking breaks from digital devices altogether. This approach was driven by the recognition of social media's role in amplifying election-related content and contribution to heightened stress levels. Individuals aim to regain control over their mental well-being by stepping away from digital platforms.

For some, staying informed and engaging with the election through research and educational content served as a coping mechanism. This proactive approach allowed individuals to confidently navigate the election's complexities and reduce feelings of helplessness and anxiety about the outcome. Despite varied strategies, a notable sentiment among the respondents was a sense of inevitability and pervasiveness associated with the election's stressors. Attempts to escape or disengage were often met with reminders of the ongoing political climate, strengthening the deep-seated impact of the presidential election on individuals' daily lives.

Even though more than 60% of participants acknowledge they experienced stress as a result of the election cycle, an overwhelming majority chose not seek support or utilize campus resources for their mental health needs. Several factors contributed to this lack of engagement with available support services. A common theme among responses was a need for more awareness of such resources, indicating a potential shortfall in communication and outreach efforts by the campus.

The responses suggest that existing services could have been more effectively publicized, especially to those new to the campus environment, such as first-years. Additionally, the perception of mental health services being “frequently busy” deterred some students from seeking help, suggesting an overwhelmed or under-resourced system struggling to meet the increased demand during this period. One respondent mentioned utilizing mental health resources and therapy sessions through University Health Services but clarified that their use was unrelated to the election or its outcomes. This indicates that while some students were engaged with mental health services for other reasons, the specific stresses induced by the presidential election did not prompt them to seek targeted support.

The collective responses call attention to a critical issue: a disconnect between the need for mental health support during high-stress events, such as a presidential election, and the actual utilization of available resources. This gap illuminates the importance of proactive outreach and communication from campus mental health services, especially during possible heightened stress. It also points to the need for campuses to reassess and adapt their mental health support systems to ensure they are accessible, well-publicized, and equipped to handle surges in demand, even under challenging circumstances like a global pandemic.

Several respondents noted a general sense of attentiveness to the election among the student body, yet the anticipated conflict was less pronounced than expected. This suggests that while the election was a focal point of interest, it did not always escalate into overt confrontations or student disputes. One student even responded by saying that “for [their] personal political beliefs, there was an overwhelming support and community. I think it was a topic on everyone’s mind so while it was tense, it was also unifying in many ways,”. This could be attributed to a shared sense of caution or a mutual understanding of the event’s significance, leading to a more restrained expression of political views. As mentioned by some respondents, the presence of a dominant political leaning on campus offered a sense of community and support for those who aligned with the majority view. This shared perspective has provided somewhat of a haven, reinforcing a sense of belonging among students. Those in the minority view argued that their stress was heightened because they did not have that political community and were scared to use campus resources. Additionally, some are indifferent to politics and were not informed. Although they did not see a change in themselves or their stress levels, they did notice a change in campus atmosphere during this voting season.

However, not all experiences were unifying. Protests and activism, such as an experience described along Agate Street, where a respondent noticed a Black Lives Matter Protest during the week of the election, introduced an element of urgency and activism into the campus environment. This activism was a stressor for some as it disrupted the normalcy of student life and imposed external political strife directly into their living spaces. For others, the activism was empowering, serving as a tangible expression of civic engagement and solidarity with broader social movements. Additionally, the impact of COVID-19 on campus life was a recurring theme, with many respondents stating that the pandemic made it challenging to assess the political

climate fully. The restrictions on gatherings, shifts to virtual learning, and general disruption of campus life created an unusual context in which the election unfolded. This meant that the lockdown muted usual channels of political discourse and engagement for some while simultaneously intensifying the focus on national events like the election for others.

In some responses from students, election significance both in their life and how they perceived the importance around them differed greatly. Some students felt detached from the political fervor, however the majority remained to maintain that the election did in fact influence their day-to-day well-being and overall mental health. This specific variation shows that even on a single college campus, there were individual experiences that made a difference in how students relate to and are affected by political events. Some found it a source of significant stress, and others viewed it with relative equanimity. Overall, all the responses reflect a complex interplay of factors influencing the political climate on campus during the election year, from the prevailing political ideologies and the intensity of activism to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. These factors help shape an environment that contributes to heightened stress and anxiety for many and offered a sense of community and shared purpose for others.

