

The 12th Biannual Youth Survey on Politics and Public Service  
by Harvard University's Institute of Politics



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# Introduction

As we prepare the twelfth installment of the Harvard University Institute of Politics' Survey on Politics and Public Service, much has changed since our first survey was taken during the spring of 2000. Seven years ago, we were in the middle of a cycle of record low turnout among college-aged youth and we found a major disconnect between young Americans and the political process.

From 9/11, to Iraq, to threats of global warming, much has changed over the course of twelve surveys, including the level of engagement of young Americans in politics. Since our first survey in 2000, we have witnessed:

- voter turnout among 18 to 24 year-olds in the United States grow approximately 31 percent -- from 36 percent in the 2000 presidential election to 47 percent in the 2004 election;<sup>1</sup>
- young voters propel Jim Webb (VA) and Jon Tester (MT) to the U.S. Senate in 2006 giving Democrats control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 12 years;<sup>2</sup>
- hundreds, if not thousands, of organic social groups of young Americans flourish online and offline in support of favored candidates or pressing policy issues.

Whether the Boomers and Xers are ready or not, the Millennial Generation is preparing in 2008 to make their voice heard again, perhaps louder

than ever -- and the approximately 29 million 18 to 24 year-olds who are the focus of this study have a new way of thinking about some of our nation's greatest challenges.

The interviewing period for this survey of n=2,923 18 to 24 year-olds (margin of error is  $\pm 3.0\%$ ), was March 8 to March 26, 2007. For most of the time the survey was in the field, two major news stories dominated headlines: the U.S. Attorney firing probe and the budget battle over withdrawing troops from Iraq between the Democrats and the White House. As the survey was winding down, the news was dominated by Mrs. Edwards' announcement that her cancer returned (March 22); the Iran-Great Britain hostage crisis began on March 23 and began to dominate news outlets the week of the 25th.

With landline telephone coverage of 18 to 24 year-olds at 48 percent, RDD (Random Digit Dialing) polling is not reliable; this is the second time the IOP poll was conducted exclusively online by our research partner Harris Interactive. Professor David C. King and IOP Polling Director John Della Volpe supervised the survey group. Matthew Valji ('08) and Marina Fisher ('09) co-chaired the student working group.

As always, the IOP survey group would like to thank IOP Director, Governor Jeanne Shaheen and Executive Director Catherine McLaughlin for their insights and support over the course of this and all IOP projects.

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<sup>1</sup> CIRCLE: The Youth Vote 2004; Author's Tabulations from the CPS Nov. Voting and Registration Supplements

<sup>2</sup> JFK School Prof. David C. King's Analysis of Election 2006; Webb won by 9,329 votes which can be accounted for by increased turnout and registration in Charlottesville and Norfolk alone; Tester topped Burns by 3,562 votes which can be accounted for by a surge in registration and turnout around the University of Montana campus in Missoula.

## Demographic, Political and Technological Profile

For this survey we completed n=1,440 online interviews with current undergraduates and n=1,483 online interviews with 18 to 24 year-olds who are not currently enrolled in a four-year college and then weighted these segments and target populations so that the final results and totals are representative of the overall 18 to 24 year-old population sampled.

### Demographic profile:

- 51 percent male, 49 percent female;
- 39 percent between 18 and 20 years olds, 61 percent between 21 and 24 years old;
- 64 percent White, 17 percent Hispanic, 13 percent Black/ African-American;
- 37 percent say that religion is a very important part of their life;
- 9 percent are married and the same number are parents or guardians of a minor; and
- 4 percent are a member of the Armed Services or National Guard.

### Current educational status:

- 13 percent of the 18 to 24 year-old sample are in high school, 4 percent in trade/ vocational school, 9 percent in a 2-year junior or community college, 28 percent are currently enrolled in a four-year college or university, 9 percent are enrolled in graduate school, business school or professionals school, and 39 percent are not enrolled in any school.
- of those (39%) not enrolled, 43 percent have already graduated from college.

### Political and ideological profile:

- 75 percent say they are registered to vote;
- 44 percent report having voted during the mid-term elections, 42 percent say they will vote in a 2008 primary or caucus and 61 percent say they will vote in the 2008 general election;
- 35 percent consider themselves Democrats, 24 percent Republicans and 40 percent are Independent;
- based on segmentation analysis, 46 percent fall into traditional "liberal" (35%) and "conservative" (11%) camps -- and 54 percent fall into non-traditional groups called, "Secular Centrists" (37%) and "Religious Centrists" (17%).

