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University Attendance and Diametric Political Polarization

Cole Jester

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

“University Attendance and Diametric Political Polarization”

written by

Cole Jester

and submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for completion of
the Carl Goodson Honors Program
meets the criteria for acceptance
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Doug Reed, thesis director

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April 18, 2019

University Attendance and Diametric Political Polarization

A Thesis Presented in the Ouachita Baptist University Honors Program

Cole Jester

May, 2019

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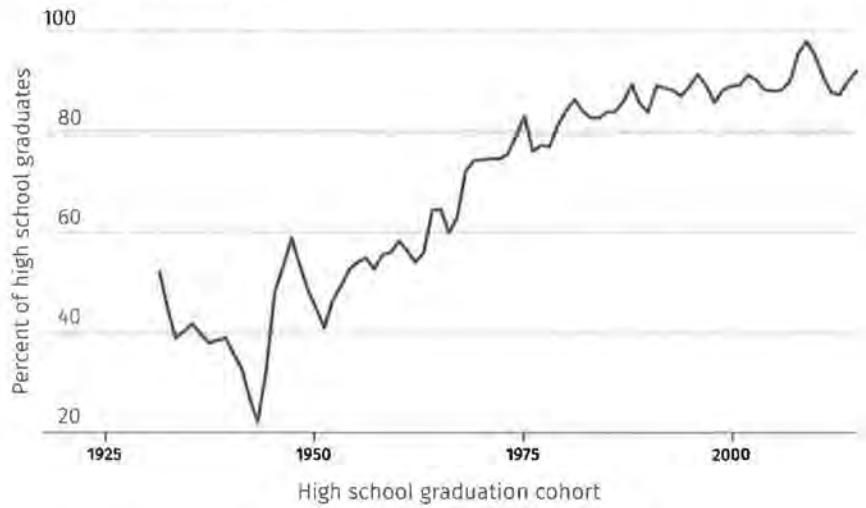
Introduction

This work will fall within the realm of political science, as a study of political socialization. People acquire political ideology through multiple aspects of life, with much acquisition occurring in childhood through early adulthood. In the year 2019, recorded political ideologies are more bimodal and extreme than in the end of the 20th century. Many have asked what is driving this phenomenon. This thesis further explores a single encompassing idea: Could increasing college attendance rates be in any way driving this political polarization? College attendance rates and political polarization have increase jointly over the past seventy year (as the charts on the next page show show) but many disconnected factors have risen as well. In fact, this idea runs counter to many of the truisms of an increasingly pluralistic society. Being exposed to those with ideas different than one's own at a college campus is to drive moderation, understanding, and civility according to commonly held wisdom.

Various factors may be changing the outcome of this common wisdom. Through social media and the internet opportunities exist for students to increasingly divide themselves into ideological echo chambers. As well, some accuse colleges of increasingly pushing ideological uniformity. A recent study of forty top universities found that democratic voting professors outnumbered republican voting professors at a ratio of eleven and a half to one. Various measures of these student's political ideologies will be examined, notably self-description, issue viewpoints, and levels of political discussion and volunteerism.

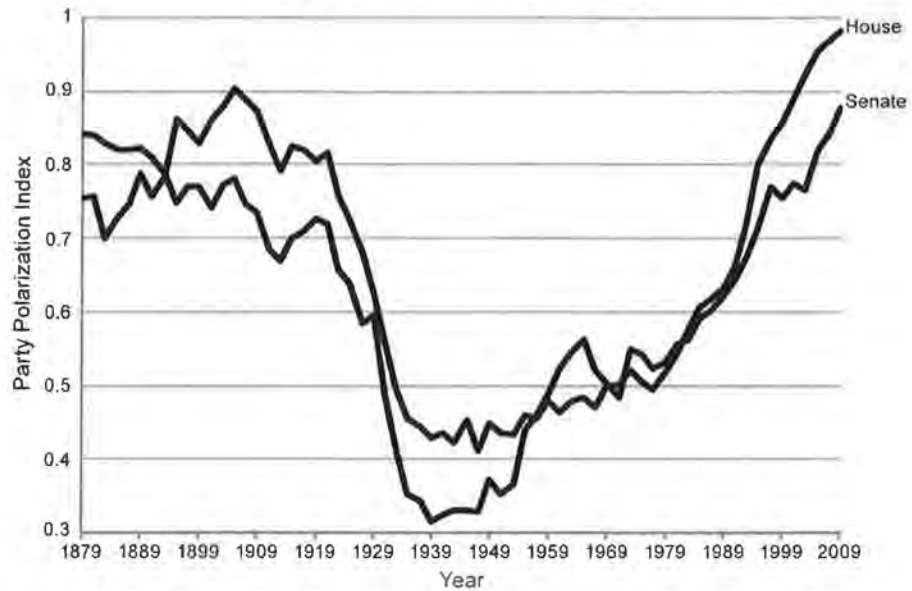
Increase in college attendance

College attendance rate



Source: Authors' calculations

Party Polarization, 1879-2009



Source: McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal, *Polarized America* (updated by the authors in January 2010 at polarizedamerica.com)

Literature Review

The four-year undergraduate experience is a time where many of the young men and women of America further define their identities. Often, careers are determined, friendships are formed, and adulthood is entered. This formation will be discussed as it relates to the national increases in political polarization. More Americans than ever are attending college, as the newest census bureau report cites 33.4 percent of Americans over the age of 24 have 4-year undergraduate degrees. How does this impact the growing climate of political polarization in America? While many say the mixing and clash of ideas in university creates increased pluralism and moderation, this paper tests the thesis that current college attendance rates increase political polarization in students. This could be occurring due to political self-sorting on campus, scholarship offering opportunities to crystalize opinion, and other factors.

Fundamentally, this is a question of political socialization in young adults. Earlier works have showed that college can affect the formation of political values in young students. A seminal example is the work of Theodore Newcomb at Bennington College in 1935-1939. Sixty-two percent of the all-female students of Bennington entered the university as conservatives, while only fifteen percent of Bennington juniors and seniors identified as conservatives. The more liberal faculty and upperclassmen politically socialized the Bennington freshmen in a way that contradicted the socialization of their primarily conservative families. As shown even in 1939, college can distinctly affect political beliefs. However, this paper is not concerned with the tendency of college experience to move the average political ideology of its students to the left. Rather, it is

concerned with diametric political socialization, the pushing of students away from moderate political beliefs, creating an even greater dual modality on a scale of political polarization.

In 1976, Paul Abramson conducted work relating to increasing polarization. In his time, political polarization was decreasing year after year in post-World War Two America as measured by decreasing party loyalty. He found that as his subjects passed through their late teens and early 20's with ever decreasing party loyalty through longitudinal analysis. This would be the opposite of increased polarization. However, Abramson does not isolate those who attend college from those who do not. As well, the political environment was different than the divided government common in the 21st century. His overall conclusion was that the extremely low levels of partisanship in the youth he studied were specific to their generational cohort, not due to their youth itself.

As the study of college political socialization continues, it becomes critical to define liberal and conservative in empirically meritorious ways. Pamela Conover and Stanley Feldman do this well in their 1981 work, "The Origins and Meaning of Liberal/Conservative Self Identifications." They define liberal and conservative as bipolar symbols for underlying policy preferences. These policy issues include social control, capitalism, and the New Deal policies. However, the authors assert that while these policies change, a fundamental pattern exists. Liberal identification focuses on a desire for change, while conservative identification focuses on the desire for the preservation of traditional values.

In "Work Experience and Political Orientation: A Panel Study" Jon Lorence and Jeylan Mortimer contribute important findings to this study. First, ten years after the students of the study graduated college their political view remained substantially unchanged. This shows the durability of political socialization in college aged Americans. Second, it showed that conservative students were distinctly more likely to pursue careers in business or the military, while liberal students were more likely to pursue careers as educators. The students were self-sorting into groups likely to reinforce their political beliefs after college. This clearly has implications for political polarization. It also begs a question asked by this paper. If sorting outside of college reinforces political view, could sorting inside the college environments reinforce and strengthen political views? Due to the wide availability of diverse majors, clubs, and activities many opportunities exist to self-sort in the college experience.

Eric L. Dey writes on college political socialization in two articles in 1996 and 1997. The first, "Undergraduate Political Attitudes: An Examination of Peer, Faculty, and Social Influences" discusses trends in the political views of college students nationwide. Dey used the CIRP survey, the same data used by this work. He found several trends. First, college students in the longitudinal studies trended towards the ideological extremes. The percent of the cohort with moderate political views decreased by nine percent from 1985 to 1989. However, the percent of both conservative and liberal students increased. Dey further examined the students by the type of university attended. Private and historically black colleges tended to move their students more towards political liberalism than traditional and public universities.

