

# Elections Report: Voters' Motivations & Perceptions



**Bristol SU**

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# Introduction

As part of the SU's plans to reassess its elections campaign outreach for 2027, in March 2026 the R&I team sent a short survey to students who voted in the elections to understand more about their motivations for voting. 1602 students anonymously responded to this question. 417 students went on to answer further questions (see p. 8 for demographics) about the influence of the branding, how positive or negative they feel about the branding materials, and their opinions on the branding used by other SUs in their elections campaigns.

## Key takeaways

### Motivations for Voting

- 'Democracy' was the highest motivating factor for voting, with 42% of students selecting this
- First years and Home Students were more likely to be motivated by incentives than international students or later years

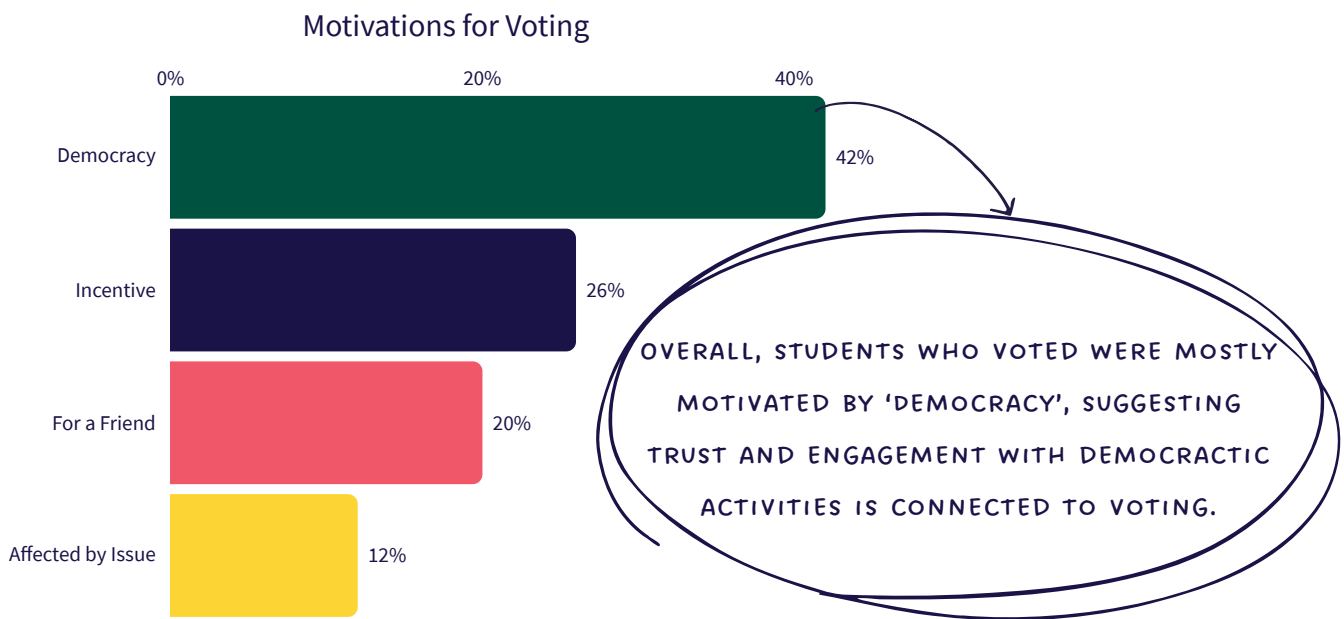
### Branding Influence

- 62% of students reported that branding influenced their elections engagement
- Branding influence was highest in first years, as well as amongst International Students compared to home students.