This viewpoint is key to cultivating a broader perspective on political events on campuses that can help mitigate their emotional impact, encouraging students to maintain a balanced view of their stake in national politics. Engagement in activism emerges as another significant strategy. Students found solace and empowerment in actively engaging in causes they care about. This approach helps alleviate helplessness and fosters a sense of agency and community among students working towards common goals. Coupled with spending quality time with friends,

family, and nature, activism provides a multifaceted approach to coping, blending social support with proactive engagement.

Throughout the survey, when prompted with a question with a quantitative response, most selected an above-average answer of 7. This value could have various interpretations. It could show a significant but not astonishing life-changing effect or be argued as a less accurate result. However, short response questions, like how college voters could better cope with stress, require more in-depth discussions and have yielded a range of responses that can average out to a quantitative score of 7. These insights, including the quantitative and qualitative information, are instrumental in developing comprehensive support systems for students navigating the complexities of political engagement while maintaining their mental well-being.

By looking at the survey's free response answers, it is clear there is a call for increased access to mental health resources. Ranging from therapists and specialists to voter rights and responsibilities workshops, or even providing students with the knowledge and tools to engage in the electoral process confidently and responsibly. This will create an environment and ultimately a space for open dialogue where students can freely express their thoughts and feelings about the election. These forums could serve as safe havens for students to navigate their political beliefs and emotions in a supportive environment. They could be moderated to ensure respectful and constructive discussions among the student body.

Staying informed while simultaneously managing one's media consumption is a nuanced strategy strengthened by respondents. The emphasis on being neutrally informed and selectively choosing trustworthy/credible sources can help students stay engaged without being overwhelmed by political media's often polarizing and sensational nature. One response even



went as far as to argue that the media was the “biggest factor” of stress and stated that “the media, I believe, is one of the worst parts of politics now. Everything is blown out of proportion, covered and analyzed to no end with the worst opinions”.

Finally, fostering an environment that encourages informed conversations and provides support resources specifically tailored to the needs of the student body can significantly contribute to alleviating election-related stress. Whether through university-founded support groups or community gatherings, these initiatives can offer informational and emotional reinforcement to ensure students feel equipped and supported in their political engagement and personal well-being. With these responses, it becomes evident that a multifaceted approach that combines personal coping strategies with institutional support and community engagement can offer college voters a robust framework for navigating the stress and anxiety of presidential election years.

A significant component of the conducted research is about higher education, the resources provided for students, and the policies to support them better during stressful periods. After surveying University of Oregon students and asking about their ideas for improvement, there is a need for action. The responses highlight a collective desire for spaces and services that foster political engagement, emotional support, and informational clarity. These insights highlight the need for a more structured support system on campus to help students navigate the complexities of election years.

A common theme among suggestions is the establishment of discussion spaces where politically involved students can share their opinions with others who have similar viewpoints. This could include multiple safe spaces catering to various political perspectives that establish

foundations of inclusivity and healthy discourse. Such environments facilitate emotional support through shared experiences and encourage respectful political conversations, contributing to a more informed and empathetic campus community. The idea of community groups where individuals can express their concerns and support one another mirrors this sentiment. It emphasizes the importance of solidarity and understanding among students with shared or even differing political views. These groups could serve as platforms for peer support, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of belonging; ultimately increasing voter turnout in college voters and lowering the levels of stress and anxiety caused by presidential elections.

Several respondents suggested apolitical or neutral resources to reduce stress, such as dog therapy sessions like those that take place during finals. These initiatives relieve the constant political discourse and offer students a chance to unwind and recharge. Educational resources were also a popular suggestion, with students wanting simplified information about candidates, campaigns, and policies. Workshops, webinars, or informational hubs that break down political jargon and clarify the electoral process could empower students to make informed decisions without feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of political discourse. Practical resources like ballot fill-out practice sessions and workshops could help demystify the voting process, especially for first-time voters. These sessions could address common questions and concerns, making voting more accessible and less daunting for students. The concept of “Election News for Dummies” or similar outlets offering concise and straightforward political information highlights the need for clarity in political conversations. Such resources could help students stay informed without navigating the often-convoluted political news landscape. Finally, the suggestion of a hotline for students experiencing extreme stress levels points to the acute need

for mental health support during election years. This resource could provide immediate assistance and guidance, connecting students with professional support services as needed.