The second article is “Undergraduate Political Attitudes: Peer Influence in Changing Social Contexts.” Here, Dey examines several cohorts in the CIRP survey. Each is surveyed their freshmen and senior year of college. This was a four-year longitudinal survey. In these surveys, students categorizing themselves as “far-right” and “far-left” declined slightly. However, the number of students classifying themselves as “moderate” declined significantly. In turn, the number of students defining as “conservative” and “liberal” increased. This data is an example of the diametric political polarization this thesis seeks to identify. However, this survey is becoming dated. The cohorts studied began their freshmen year in 1966, 1971, 1983, and 1987 respectively.

“Political Polarization in the American Public” is an article written by Michael Dimcok, Carroll Doherty, Jocelyn, Kiley, and Russ Oates in 2014. This is an incredibly useful data set. It surveys how political polarization has changed in the past twenty years. It shows how a dual modality is developing on the ideological spectrum of Americans. Moderates are shrinking every year. This data does not seek to explain why this is occurring. However, it is the most detailed model yet recording the measurable aspects of political polarization. The vast changes in the polarization of the American public could have implications for the political socialization of college students.

Later in this thesis, Student socialization at a small liberal arts college, Ouachita Baptist University is examined. This relates to the article “Do Liberal Arts Colleges Make Students More Liberal?” by Jana M. Hanson, Dustin D. Weeden, Ernest T. Pascarella, and Charles Blaich in 2012. This article explains the relationship between attending a liberal arts college and students’ political views. Compared to their

counterparts at other 4-year institutions, liberal arts college students began postsecondary education with more liberal political views, but also made moves toward liberal political views over 4 years of college. These movements persisted even in the presence of important influences such as pre-college political views. Attempts to explain the mechanisms underlying this apparent institutional influence were partially successful. This regards a possible thesis that asserts that college moves students to the political right as well as left.

Other works exist regarding what forms the conservative or liberal orientation of college students. "The Liberal-Conservative Orientation of College Students? A Comparative Study of Two Universities" by Gizachew Tiruneh, T. Price Dooley, and Joseph Yuichi Howard in 2016. was presented as the Southern Political Science Association Annual Meeting on Jan7-9, 2016. It offers a general overview of the political socialization process from early childhood. However, the bulk of this work is a statistical survey of students at the University of Central Arkansas and University of Illinois at Springfield. The survey finds little difference between the college students and their non-educated but same age counterparts. However, parental background was still the primary factor in predicting student ideology. However, the students tended to be more liberal than their parents. As well, the student's ideology and partisanship had a correlation of .80. The students seemed clearly more liberal than the United States population as a whole.

Other studies examine the impact of college socialization in relation to other factors. For example, "Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined"

by Kent Jennings, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers in 2009. This study is a longitudinal study of three generations of families to examine how political socialization occurs over time. This article asserts that polarized political families produce polarized youth. It uses data from the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center and Center for Political studies. It is a survey of 1669 high school seniors. Clearly, family background exceeds or equals the importance of the college experience in political socialization.

It is critical to ascertain if political changes in college are durable. "Evidence of the Long-Term Persistence of Adults' Political Predispositions David Sears, and Carolyn L. Funk asserts the durability of political dispositions. This study uses the Terman longitudinal study, in which the party identification and ideology of 1,272 respondents were measured on four occasions between 1940 and 1977 from roughly age 30 to retirement age. The study confirms that political orientation is remarkably steady throughout the lifespan. It is interesting in that it seems to show that policy positions crystalize and become firmer over time. The respondents seemed to become more polarized as they aged.

Research Questions

Throughout the course of this study, several questions relating to political polarization will be explored. These questions will be examined using data from both national and Ouachita Baptist University datasets. The questions are as follows.

1. Nationally, are senior students as a whole leaving the university experience with a higher level of bimodality in regards to their political ideology than when they entered as freshmen? Is the difference statistically significant?
2. At Ouachita Baptist University, are senior students as a whole leaving the university experience with a higher level of bimodality regarding their political ideology than when they entered as freshmen? Is the difference statistically significant?
3. At Ouachita Baptist University, are students graduating with increasingly strong opinions on subjects such as abortion or healthcare, at a statistically significant level?
4. At Ouachita Baptist University, are students' lives increasingly oriented around politics as measure by level of political discussion and levels of campaign activity? Is this statistically significant?

Methodology

This will be a statistical study of two groups of data. The first is the University of California at Los Angeles HERA freshmen and senior survey data as made available through their online portal. For over 50 years, the CIRP Freshmen Survey has provided data on incoming college students' background characteristics, high school experiences, attitudes, and behaviors. The survey has resided at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA since 1973. To date, over 15 million students at over 1,900 institutions have participated in the survey. The College Senior Survey (CSS) connects academic and civic outcomes with a comprehensive set of college experiences, measuring the impact of college. For the senior survey, this study is examining the years 2000-2006. The same survey for freshmen is available from 2000-2008, but the data will be focused on the years 2000-2006 in order to parallel the senior survey. Newer surveys than 2006/2008 have been taken, but the raw data is only available to select paying universities.

Many cross-tabulations of this data will be performed to examine various correlations between the variables. A Chi-Squared test of significance will be used to measure for a statistically significant effect using an alpha of .05. As well, the total number of freshmen in the years 2000-2006 identifying as far right, conservative, moderate, liberal, and far left will be tabulated. The same will then be done for freshmen. These scores will then be compared using a Chi-Squared independence test. The alpha will still be .05.

Secondly, a survey of Ouachita Baptist University will be taken. Ouachita is a Christian liberal arts college in Arkansas with a student enrollment of approximately 1600. No random sampling procedure will be performed. Rather, an email containing a survey will be sent to all students. The survey is a short fifteen-minute online questionnaire. The response rate was approximately twenty-five percent. This survey asked students questions regarding their political ideology, family background, socioeconomic status, and lifestyle habits. The answers to these questions will then be crosstabulated using SPSS (IMB Statistics Package for the Social Sciences). The cross tabulations will be analyzed using a Chi-Squared test of significance.

National Data Analysis

A central focus of this work is asking one question in particular: does college drive political polarization? Of course, the term polarization must be defined. In this scenario, diametric political polarization is discussed. This entails the movement of a population into a bimodal distribution when in regards to political ideology on a five or seven-point scale. A five-point scale is selected as it matches the available data from UCLA's HERA institute. The clearest indicator of diametric political polarization would be a decrease in self-described "middle of the road" respondents on the survey.

Chart A displays the percentages of college freshmen in the HERA survey who self-identify as "Far Left", "Liberal", "Middle of the road", "Conservative", and "Far Right". The percentages break down as 3.2% Far Left, 27.8% Liberal, 45.3% Middle of the road, 21.7% conservative, and 1.7% far right. The clear plurality of college freshmen identified as Middle of the Road, with Liberal and Conservative coming in second and third respectively. Notably, very few identified as far left or far right, with less than five percent combined.

			Survey year								Total	
			2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
How would you characterize your political views?	Far right	Count	5398	8053	5135	5938	8662	6934	5835	5132	5551	54638
		% within Survey year	1.4%	1.6%	1.3%	1.6%	2.2%	1.9%	1.6%	1.5%	1.8%	1.7%
	Conservative	Count	73565	73679	80395	78173	89639	84246	88184	78788	66262	712931
		% within Survey year	19.8%	19.4%	20.9%	21.3%	22.3%	23.4%	24.7%	23.0%	21.3%	21.7%
	Middle of the road	Count	184212	181870	188417	177669	178435	154697	146889	144376	127534	1484199
		% within Survey year	49.5%	47.9%	48.9%	48.4%	44.3%	42.9%	41.1%	42.1%	41.0%	45.3%
	Liberal	Count	97799	105564	101016	94591	111102	101341	106022	104521	100557	922513
		% within Survey year	26.3%	27.8%	26.2%	25.8%	27.6%	28.1%	29.6%	30.5%	32.3%	28.1%
	Far left	Count	11361	12159	10367	10824	14624	12982	10678	10022	11086	104103
		% within Survey year	3.1%	3.2%	2.7%	2.9%	3.8%	3.8%	3.0%	2.9%	3.6%	3.2%
Total		Count	372335	379325	385330	367195	402462	360200	357608	342839	311090	3278384
		% within Survey year	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chart B displays the percentages of college seniors in the HERA survey who self-identify as “Far Left”, “Liberal”, “Middle of the road”, “Conservative”, and “Far Right”. The percentages break down as 3.1% Far Left, 28.1% Liberal, 43.1% Middle of the road, 24.9% conservative, and 1.2% far right. The clear plurality of college freshmen identified as Middle of the Road, with Liberal and Conservative coming in second and third respectively. Notably, even fewer identified as far left or far right, with less than four and a half percent combined.