### Technological profile:

- 89 percent own a cell phone, only 48 percent have a landline and 6 percent have VOIP telephone service;
- 64 percent have a MySpace account, and 69 percent of those checked it in the last day;
- 75 percent of college students have a Facebook account, 82 percent have checked it in the last day;
- 22 percent have visited YouTube in the last day, another 27 percent within last week;
- 69 percent believe those who post personal information on social networking sites should be concerned that the information could come back to haunt them in the future.

# Personalities and Issues of Election '08

## The Primaries

Close to 10 months before the first ballots of the 2008 presidential season are cast, 18 to 24 year-olds are beginning to tune in, talk about politics and choose sides for Election '08. Over the general timeframe that the survey was conducted (March 8-26, 2007), a majority of 18 to 24 year-olds sampled reported talking about the presidential campaign (56%), U.S. politics (55%) and Iraq (57%) with their friends. While more conversations were happening on campus than off (between 63% and 66% of undergraduates discussed these issues), the early signs indicate that the increased voter participation witnessed among young voters in the 2004 and 2006 campaigns will hold true for the 2008 cycle as well. Forty-two percent (42%) of 18 to 24 year-olds say that they will “definitely” vote in a primary or caucus and 61 percent say that they will “definitely” vote in the general election.

Understanding that looking ahead to 2008 is dangerous in 2007 (N.B. four years ago, George W. Bush led the generic Democratic candidate by 2%, but lost the election handily among this cohort), an early look at the field for Republicans shows the youngest voters mirroring the Republican electorate as a whole, while the race for the Democratic nomination looks different to 18 to 24 year-olds than the national Democratic electorate.

Among 18 to 24 year-olds who indicate that they would vote in a Republican primary or caucus, Rudy Giuliani holds a 13 point lead over John McCain and a 23 point lead over former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney.

## REPUBLICAN PRIMARY HORSE RACE IOP YOUTH POLL VS. GALLUP 18+

	IOP March 8-26 N=906	Gallup March 23-25 N=430
RUDY GIULIANI	31%	34%
JOHN MCCAIN	18%	22%
FRED THOMPSON	NA	13%
MITT ROMNEY	8%	4%
DUNCAN HUNTER	3%	1%
MIKE HUCKABEE	3%	2%
SAM BROWNBACK	2%	3%
OTHER	12%	14%
UNDECIDED	24%	9%

At this stage, Mayor Giuliani leads among most demographic groups in the survey -- with his largest margins in the Eastern states (+25 points over McCain). Senator McCain's vote increases on college campuses (21% among undergraduates versus 16% among those not in college) and as young Republican voters age. For example, McCain trails by 20 percentage points among 18 and 19 year-olds, 10 among 20 and 21 year-olds, and by 8 among 22 to 24 year-olds -- those most likely to remember his 2000 campaign against George W. Bush.

The Republican electorate is also divided by religious preference at this early stage in the race. Nearly a third (32%) of the Giuliani vote comes from Catholics, 45 percent of McCain's vote comes from Protestants and a majority (52%) of Romney's vote comes from Mormons. As seems to be the case nationally, the influential

Evangelical vote has not coalesced behind a candidate yet, 56 percent indicate that they either are undecided at this time or support a candidate that has not currently announced.

While Mitt Romney is solidly in third place and trailing significantly, his constituency is the most loyal of all candidates -- 83 percent of those who plan to vote for Romney also say that they are interested in volunteering on his campaign; 48 percent of Giuliani voters and 38 percent of McCain voters say that they are interested.

In contrast to the Republicans, the young voters likely to vote in a Democratic primary or caucus seem to be sending an early message to their party elders. Young Democrats are challenging frontrunner Senator Hillary Clinton; Clinton who leads by 18 percentage points in recent national polls among Democrats 18 and older, trails Senator Obama by 7 percentage points in the IOP youth poll of 18 to 24 year-olds.

DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY HORSE RACE  
IOP YOUTH POLL VS. GALLUP 18+

	IOP March 8-26 N=1359	Gallup March 23-25 N=491
BARACK OBAMA	35%	24%
HILLARY CLINTON	28%	42%
JOHN EDWARDS	9%	17%
DENNIS KUCINICH	2%	1%
BILL RICHARDSON	1%	4%
CHRIS DODD	1%	-
JOE BIDEN	-	2%
OTHER	6%	4%
UNDECIDED	17%	5%

Not only does the early Democratic primary race look different among younger voters than older voters, it also takes a different shape on campus and off. For example, while Barack Obama leads Hillary Clinton by 7 percentage points among all 18 to 24 year-olds, he leads by 17 percentage points among current undergraduates and by only 3 percentage points among those not currently in college. In addition, Obama leads among African-American voters by 30, Midwestern voters by 24, men by 23 and White voters by 8.

