
Political Awareness Among Students of Southeastern State College

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This study was undertaken to determine and evaluate the political awareness of Southeastern State College students. Southeastern State College is located in the predominantly rural, Third U.S. Congressional District of Oklahoma. Approximately 80% of the student body is from this district, with the majority of the remaining students coming from other areas of Oklahoma.

The sample for this survey was constructed by using entire sections of various subject classes. Most Departments in the college cooperated to give the sample a representative distribution by sex, year classification, and major in school. The sample consisted of 439 respondents out of an undergraduate enrollment of 1907 students.

The questionnaire used in this study emphasized the respondent's ability to correlate prominent state and national political figures with their political roles. Eight of the 15 questions were of this nature. Four questions involved a knowledge of the structure of the national government and voter qualifications. Only three questions involved any mention of political issues. The questionnaire was administered in October, 1966, about three weeks before the November general elections.

Some apparent significance seems to be shown by the percentage of correct answers to the questions asked. These results are shown in Table I.

TABLE I. PERCENTAGE OF CORRECT ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Number	Question	% Correct
1.	The President of the U.S. is ?	100.0
2.	How many U.S. Senators are there from New York?	69.1
3.	The membership of the U.S. House of Representatives is larger than that of the Senate. True or False?	90.7
4.	The President is the head of the legislative branch of the U.S. government. True or False?	71.8
5.	Would Barry Goldwater be considered liberal or conservative in his political outlook?	57.6
6.	Who is the representative from this, the Third, U.S. Congressional district?	58.6
7.	Name the present Vice President of the U.S.	97.1
8.	The oldest age you may be and still vote in a national election is: 55, 62, 65, 75, No limit?	97.5
9.	Who was the candidate for Vice President on the Republican ticket in 1964?	16.6
10.	Name the Majority Leader in the U.S. House of Representatives.	33.3
11.	Name the Democratic and Republican Candidates for Governor.	(at least one) 68.2*
		(both) 42.9
12.	Name any other candidate for State or National office	24.7
13.	What is the principal issue in the present Governor's campaign in Oklahoma?	36.0
14.	What is "Life Line"? Do you agree or disagree with it?	15.4
15.	Name the two U.S. Senators from Oklahoma.	(at least one) 57.9*
		(both) 25.8

*This number includes respondents who knew both candidates.

Not shown in Table I, but of interest, are the various responses to some of the questions. Responses to question number 9, (1964 Republican Vice Presidential candidate), included: Nixon (14.0%), Goldwater (5.6%), and Rockefeller (2.9%). Other names appeared, but not as frequently. Preston Moore, the Democratic candidate, was named more times as a gubernatorial candidate than was Dewey Bartlett, the Republican candidate, (question number 11). Two individuals not in the gubernatorial contest, Raymond Gary (Former Democratic Governor-3%) and Henry Bellmon (the then Republican governor-3%), were also notable responses to question number 11. In 77 responses to question number 13, taxes were indicated as the principal issue in the gubernatorial contest. Ranking next in number of responses to question number 13 were education (30) and highways (26). A total of 23 different issues were indicated by the responses to question number 13. Also in response to question number 13, prayer in schools, an issue more related to contests other than the gubernatorial race, was mentioned 5 times.

Carl Albert (Representative from the Third U.S. Congressional District) was incorrectly indicated by 15.6% of the respondents as a U.S. Senator (question number 15). There is a positive relationship between those who knew at least one U.S. Senator and those who knew at least one candidate for the governorship. ($\chi^2 = 8.901$; p is less than 0.01).

For the entire sample, correct answers were given 55.3% of the time. Men scored higher on 13 of the 15 questions. The ranking of responses by classification in school and by sex is shown in Table II.

TABLE II. PERCENTAGE OF CORRECT ANSWERS BY CLASS AND SEX

Group	N	% Correct Answers	Rank
Sophomore Men	69	62.5	1
Senior Men	31	62.4	2
Junior Men	52	61.1	3
Senior Women	34	55.6	4
Freshmen Men	52	53.6	5
Junior Women	57	53.3	6
Sophomore Women	63	53.2	7
Freshmen Women	81	50.5	8

To facilitate comparison of groups within the sample, and to accommodate different degrees of awareness indicated by particular questions, an index value was assigned to each correct response. The index value of each question was established after administering the questionnaire to a control group of students in the "Introduction to American Government" course. The index value for each correct answer was based upon the percent of correct responses to the question. Index values assigned for correct answers were divided into five groups: 100% = 0; 76-99% = $\frac{1}{2}$; 50-75% = 1; 25-49% = 2; and 15-24% = 3. The values for each question are indicated in Table III. The maximum possible score for the questionnaire was 19 points.

