



How a Student's Demographics Influences their Knowledge of Global Affairs



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Abstract

How does a student's demographics influence their knowledge of global affairs? I hypothesize that students of color and the more a student is engaged with campus life, the more likely they are to have greater knowledge of global affairs. Through this research I have been able to gain a better understanding of how a student's identities relate to what they know about major events happening today.

Introduction and Rationale

Global affairs are becoming increasingly important as tensions between people and nations grow both domestically and internationally. Through examining the intersection of identities of the public and global affairs, we can better understand the public's knowledge to advance policy and actions directly applicable to the constituency by state or non-state actors.

Given this, I ask respondents questions related to their knowledge of the ongoing conflicts in Russia and Taiwan. These are countries that have great influence on the rest of the world and whose events are shaping current policy and action taken by world leaders. These two countries and conflicts are important for understanding the changing political landscape globally and domestically and how state and non-state actors respond accordingly to de-escalate tensions as conflicts arise.

Literature Review

As government institutions are underperforming, research suggests that the need for citizen's political participation is more meaningful and needed in the public sphere: specifically women and the youth (Mayer, 2011). Studies also suggest that under these circumstances the public is more knowledgeable on political affairs (Lyons, Jaeger, & Wolak, 2013). This demonstrates how political knowledge across demographics are essential but also needed to fuel political participation. Consequently, marginalized groups are being left out policymaking, leading to lack of political knowledge, and thus also a lack of said political participation.

Research has also shown how political action and knowledge among American citizens is not fixed but instead changes with "political stimuli" across varying time periods (Beck & Jennings, 1979) (Lyons, Jaeger, & Wolak, 2013). Voting patterns change, which tells us that when different issues arise over time, different groups and values are brought to the forefront when advocating for policy making. Groups are more likely to become involved and inform themselves when politics means something to them. Put another way, the public is more likely to be knowledgeable of events around them when they are directly affected.

