

## Context

The *Post-Secondary Learning Act* mandates student associations to work for students' well-being and represent their voices. The UASU often surveys its members, the undergraduate students of the University of Alberta, to learn about their needs and priorities.

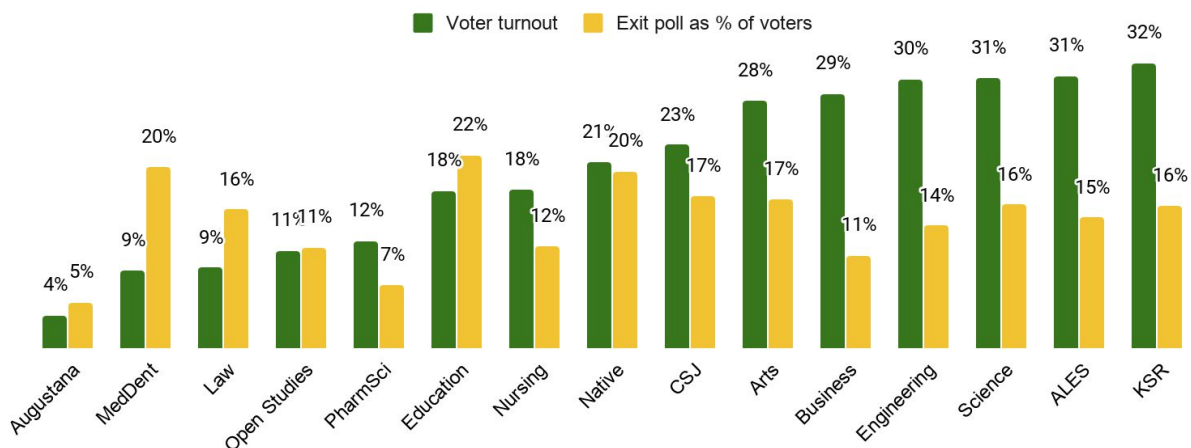
The first half of the March 2020 General Election ballot included five Executive races and the Board of Governors Representative race. The second half included referenda or plebiscites for the Sustainability and Capital Fund (passed), The Gateway (failed), the Golden Bears and Pandas Legacy Fund (failed), and The Landing (passed).

Students who voted in the UASU General Election were asked to take a short follow-up survey on voting behaviour. 1167 out of 7489 voters (15.6%) opted to take the exit poll. Their responses were fully de-linked from their votes.

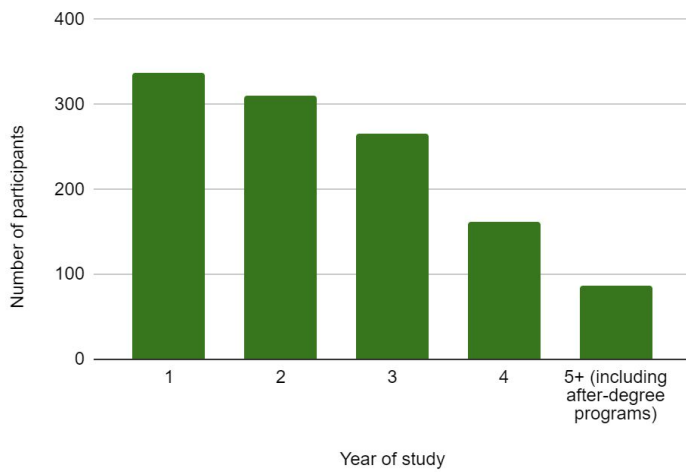
## Sample Composition

Like the voter pool, the exit poll sample varied widely across faculties. Education voters, for example, were especially likely to take the exit poll; meanwhile, voters from Business were especially unlikely to take the poll. These outcomes (and the small numbers involved in some cases, e.g. Law, PharmSci, Medicine and Dentistry) limit our ability to drill down for meaningful results at a per-faculty level. However, they speak to the diversity of the sample. We can be reasonably certain that very large faculties do not disproportionately dominate the sample.

What faculties had the highest voter turnout? Out of those voters, what faculties were most interested in taking the exit poll?