Crostab

		CSS Year								
		2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total	
How would you characterize your political views?	Far right	Count	386	426	405	428	483	444	407	2988
		%	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%	1.3%	1.4%	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%
		within CSS Year								
		Count	9524	10002	9713	7776	9158	7917	8547	62639
	Conservative	%	22.9%	22.6%	26.1%	23.9%	26.6%	25.2%	26.1%	24.9%
		within CSS Year								
		Count	19605	19669	17105	14592	14578	11766	11202	106517
	Middle-of-the-road	%	47.1%	44.4%	45.9%	44.8%	42.3%	37.5%	36.8%	43.1%
		within CSS Year								
		Count	11081	12905	9146	8821	9145	9947	9156	70181
Liberal	%	26.8%	29.1%	24.5%	27.1%	26.5%	31.7%	30.1%	27.8%	
	within CSS Year									
	Count	1016	1332	910	968	1085	1299	1089	7699	
Far left	%	2.4%	3.0%	2.4%	3.0%	3.1%	4.1%	3.6%	3.1%	
	within CSS Year									
Total	Count	41592	44334	37279	32587	34459	31373	30401	252025	
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	within CSS Year									

As shown below, there was a statistical relationship between the year the college freshmen took the survey and their political ideology. A chi-squared test showed a significance of .000, far beyond the necessary alpha of .05. This can be attributed to several issues. Primarily, the “N” of this dataset is massive, with over three million respondents. This creates a very low bar for the chi squared test to reveal significance. As well, there are clear trends in the data. In years 2000 through 2008 there were 49.5%, 47.9%, 48.9%, 48.4%, 44.3%, 42.9%, 41.1%, 42.1%, and 41% of college freshmen

identifying as middle of the road. The trend is a slow but relatively steady retreat from moderatism. Interestingly, the number of freshmen identifying as far left and as far right both peak in 2004, notably a presidential election year. However, both numbers remain small. In 2004 2.2% of seniors self-identified as far right and 3.6% of college students identified as far left. Rather, the number of those identifying as conservative and those identifying as liberal both grew. In 2000, 26.3% of freshmen identified as liberal. In 2008, 32.3% of freshmen identified as liberal, an increase of 6.0%. In 2000, 19.8% of freshmen identified as conservative. By 2008, this number was at 21.3%, a smaller but notable increase of 1.5%.

Results						
	Far right	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Far left	Row Totals
Freshmen	43955 (-517.11) [-3824648.37]	567881 (387.32) [831481269.03]	1212189 (30.39) [48349208879.26]	717435 (-461.25) [-1117351904.07]	82995 (-391.94) [-17740899.69]	2624455
Seniors	2889 (577.12) [9261.17]	62639 (-75.22) [-52286840.09]	108517 (-284.18) [-41655157.31]	70818 (266.37) [18686522.20]	252025 (-332.01) [-191815584.25]	496888
Column Totals	46844	630520	1320706	788253	335020	3121343 (Grand Total)

As well, there was a statistical relationship between the year the college seniors took the survey and their political ideology. A chi-squared test also showed a significance of .000, far beyond the necessary alpha of .05. This can be attributed to several issues. Primarily, the “N” of the senior dataset is large, with 1.37 million respondents. This creates a low bar for the chi squared test to demonstrate significance. There are distinct trends in the data. In years 2000 through 2006 there were 47.1%, 44.4%, 45.9%, 44.8%,

42.3%, 37.5%, and 36.8% of college seniors identifying as “middle of the road”. The trend is a clear retreat from moderatism. The percent of college seniors identifying as far right peaked in 2004-2005, with 2004 being an election year. The percent of college seniors identifying as far left peaked in 2005 at 4.1 percent of students, a number much higher than the 1.4% of students identifying as far right in that same year. In 2000, 26.6% of seniors identified as liberal. In 2006, 30.1% of seniors identified as liberal, an increase of 3.5%. In 2000, 22.9% of seniors identified as conservative. By 2006, this number was at 28.1%, a notable increase of 5.2%.

However, this analysis of change over time in the identifications of college freshmen and seniors does not address how the ideology of the students may change as they transition from freshmen to senior year. This must be done by comparing the freshmen to the seniors directly.

The raw data can be examined as a percentage. Averaging the years 2000-2006 the data is as follows. For college seniors, 1.2% identified as conservative. On the other hand, 1.7% of college freshmen identified as conservative. Further, 24.9% of college seniors identified as conservatives in the survey, a much larger segment. Meanwhile, 21.6% of college freshmen identified as conservative. Overall, college seniors had a larger number of students identifying as far right or conservative than freshmen.

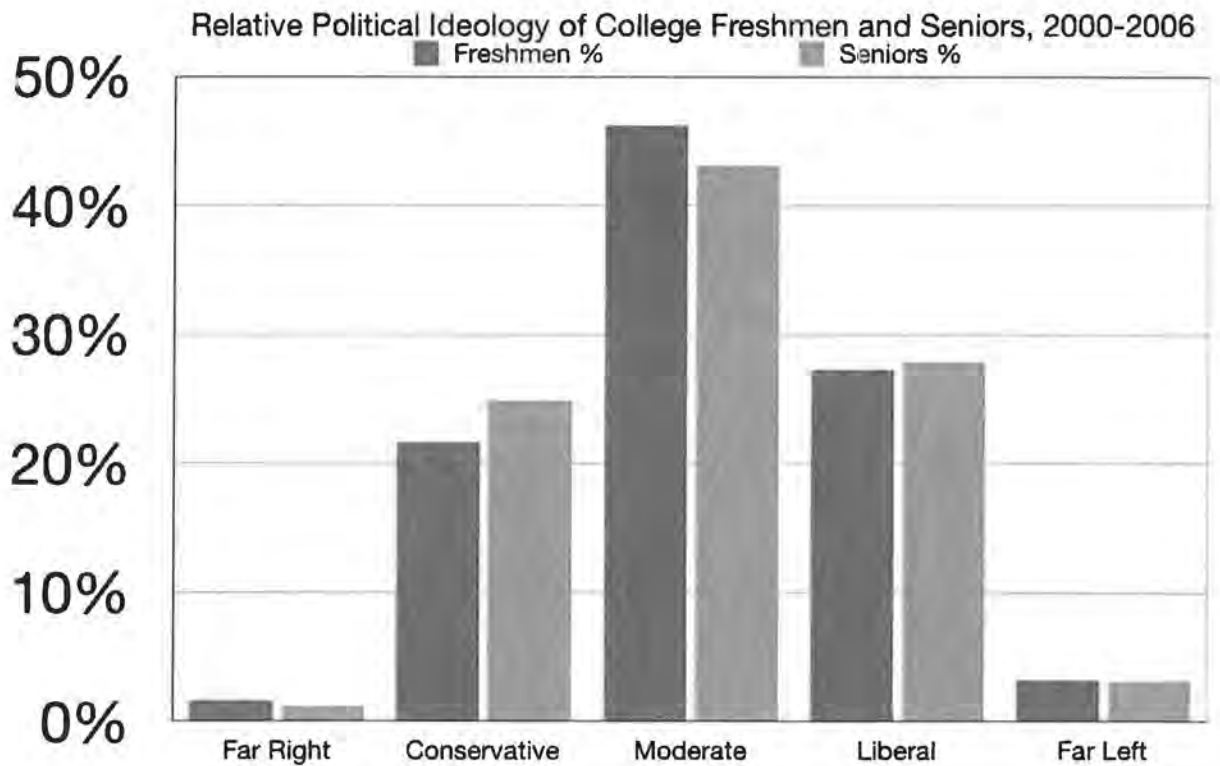
Further, there is a change of the percentage of moderates. Forty-six percent of college freshmen identified as moderates, almost half. Out of the college seniors, forty-three percent identified as moderates, a decrease of approximately three percent.

However, seniors had comparably more students fall into the category liberal or far left. Out of the college freshmen in the survey, 27% identified as liberal. Out of the college seniors, 30.1% identified as liberal, a comparative increase of three percent. However, 3.1% of freshmen identified as far left while 3.1% of seniors also identified as far left.

Overall, the trend is a move away from moderation. The seniors were clearly more likely to be liberal or conservative and less likely to be moderate than the freshmen. Of note, the number of far left students is the same in the senior and freshmen classes. The numbers of far right and far left students collectively are less than six percent. It seems that the number of these students is depressed by the terminology used in the survey, a somewhat derisive far-left and far-right labels.

In regard to statistical significance, a Chi-Squared test was performed. There were 43,995, 567,881, 1,212,189, 717,435, and 82,995 freshmen identifying as far right, conservative, moderate, liberal, and far left respectively. There were 2,989, 62,639, 108,517, 70,818, and 7,699 seniors identifying as far right, conservative, moderate, liberal, and far left respectively. There are notable fewer seniors surveyed overall than freshmen. When a Chi-Squared test for independence is applied, a p-value of less than .001 is discovered. At an alpha of .05, the test reveals significant correlation in the data. Due to the high number of data points available, the standard for significance in the Chi-Squared test is relatively low. However, the data reveals that while 46.19% of freshmen were moderates, 43.06 percent of seniors were moderate, a decrease of 3.13 percent. However, 3.21% more seniors identified as conservative than did freshmen. As well, slightly more seniors identified as liberal. While 27.34% of freshmen identified as liberal, 27.85% of

seniors identified as liberal. However, from freshmen to senior year the percentages of those identifying as far right and far left decreased. In 2000-2006 the percentage of freshmen identifying as far right or far left was 1.67% and 3.16% respectively. During those same years, the percentage of seniors identifying as far right or far left were lower, at 1.19% and 3.05% respectively. This is observable through the following chart.



