

# Political Discourse and Social Media: Is there a Correlation between Social Media Use and Political Involvement?

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## Abstract

In a world where many people are disconnected from political discussion and interaction, it is imperative to study the role of social media as a mainstream platform for political communication. The accessibility of information on the Internet is a valuable asset in today's world. However, it is uncertain whether or not the general public commonly uses the Internet for educational or informational purposes. The goal of this study is to determine if social media use has any correlation to political involvement.

## Methodology



This research is part of a quantitative study that was conducted using a survey hosted online using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed via Facebook and was available to the general public. A total of 84 people participated. Research Design: The 37 question survey addressed points including, demographics, social media use,

and political involvement or engagement. Survey participants include men and women of all ages, ethnicities, backgrounds, and educational levels. All results were anonymous. Context: Following IRB approval, a Google Forms survey was posted to Facebook and Instagram. Accompanying graphic design (shown above) was created along with the post to draw the attention of viewers. On March 24th, 2016 the result collection was finalized and the data was analyzed using SPSS. It will be presented at ESU's Spring 2016 Symposium and may also be eligible for publication.

## Discussion & Limitations

When looking at the survey results as a whole, the relationship between social media use and political involvement is significant in most instances such as voting, discussion, and overall political awareness. However, participants felt that the information they get from social media sites is not always reliable and most do not participate in political interactions online. Social media is most useful when used as an informational resource. Results show that despite some discontent with social media, it could be considered a helpful outlet for accessing political content/news. Recent research studies suggest that there are more "readers" than "writers" and many claim that they would rather have face to face conversations about politics (Sy-

eningsson, 2014). This was relevant to the current research because the results showed similar findings. Overall it was suggested that social media presence is best for political awareness, which is also a concept that corresponds with the current research (Syeningsson, 2014). Limitations include a lack of enthusiasm or skepticism towards politics that might result in negative and biased responses. In addition, about 50% of the participants are ages 18-24, so they don't have much prior background and experience of political history to compare the current political discourse to. They might favor in the side of technology just because it's what they are used to. Also, 36.6% have never voted.

## Research Question & Supporting Literature

- Primary Question:**
- Is there a correlation between social media use and political participation amongst adult social media users?
- Secondary Questions:**
- Does social media play an influential role in presidential elections?
  - Does social media prompt political discussion?

It is recorded that as of September 2014, 74% of adults use social media (PEW Research Center, 2014). Having the ability to utilize social media could be a major advantage for politicians and news teams because of the ability of social media posts to reach large audiences using different medias such as video, photography, articles, and more. Citizens also benefit from quick access to up to date news and a variety of sources to topics (Zhou & Pinkleton 2012). So what is the relationship between our growing technological society, social media networks, and political engagement? Although studies have already found that social media use is helpful in communicating political information (Parmelee, 2013; Velasquez & LaRose 2015; Lineman, Do, & Joo, 2015), it is still a topic that would benefit from further inquiry.

If utilized correctly, social media can be used as a platform for educating and involving the public in political discussions and actions. As important as it is to get people to learn about a topic, it is even more important for people to act upon that feeling. As we move into the 21st century world, it would be helpful to study the correlation between social media use and online/offline political discourse (Velasquez & LaRose 2015). In order to have a society that is educated and aware of global issues, we must study and assess the ways that they learn most effectively.

Lineman, M., Do, Y., Kim, J., & Joo, G. (2015). Talking about Climate Change and Global Warming. PLoS ONE, 1-12. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0138996

Parmelee, J. H. (2013). Political journalists and Twitter: Influences on norms and practices. Journal of Media Practice, 14(4), 291-305.