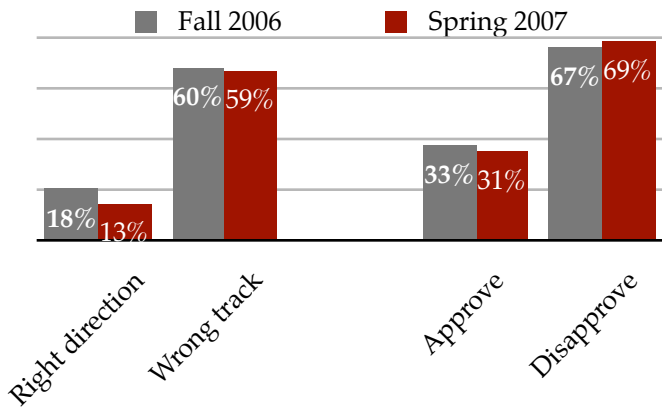
Senator Clinton leads among Western voters and women by 6 and Hispanic voters by 29.

While not as loyal at this moment as the relatively small Romney base, the passion among both the Obama and Clinton supporters is evident. Two-thirds (66%) of Obama voters say that they are interested in volunteering on his behalf and 60 percent of Clinton voters say the same.

**Mood of the Country**

In October of 2006, a few weeks before the Democrats took control of the U.S. Senate and House, 60 percent of 18 to 24 year-olds indicated that the nation was off on the wrong track and 67 percent disapproved of the job that George W. Bush was doing as President. As indicated in the following graph, in the five months since our last poll, the general mood has not improved, and, in fact, may have soured a little.

DIRECTION OF NATION AND  
BUSH JOB APPROVAL  
FALL 2006 VS. SPRING 2007



Similar to the results from our October 2006 survey, opinion of the nation’s direction and Bush’s approval does not change based on whether or not someone is enrolled in a college or university, or not. Across the board, even among young Republicans (30% right direction, 39% wrong track, 31% not sure), more believe the nation is headed off on the wrong track than think the U.S. is headed in the right direction.

**Iraq**

Asked in an open-ended question for the national issue that concerns them most, 50 percent of all 18 to 24 year-olds cite Iraq or other national security issues: Iraq (29%), the War (14%), the War on Terror (4%), domestic security (3%). After these issues, there is no other single issue that commands more than 6 percent of the vote. In a similarly worded question asked in the March 2-5, 2007 NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll of n=1,007 adults nationwide, 30 percent indicated that the war in Iraq was the top priority, 18 percent said health care, 13 percent said terrorism, and 12 percent said job creation or economic growth.

When 18 to 24 years olds are challenged with the question of “What should the United States do now?” there is little discord among young Americans, a majority favor either a decrease (29%) or removal (29%) of U.S. troops -- and only 11 percent favor the President’s call to increase the number of troops.

FROM WHAT YOU HAVE SEEN OR HEARD  
ABOUT THE SITUATION IRAQ, WHAT SHOULD  
THE U.S. DO NOW?

	College Under-graduates N=1,440	18 -24 Year-Olds Not in College N=1,483
INCREASE TROOPS	11%	11%
KEEP SAME LEVEL	10%	9%
DECREASE TROOPS	32%	27%
REMOVE TROOPS	28%	30%
NOT SURE	18%	23%

During the second week of February (8-11), when CBS News asked this question of the adult population (n=1,142), 26 percent of Americans favored an increase and 17 percent preferred to keep the same number of troops as there is now. Whereas 22 percent of 18 to 24 year-olds indicated that they were not sure what to do, only 6 percent of adults answered “not sure” in the CBS study.

# A New World View

## Darfur

With the news and early phase of this election dominated by Iraq, foreign policy is poised to play as important role in this campaign as any in the last 40 years. To look ahead and get a sense of the next big foreign policy issue among young Americans, perhaps an issue that a candidate could use to differentiate himself or herself -- we chose to ask a question that was similar to one originally asked to a national sample of n=1,018 adults by Washington, DC polling firm, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner between December 14-17, 2006.

The question, "Which one of the following (see table below for complete list) do you think should be the next foreign policy priority for President Bush and his Administration," was included to test the relative importance of Darfur compared to other foreign policy priorities among young people. The differences between young Americans and the nation as a whole are stark.