OBU Data Analysis

College Seniority and Political Focus

How will seniors and freshmen compare in levels of political engagement? Is the college experience increasing political engagement? These are questions relating to the length of time each student has spent in college. This paper examines this in terms of years spent in college in general as well as years spent at Ouachita Baptist University in particular.

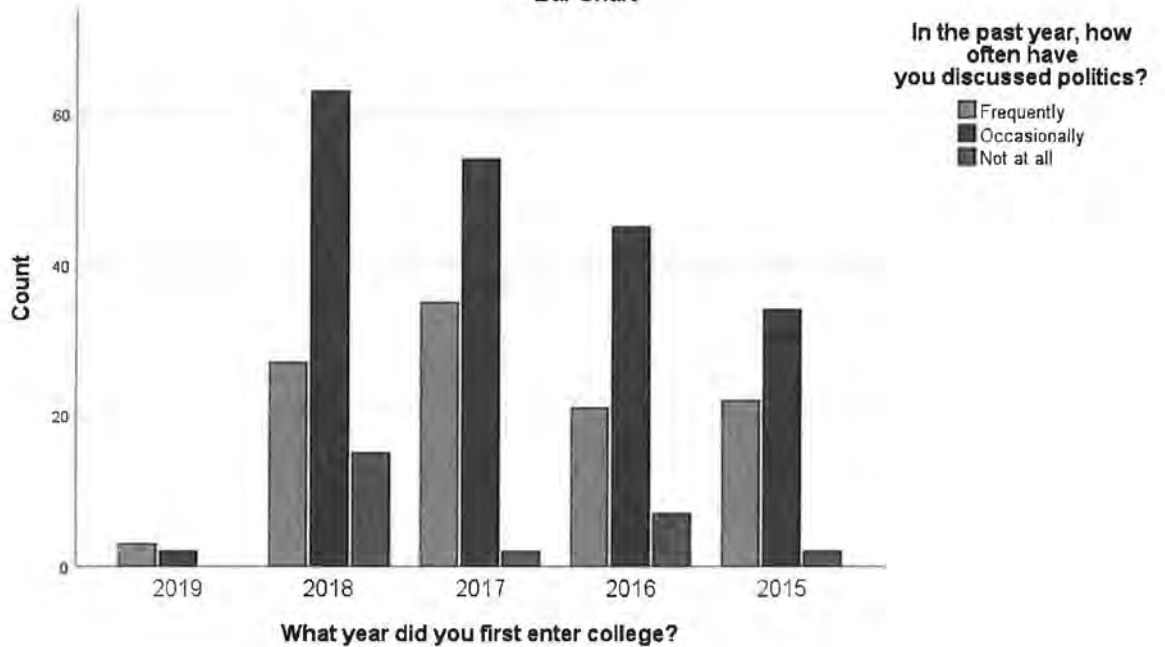
First, the correlation between college seniority and the frequency of discussing politics is examined. When the year the students first entered any college is compared to the frequency of their discussion of politics on a three-point scale of: Frequently, Occasionally, and Not at All. This is the same scale used by University of California at Los Angeles. When measured with a two-tailed chi-squared test, this proved to be a statistically significant correlation with a significance of .039, lower than our alpha of .05. As well, there was a likelihood ratio of .028, even stronger. The Pearson's R was .137 and the Spearman Correlation was a similar .136, neither showing significance. This shows that the data does not conclusively prove that multiple years in the college experience moved students to discuss politics more or less often. Whether the student had spent one, two, three, four, or five years in college did not affect how often they discussed politics in a statistically significant way.

Crosstab

Count

	In the past year, how often have you discussed politics?			Total
	Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all	
	What year did you first enter college?			
2019	3	2	0	5
2018	27	63	15	105
2017	35	54	2	91
2016	21	45	7	73
2015	22	34	2	58
Total	108	198	26	332

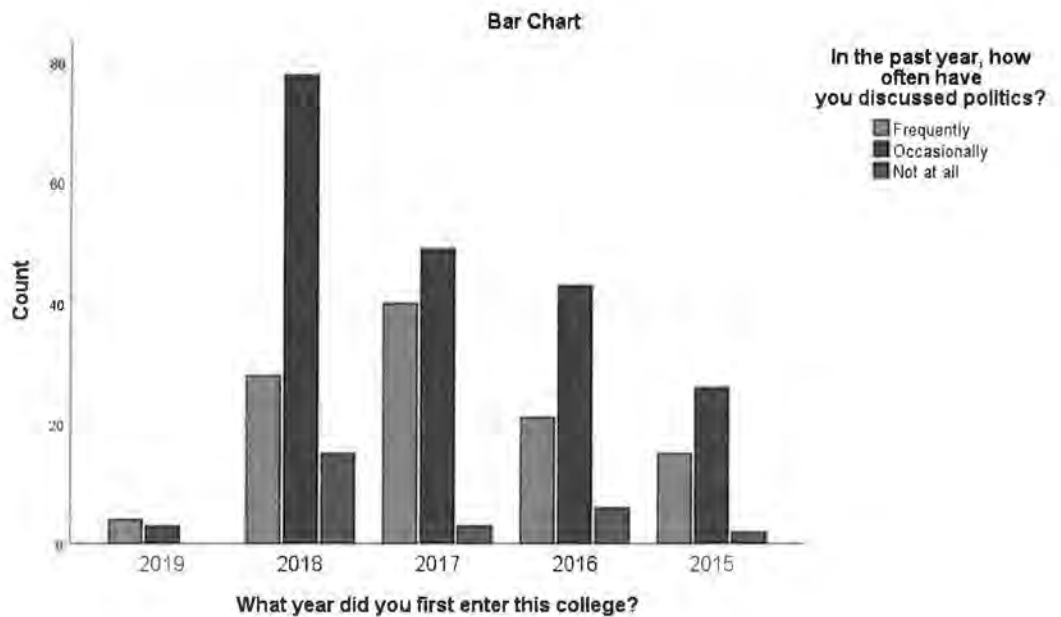
Bar Chart



Next, the frequency of discussing politics is compared with the year each student entered their current college, Ouachita Baptist University. The data is analyzed using a Chi-Squared test and significance is found. The same three-point scale is used. A significance of .035 and .028 were found by the Pearson Chi-Squared test and the Likelihood ratio respectively. Both are significant and below the .05 alpha. This shows that the data does not conclusively prove that multiple years at Ouachita Baptist University moved students to discuss politics more or less often. Whether the student had spent one, two, three, four, or five years in college did not affect how often they discussed politics in a statistically significant way.

Crosstab

Count		In the past year, how often have you discussed politics?			
		Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all	Total
What year did you first enter this college?	2019	4	3	0	7
	2018	28	78	15	121
	2017	40	49	3	92
	2016	21	43	6	70
	2015	15	26	2	43
Total		108	199	26	333



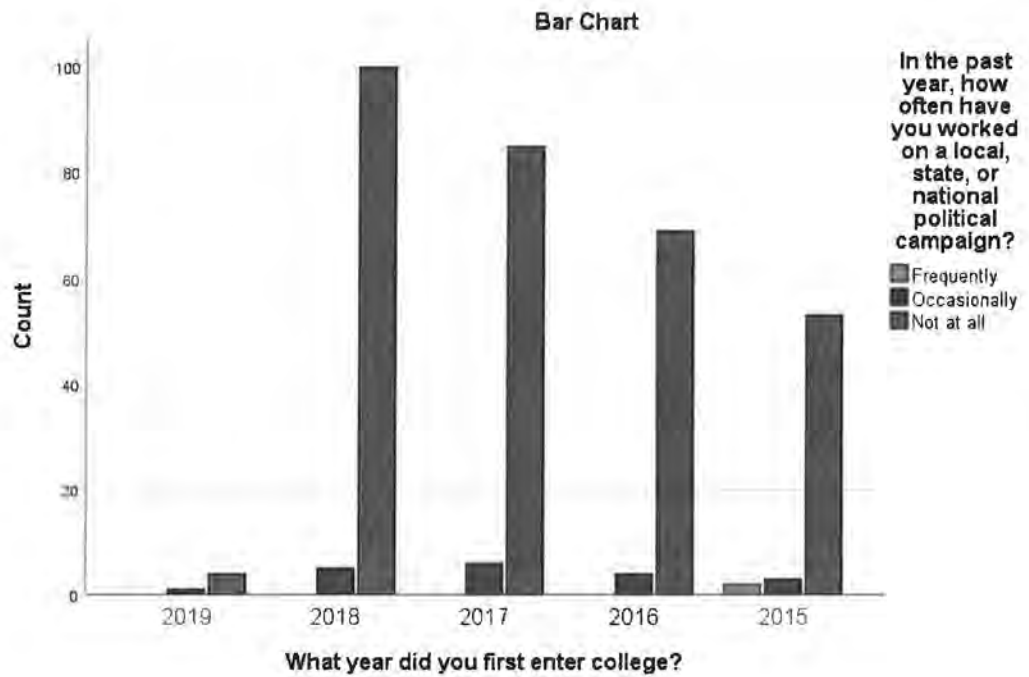
Further, political engagement can be examined by the ratio of students currently involved in state or local political campaigns. Beginning by comparing the year the students entered any college with the frequency they worked on a local, state, or national political campaign. The chi squared ratio is .164, and significance is not confirmed. This means the data did not significantly show that years spent in college influenced the amount of involvement in state or local political campaigns.