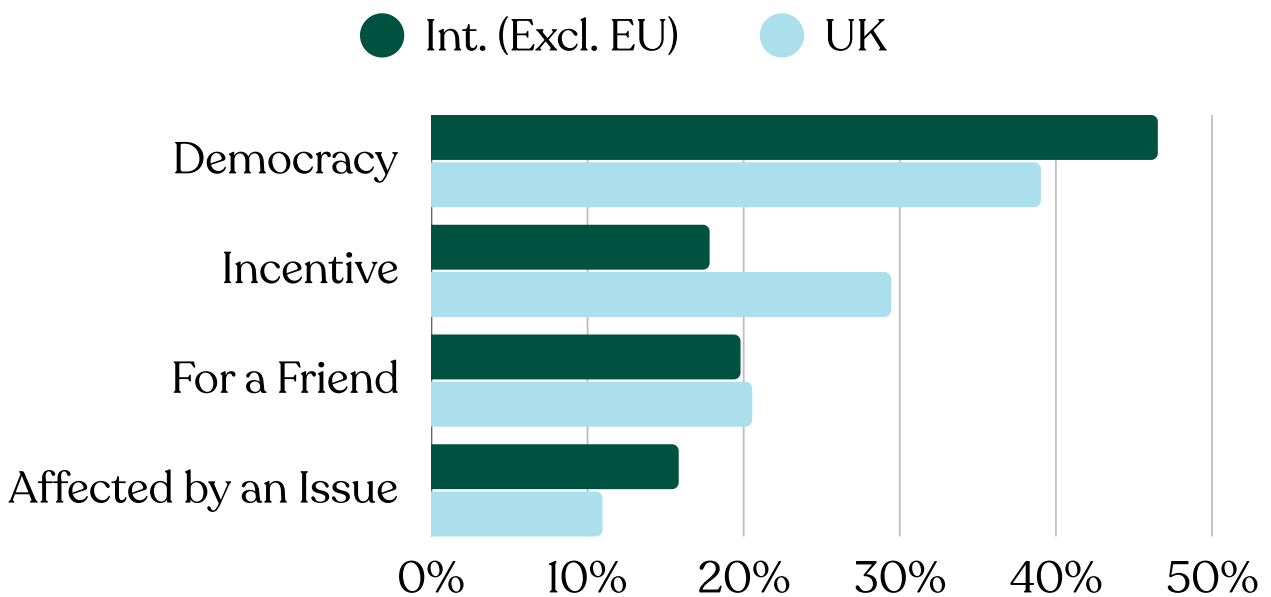
### Views on Branding

- All SU branding and outreach was viewed positively, with 'Thyme Plants' viewed the most positively
- 'Time to Lead' and 'Time to Vote' showed high influence on voting
- Students like branding that is colourful with simple, clear messaging and dislike photographs, too much text, and infantilising messaging