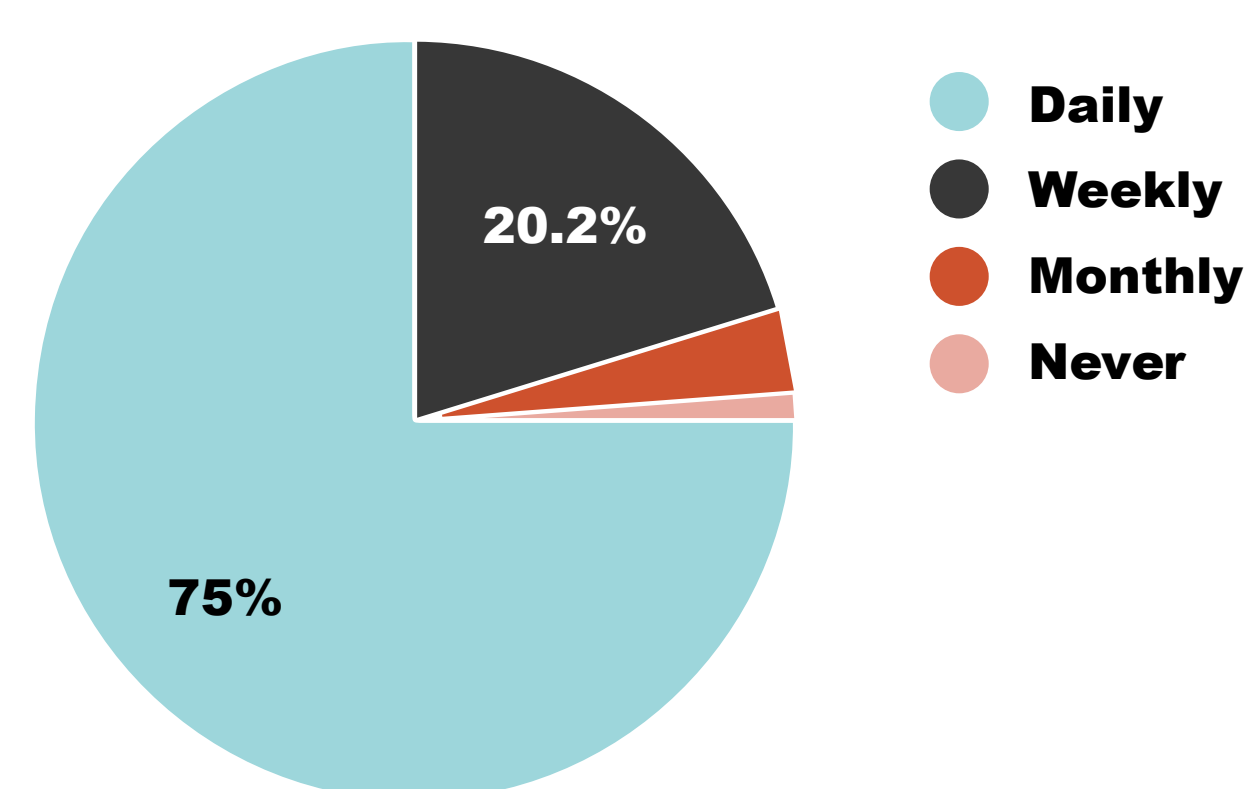
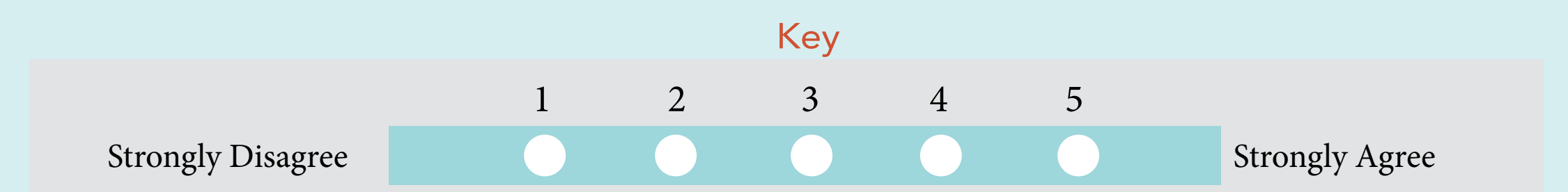
Social Networking Fact Sheet. (2013, December 27). Retrieved November 17, 2015, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheets/social-networking-fact-sheet/>

Sveningsson, M. (2014). "I don't like it and I think it's useless, people discussing politics on Facebook": Young Swedes' understandings of social media use for political discussion. Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 8(3), article 8. doi: 10.5817/CP2014-3-8