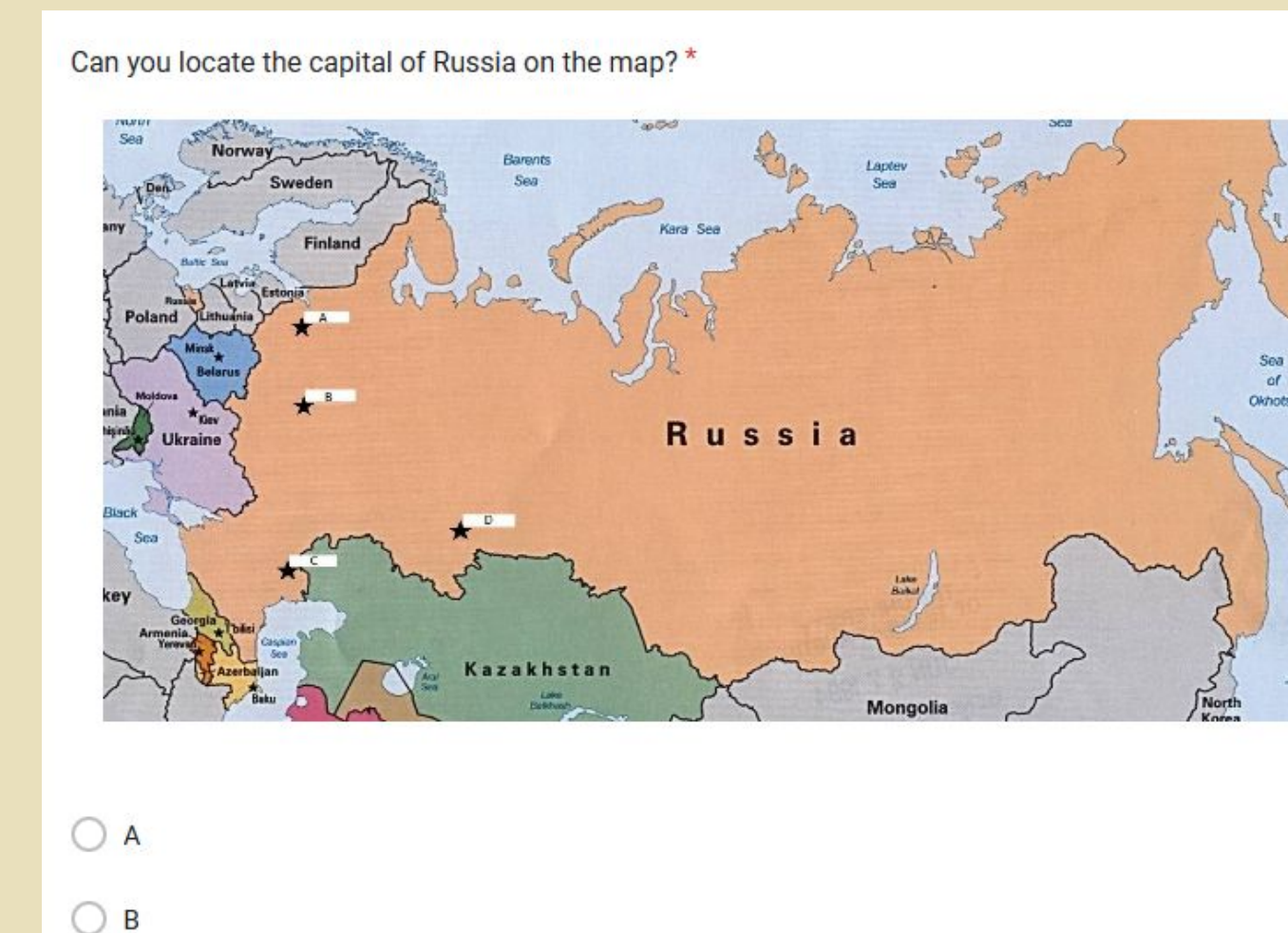
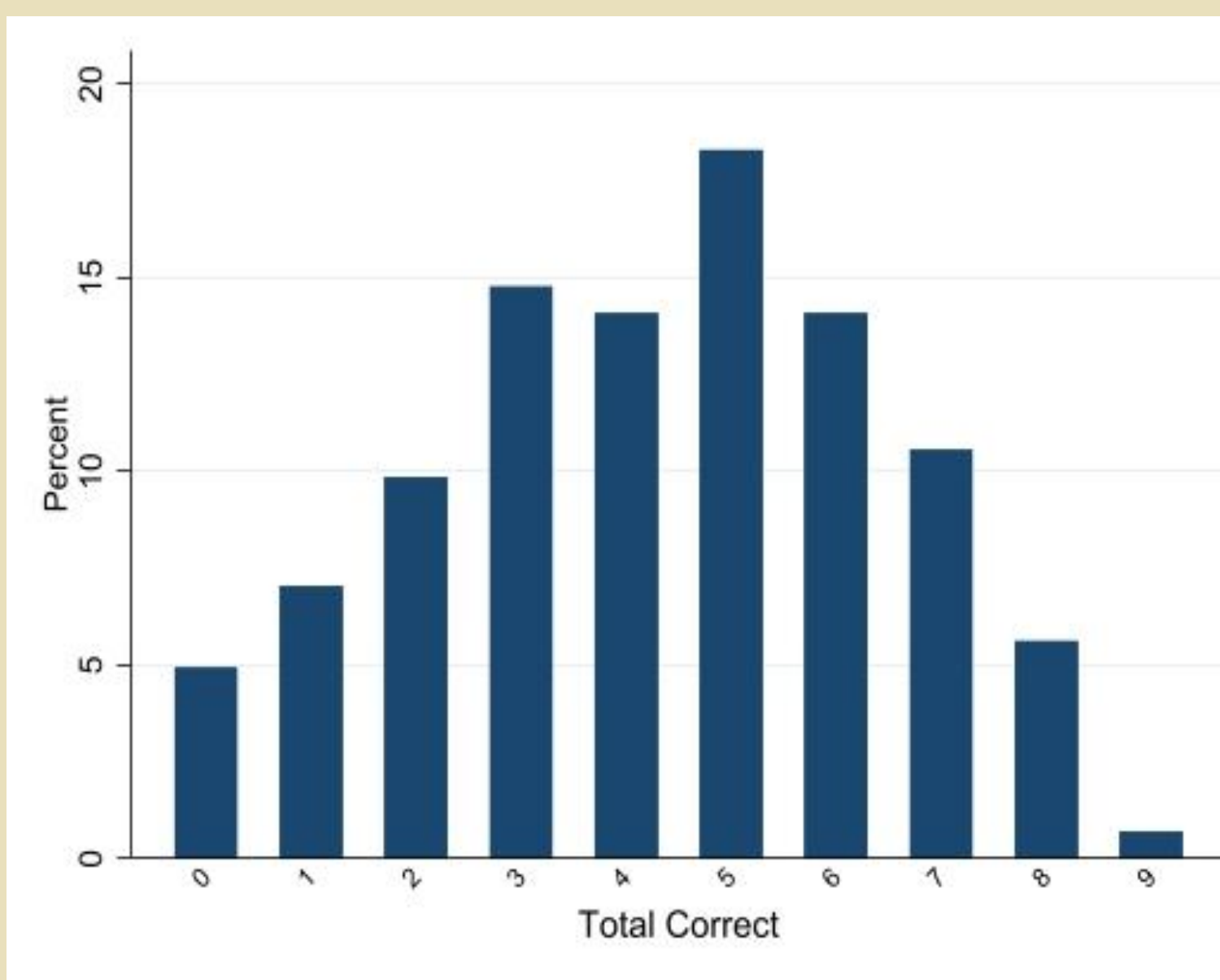
For example, prior scholarship indicates there is a gender gap in political knowledge, with women generally have less political knowledge than men. This may be due in part to a lack of representation or political socialization among women. These findings are essential in explaining the gender knowledge gap and also how descriptive representation effects political engagement overall (Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Dassonneville & McAllister, 2018).

