ABSTRACT

TITLE:	Exercising the Right: Influences on Young New Voters
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ABSTRACT: The 2008 United States presidential election was a unique event, not only due to the running of two figures which have never before come so close to nomination (an African American president and a woman vice-president) but also the record breaking participation of new or first time voters. This population of new voters has brought the percentage of young voters up to 52% matching the record set in 1972, when youths first acquired the right to vote (Braun 2008). This study set out to assess what influences these new voters' political views and to what extent their perceptions conform to the post election results. Pre-post surveys were completed by 363 undergraduate freshman level math students to assess the extent of this influence of family, media, peers, and religion. Opinions were also gathered regarding what the subject believes the most important topic that need to be changed by the next president. Each subject was asked to rate the likelihood of each candidate winning the '08 election, as well as how they felt about each candidate being president of the United States of America. We collected the subjects voting history to assess patterns of prior voting tendencies. Demographic information was collected to allow any consideration that could be derived from minority voting patterns. We found substantial evidence in what influences young/new voters. Family in almost all cases was indicated as the largest influence. Familial influence amongst McCain voters displays a large difference between the other three categories. In the No Vote category, peers had the largest influence. Obama voters ranked family, peers and media almost equal, with religion being the least influential. In further research it would be worthwhile to look at why the largest influence after family was the peers of the No Vote group. When asked what one thing needs to be changed by this next president the majority of participants, not surprisingly, said the economy and taxes. This study shows how young, new voters of Fort Lewis College were influenced to exercise the right in the 2008 presidential election.