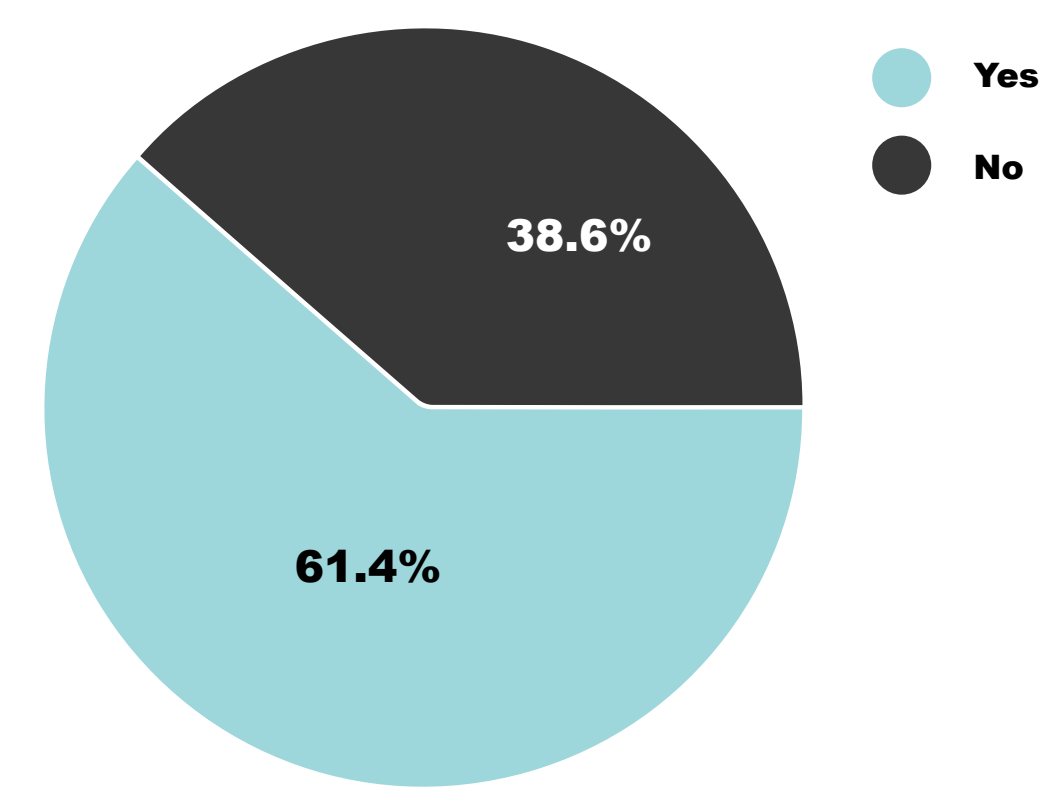
Terracina-Hartman, C., Bienkowski, B., Myers, M., & Kanthawala, S. (2013). Social Media for Environmental Action: What Prompts Engagement and Intent toward Activism?. International Journal Of Technology, Knowledge & Society, 9(4), 143-161.

Velasquez, A., & LaRose, R. (2015). Social Media for Social Change: Social Media Political Efficacy and Activism in Student Activist Groups. Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 59(3), 456-474. doi:10.1080/08838151.2015.1054998