Crosstab

Count

In the past year, how often have you worked on a local, state, or national political campaign?

		Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all	Total
What year did you first enter college?	2019	0	1	4	5
	2018	0	5	100	105
	2017	0	6	85	91
	2016	0	4	69	73
	2015	2	3	53	58
Total		2	19	311	332



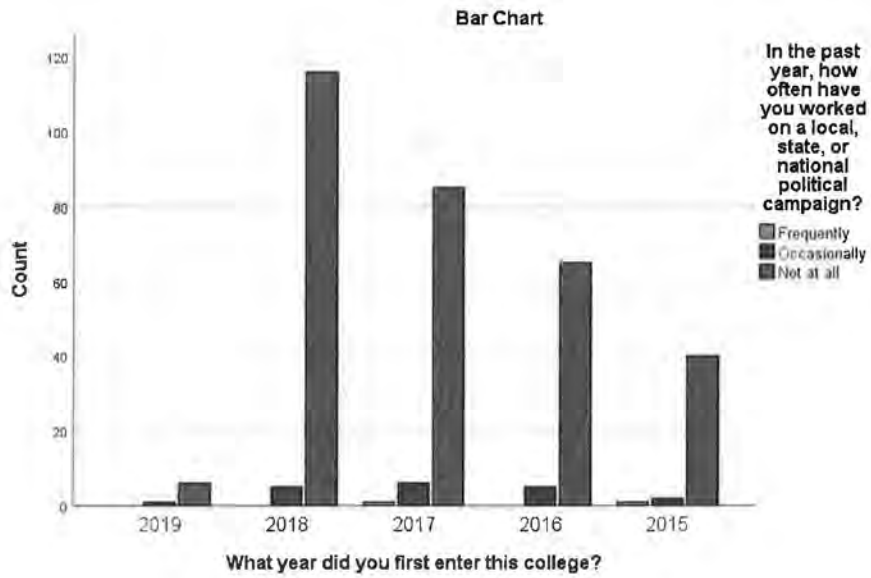
When year the student entered their current college specifically is compared with the frequency of working on a local, state, or national political campaign, the chi-squared is .682, showing little statistical significance. Notably, there is a far weaker correlation here than when students were asked about the first year they attended *any* college. This shows that the data does not conclusively prove that multiple years at Ouachita Baptist University moved students to discuss politics more or less often whether the student had spent one, two, three, four, or five years at Ouachita.

Crosstab

Count

In the past year, how often have you worked on a local, state, or national political campaign?

		Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all	Total
What year did you first enter this college?	2019	0	1	6	7
	2018	0	5	116	121
	2017	1	6	85	92
	2016	0	5	65	70
	2015	1	2	40	43
Total		2	19	312	333



For further analysis, we asked students about the importance of keeping up to date with political affairs to them. This is a rough indicator of political polarization. Extreme partisans, those on the far left and far right tend to keep up with politics, while moderate voters tend to be the least informed voting group according to years of political science surveys. Ouachita students were asked to rank the importance of keeping up to date on a five-point scale. This language mirrored the language used in the UCLA HERA study. When compared to the year they first entered Ouachita Baptist University, no significant correlation is found. As shown, the Chi-Square value was .426.

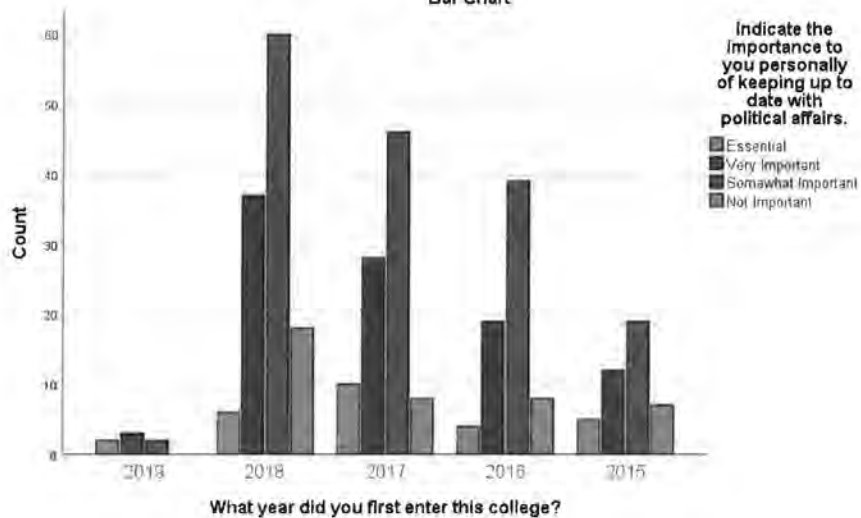
Crosstab

Count

Indicate the importance to you personally of keeping up to date with political affairs.

		Essential	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	
What year did you first enter this college?	2019	2	3	2	0	7
	2018	6	37	60	18	121
	2017	10	28	46	8	92
	2016	4	19	39	8	70
	2015	5	12	19	7	43
Total		27	99	166	41	333

Bar Chart



When college students were asked what year they first entered any college and this data was compared to how they perceived the importance of keeping up with political affairs, more correlation was shown with a Chi-square value of .283. However, this still did not show a significance when an alpha of .05 is used. This means that a correlation was neither found between attending Ouachita Baptist University and importance of keeping up to date with political affairs nor with attending any university.

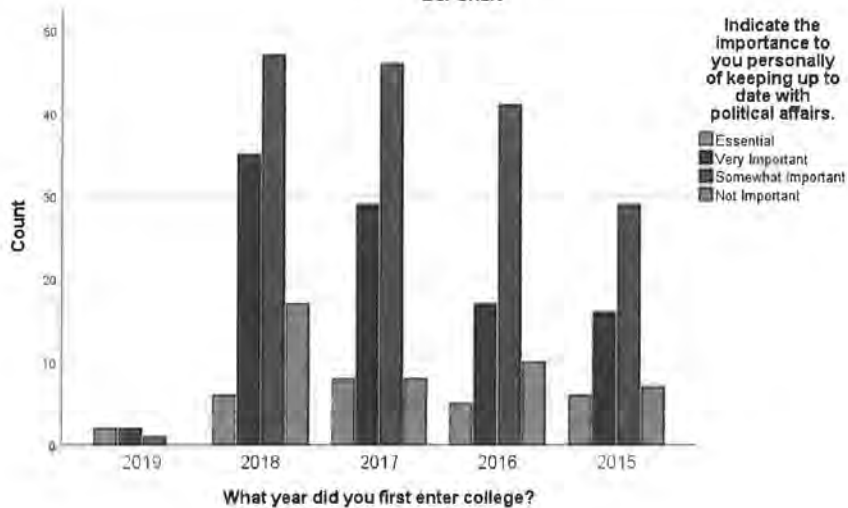
Crosstab

Count

Indicate the importance to you personally of keeping up to date with political affairs.

		Essential	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important
What year did you first enter college?	2019	2	2	1	0
	2018	6	35	47	17
	2017	8	29	46	8
	2016	5	17	41	10
	2015	6	16	29	7
Total		27	99	164	42

Bar Chart

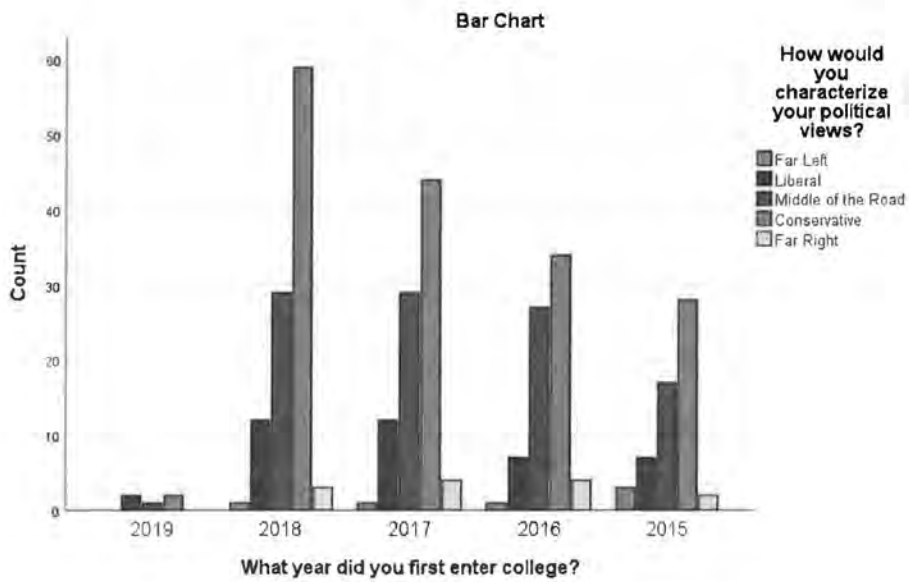


The most useful measure of political polarization may be how the students perceive themselves on a five-point scale of political ideology: far right, conservative, moderate, liberal, or far left. If a higher number of years spent in college correlated with a decrease in their tendency to self-describe as moderates, the thesis would be supported. We asked students how they would rank themselves, what year they entered any college, and what year they entered this college. Our data was gathered at the nominal level. The results were then analyzed with a Chi-Squared test.

