

# Student Voting Behavior in the 2024 Election Cycle

Nathanael Bracy<sup>1</sup>, Joseph Kerekes<sup>1</sup>, Megan Zalepeski<sup>1</sup>, Ethan Jansen<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Clarkson University, Potsdam, New York 13676, United States

## \* Correspondence:

Nathanael Bracy  
bracynj@clarkson.edu

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## Abstract

This study examines generational differences in voting behavior by analyzing the voting intentions of undergraduate students at Clarkson University and comparing them with national and state polling data from New York during the same election cycle. The analysis revealed that, in the regular dataset, students expressed stronger support for Donald Trump, contrasting with broader polling results. When parental voting behaviors were included in the expanded dataset, the support for Trump increased slightly while Harris's support rose, narrowing the gap between the two candidates. Despite this adjustment, the student body's preferences still deviated significantly from larger regional trends, with Trump maintaining a higher share of support compared to his polling figure, and Harris's support falling below her state- and national-level polling. These findings highlight generational differences in political preferences, suggesting that younger voters, particularly those surveyed in this study, are more likely to diverge from their parents' political choices, reflecting a shift in the political landscape that is driven by evolving social and political values. This research provides valuable insight into youth engagement and the potential influence of generational voting behaviors in shaping electoral outcomes.

## Introduction

Voting behavior has long been studied in political science, with numerous factors influencing individuals' political choices, including demographic characteristics, socio-economic status, and social connections. One key area of interest is how generational differences affect political preferences. The voting patterns of younger generations often differ from those of their parents, reflecting changing societal values, political climates, and personal experiences. This study aims to investigate these generational differences by focusing on the voting intentions of undergraduate students at Clarkson University and comparing them with the inferred voting preferences of their parents.

## 1 Methods and Materials

A cross-sectional survey was administered to undergraduate students enrolled in the STAT383 course at Clarkson University. The survey was designed to capture students' intended voting behaviors, including their candidate preference and whether they plan to vote similarly or differently from their parents. We assumed that this course's student population is representative

of the broader student body at Clarkson University, which provides an adequate sampling frame to understand the political trends within this demographic.

After the survey responses were collected, the data underwent preprocessing. The initial dataset contained responses regarding student voting behavior and their parents' inferred voting preferences. This data was expanded to include inferred parental votes based on students' reporting of whether their voting preferences differed from their parents. For students who selected "Other" as their preferred candidate, the parental vote could not be inferred, so these responses were excluded from the expanded dataset. For students who reported voting similarly to their parents, the inferred parental vote was assumed to be the same as the student's vote, and in favor of the other candidate otherwise.

The data processing and analysis were conducted using the R programming language within Rstudio, and the following libraries were used to facilitate the processing and visualization of the data: [here](#) for managing file paths, and [ggplot2](#) for creating visualizations. The analysis involved calculating the percentage of students supporting each presidential candidate in both the original and expanded datasets. The results were visualized using pie charts to illustrate the distribution of votes in each dataset.

After processing the survey data, we performed a comparative analysis of the original and expanded datasets. The original dataset contained only the students' reported voting preferences, while the expanded dataset included inferred parental voting behavior. By comparing the two datasets, we were able to assess the extent to which younger voters' preferences diverged from those of their parents and how these generational differences might reflect broader trends in voting behavior.

To compare the original and expanded datasets, we first calculated the percentage of students supporting each presidential candidate (Donald Trump, Kamala Harris, and Other) in both the original and expanded datasets. These percentages were calculated as the proportion of students supporting each candidate, multiplied by 100 to express the results as percentages. The percentage change was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Percent Change} = \frac{\text{Percentage in Expanded Dataset} - \text{Percentage in Original Dataset}}{\text{Percentage in Original Dataset}} \times 100$$

## 2 Results

### *Original Vote Distribution*

Candidate	Percentage (%)
D. Trump	49.586777
K. Harris	40.495868
Other	9.917355

### *Expanded Vote Distribution*

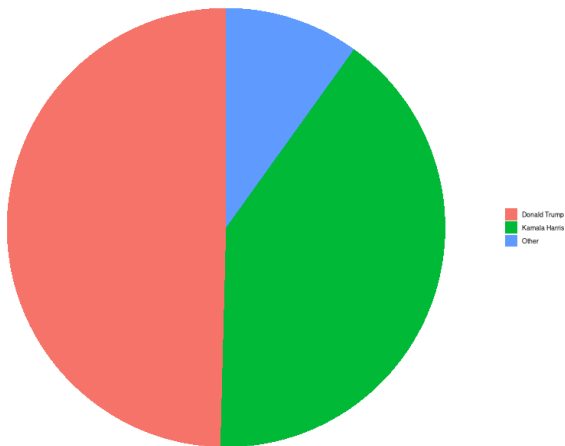
Candidate	Percentage (%)
D. Trump	50.869565
K. Harris	43.913043
Other	5.217391

