

One in 10 college students changed their minds after debate, smartphone app data finds

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This graph shows how students perceived the two candidates were spinning their answers in the debate. Credit: Amber Boydston/UC Davis graph

(Phys.org)—Seven in 10 college students believe President Obama won the second presidential debate Tuesday night, even though only about half identify as Democrats, according to a nationwide poll conducted with a smartphone application co-designed at the University of California, Davis. Women and nonwhites heavily favored Obama.

In the app's third trial run, with 2,300 [college students](#) across the country participating, 10 percent of participants said the debate changed their

minds about whom to vote for, with more than two-thirds switching to Obama. Less than a third shifted to Republican challenger Mitt Romney.

Most of those who shifted their vote choice started out the night undecided.

Respondents signed in to the app from 42 states Tuesday, with three states—South Carolina, Mississippi and Maine—recording a majority of respondents who said Romney won the debate.

"We should take these preliminary findings with a healthy grain of salt, since we're dealing primarily with student participants, and we know that effects can be fleeting, but these findings suggest that this debate may have helped sway [independent voters](#) toward Obama," said Amber Boydston, an assistant professor of political science at UC Davis who co-designed the app with colleagues at UC Davis; the University of Maryland, College Park; and the University of Arkansas, Little Rock.

The app allows, for the first time, live reaction to a debate on a large scale, with participants able to click buttons that say "agree" or "disagree" as well as "dodge" or "spin" as the candidates speak and answer questions.

The app was used for the first presidential debate on Oct. 3, when about 4,000 students participated in the polling, and again for last week's vice presidential candidate debate.

Students have been invited to participate by a network of hundreds of political science professors around the country.

In the latest [app](#) poll, just more than half of the students said they were Democrats, and 31 percent said they were Republicans. Similarly, 56 percent said they plan to vote for President Obama, and 30 percent said

they plan to vote for Romney.

Many candidate responses during the town hall-style debate were polarizing, Boydstun observed. For instance, Romney's response to his stance on gun control received his peak in both "agree" and "disagree" clicks.

Although participants tended to agree with Obama, they perceived his response to the question about the Libya embassy attack as the biggest "dodge" of the night. Respondents also appeared to approve of Candy Crowley as moderator, delivering a surge of "agree" clicks when she fact-checked Romney.

When looking at poll participants by gender, slightly more than half were male. More than 60 percent said they were white; 13 percent Hispanic; 9 percent African American; 9 percent Asian; and 5 percent "other."

A slide show breaking down response by state, race, gender and other factors is available at the [React Labs: Educate website](#).

Download graphs showing how students perceived the [candidates dodged](#) issues or [put a spin](#) on them.

Provided by UC Davis

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