Overall, the survey responses indicate a multifaceted approach to supporting students during election years, combining spaces for political discussion, stress-relieving activities, educational resources, and mental health support. Implementing these resources on campus could significantly enhance students' ability to positively and constructively engage with the electoral process, ensuring their well-being is safeguarded amidst election season's heightened emotions and tensions. Enhancing mental health support, particularly during election seasons, is paramount. If universities expand services such as counseling, support groups, and mental health awareness campaigns, it will provide students with a safety net, offering guidance in times of uncertainty. Universities can ensure students feel heard and supported, regardless of political affiliations, by proactively addressing the psychological impacts of the political environment. This holistic approach reiterates the university's role as an academic institution and a nurturing ground for the next generation. Our community members need to be informed and capable of navigating the challenges of voting with empathy and an unwavering commitment to democracy.

## Conclusion

Elections are catalysts of emotions no matter the year. It is clear that, one, there is an intersection of politics and mental health, and two, it is especially common and complex within the demographic of college students. The United States primary presidential elections are essential in shaping the socio-political landscape in all communities. As such, the psychological impact they have on first-time voters and college students is significant. This study centers on the experiences of University of Oregon students and provides crucial insights into this dynamic relationship. With their heightened media coverage, intense social discussions, and the emotional weight of choosing a nation's leader, election years can impose significant stress, particularly on young, impressionable minds. The exploration of the University of Oregon community showed that such stresses are prevalent and can manifest in negative psychological implications on students' mental well-being. With the complexities of social media and the variety of forms of media consumption, the flood of election-related information, it can certainly be daunting and lead to heightened anxiety and stress at times.

Furthermore, the impact of election results on different groups of the population, as seen in some studies, showcases individuals' profound emotional ties to political outcomes, no matter political party preference. No matter the reasoning, the emotional twists and turns run deep, whether that be a previous president's legacy or a current candidate's unpredictability. Regardless of the situation, it is essential to recognize that while elections and their associated dynamics can exert stress, they can also offer an opportunity for empowerment, representation, and the strengthening of democracy. For every student or individual who feels overwhelmed, there might be another who finds a voice, a purpose, or a passion for societal change. Recognizing the duality of this impact is crucial for universities and support systems. While it is vital to provide resources and mechanisms to

help those who feel stressed, it is equally essential to channel the energy of those who feel empowered into constructive forums for discussion, engagement, and positive action. In a future study, it would be interesting to analyze how engaging with those of different political beliefs affects stress levels, urges to learn more, and interests in future interactions with the opposing view. This is a prevalent issue on campuses as students intentionally and unintentionally separate themselves from those with differing views.

Ensuring student voices are being heard is a leading factor in the significance of this data and an integral part of its analysis. Most of the data population stated they would have benefited from a campus resource geared to help them better understand the election and a supplemental resource to help them cope with first-time voting pressures. A solution that could benefit students at the University of Oregon is a campus-wide electoral education and support program. This program would provide students with the necessary resources and guidance to navigate the complexities of the electoral process, better their understanding of politics, and offer support to address the uncertainties and anxieties of first-time voting. This kind of program would include key components such as voter registration drives, civic engagement forums, electoral education workshops, and even well-being support, ranging from stress management workshops, counseling services, and peer support groups that could pair with the Duck Nest. Implementing this program would empower students politically and foster a more engaged, informed, and resilient student body. This approach recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities the electoral process presents to young voters, particularly in a university setting. By investing in such initiatives, the University of Oregon can promote civic engagement and support student well-being during election seasons. Although these ideas are specifically for the University of Oregon, they could easily be translated to other college campuses so that students can feel supported regardless of their background, previous knowledge, or

political affiliation. The potential for this program to create a ripple effect and inspire similar initiatives across campuses nationwide emphasizes its significance and the critical need for universities to play proactive roles in the education and engagement of their students.