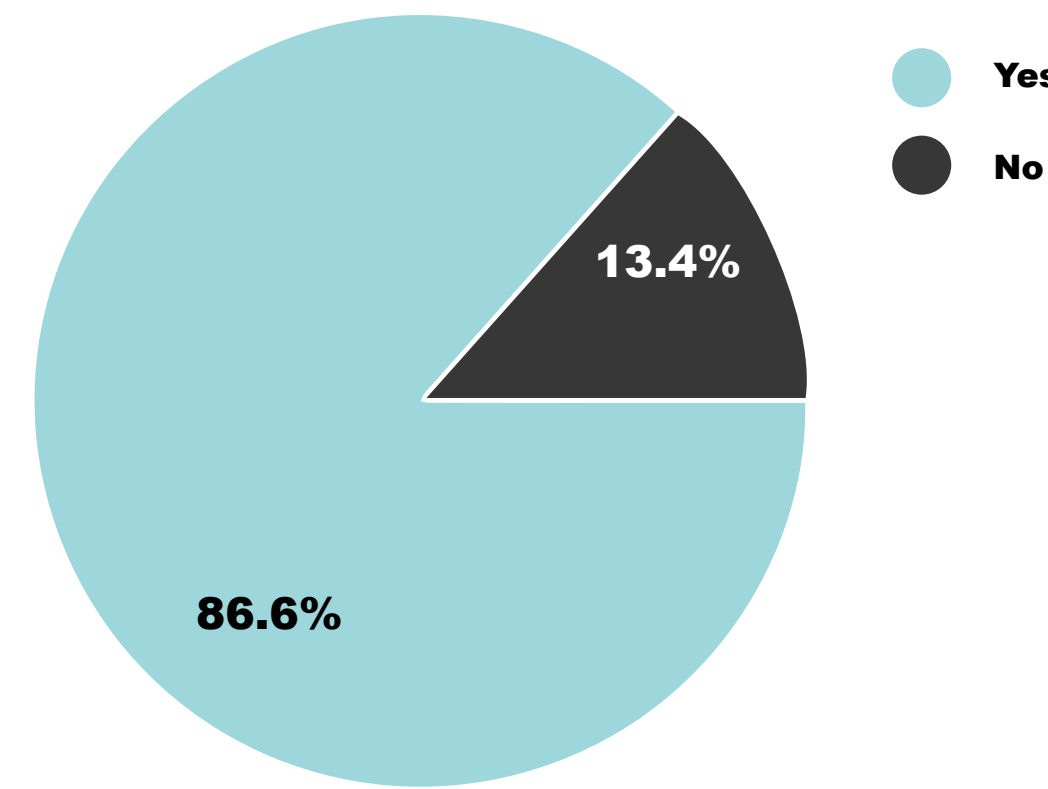
## Findings



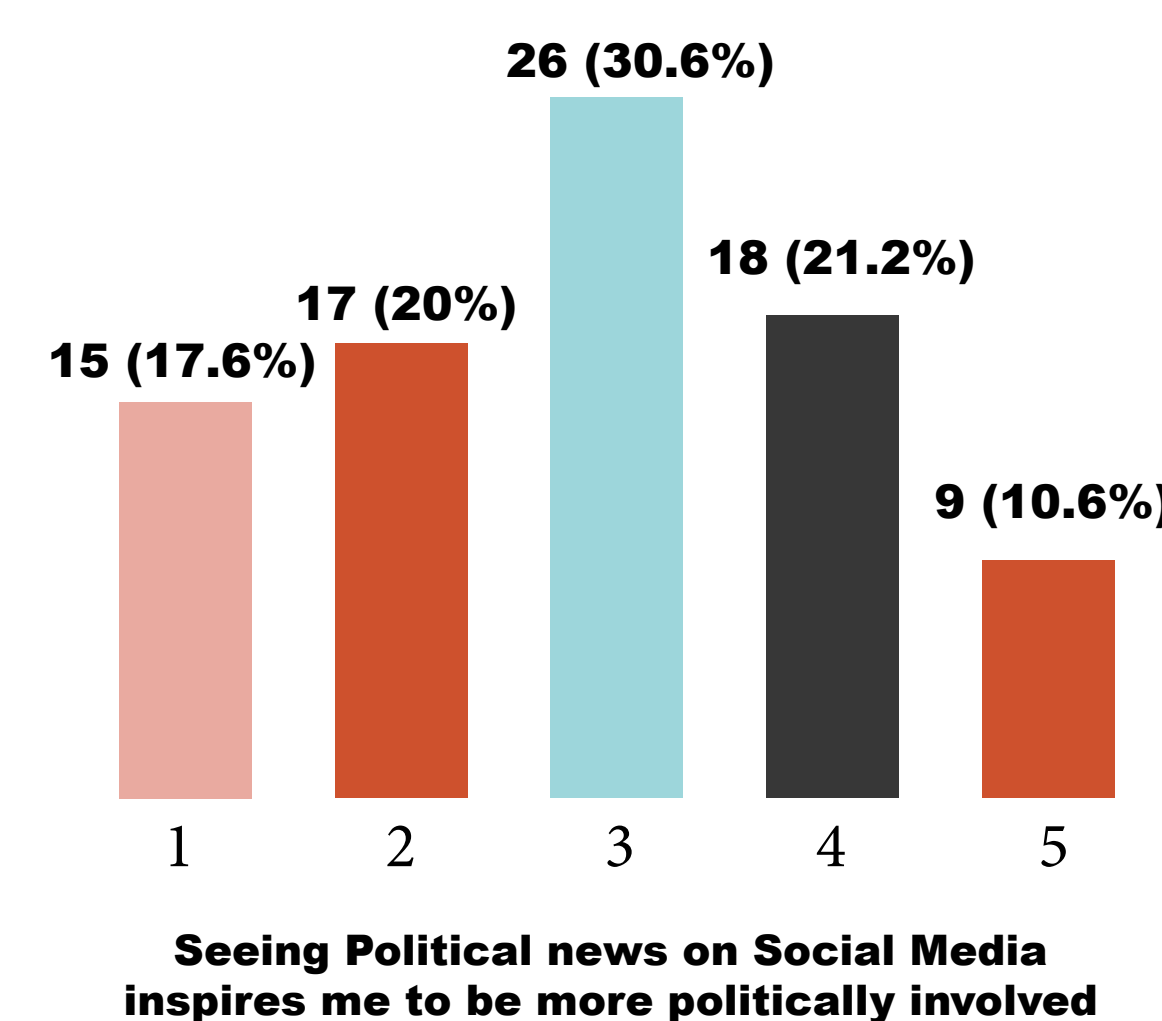
How often you see information about political candidates on social media?



