

The Hype about Politics: Political Unawareness at Science and Math

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It's election time, and sometimes you wonder how much the populace actually knows about candidates and politicians. Do people really know who they are voting for?

I conducted a survey to see how politically aware students at NCSSM are, though, politically "unaware" might be more appropriate. We surveyed a hundred people during one lunch period outside the cafeteria. All students walking by were invited to fill a survey, and we acknowledge that there may be voluntary bias in the setup of the investigation. Phillip Golladay, Karthik Sekar, Chris McLain, and Toan Tran-phu helped with distribution of surveys. We stayed until all the ballots were filled. The survey asked for their opinions of a particular politician, from strongly disapprove to strongly approve, with no opinion for politicians whom students don't know about. Furthermore, each

Table 1

George W. Bush	R-TX	Presidential Candidate (I)
John Kerry	D-MA	Presidential Candidate
Dick Cheney	R-WY	Vice Presidential Candidate (I)
John Edwards	D-NC	Vice Presidential Candidate
Mike Easley	D-NC	Gubernatorial Candidate (I)
Elizabeth Dole	R-NC	US Senator
Erskine Bowles	D-NC	US Senate Candidate
Richard Burr	R-NC	US Senate Candidate
John McCain	R-AZ	US Senator
Hillary Clinton	D-NY	US Senator
Lincoln Chafee	R-RI	US Senator
Zell Miller	D-GA	US Senator

politician's party affiliation and state is given.

For the politicians in question, I used the politicians

shown below: (see Table 1)

I included Lincoln Chafee and Zell Miller

Table 2:

Ronald Luciano	D-NC
Robert Griggs	R-NC
Joseph Thompson	D-NC
Buddy Taylor	R-NC

because they tend to vote against their party lines. For the survey, politicians were arranged such that they were in alternate party affiliations, and half the surveys had a Republican to start while the remaining half started with a Democratic politician.

For good measure, I included four people who aren't politicians at all and dog.

door neighbor, Joseph Thompson is nobody, just a generic American name, and

Democrats definitely score higher marks than their Republican counterparts.

It is interesting to note that Edwards and Kerry top the charts aside from McCain while Cheney and Bush are at the bottom. Furthermore, my good friend Mr. Luciano has the

est "politician," and Joseph Thompson did pretty well himself. Meanwhile, also interesting is that aside from McCain, Buddy Taylor and Robert Griggs fare better than every other Republican.

Our surveys were filled with "straight tickets," a pretty zigzag of strongly approves and strongly disapproves. Alas, 11 people strongly disapprove of Mr. Luciano, and eight people strongly approve of him without knowing him. Maybe he should run for public office some day.

The lesson we should all learn is to know about the candidate before we vote. Party affiliations mean little if anything. There are some Republicans more liberal than some Democratic politicians, and vice versa. Don't vote for just anyone. Vote for someone whose opinions correspond to yours.

Table 3

(%)	Strongly Disapprove	Disapprove	Neutral	Approve	Strongly Approve	No Opinion
George Bush	48	22	5	10	10	5
John Kerry	17	20	13	26	18	6
Dick Cheney	37	26	9	9	11	8
John Edwards	16	13	20	19	20	12

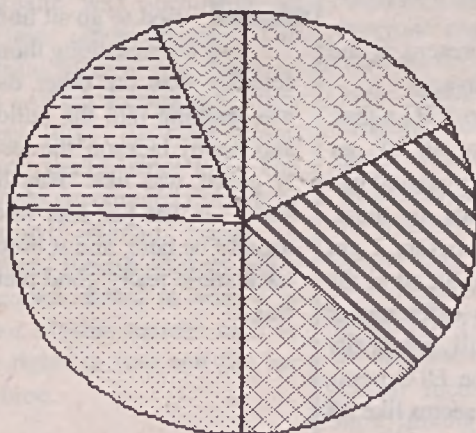
Table 4

Politician		Approval
John McCain	R-AZ	57
John Edwards	D-NC	54
John Kerry	D-MA	52
Mike Easley	D-NC	50
Ronald Luciano	D-NC	48
Joseph Thompson	D-NC	48
Zell Miller	D-GA	46
Erskine Bowles	D-NC	45
Hillary Clinton	D-NY	42
Buddy Taylor	R-NC	42
Robert Griggs	R-NC	41
Elizabeth Dole	R-NC	40
Richard Burr	R-NC	36
Lincoln Chafee	R-RI	36
Dick Cheney	R-WY	31
George Bush	R-TX	27

Next, I devised a system to measure the results. "Strongly disapprove" would be at the bottom of the scale (0), while "Strongly Approve" would be at the top (4); all these values would be averaged and then rescaled to a 100 point system. Therefore, scores would range from lowest (0) to highest (100). "No opinion" is disregarded. (for results, see Table 3)

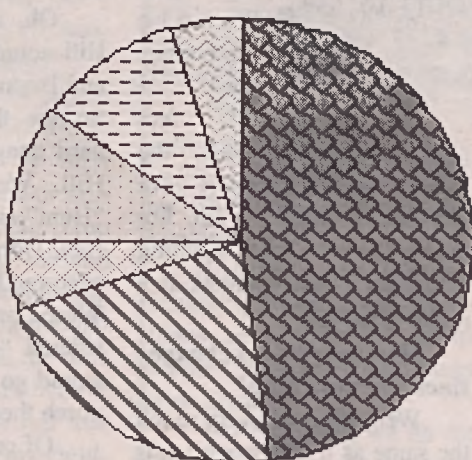
What does this show? (see Table 4) Well, the results surely are interesting. Congratulations, John McCain, for you a Republican from Arizona, top the charts. However, we notice a string of eight Democrats followed by seven Republicans as the

John Kerry



- Strongly Disapprove
- Disapprove
- Neutral
- Approve
- Strongly Approve
- No Opinion

George W. Bush



- Strongly Disapprove
- Disapprove
- Neutral
- Approve
- Strongly Approve
- No Opinion