# Motivations for Voting

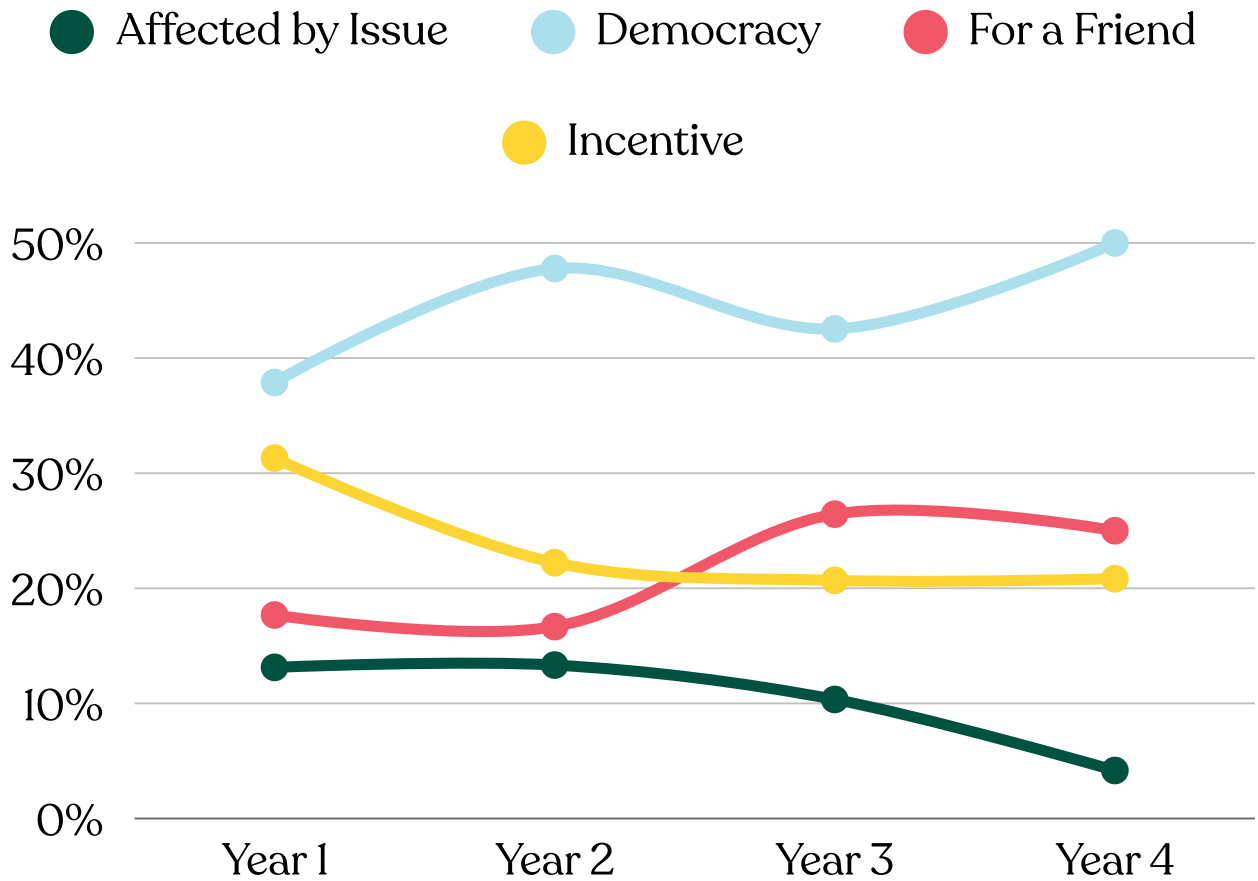


## Motivations by Fee Status



Across all demographics, **'Democracy'** was most frequently selected as the motivating factor to voting. However, **UK students selected 'Democracy' significantly less, and 'Incentive' significantly more,** as a motivating factor than their international peers.

# Motivations by Year



Motivations for voting also changed across the years. **First years were much more likely to be motivated to vote due to incentives** than other years. **Year 3 & 4 voters were more likely to vote for a friend** than for incentives.

# The Influence of Branding on Voters

62%

Were influenced by branding to engage with elections

## International Students (Excl. EU)

71%

'A Lot' or  
'Somewhat'

11%

'Not at All'

## Home Students

60%

'A Lot' or  
'Somewhat'

