

Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes
Toward Politics and Public Service:
16th Edition, Tracking Poll

Institute of Politics, Harvard University



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Introduction

Conceived by two Harvard undergraduate students during the winter of 1999, Harvard University's Institute of Politics Survey of Young Americans' Attitudes Toward Politics and Public Service began in 2000 as a national survey of 18 to 24 year old college undergraduates. Over the last ten years, this research project has grown in scope and mission as this report now includes an analysis of 18 to 29 year olds on a broad set of longitudinal and current events issues.

Methodology

The first survey of N=800 college undergraduates was completed in the Spring of 2000 and all interviews were conducted over the telephone; since that time 15 subsequent surveys have been released. Over this period, a number of modifications have been made to the scope and methodology in order to ensure that sampling methods most accurately capture the view of the population of young adults in a manner that will be useful to both the Institute of Politics and the broader research and political communities.

- In 2001, the survey was expanded from N=800 to N=1,200 college students in order to capture a robust sample of the undergraduate population;
- In 2006, the survey expanded to N=2,400 interviews, as we began interviewing members of the 18 to 24 year old cohort who were not currently attending a four-year college or university; in addition, because of changing uses of technology among younger Americans, in 2006 the survey moved from a telephone poll to a survey that was administered online;

- In 2009, we expanded our scope a third time to include the population of young adults aged 18 to 29. While we will continue to report on the attitudes and opinions of U.S. college students, this change in our research subject was made to allow for better and more direct comparisons to the broader set of election and general public opinion research tracking data which tends to track the 18 to 29 year old demographic group. Our Fall political tracking surveys will include samples of N=2,000 while the Spring semester's research project will be more in-depth and include N=3,000 interviews in both English and Spanish. Using Knowledge Networks as our research partner, the Institute of Politics surveys now will use RDD and Address-Based Sampling (ABS) frames and be administered online (see appendix for more information).

The interviewing period for this survey of N=2,087 18 to 29 year-olds was November 4 to November 16, 2009. The margin of error for the poll is +/- 2.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. During the interviewing period, the Foot Hood shootings occurred, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the health care bill and it was announced that some terrorism suspects would be tried in New York City.

IOP Polling Director John Della Volpe supervised the survey group of undergraduate students. As always, the IOP survey group would like to thank IOP Director Bill Purcell and Executive Director Catherine McLaughlin for their insight and support over the course of this and all IOP projects.

Overview

One of the principle building blocks of President Obama's electoral victory in 2008, young voters aged 18 to 29 are now one of the most important subgroups in American politics. This survey aims to measure the attitudes and opinions of this generation of Americans as they relate to President Obama, Congress, Afghanistan, the economy and health care reform.

The rise of these young voters and their impact on the political system in 2008 was not an anomaly. Our polling accurately predicted the spikes in political activity in 2004, 2006 and in 2008 -- from the Iowa caucuses where young voters voted 57 percent to 11 percent¹ for Barack Obama over Hillary Clinton to the general election where they voted for Obama by a margin of 66 percent to 32 percent. Our research since 2000 has consistently shown that young Americans care deeply about their community and their country -- and are willing to participate in public life and all aspects of the political process.

In the earlier part of this decade, post 9/11 -- young voters rallied around President Bush but later turned against his policies as the Iraq War continued into 2004. In the proceeding elections,

young voters on and off college campuses, voted in near record numbers, and were critical elements of Democratic electoral successes nationwide.

Understanding how this generation views President Obama, Congress, and public policy, is critical to understanding the future of politics in America.

The following pages provide a summary of the key findings of this survey. In addition, a top-line report is available that provides responses of the total sample and college students. A SPSS data-file is available upon request.

Lastly, please note that despite broadening the scope of our research to include all members of the 18 to 29 year old demographic group, we will continue our original mission to survey and report on the opinions and attitudes of undergraduate students in the United States as they relate to politics and public service. Our 17th survey will be released in March, 2010.

¹ Iowa Entrance Poll Results reported on CNN.com

Demographic and Political Profile

For this survey we completed N=2,087 online interviews with 18 to 29 year old young adults in the United States.