First, the year students entered Ouachita Baptist University was compared to how they distributed themselves on the five-point scale. A Pearson's Chi-Squared ration of .448 was found. The alpha value of .05 was not met, and this test did not reject the null-hypothesis. Next, the year the students entered any college was analyzed with their political ideology selection. The Chi-Squared value was found to be .636, below the .05 alpha. No statistical significance was found. Notable, the connection was even weaker than that between political ideology and year students first attended Ouachita Baptist University.

Crosstab

Count		How would you characterize your political views?				
		Far Left	Liberal	Middle of the Road	Conservative	Far Right
What year did you first enter college?	2019	0	2	1	2	0
	2018	1	12	29	59	3
	2017	1	12	29	44	4
	2016	1	7	27	34	4
	2015	3	7	17	28	2
Total		6	40	103	167	13



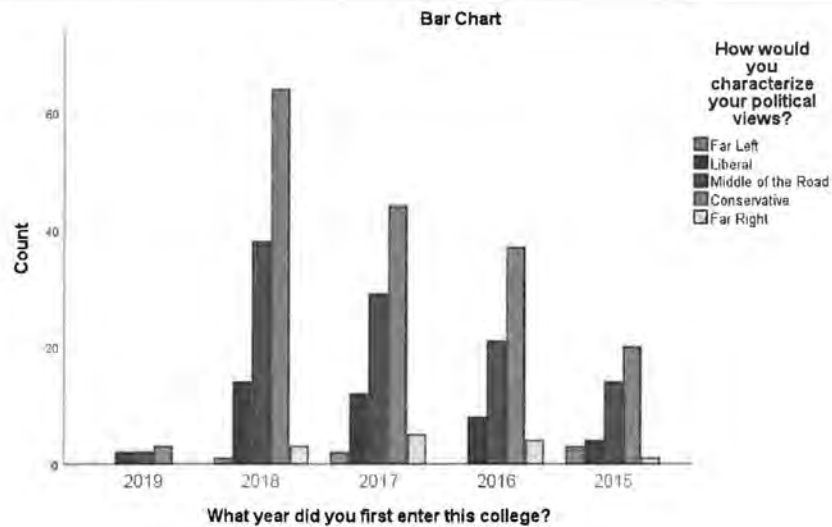
Crosstab

Count

How would you characterize your political views?

Middle of the

		Far Left	Liberal	Road	Conservative	Far Right	Total
What year did you first enter this college?	2019	0	2	2	3	0	7
	2018	1	14	38	64	3	120
	2017	2	12	29	44	5	92
	2016	0	8	21	37	4	70
	2015	3	4	14	20	1	42
Total		6	40	104	168	13	331



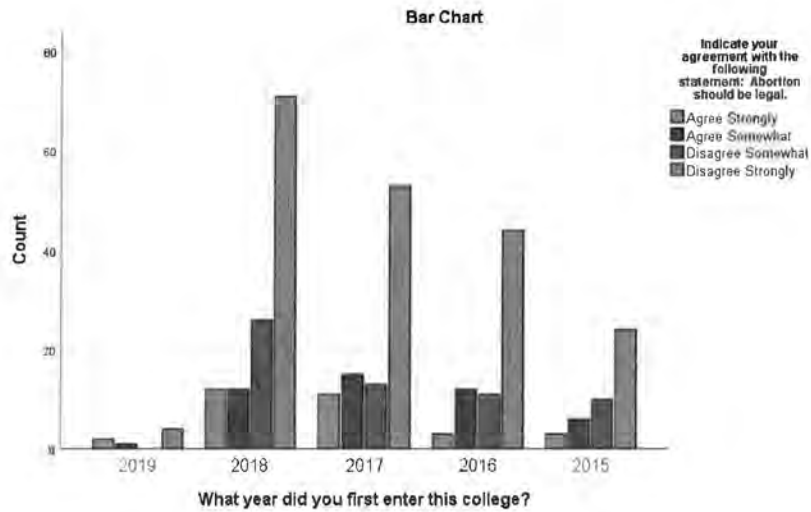
Next, we examine an indirect measure of ideology, view on abortion. Students were asked whether they believed abortion should be legal. They chose from a four-point scale: Strongly agree, Agree Somewhat, Disagree Somewhat, Strongly Disagree. This was then compared with the number of years they have attended Ouachita Baptist University. When the data was analyzed with a Chi-Squared test, a significance value of .636 was found. When using an alpha of .05, the results clearly do not prove a statistically significant correlation. However, the number of years the students have been attending any college were also examined. When compared to their stance on the legality of abortion the significance was still not proven with a Chi-Squared test, as the significance was .288. However, this still shows a stronger significance than the number of years spent attending Ouachita Baptist University.

Crosstab

Count

Indicate your agreement with the following statement: Abortion should be legal.

		Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Total
What year did you first enter this college?	2019	2	1	0	4	7
	2018	12	12	26	71	121
	2017	11	15	13	53	92
	2016	3	12	11	44	70
	2015	3	6	10	24	43
Total		31	46	60	196	333

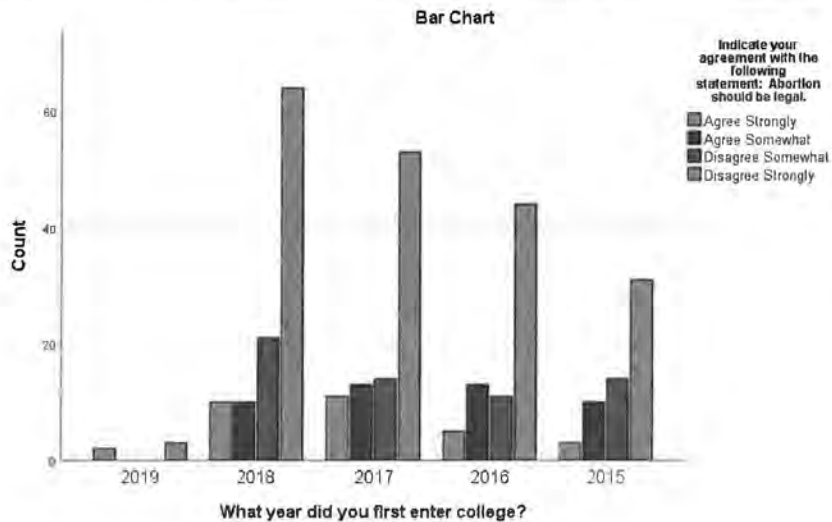


Crosstab

Count

Indicate your agreement with the following statement: Abortion should be legal.

		Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Total
What year did you first enter college?	2019	2	0	0	3	5
	2018	10	10	21	64	105
	2017	11	13	14	53	91
	2016	5	13	11	44	73
	2015	3	10	14	31	58
Total		31	46	60	195	332