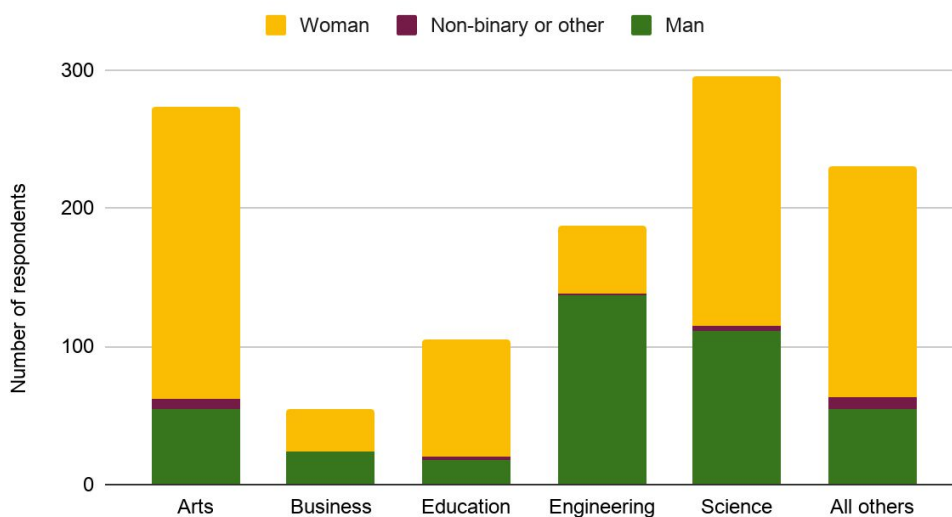
Sample composition by year of study



By and large, the exit poll sample was representative so far as year of study is concerned. In comparison with actual enrolment figures, the exit poll sample overrepresented early-year students and underrepresented late-year students. (For example, 28% of UAlberta undergraduates are in fourth year or higher, compared with 21% of the exit poll; 27% of respondents were in second year, compared with 23% of the undergraduate student body.)

63% of exit poll respondents identified as women, compared to 55% of the undergraduate student body (as per the Annual Report on Undergraduate Enrolment 2019/20 from the Office of the Registrar). 1.9% identified as 'non-binary or other' in terms of gender; this rate is significantly higher than other UASU surveys or Registrar numbers. As in other surveys, international students were underrepresented. Only 4.7% of respondents were international students, compared to 15.3% of the undergraduate student body. We compensated for these imbalances by assessing the following questions with reference to faculty, gender, year of study, etc. whenever possible.

Respondents by gender and faculty

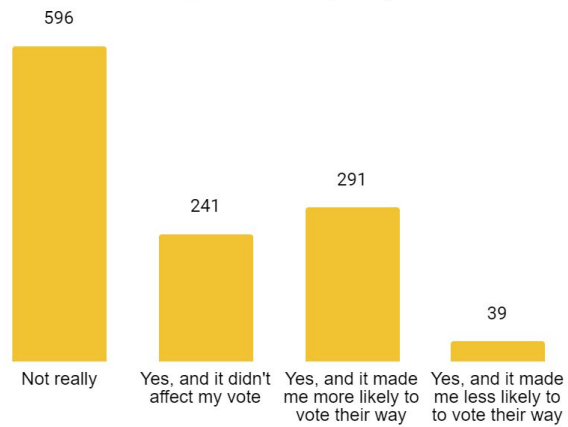


## Communications Methods

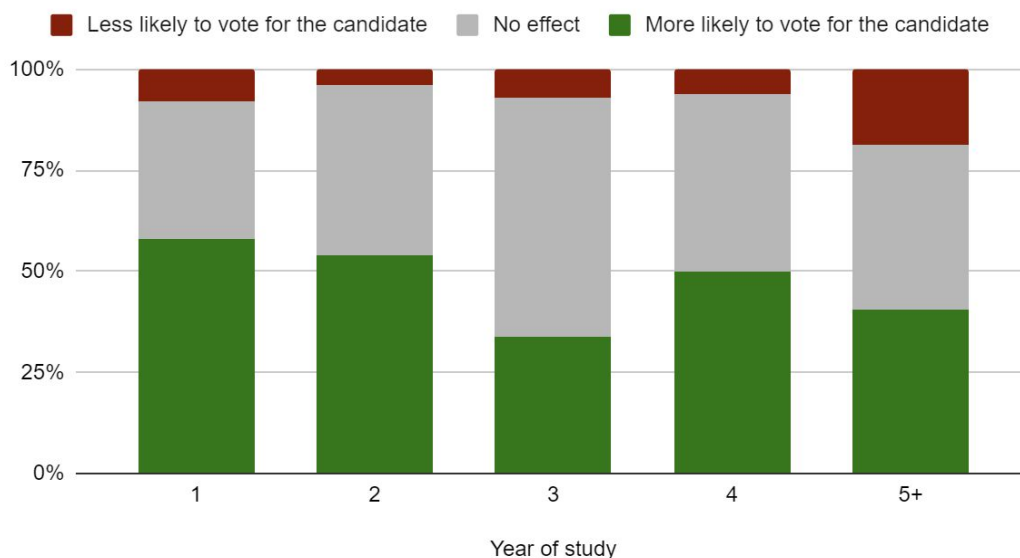
Previous UASU surveys have asked questions about the relative effectiveness of communications methods. However, this survey's updated questions and time frame (i.e. immediately after voting) make it a high-quality source for understanding what influenced student voting behaviour in this election.