Demographic profile:

- 49 percent male, 51 percent female;
- 57 percent are between the ages of 18 and 24, 43 percent are between the ages of 25 and 29;
- 64 percent White, 16 percent Hispanic/Latino, 12 percent Black/African-American;
- 22 percent are Catholic, 14 percent Protestant, 13 percent Fundamental/Evangelical, 2 percent Jewish, 2 percent Mormon, less than one percent Muslim, 12 percent another religion, 20 percent cite no religious preference, and 15 percent decline to answer;
- 23 percent are married, 14 percent are living with a partner, one percent are divorced, one percent are separated and 61 percent have never been married;
- 70 percent have health care coverage, 25 percent do not, 5 percent are unsure or refused to answer;
- 59 percent are employed, 41 percent are not employed;
- 83 percent own a cell phone, 50 percent own only a cell phone (71 percent of college students own only a cell phone), 43 percent have a landline and 3 percent have VOIP telephone service.

Current educational status:

- 2 percent of the sample are in high school, 2 percent in trade/vocational school, 10 percent in a 2-year junior or community college, 20 percent in a four-year college or university, 4 percent in graduate school, business school or professional school, 2 percent are not enrolled but taking at least one class, and 61 percent are not enrolled in any of these categories;
- 71 percent of college students attend a public institution, 29 percent a private one;
- 51 percent of students attend a college in an urban or city area, 28 percent in a suburb and 21 percent in a small town or rural area.

Political and ideological profile:

- 75 percent say they are registered to vote;
- 67 percent said they voted in the 2008 general election (50 percent at a polling place, 10 percent by absentee ballot and 7 percent early);
- 36 percent say that they definitely will vote in the 2010 midterm elections for Congress;
- 24 percent consider themselves to be politically engaged or active;
- 40 percent consider themselves Democrats, 26 percent Republicans and 34 percent Independents.

58% of Young Voters Approve of Obama's Job Performance, but Majorities Disapprove of Handling of Major Issues

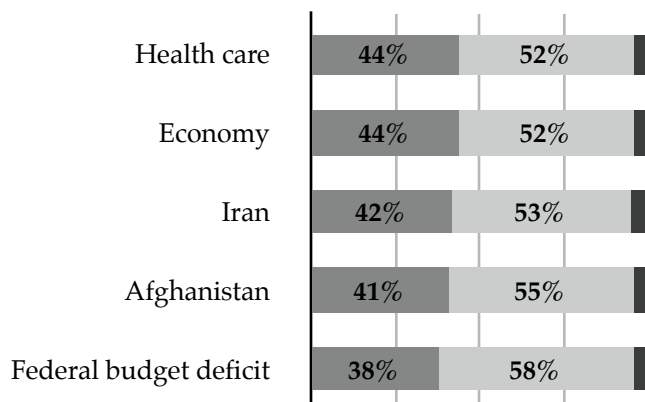
Job Performance of President Obama, Democrats and Republicans in Congress

One year and a few weeks after young Americans aged 18 to 29 voted 66 percent to 32 percent² to elect Barack Obama the 44th President of the United States, the President has an overall approval rating of 58 percent among this segment of the electorate (compared to 54 percent among all Americans 18+)³.

However, when young Americans are asked to rate his performance on a host of specific domestic and foreign policy priorities his approval ratings are far lower. On every issue included in the survey, a majority of 18 to 29 year olds disapproved of the President's job performance.

DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE WAY BARACK OBAMA IS HANDLING:

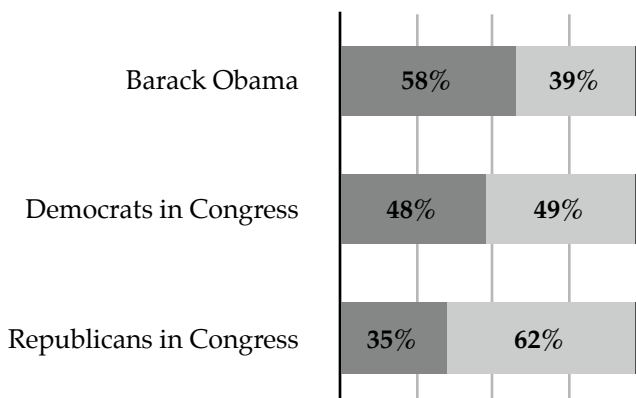
■ Approve ■ Disapprove ■ Refused



In contrast to their feelings of the President generally (58%-39%, net positive difference of 19 points), 18 to 29 year olds are split in their opinion of Democrats in Congress (48% approve, 49% disapprove, -1 net) and hold largely disapproving views of Republicans in Congress (35% approve, 62% disapprove, -17 net).

DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE JOB PERFORMANCE OF:

■ Approve ■ Disapprove ■ Refused



Among the segment of the youth electorate who are attending a four-year college or university, the President's approval rating is slightly lower than the 18 to 29 year old cohort as a whole -- 57 percent approve and 42 percent disapprove.

Behind the President's Job Performance

Mirroring the national electorate, the President remains popular among most Democrats (86%

² National Exit Poll Results reported on CNN.com

³ Average of CNN/ORC, ABC/Washington Post, AP-GfK, USA Today/Gallup polls conducted between November 5-15, 2009

approve, 14% disapprove), unpopular among Republicans (21% approve, 77% disapprove) -- with Independents split nearly evenly, 49 percent approve and 46 percent disapprove. The weekly average for Gallup surveys taken the week of November 9 to 15, 2009 shows very similar approval ratings based on party identification (Democrats approval rating: 88%, Republicans 17%, Independents 48%). The following table illustrates the overall approval ratings of the President by subgroup.

OBAMA JOB PERFORMANCE
BY SUBGROUP

	APPROVE	DISAPPROVE
18-29 TOTAL	58%	39%
18-24	60%	38%
25-29	56%	41%
IN 4-YR COLLEGE	57%	42%
DEMOCRAT	86%	14%
REPUBLICAN	21%	77%
INDEPENDENT	49%	46%
WHITE	48%	50%
AFRICAN-AM.	84%	12%
HISPANIC	81%	17%
MALE	56%	42%
FEMALE	60%	37%
NORTHEAST US	66%	32%
MIDWEST US	57%	40%
SOUTH US	52%	47%
WEST US	64%	33%

The Status of Obama's Volunteers

On the heels of GOP victories in the recent New Jersey and Virginia governor's races, there has been speculation as to whether or not the young people who were integral to President Obama's victory over Senator McCain would continue to remain active in 2010 and beyond. According to our survey, nearly one-in-five (19%) young voters (18-29) actively engaged on behalf of the 2008 Obama campaign in some way (in addition to voting). In contrast, only six percent (6%) did the same for Senator McCain's campaign. Among the more popular activities of Obama volunteers were: persuading friends (55%), participating online (30%), volunteering time (20%) and donating money (16%).

When these most active Obama supporters were asked if they would engage in similar activities in 2012 for Barack Obama, 55 percent reported that they would be very likely to engage and an additional 30 percent indicated that they would be somewhat likely to engage. Thirteen percent (13%) reported that they were either not very (7%) or not at all likely (6%) to engage in 2012.

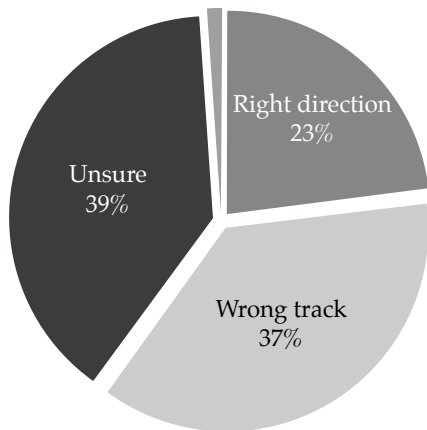
As Organizing for America seeks to build upon the Obama for America campaign of last year, we asked these same Obama volunteers their likelihood of engaging on other political issues between now and 2012 on behalf of the President, and 34 percent indicated that they would be very likely to do so if asked, with an additional 43 percent somewhat likely.

The Economy Continues to be the Dominant Issue for Young Voters, Health Care and War Trail Far Behind

State of the Country and the Top Issues of National Concern

At the moment, less than one in four (23%) 18 to 29 year olds believe things are generally headed in the right direction, 37 percent say things are off on the wrong track -- with a slight plurality (39%) unsure which direction the country is headed. Nearly two-in-five (37%) Democrats believe the U.S. is headed in the right direction, which contrasts sharply to Republicans (6%) and Independents (15%).

ALL IN ALL, DO YOU THINK THAT THINGS IN THE NATION ARE ...