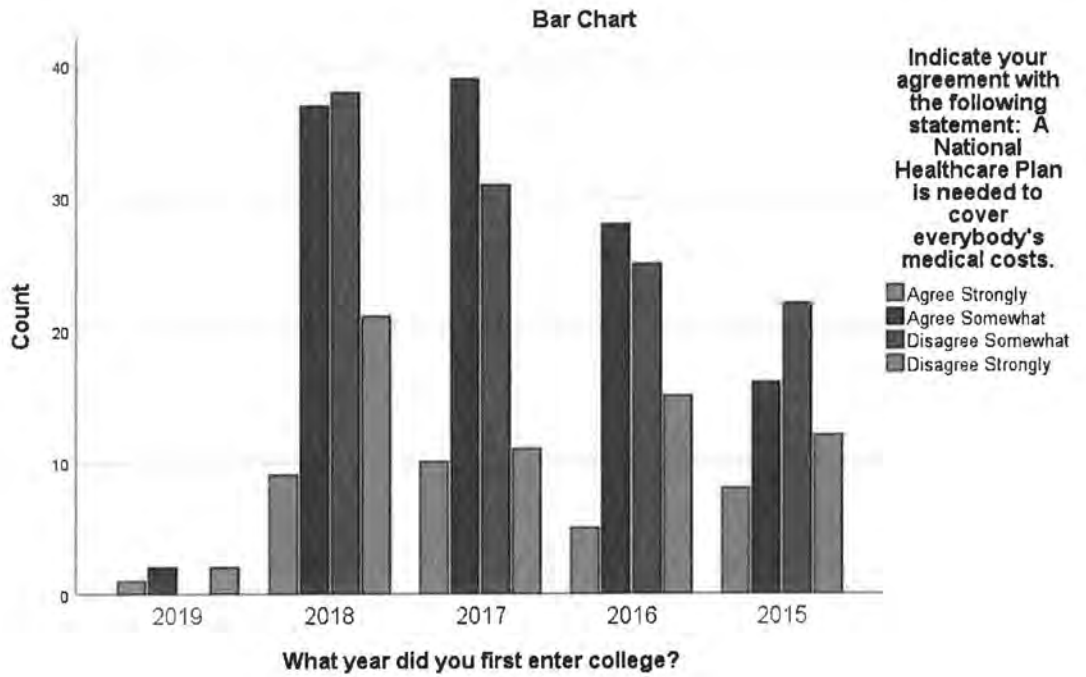
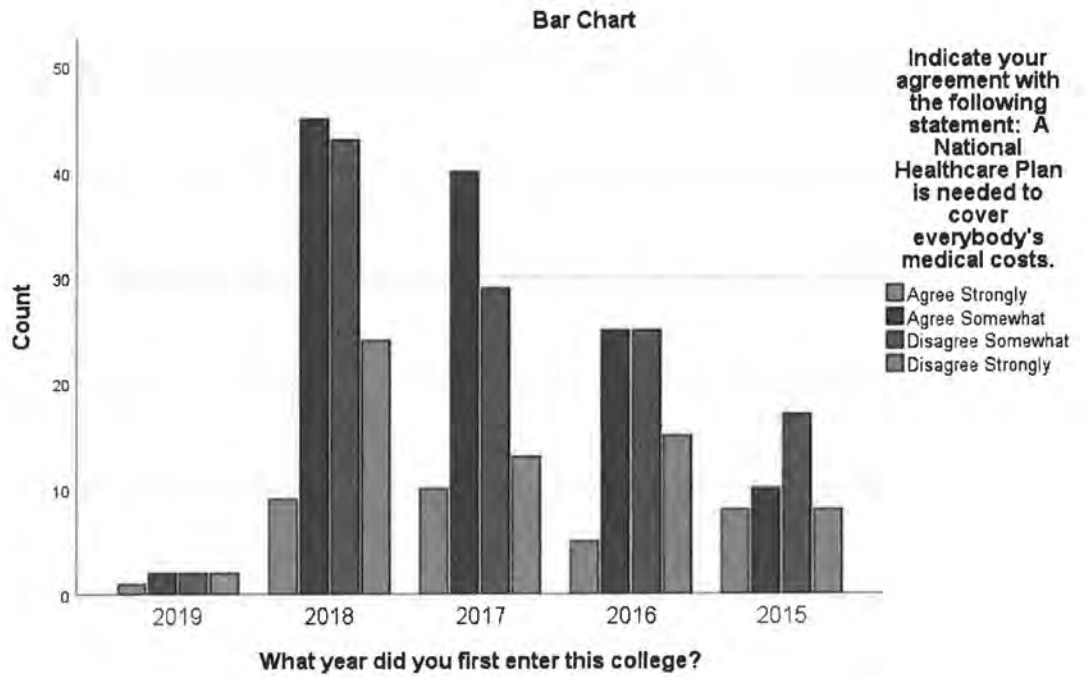
Another indicator of political ideology was also examined. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with this statement: “A National Healthcare Plan is needed to cover everybody’s medical costs.” Participants were given the same options as in the abortion view question: Agree Strongly, Agree Somewhat, Disagree Somewhat, Disagree strongly. The presumption is that a preference for a national healthcare plan coincides with political liberalism. This was then compared to the year the students first entered any college and the year the students entered Ouachita Baptist University. When compared with a Chi-Squared test to the year they first entered Ouachita Baptist University, a correlation of .559 was found, not meeting the threshold of the .05 alpha. No statistic significance was found with either the year the subject entered Ouachita Baptist University or college in general. Neither political ideology, view on abortion, or view on healthcare correlated significantly with what year the student entered their current college or any college.

Crosstab

Count

Indicate your agreement with the following statement: A National Healthcare Plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs.

		Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Total
What year did you first enter this college?	2019	1	2	2	2	7
	2018	9	45	43	24	121
	2017	10	40	29	13	92
	2016	5	25	25	15	70
	2015	8	10	17	8	43
Total		33	122	116	62	333

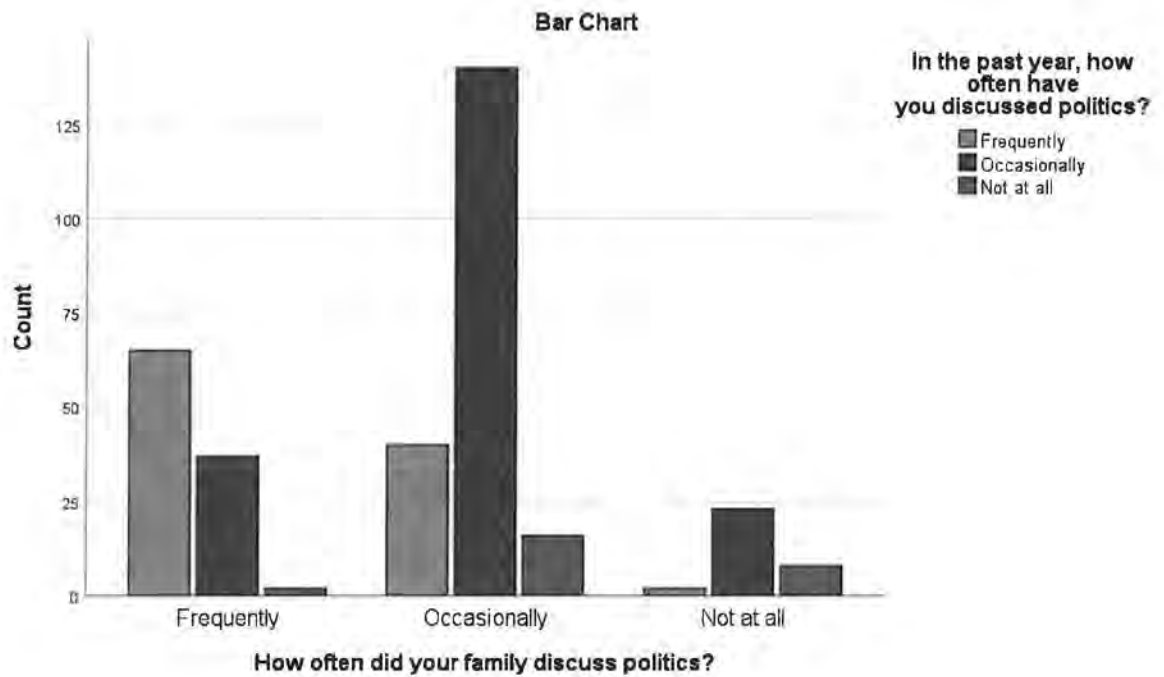


A Note on Strong Correlations

In the course of this study of Ouachita Baptist University students, several strong correlations were found. Students were asked how often they discussed politics in the past year on a three-point scale of frequently, occasionally, and not at all. As well, they were asked how often their families discussed politics on the same three-point scale. When these data sets were compared with a Chi-Squared test, a strong correlation was discovered. The Pearson Chi-Squared significance was lower than .001, which passes the alpha level of .05 easily. This supports earlier social science research which states that the most important time of political socialization is the early context in the childhood home. Clearly, patterns developed in their families' homes matched the patterns they displayed in college.

Crosstab

Count		In the past year, how often have you discussed politics?			
		Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all	Total
How often did your family discuss politics?	Frequently	65	37	2	104
	Occasionally	40	140	16	196
	Not at all	2	23	8	33
Total		107	200	26	333



Students were also asked the importance of keeping up to date with political affairs. This was then compared to those student's responses of how often their families discussed politics. The results were clear. The two variables showed a Pearson's Chi-Squared significance of lower than .001, which indicates a statistically significant relationship. Students in families who discuss politics often were more likely to desire to keep up to date with political affairs. The Chi-Squared Test revealed this as a genuine correlation.

