

2016 Presidential Campaign and the American College Student

It is perceived by many that college students have low awareness of the presidential campaign and its candidates. Many blame the sources from which knowledge is attained. Most researchers agree that the Internet and newspaper are the most popular sources, and both are positively related to political knowledge (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Valentino, Hutchings, & Dmitri, 2004; Cao, 2008). Cao (2008) also found a positive association between young adults and political comedy shows, which have become even more popular since 2008. Other researchers found that watching presidential debates increased knowledge of candidates, but only individuals who were already interested in politics took the time to watch the debates (Boyle, 2013; Valentino, Hutchings, & Dmitri, 2004; Drew & Weaver, 2006). This research is aimed at determining, with the most reliable measures possible, the level of political knowledge that college-aged students have compared to their perceived level of knowledge, as well as what source the knowledge was obtained from. Participants were 55 students (39 female, 16 male, 21 Republican, 21 Democrat, 13 Neither) primarily enrolled in an introductory psychology course. Participants completed a survey measuring their personal viewpoints, knowledge of candidates, and information regarding the sources of this knowledge. Preliminary results suggest low campaign knowledge attained from a variety of sources, however degree of knowledge was not impacted by political affiliation, gender, ethnicity, strength of affiliation to political parties, and other related variables. Results, and implications of these results, will be discussed in more detail during the presentation.