Among 18 to 24 year-olds, on campus and off, Darfur ranks as the second most pressing foreign policy concern, ahead of situations in Iran, North Korea, China, Israel and the global war on terrorism. While stabilizing Iraq is clearly the dominant issue (24% in this question), Darfur ranked second with 17 percent of all 18 to 24 year-olds citing this as their next foreign policy priority. Darfur, which received 5 percent in the similar Greenberg poll of adults from last December, is of particular importance for: 18 and 19 year-olds (21%), Democrats (23%), Independents (21%), political activists (24%) and Obama voters (37%). Other than for Giuliani supporters (13%), Darfur is not a major issue

among supporters of the Republican candidates. For them, the foreign policy priority is Iraq first and everything else a distant second for now.

WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE THE NEXT FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITY FOR PRESIDENT BUSH AND HIS ADMINISTRATION?

	College Under-graduates N=1,440	18 -24 Year-Olds Not in College N=1,483
STABILIZING IRAQ	29%	22%
DEALING WITH THE GENOCIDE IN DARFUR, SUDAN	19%	16%
FIGHTING THE WAR ON TERRORISM	5%	6%
DEALING WITH CHINA AS GROWING SUPERPOWER	5%	6%
DEALING WITH NORTH KOREA'S WEAPONS PROGRAM	5%	5%
DEALING WITH IRAN'S NUCLEAR ENERGY PROGRAM	7%	5%
NEGOTIATING PEACE BETWEEN ISRAEL AND ITS NEIGHBORS	5%	4%
NOT SURE	25%	36%

Following up with two questions regarding the U.S. role in Darfur, young Americans make two points: (1) they believe that the U.S. should do more in Darfur (48% of undergraduates agree and 35% of non-college 18-24 year-olds agree), and (2) the most effective way for U.S. to improve the situation is to work through the United Nations (43% of undergraduates agree and 30% of non-college 18-24 year-olds agree).

### The Rising Importance of the United Nations

Continuing a trend we first spotted in 2005, young Americans strongly believe that the most effective method of solving international crises and conflicts is for the United Nations and other countries to take the lead -- rather than the United States taking the lead by itself.

This finding speaks to this generation's world view as much as any other we have found in the seven years since this project began. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of all 18 to 24 year-olds subscribe to this view, and a majority of nearly every major demographic and political cohort agrees.

When this question was last asked to a national sample of n=1,127 adults by CBS News and the New York Times between July 21-25, 2006, 59 percent indicated that the U.S. should let other countries and the U.N. take the lead, and 31 percent said the U.S. should take the lead. In September 2002, when the exact same question was asked to a national sample of adults, 48 percent indicated that the U.N. should take the lead and 46 percent said the U.S.

### ROLE OF THE U.S. AND THE U.N. IN SOLVING INTERNATIONAL CRISES AND CONFLICTS BY SUBGROUP

	UN/ OTHERS SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD	UNITED STATES SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD
18-24 YEAR-OLD UNDERGRADUATES	75%	25%
18-24, NOT IN COLLEGE	73%	27%
DEMOCRATS	84%	16%
REPUBLICANS	57%	43%
INDEPENDENTS	78%	22%
OBAMA VOTERS	84%	16%
CLINTON VOTERS	84%	16%
EDWARDS VOTERS	81%	19%
GIULIANI VOTERS	55%	45%
MCCAIN VOTERS	55%	45%
ROMNEY VOTERS	50%	50%

Further evidence of young Americans' strong multilateral views toward U.S. foreign policy are evident when the responses of the following two questions are compared:

- 61% agree: It is important for the U.S. to be respected by the rest of the world;
- 35% agree: The U.S. should spread freedom and democracy across the world.

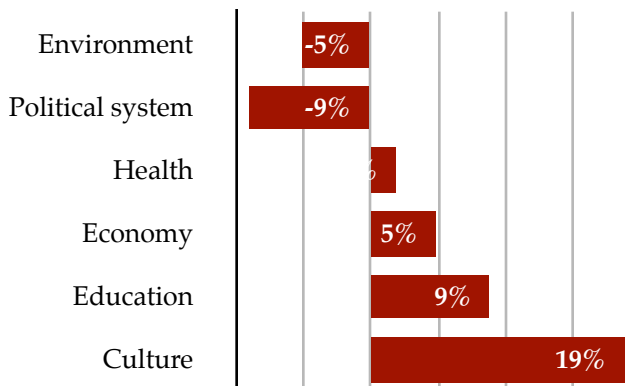
## Views of Globalization in America

Broadening our look of young Americans' views of the world, we studied attitudes toward globalization generally, some of the specific impacts of globalization on the United States, and also views about living and working abroad.