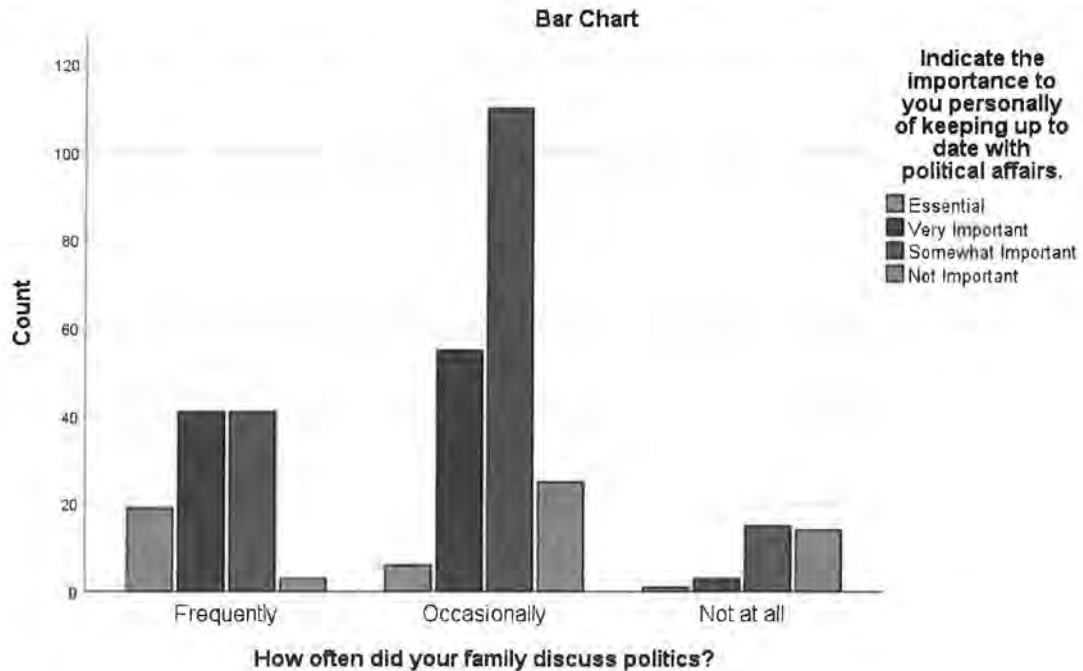
Crosstab

Count

Indicate the importance to you personally of keeping up to date with political affairs.

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Total
Essential				

How often did your family discuss politics?	Frequently	19	41	41	3	104
	Occasionally	6	55	110	25	196
	Not at all	1	3	15	14	33
Total		26	99	166	42	333



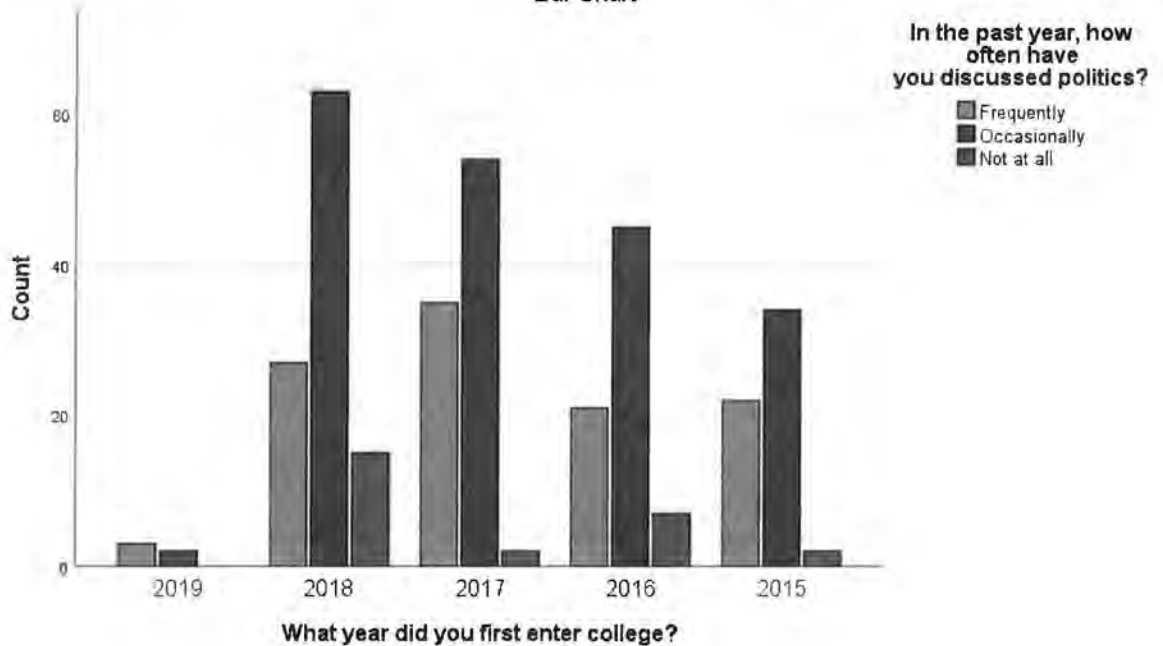
Further, there was a statistically significant relationship between the years the students entered college and the frequency of their discussion of politics. The alpha level was .05. When the frequency of the students discussing politics on a three-point scale was crosstabulated with the length of time they had been in college, a Pearson Chi-Squared ratio of .039 was found. This is below the alpha level, and it proves statistical significance. One cannot know from this test whether a longer college experience makes students more or less likely to discuss politics in a statistically significant way, but two-tailed significance is clear.

Crosstab

Count

		In the past year, how often have you discussed politics?			
		Frequently	Occasionally	Not at all	Total
What year did you first enter college?	2019	3	2	0	5
	2018	27	63	15	105
	2017	35	54	2	91
	2016	21	45	7	73
	2015	22	34	2	58
Total		108	198	26	332

Bar Chart



Interestingly, an unexpected association developed between how often students' families discussed politics and whether they believed a national healthcare plan is needed. Students were asked: How often did your family discuss politics, and they responded on a three-point scale of frequently, occasionally, or not at all. They were also asked to indicate their agreement with this statement: A national healthcare plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs. They answered that question on a four-point

scale as discussed previously. There was a very strong relationship between these two responses. A Chi-Squared significance test showed a significance of .001, a statistically significant asymptotic significance with our alpha of .05. This could be explained through a variety of factors. Chief among them is that students from homes where politics were frequently discussed were more likely to have strong opinions in regards to a national healthcare plan.

Crosstab

Indicate your agreement with the following statement: A National Healthcare Plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs.

		Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Total
How often did your family discuss politics?	Frequently	7	28	37	32	104
	Occasionally	23	75	74	24	196
	Not at all	3	19	6	5	33
Total		33	122	117	61	333

Conclusion

When the data is followed, a clear correlation is established. Nationally, there was a statistically significant correlation between whether students were freshmen or seniors and their identification on a five-point ideological scale. Moderates decreased while ideological affiliation in the conservative and liberal camps increased. The central thesis is affirmed. Years of college attendance correlated with political polarization. This bears no witness to the causation of one upon the other.

At Ouachita Baptist University, no correlation was established between college seniority and ideological affiliation. However, other trends were affirmed. There was a correlation between how often a student's parents discussed politics and how often that student discussed politics in college. Further, there was a correlation between how often a student's parents discussed politics and how much that student valued keeping up to date with political affairs. As well, a correlation was confirmed at Ouachita between years spent attending college and how the student valued keeping up to date in politics.

Suggestions

This thesis is by design more indicative than conclusive in nature. As with so much study of human nature, correlation, not causation, is the factor to be proved or disproved in this study. However, even in the exploration of correlation, some improvements are possible in this thesis. The data gathered from the HERA study could have been more recent. The Hera study itself could be more representative. More direct questions of polarization could be performed. A higher response rate on the Ouachita Baptist survey could be desired. A more representative school for the nation than Ouachita Baptist University could have been chosen.

The University of California at Los Angeles allows the public to apply for free access to its HERA database for academic purposes. However, the most recent data is excluded. For the freshmen survey, no data more recent than 2008 was available. For the senior survey, the most recent allowed year was 2006. As a result, this thesis cannot account for the changes occurring in the undergraduate population since the mid-2000s. The Obama and Trump presidencies have occurred after that time, presiding over massive increased of political polarization. For a more authoritative study, it would be critical to gather data after the 2016 presidential campaigns to have current results as America's political landscapes have shifted.

The reprehensions of the HERA study itself can be called into question. The study is given to students across the nation. However, this only occurs at the request of university administrators. Therefore, some universities are more likely than others to be a

part of the HERA survey pool. Large and well-funded universities are more likely to be included. This creates a small socioeconomic preference in the survey. However, the HERA studies are by any standard the most representative and comprehensive surveys of college freshmen and seniors available.

Non-HERA questions regarding political polarization could assist in finding stronger results. In this survey, self-identification in regards to ideology, public policy, and political activity were used as proxies for polarization. This paints a strong but incomplete picture. Questions measuring political divide could prove useful. Such questions may ask subjects: “What percentage of your friends share your political party”, “How do you perceive the intentions of the political party to which you are most opposed”, and “How important is it to you that your chosen political party prevails?”. All of this data could be collected at the nominal level.

The response rate at Ouachita Baptist University was strong, but it could be improved further. At approximately 25%, the response rate was high enough to yield useful results. However, the rate could be improved further through a variety of means. A small incentive could be given to students to participate. This could be in the form of a gift card. As well, multiple follow up emails could have been sent, reminding students to take the survey.

Notably, the university chosen for the small-scale survey yielding recent data is not a proper demographic reflection of America as a whole. Ouachita Baptist University freshmen through seniors differ markedly from the average university freshmen-seniors.

The Ouachita students are of a higher socioeconomic status, more religious, and more conservative. However, the desire of this analysis of Ouachita students is not to extrapolate to the broader American culture. Rather it is to study a specific community at a specific time.

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