Class talks are a key campaign tactic. Half of the exit poll respondents did not experience candidate talks in their classes; campaigns may be leaving votes on the table. Of those respondents who did experience class talks, 42% said it did not affect their vote, 51% said it affected their vote positively, and 7% said it affected their vote negatively. Workshopping effective class talks could be a value-add for future election seasons. Later-year students (probably due to class sizes) had a much higher likelihood of not experiencing class talks. 35% of first-year respondents and 45% of second-year respondents answered 'not really,' compared to 62% of third-years and 69% of fourth-years or above. As a general rule of thumb, class talks were more effective for connecting with lower-year students and women.

“Did candidates or referendum campaign representatives speak in any of your classes?”

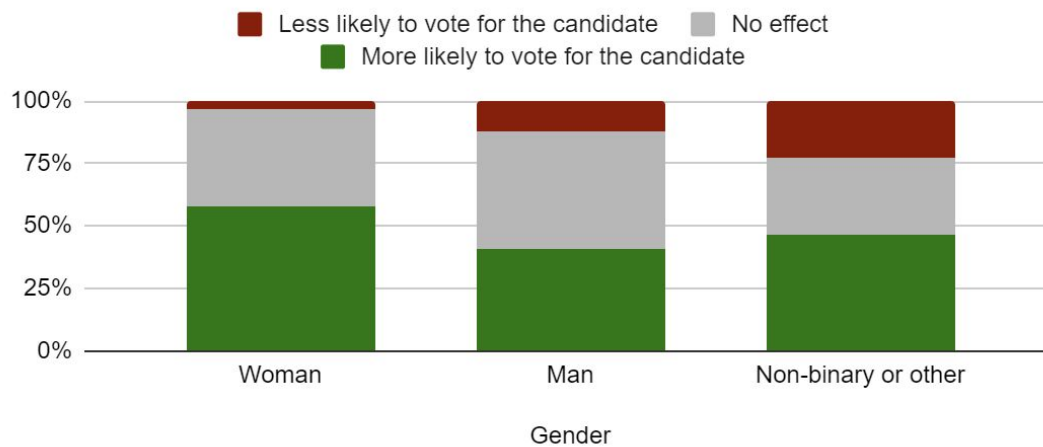


## How effective are class talks?



## How effective are class talks?

Note that very few gender non-binary respondents answered this question.