Data and Methods

I conducted an original IRB approved survey of Geneseo students from 03/28/2023-04/10/2023 via Google forms. My dependent variables are counts of the number of questions students got correct related to events in Russia and Taiwan. I estimate an OLS regression model controlling for measures of students' demographic characteristics including: class, major, whether or not they live on/off campus, gender, race, involvement on campus, political ideology, news involvement, if they are registered to vote, and if they voted in the November 2022 general election.

Response Rates:

- 2.94% of Geneseo Undergraduate students took my survey (142 of 4,828)
- 61% of respondents were Cis-Women
- ◆ Compared to Geneseo as a whole: 65% of undergraduates are Female
- 25% of respondents were POC
- ◆ Compared to Geneseo as a whole: 14.5% of undergraduates are POC



Results

OLS Regression Results: How a Student's Identity Influences their Knowledge of Global Affairs

VARIABLES	(1) Overall Total Questions Correct	(2) Total Russia Questions Correct	(3) Total Taiwan Questions Correct
Class Standing	0.652*** (0.208)	0.122 (0.112)	0.529*** (0.157)
Social Science Major	0.583* (0.336)	0.105 (0.165)	0.478** (0.239)
Lives On-Campus	0.246 (0.402)	-0.330 (0.226)	0.576* (0.307)
Cis-Woman	-1.375*** (0.382)	-0.410** (0.175)	-0.965*** (0.274)
POC	0.161 (0.368)	-0.016 (0.190)	0.176 (0.275)
On-Campus Club Involvement	-0.040 (0.500)	0.032 (0.217)	-0.071 (0.354)
Political Ideology	0.011 (0.133)	-0.003 (0.063)	0.014 (0.098)
Keeps Up with News	0.758*** (0.205)	0.252** (0.106)	0.506*** (0.137)
Registered to Vote	0.243 (0.497)	0.224 (0.231)	0.019 (0.416)
Voted in 2022 General Elections	-0.142 (0.417)	-0.141 (0.206)	-0.001 (0.299)
Constant	0.371 (1.198)	0.922 (0.656)	-0.550 (0.887)
Observations	142	142	142
R-squared	0.285	0.153	0.285

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Discussion and Conclusion

I find that students' demographic characteristics influences their political knowledge. One of the largest discrepancies found in political knowledge was gender, with cis-women students having lower levels of knowledge. This finding is similar to prior scholarship (Sanbonmatsu, 2003; Dassonneville & McAllister, 2018). However, my expectation regarding students of color was not supported. I also find that keeping up with the news has a positive and statistically significant impact on knowledge. Specifically for knowledge related to Taiwan, students who are social science majors and further in their undergraduate studies, are more likely to have knowledge of the conflict in Taiwan.

My findings make important contributions for understanding how an individual's identity and demographics influence what they know about global affairs, but also how they participate politically. Political knowledge and political participation are connected: when an individual has more knowledge of politics, the more likely they are to participate in government.

My results help identify groups that are being left out in the distribution of information and policy making decisions. To close the gender gap, empowerment through socialization is key. In addition, encouraging students to become informed of current events through keeping up with the news may help close the political knowledge gap.

Future research should center younger generations in analyses of political views, engagement, and knowledge.

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