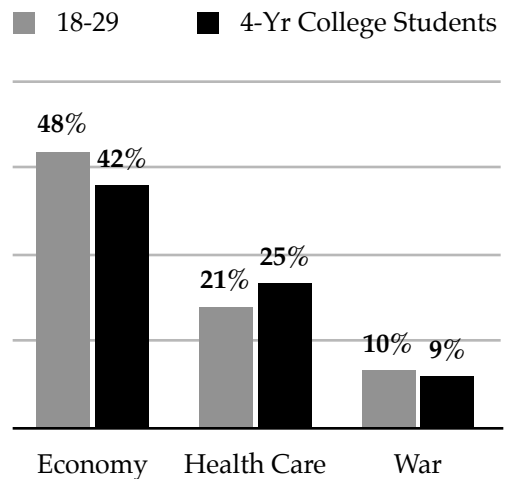


In an open-ended question about what national issue concerns them most, nearly a majority (48%) of all young voters between 18 and 29 cited the economy -- with health care (21%) and the wars (10%) trailing far behind. Other domestic issues such as education (3%), the national debt (2%), environment (2%) and energy (1%) dwarf in comparison to the

priorities of improving the economy and resolving the health care debate.

The graph below highlights the slight differences in the way that four year college students view these issues compared to all 18 to 29 year olds.

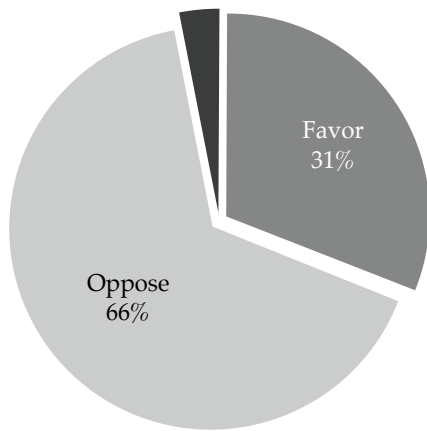
THINKING ABOUT NATIONAL ISSUES FOR THE MOMENT, WHICH ISSUE CONCERNS YOU MOST? (OPEN-ENDED)



Afghanistan

On the issue of whether or not to send more troops to Afghanistan, an overwhelming majority disagree with the President's recent decision to send 30,000 additional American troops. Less than one-third (31%) favor such a decision and 66 percent oppose it according to our November 4 to 16 poll. A majority of nearly every subgroup oppose additional troops, with the exception of McCain voters (53% favor).

WOULD YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE A DECISION BY PRESIDENT OBAMA TO SEND MORE U.S. TROOPS TO AFGHANISTAN



Among only the 18 to 24 year olds in our survey, there was slightly more opposition to the troop buildup off college campuses than on campus.

- 63 percent of college students oppose troop buildup in Afghanistan, whereas 70 percent of 18 to 24 year olds not enrolled in college oppose additional troops.

Issues and Political Decisions

In an effort to understand the role of some of the issues of the day in a young person’s conscious political calculus, we asked how important a series of issues were to them using a discrete scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means the issue was “not at all important” and 10 means the issue was “extremely important.”

Again, the economy ranked most important, with health care and the deficit following behind in the second and third positions. Below is a table that ranks each of these issues by 18 to 29 year olds in general, and four year college students.

PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THE FOLLOWING ISSUES ARE TO YOU WHEN MAKING POLITICAL DECISIONS: [% RESPONSES 8-10 REPORTED]

	18-29	COLLEGE STUDENTS
ECONOMY	69%	68%
HEALTH CARE	54%	50%
BUDGET DEFICIT	48%	49%
ENERGY	39%	42%
AFGHANISTAN	34%	33%
IRAN	32%	34%
ABORTION	31%	24%

While the economy, health care and the deficit are the top three issues of importance when making political decisions for both Democrats and Independents in our survey, among Republicans, abortion (43%) is in a virtual tie with health care (44%) for the third position. The proceeding table illustrates the differences by political affiliation.