Election periods are pivotal in American democracy, and preparing young individuals to engage in these times healthily is essential. Observations from the University of Oregon students shed light on the potential experiences of young adults nationally, indicating a need for increased support from educational institutions during election cycles. This research could serve as a foundation for broader investigations across various campuses to capture a wider range of perspectives and a more comprehensive understanding. There is a clear call to action for universities to enhance their efforts in supporting student well-being, particularly in the context of elections. Looking ahead, educational institutions could integrate these insights into their strategies, ensuring students are not only engaged and informed about politics but also mentally resilient and ready to contribute actively to the democratic processes. The potential for universities to serve as catalysts for a more politically aware and emotionally robust generation is worthy of attention. By adopting a holistic approach that combines electoral education with mental health support, universities can cultivate environments where students feel empowered to participate in democracy without being overwhelmed by its complexities. This endeavor requires a collaborative effort among faculty, staff, administration, and student organizations, as the campus populations they serve hold significant ties to recognition and advocacy. They need to come together to leverage existing resources and introduce innovative programs tailored to the unique needs of the student body. The goal is to cultivate a campus culture where civic engagement is valued and reinforces the pillars of democracy for future generations.

## Appendices

### Survey Questionnaire

1. The following information is to be used for a study and thesis at the University of Oregon titled, The Consequences of Presidential Elections on Voter Behavior and Political Participation: An Evaluation of Psychological well-being in College Voters. The following survey is to be completed by those who are able and willing to, are at least 18 or older, and who participated and voted in the Primary Presidential election of 2020 while attending the University of Oregon. By completing the following question and marking "I do agree..." you are giving consent for your answers to be used anonymously at the University of Oregon Political Science Department and Clark Honors College.
2. I consent to the following:
  - a. I do agree to participate and for the following information to be used in the study: An Evaluation of well-being of College Voters.
  - b. I do not agree to participate and for the following information to be used in the study: An Evaluation of well-being of College Voters.
3. Please Identify your gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-binary/ third gender
  - d. Prefer not to say
4. Select the best description of your political party preference
  - a. Democratic
  - b. Republican
  - c. Third Party
    - i. Fill in

5. Did you vote in the 2020 election while at the University of Oregon?
  - a. No
    - i. If no, end survey
  - b. Yes
6. If yes, who did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election?
  - a. Donald Trump
  - b. Joe Biden
  - c. Third Party
    - i. Fill in
7. What county and state are you registered to vote in?
  - a. Fill in
8. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being minimal and 10 being severe, please rate the level of stress you experienced during the presidential primary election year.
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
  - g. 7
  - h. 8
  - i. 9
  - j. 10
9. How did the presidential primary election year impact your overall well-being and mental health? Please provide a brief qualitative response.



a. Fill in

10. On a scale of 1-10, to what extent did the presidential election's outcome impact your mental well-being as a first-time voter?

a. 1

b. 2

c. 3

d. 4

e. 5

f. 6

g. 7

h. 8

i. 9

j. 10

11. How did you cope with the stress and anxiety of the presidential election year? Please provide specific strategies or mechanisms you used.

a. Fill in

12. How effective were your coping strategies in dealing with the stress and anxiety of the election year?

a. Not effective at all

b. Slightly effective

c. Moderately effective

d. Very effective

e. Extremely effective

13. Did you seek support or utilize any resources available on campus to address your mental health needs during the presidential election year? Please provide a qualitative response.

- a. Fill in
14. How do you believe the media exposure and engagement with social media during the presidential election year influenced your mental well-being? Please elaborate on your experience.
- a. Fill in
15. How significant was the influence of media exposure and social media engagement on your mental well-being during the election year?
- a. No Influence
  - b. Slight Influence
  - c. Average Influence
  - d. High Influence
16. How would you describe the overall political climate on your college campus during the presidential election year? Did it contribute to your stress or anxiety levels? Please provide a brief qualitative response.
- a. Fill in
17. How do you think college voters can better cope with the stress and anxiety of presidential election years? Please suggest any potential strategies or resources.
- a. Fill in
18. How important do you believe it is for college campuses to provide resources and support systems to address students' mental health needs during election periods?
- a. Not at all Important
  - b. Slightly Important

- c. Moderately Important
- d. Very Important
- e. Extremely Important

19. If you could make one new resource on campus for students during election years, what would it be and how would it help?

- a. Fill in

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences during the presidential primary elections and their effects on your well-being as a college student?

- a. Fill in

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