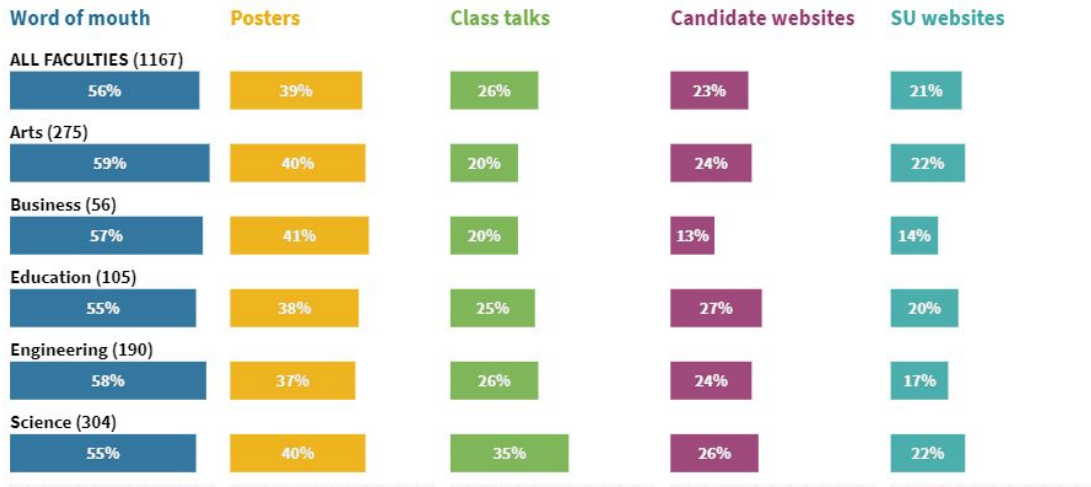


A separate question listed various campaign communications methods and asked respondents to select up to three that "made the biggest difference in the voting decisions you just made." Since roughly 10% of respondents selected more than three options, we decided to interpret the 'choose all that apply' question as a list of all factors that significantly influenced a given student's voting behaviour, which appears to be how some students understood the question.

A few points of note:

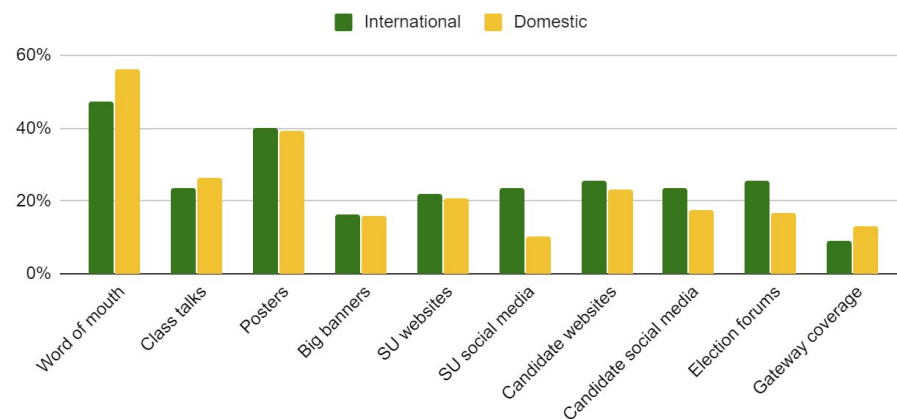
- Word of mouth and posters are the unchallenged top choices.
- SU social media tends to focus more on general awareness of the election than on presenting the candidates.
- Candidate social media was a middle-of-the-road choice for most students, but it made a disproportionate impact on Business students. This is especially noteworthy because so few other communications channels made an impact on Business students.
- Business and Arts students were much more likely than most others to be influenced by Gateway coverage.
- Science students connected heavily with class talks this year.
- International students were somewhat less likely to rely on word of mouth or Gateway coverage.
- International students were somewhat more likely to be influenced by SU or candidate social media, or by election forums.

## What percent of each faculty's voters did each communications method reach? "Which of the following made the biggest difference in the voting decisions you just made?"



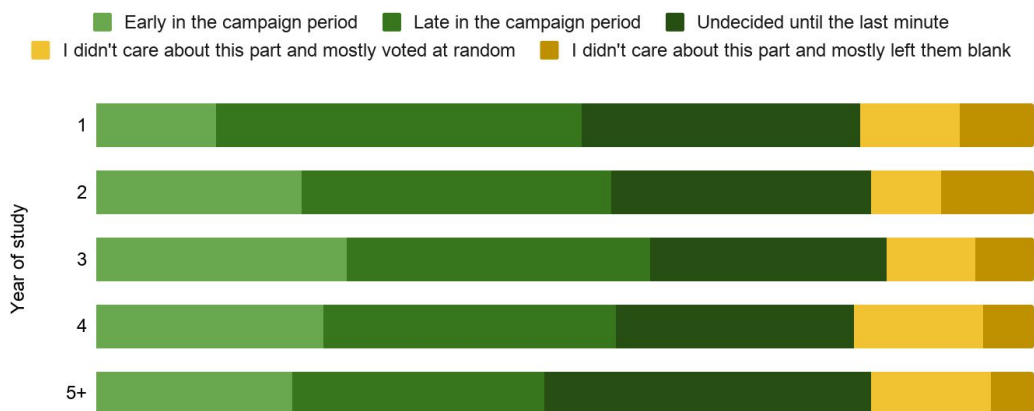
## International students and election communication methods

"Which of the following made the biggest difference in the voting decisions you just made?"