PLEASE INDICATE HOW IMPORTANT THE FOLLOWING ISSUES ARE TO YOU WHEN MAKING POLITICAL DECISIONS:
[% RESPONSES 8-10 REPORTED BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION]

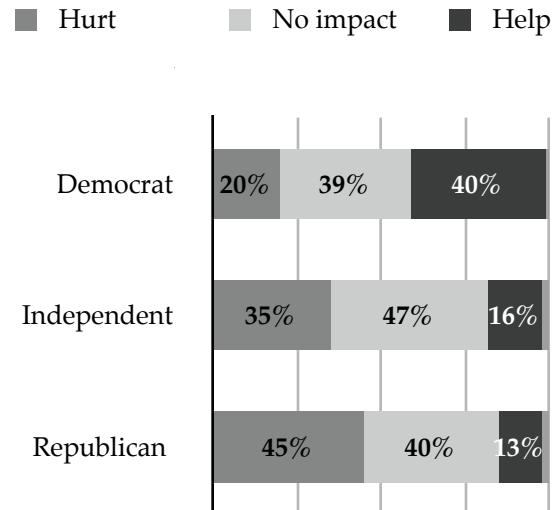
	DEM.	REP.	IND.
ECONOMY	76%	70%	61%
HEALTH CARE	66%	44%	47%
BUDGET DEFICIT	50%	52%	45%
ENERGY	43%	26%	33%
AFGHANISTAN	39%	35%	23%
IRAN	35%	33%	24%
ABORTION	28%	43%	25%

Digging Deeper on the Economy

As a follow-up to the general questions probing the economy, the survey asked 18 to 29 year olds two additional questions about economic policy.

Illustrating the pessimism that exists about the state of the country and the economy, more young Americans believe that the government's efforts to improve the economy will hurt (30%) and not help (26%) their financial situation -- a plurality, 41 percent, say that these efforts will have no impact.

IN THE SHORT-TERM, DO YOU EXPECT THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMY WILL HELP YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION, HURT YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION OR HAVE NO IMPACT ON YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION?



On the question of government regulation, young Americans do not seem concerned that we have too much. In fact, 39 percent believe that we ought to have "more regulation of Wall Street," which is more than twice the number who believe we should have less (18%). Thirty-nine percent (39%) opt for the status quo.

The Future of Health Care Reform Is An Open Question For This Generation of Americans

Overall View of Health Care Reform

Despite the intense national spotlight, the issue of health care reform has not dominated the political landscape of the average young voter aged 18 to 29. Quite the contrary, as less than one-in-ten (8%) are following the discussions in Washington on this subject closely (34% following them somewhat closely, 33% not very closely and 23% not at all). The percentages are nearly identical on college campuses.

Days after President Obama’s nationally televised address on health care, Kaiser Family Foundation, under the director of Harvard Kennedy School Professor Robert Blendon, conducted a survey of N=1,203 adults (September 11 to September 18, 2009) and asked “Which comes closer to your opinion about what Congress and the president should do regarding health care reform this year?” In that survey, 50 percent of Americans believed that Congress and the president should continue trying to pass a major reform of the health care system, 25 percent said they should pass a more limited version, and the remaining 25 percent believed that they should leave health care reform for another time.

Two months later, and with a population that would seemingly be more supportive of President Obama and Congress than the electorate as a whole, we see similar numbers in our poll as Kaiser did in theirs.

WHICH COMES CLOSER TO YOUR OPINION ABOUT WHAT CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENT SHOULD DO REGARDING HEALTH CARE REFORM THIS YEAR?

	IOP 18-29 (11/4-16)	KFF 18+ (9/11-18)
THEY SHOULD CONTINUE TRYING TO PASS A MAJOR REFORM OF THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM	48%	50%
THEY SHOULD STOP TRYING TO PASS A MAJOR REFORM THIS YEAR AND INSTEAD WORK ON PASSING A MORE LIMITED VERSION	30%	25%
THEY SHOULD LEAVE HEALTH CARE REFORM FOR ANOTHER TIME	22%	25%

Among young Democrats, 69 percent believe that Congress should continue trying to pass major reform with 22 percent opting for a more limited version. Less than a fifth of young Republicans (18%) agree that major reform should be the goal, while 45 percent believe in a more limited version. A plurality (40%) of Independents believe that major reform is needed, 30 percent opt for a more limited version and 31 percent report that reform of health care should be saved for some other time.

The Specifics of Health Care Reform

In contrast to the way in which young Americans view the President -- they approve of his job performance in general, but disapprove of his performance on specific issues -- young Americans seem more supportive of the individual elements of proposed health care reform than they are of the concept in general.

A solid majority of those polled indicate that they are in favor of the major issues at the forefront of the health care reform debate, including the public option.