18%

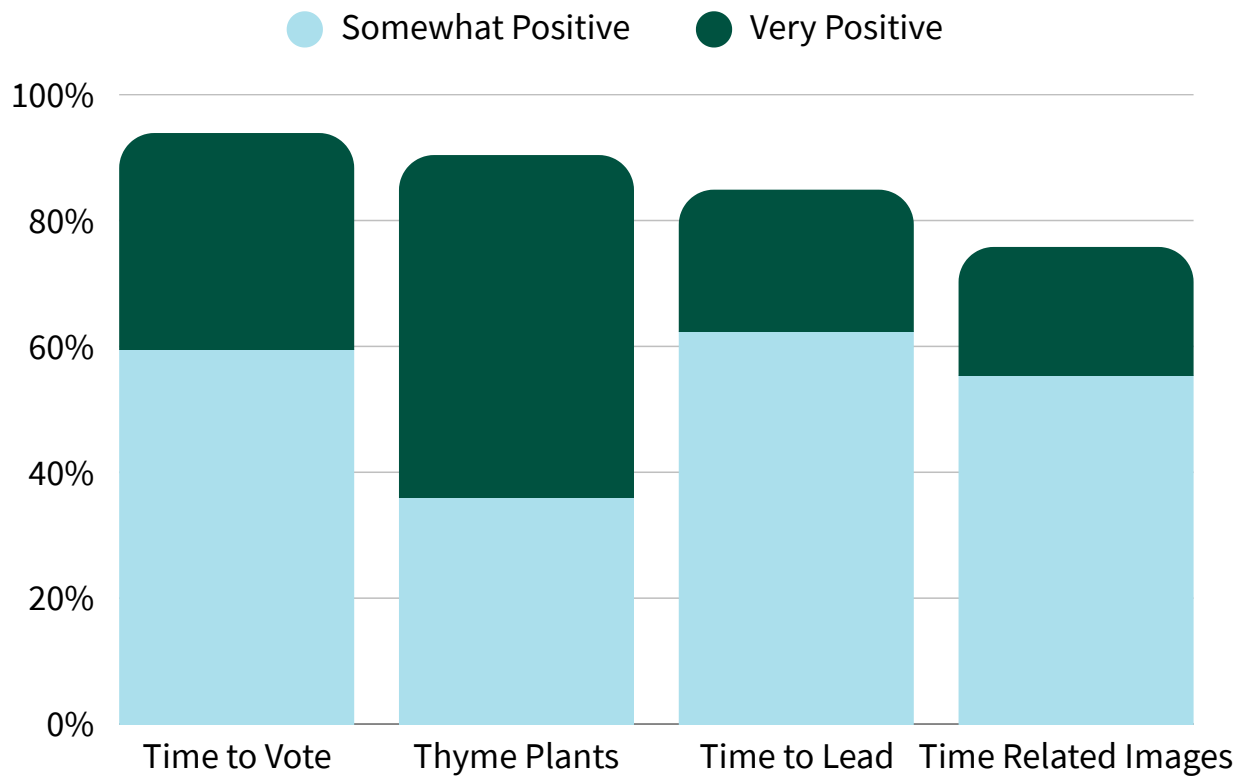
'Not at All'

## Influence by Year



Branding meaningfully influenced voter engagement for 62% of respondents, though this varied by group. **International students reported higher levels of influence** and were less likely than home students to say branding had no impact. **First year voters were more influenced by branding** than all other years with sharp drop offs in Years 2 & 4, but a slight uptick in Year 3.

# Voters' Views on Branding



**Voters expressed largely positive views of Bristol SU's messaging, imagery, and outreach activities.** 'Time to Vote' was received more favourably than 'Time to Lead', and positive perceptions of both slogans were associated with higher reported influence of branding. Among outreach activities, the **Thyme Plants generated the highest proportion of 'Very Positive' responses.**

When asked to select their favourite from a selection of other election materials, the **two below were overall winners with 31% each.**

**Students liked the bold colours, simple designs, and clear messaging.**



“It looks visually striking without seeming too ‘corporate’, which makes the elections process seem friendly and down-to-earth.”



“Easy to understand, like bold background colour, not patronising, just simple reminder.”

This option received 18% of votes overall, putting it at a distant 3<sup>rd</sup>. However, it was voted **significantly higher amongst women and international students**, who had it in second behind the red “Vote Now” above. In contrast, home student men only voted for it 8%, with this group voting in much higher proportions for the blue “Ready to Vote?” poster above.



“More standout, easy to understand and not boring!”

### Students generally liked

- Bright colours
- Short, clear messaging
- Graphics, not photographs

### Students generally disliked

- Too much text
- Photographs
- Patronising or didactic messaging

# Demographics

Demographic		% of Respondents
Study Type	UG	80%
	PGT	13%
	PGR	7%
Mode of Study	Full-Time	98%
	Part-Time	2%
Fee Status	EU	2%
	Home	74%
	International	24%
Sex	Female	72%
	Male	28%
Gender ID	Transgender	3%
	Cisgender	93%
	Prefer not to say	4%
Ethnicity	Asian	21%
	Black	<1%
	Mixed Ethnicity	7%
	White	65%
	Other	2%
	Prefer not to say	6%
Sexuality	Bisexual	13%
	Gay Man	1%
	Gay Woman/ Lesbian	3%
	Heterosexual	58%
	Other	6%
	Prefer not to say	19%