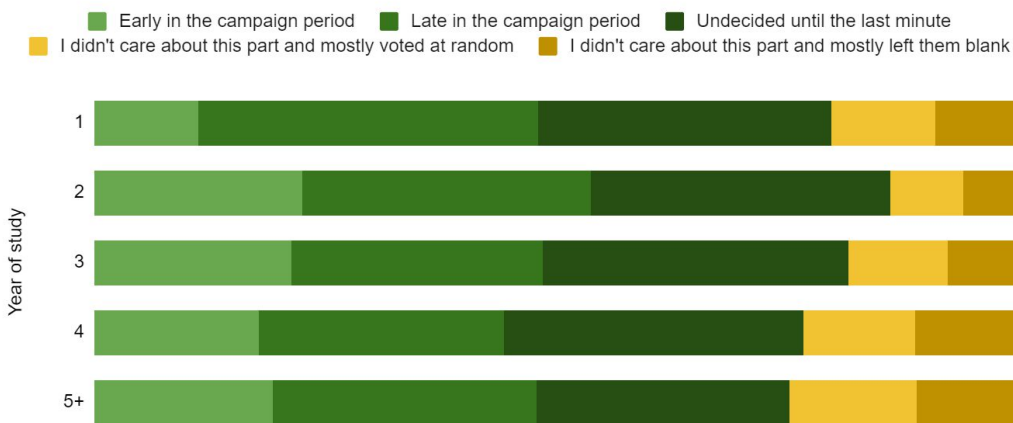


## How and when voters make decisions

"Thinking about most of the votes you just cast for EXECUTIVE races, when did you decide to vote?"



"Thinking about most of the votes you just cast for NON-EXECUTIVE races/decisions, when did you decide to vote?"

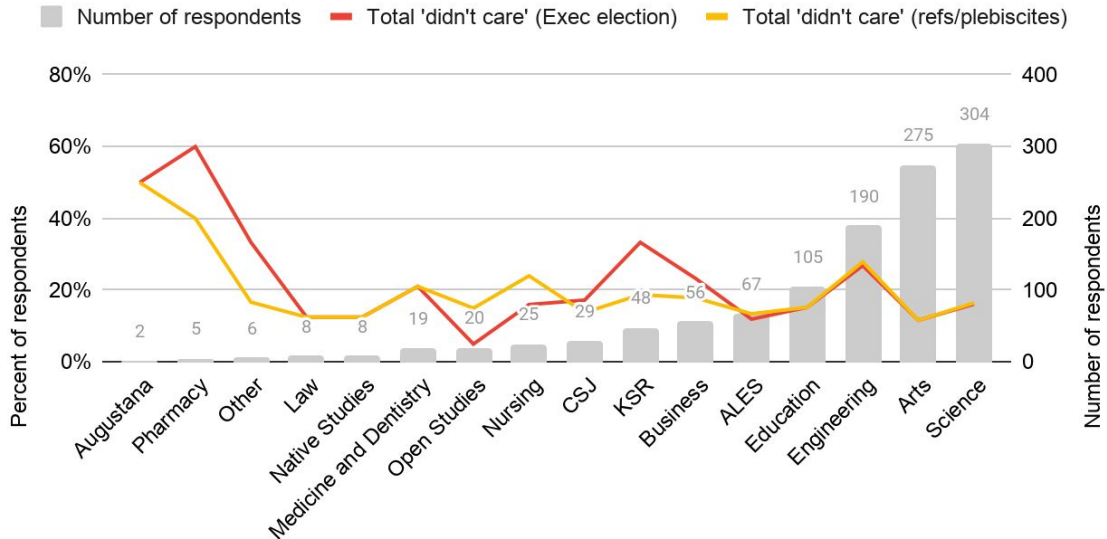


Some points of note:

- Students of all years of study are far more likely to make voting decisions later rather than earlier. A huge fraction of *considered* votes are last-minute decisions. First-year students were especially likely to wait to make their mind up.
- Students in later years of study were more likely than younger students to not care about the plebiscites and referenda.
- Men were significantly more likely than women to choose one of the two 'didn't care about this part' options for the Executive races.