- 76 percent favor: *Requiring insurance companies to sell health coverage to people, even if they have pre-existing medical conditions;*
- 63 percent favor: *Requiring employers to pay into a government health care fund if they do not provide health insurance to their employees;*
- 60 percent favor: *Requiring that all Americans have health insurance, with the government providing financial help for those who can't afford it;*

- 59 percent favor: *Raising taxes on families with incomes of more than \$350,000 as a way to pay for changes to the health care system;*
- 57 percent favor: *A government health insurance plan to compete with private health insurance plans;*
- 57 percent favor: *Limits on the amount of money that patients can collect in medical malpractice lawsuits.*

On most issues in this survey, including health care, the opinions of college students fall in line with the 18 to 29 cohort generally. However, there are a few differences worth noting, especially with health care reform. For example:

- 18 to 29 year olds favor the "public option" by an 18-point margin, 57 percent to 39 percent -- college students favor it by a 10-point margin, 54 percent to 44 percent;
- 18 to 29 year olds favor raising taxes on families with incomes of more than \$350,000 as a way to pay for changes to the health care system by a 22-point margin (59%-37%) -- college students still favor it, but by 13 points (56%-43%).

Conclusion

Much has been written in the last few years about the power of the youth vote in America. On January 31, 2008 Time declared 2008 “The Year of the Youth Vote” -- and it was. Americans in their late teens and twenties voted overwhelmingly for change in 2008. They supported President Obama by a margin 2 times greater than that of any other age group in the first contest in Iowa and 5 times that of any age group in the November general election against Senator John McCain.

IOWA ENTRANCE POLL AND U.S. EXIT POLL
RESULTS FOR GENERAL ELECTION
BY AGE GROUP ⁴

	IOWA CAUCUS		GENERAL ELECTION	
	OBAMA	CLINTON	OBAMA	MCCAIN
18-29 (22% / 18%)	57%	11%	66%	32%
30-44 (18% / 29%)	42%	23%	52%	46%
45-64 (38% / 37%)	27%	28%	50%	49%
65+ (22% / 16%)	18%	45%	45%	53%

But, it does not always have to be that way.

Six and a half year ago, during the *Spring of 2003*, when the older segments of this generation were entering or in college -- our IOP polling showed that nearly as many college students were Republican (26%) than Democrat (29%); 61 percent of college students approved of George W. Bush’s job performance; and a plurality (34% to 32%) of college students supported George W. Bush’s re-election against a generic Democratic candidate.

With the escalation of the Iraq War, the response to Hurricane Katrina and other issues, President Bush and the Republican party lost the support of many of these young voters. Members of both the Democratic and Republican parties witnessed the political force of this generation repeatedly in 2008 when the combination of leadership, issues and technology were used to inspire and engage millions of young Americans.

This generation, which we refer to as Millennials, will be the largest generation of voters in our history when they all come of age in the next five years. They already know that they are a political and economic force whose support should not be taken for granted. It is up to government and each of the political parties to continually challenge and inspire them. Those who do not, do so at their peril.

⁴ In Iowa, 17 year olds were eligible to caucus; the first percentage under each age group represents the total number of votes cast in the Iowa caucuses for that cohort; the second percentage represents the total number of votes cast in that cohort in the general election. All data available on CNN.com.

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Harvard's Institute of Politics (IOP) was established in 1966 as a memorial to President Kennedy. The IOP's mission is to unite and engage students, particularly undergraduates, with academics, politicians, activists, and policy-makers on a non-partisan basis and to stimulate and nurture their interest in public service and leadership. The Institute strives to promote greater understanding and cooperation between the academic world and the world of politics and public affairs. The Institute has been conducting national political polls of America's college students since 2000. More information, including past results, is available online at www.iop.harvard.edu

Appendix

Methodology

The survey was conducted using the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, Knowledge Networks provides at no cost a laptop and ISP connection. People who already have computers and Internet service are permitted to participate using their own equipment. Panelists then receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online, and then are sent emails throughout each month inviting them to participate in research. More technical information is available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html>.

About Knowledge Networks

Knowledge Networks delivers quality and service to guide leaders in business, government, and academia – uniquely bringing scientifically valid research to the online space through its probability-based, online KnowledgePanel®. The company delivers unique study design, science, analysis, and panel maintenance, along with a commitment to close collaboration at every stage of the research process. Knowledge Networks leverages its expertise in brands, media, advertising, and public policy issues to provide insights that speak directly to clients' most important concerns. For more information about Knowledge Networks, visit www.knowledgenetworks.com.