Above all, on this subject, views of college undergraduates and 18 to 24 year-olds not in college are more similar than many may think and one of the many things that they agree on is that globalization is very much an open book.

Nearly two-in-five (37%) 18 to 24 year-olds say that they favor globalization, 20 percent oppose globalization and a plurality say that they are neutral, neither favoring nor opposing. By varying margins, more young Democrats (42% favor -15% oppose), Republicans (36%-30%) and Independents (32%-20%) favor globalization than oppose it. The following graph illustrates the overall feelings of 18 to 24 year-olds toward the various elements of globalization's impact on the United States.

WHAT IMPACT IS GLOBALIZATION HAVING ON EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS OF LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES?  
NET POSITIVE: POSITIVE % - NEGATIVE %



## Life Outside the United States

For another measure of how 18 to 24 year-olds view the world, we asked how strongly they would consider studying, working or raising a family abroad. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of college students report that they would strongly consider studying abroad for a semester -- with student Democrats being slightly more likely than Republicans and Independents to consider the option. Among other things, the following table illustrates the united views of this generation toward the world outside the U.S.

HOW STRONGLY WOULD YOU CONSIDER ...  
NET: VERY AND SOMEWHAT STRONGLY

	College Undergraduates N=1,440	18 -24 Year-Olds Not in College N=1,483
WORKING ABROAD FOR A YEAR OR MORE?	56%	53%
RAISING A FAMILY ABROAD?	31%	31%

## English as the Official Language

Asked if they favor making English the official language of the United States, nearly three-in-four (72%) of all 18 to 24 year-olds answer with a resounding yes.

While 77 percent of young whites and 79 percent of African-Americans are in favor of making English the official language, the Hispanic (51% favor, 49% oppose) and Asian (53% favor, 47% oppose) communities are split on the issue.

# Understanding a New Ideology

## **The Influence of Religious and Secular Centrists**

Through data, both quantitative and qualitative, we know that the traditional political ideology of the last century does not neatly fit this generation of young Americans. Forty percent (40%) of 18 to 24 year-olds in our survey report that they are "Independent" -- not Democrats or Republicans and 46 percent describe their political views as "moderate" -- not liberal or conservative.

So, if a significant number of young people are not liberal or conservative, Democrat or Republican, the next logical question is what are they? And why does it matter?

Through the same statistical segmentation analysis that we have used since 2004, we found that the political views of over half of all 18 to 24 year-olds (54%) fall into the middle of the political spectrum and are defined as much by moral and religious views as by politics.

Approximately one-in-five (17%) of the young Americans in our survey fall into a group we call "Religious Centrists" and 37 percent fall into a group we call "Secular Centrists." The remaining two groups which total 46 percent are "Traditional Liberals" (35%) and "Traditional Conservatives" (11%).

So, who are Religious Centrists and why should we care? More likely to be African-American (31%) than any of the other three groups, Religious Centrists have typically been the last group to make up their minds in support of a candidate. In some measures, they mirror what some would consider to be conservative views as they relate to our culture -- Religious Centrists

are more concerned about the moral direction of our country than any other group. They are also more likely to hold the belief that "homosexual relationships between consenting adults are morally wrong." On the other hand, Religious Centrists are also more supportive of universal health care than any other group and also are known to be "very green" on environmental issues. Religious Centrists seek candidates who are comfortable speaking about the role of faith in their lives and who also couch some issues on moral terms.

By contrast, Secular Centrists do not believe that political issues should be cast in a moral light and are generally less supportive of government's role in providing health care and protecting the environment. Unlike Traditional Conservatives, however, they hold moderate views on domestic partnerships. Openly dispassionate about their political views, Secular Centrists, unlike the other three groups, are least likely to vote.

The remaining two groups Traditional Liberals and Traditional Conservatives have largely chosen whom they will support in 2008 based on party identification. It is therefore incumbent on whichever candidate hopes to win the presidency in 2008 to spend time talking to the new Centrists.

Democrats seeking the Religions Centrists must openly talk about their faith and position some issues in starkly moral tones. Republicans seeking the Secular Centrists must respect their views on domestic partnerships and inspire them to get engaged and vote in local and national elections. If engaged, this new center could well make the difference in 2008.

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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 for seven years. More information, including past results, is available online at [www.iop.harvard.edu](http://www.iop.harvard.edu)