TABLE III. INDEX VALUES OF QUESTIONS

Question Number	Index Value	Question Number	Index Value
1	0	9	3
2	1	10	1
3	$\frac{1}{2}$	11	2
4	$\frac{1}{2}$	12	2
5	1	13	1
6	1	14	3
7	$\frac{1}{2}$	15	2
8	$\frac{1}{2}$		

This system of measure indicated a median and a mode of 7.0 for the sample as a whole. The distribution by class and sex is shown in Table IV. Except for the reversal in rank of sophomore and senior men, this method of ranking corresponds to ranking by the percentage of correct answers.

As a check on the validity of apparent differences between classes, chi square tests were used. The closest to rejection of the null hypothesis, that no difference because of classification existed, was the comparison between the freshmen and senior classes where p was about 0.10. Thus, on the basis of this sample, it would not be accurate to state that there was a significant difference of political awareness on the basis of undergraduate classification. Similar results were observed regarding possible differences between the sexes in each class. The Mann-Whitney U-test indicated that there was no validity of a hypothesis of difference based on sex.

TABLE IV. INDEX SCORES BY UNDERGRADUATE CLASS AND SEX

Group	N	Median Index Score	Rank
Sohomore Men	69	9.0	2
Senior Men	31	10.0	1
Junior Men	52	7.5	3.5
Senior Women	34	7.5	3.5
Freshmen Men	52	7.0	5.5
Junior Women	57	7.0	5.5
Sophomore Women	63	6.5	7.5
Freshmen Women	81	6.5	7.5
Entire Sample	439	7.0	

Analysis of the median and mean index scores by major fields of study does show some apparent differences. Majors, as indicated by the respondents, were grouped into 15 categories. These groups and their median scores are indicated in Table V. Individuals who indicated an education major other than elementary education are included under the subject matter category, for example, social studies majors are included in the "Social Science" group.

TABLE V. MEDIAN INDEX SCORES BY MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY

Major Field	N	Median Index Score
Preprofessional	17	11.0
Social Science	52	10.0
Music	11	9.0
Natural Sciences	20	9.0
Foreign Language	8	8.5
Physical Education	38	7.5
Business	75	7.0
English	21	7.0
Mathematics	33	7.0
Elementary Education	94	6.5
Art	10	6.0
Home Economics	14	5.0
Undecided	21	5.0
Industrial Arts	11	4.0

Two tests were used to establish the reliability of this data. Initially, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-sample test was applied to each group, both by classification in school, and as a whole. This was done first at the +7.5 median, then at the +10.0 median level. At the 7.5 level, p was in no instance more reliable than 0.20. This was also true for the sophomores and seniors at the +10.0 level. Only with the juniors at the +10.0 level was a p of 0.10 approached. Since the Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-sample test is generally applicable to units of equal value, the arbitrary arrangement of units could conceivably have biased the sample too greatly for it to be of optimum value.

As a further check, the chi square test was applied in comparing the social science group with all other groups. With these sets, p varied from 0.99 to greater than 0.001. By using the method of combining probabilities from independent tests of significance and converting these into chi square equivalents, a value for p of between 0.05 and 0.01 was observed.

Comparison was also made between groups having a median of 7.0 (the sample's median) and groups having a median of less than 7.0. Many of these com-

parisons indicated a significant difference between the groups. For example, in comparing the "Business" group with the combined "Industrial Arts and Home Economics" group, p lay between 0.01 and 0.001. Thus, it may be assumed that there are significant differences in political awareness based upon vocational and training interests.

CONCLUSIONS

1. No predictable difference based on sex or classification is indicated.
 2. There are significant differences in political awareness based on major areas of study.
 3. Question number 5 (Is Goldwater conservative or liberal) possibly should have been worded or split into two parts to test knowledge concerning the identity of Goldwater as distinct from recognition of his place in the political spectrum.
 4. Responses to question number 5, and the test in general, indicates the need for detailed study of direction and intensity of student awareness of political issues.
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