## Respondents who did not care about the Executive election half and/or the referendum/plebiscite half

"I didn't care about this part and mostly voted at random" or "...mostly left them blank"

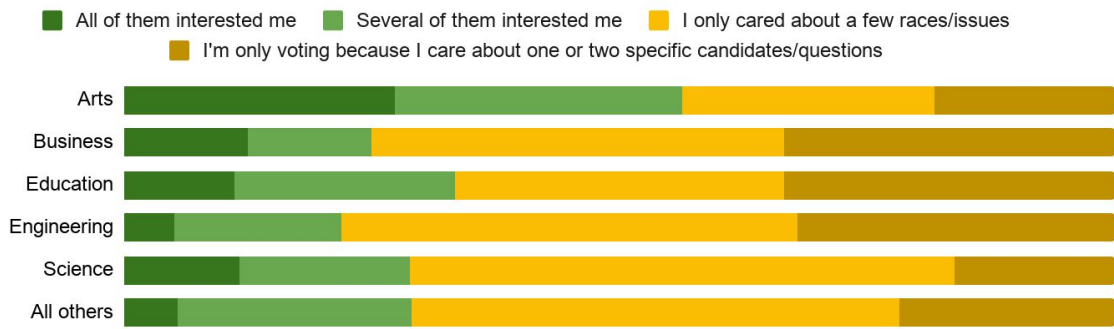


Some points of note:

- Around one out of six (~200) students selected one of the 'didn't care' options for at least one of the ballot halves. There was significant overlap: 140 (12%) selected a 'didn't care' option for *both* sections.
  - These voters overwhelmingly selected 'I only cared about a few races/issues' or 'I'm only voting because I care about one or two specific candidates/questions' in the next question.
- The disparity in the Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport and Recreation is probably due to the plebiscite campaign for the Golden Bears and Pandas Legacy Fund.
- International students and domestic students answered this question in similar ways and proportions, with one major exception. During the referenda/plebiscite half of the ballot, international students were much more likely (16% versus 10% of domestic students) to vote at random.

### Breadth of interest by faculty (men only)

"How did you feel about the races/issues you just voted on? Pick the option that comes closest to your opinion."



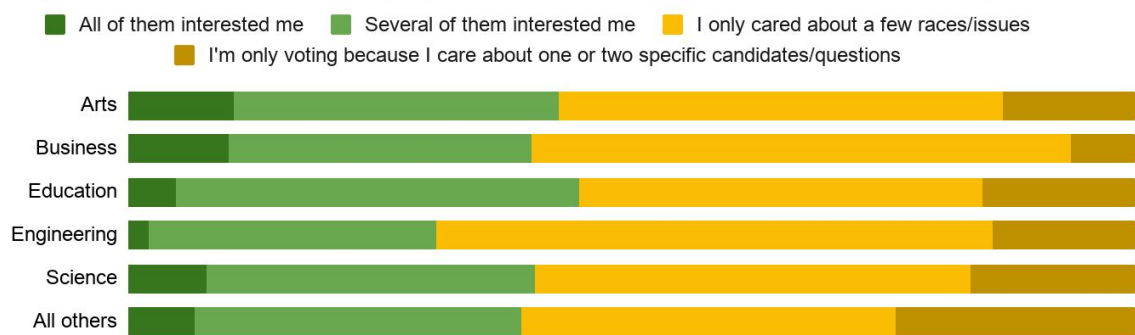
Gender ratios varied widely across faculties. When we controlled for gender, we found that faculty remained a major predictor of interest in ballot items (e.g. women in Engineering and men in Engineering both skewed toward caring about only a few races/issues).

Conversely, we also found that gender made a significant difference regardless of faculty (e.g. except for Arts, women were more likely than men to be interested in several or all of the races/issues).

In other words, patterns specific to a given faculty are both because of faculty-specific needs/interests/culture *and* because of gender balances or imbalances in that faculty.

### Breadth of interest by faculty (women only)

"How did you feel about the races/issues you just voted on? Pick the option that comes closest to your opinion."



International students and domestic students answered this question in similar ways and proportions, with one major exception. International students were more than twice as likely (20% versus 9% of domestic students) to be interested in all the races and issues on the ballot.



## APPENDIX: Breadth of interest versus decision timing

		"How did you feel about the races/issues you just voted on?"				
		All of them interested me	Several of them interested me	I only cared about a few races/issues	I'm only voting because I care about one or two specific candidates/questions	
"Thinking about most of the votes you just cast...when did you decide to vote?"	Executive races	Early in the campaign period	46	89	30	74
		Late in the campaign period	33	205	39	118
		Undecided until the last minute	14	126	76	110
		I didn't care about this part and mostly left them blank	8	38	35	9
		I didn't care about this part and mostly voted at random	6	49	49	13
	Other races/decisions	Early in the campaign period	46	59	21	89
		Late in the campaign period	34	225	42	69
		Undecided until the last minute	16	142	85	137
		I didn't care about this part and mostly left them blank	7	25	34	11
		I didn't care about this part and mostly voted at random	4	56	47	18