### *Percent Change in Support for candidates between Original and Expanded Datasets*

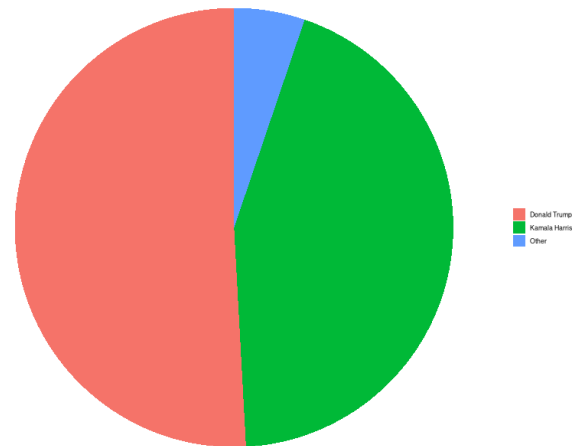
Candidate	Original Dataset (%)	Expanded Dataset (%)	Percent Change (%)
D. Trump	49.586777	50.869565	+2.59
K. Harris	40.495868	43.913043	+8.44

### *Vote Distribution in the Original (below-left) and Expanded (below-right) Datasets*

Vote Distribution (Regular Dataset)



Vote Distribution (Expanded Dataset)



## **3 Discussion**

The results revealed that, in the original dataset, students expressed stronger support for Donald Trump than would be expected based on state-level polling data. Conversely, Kamala Harris had significantly lower support among the students than her polling numbers in New York and

nationally, where she was leading Trump by and +16 and +1 points, respectively.<sup>1 2</sup> When we expanded the dataset to include inferred parental voting behaviors, the patterns shifted. The expanded dataset showed a modest increase in support for Trump and a slightly greater increase in support for Harris, but it still did not align closely with broader polling. While the inclusion of parental influence helped to narrow the gap between the students' voting preferences and broader regional trends, generational differences were still apparent.

The observed divergence in voting preferences between the student population and their parents' inferred voting behaviors is a key finding of this study. Specifically, students in the original dataset tended to show more support for Trump.

One of the limitations of this study is the relatively small and homogenous sample size ( $n=120$ ), which consisted solely of students from a single university in the northeast United States. While the course was assumed to be representative of the broader student body at Clarkson University, the findings may not fully generalize to the larger or more diverse national population. Additionally, while the inferred parental voting behaviors provided valuable insight, the method of inferring these preferences based on students' reports introduces a potential source of bias. Students may not always accurately assess their parents' political preferences, or they may be influenced by their own political biases when reporting whether they vote similarly or differently from their parents. Future studies could expand the sample size to include students from multiple universities across different regions and further refine the methods for capturing parental voting behavior.

#### **4 Conclusion**

This study highlights significant generational differences in voting behavior, particularly among undergraduate students at Clarkson University. The findings suggest that younger voters, as represented by the students in this survey, tend to favor Donald Trump more strongly than the broader electorate, in contrast to state and national polling where Kamala Harris held a commanding lead. The inclusion of parental voting behaviors in the expanded dataset helped to bring the student voting patterns closer to broader polling trends, but the divergence between the youth vote and the broader electorate remained evident.

The results underscore the evolving political preferences of younger generations, who are more likely to diverge from their parents in terms of candidate support. While parental influence appears to play a role in shaping youth voting behavior, it is clear that generational differences are influencing political choices, with younger voters reflecting distinct social and political values. As the political landscape continues to evolve, understanding the dynamics of youth voting behavior will be crucial for interpreting trends in public opinion and forecasting electoral results.

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<sup>1</sup> CBS News, *CBS News/YouGov Poll, October 23-25, 2024*, Scribd, accessed November 29, 2024, <https://www.scribd.com/document/784786236/cbsnews-20241027-1-SUN>.

<sup>2</sup> Research Co., *Research C. Poll, Nov 2-3, 2024*, FiveThirtyEight, accessed November 29, 2024, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/president-general/2024/new-york/>

## Data Availability Statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article and the associated R code will be made available by the authors without undue reservation in the repository at [github.com/servusdei2018/stat383-project](https://github.com/servusdei2018/stat383-project). This repository will include both the survey data and the analysis code in a single folder.

## Author Contribution

NB: Coding, statistical analysis

JK: Writing, data curation

MZ: Coding, statistical analysis

EJ: Editing, data collection

## References

1. CBS News. CBS News/YouGov Poll, October 23-25, 2024. Scribd. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://www.scribd.com/document/784786236/cbsnews-20241027-1-SUN>.
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