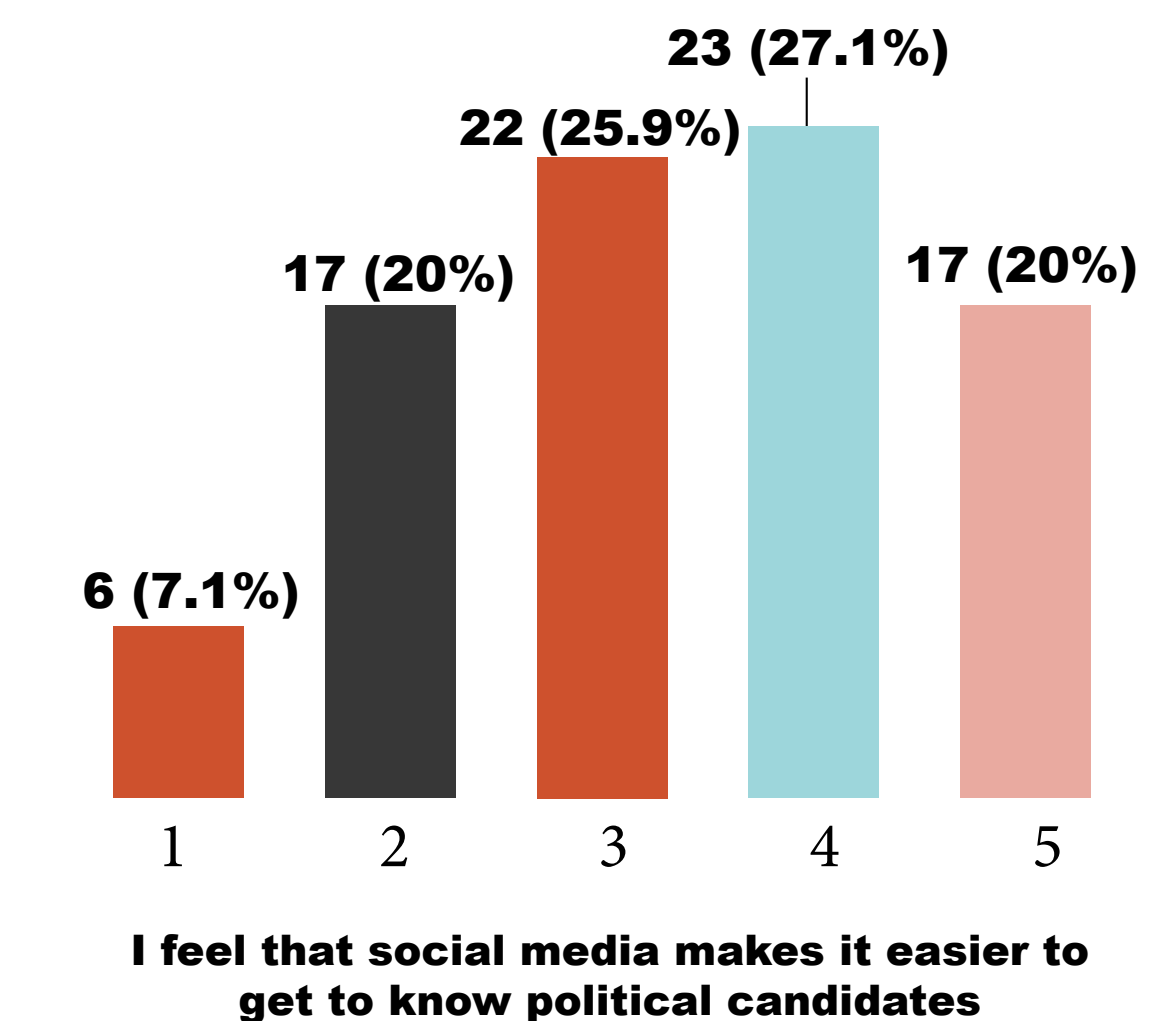
Have you ever voted in a U.S. Presidential election?



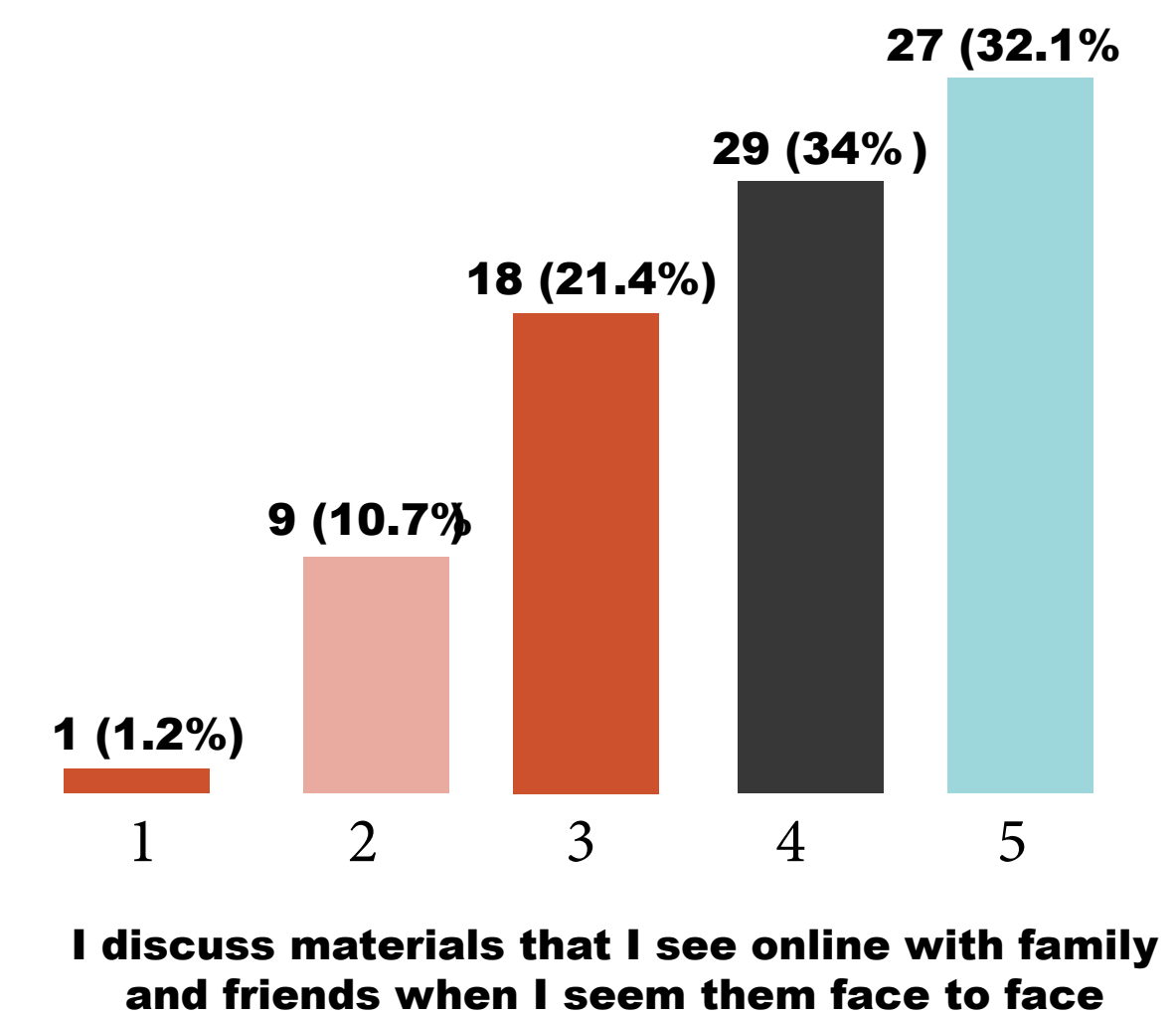
Do you plan on voting in the next Presidential election?



Seeing Political news on Social Media inspires me to be more politically involved



I feel that social media makes it easier to get to know political candidates



I discuss materials that I see online with family and friends when I see them face to face