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## **18-24 YEAR OLDS POISED TO CHALLENGE MIDTERM ELECTION TURNOUT RECORDS, HARVARD POLL FINDS**

### ***President Bush Gets Below-Average Grade of "C-" on Key Issues; Majority of Likely Voters Favor Switch to Democratic Majority in Congress***

Washington, DC – A new national poll by Harvard University's Institute of Politics (IOP), located at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, finds nearly a third (32%) of 18 to 24 year olds "definitely" plan on voting in the upcoming midterm elections, a proportion that will likely amount to the highest turnout percentage for this age group in any midterm election in the last twenty years. The poll also finds that young people continue to disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as President, with the President averaging a grade of "C-" on seven key issues facing America, with the lowest mark coming on his handling of the War in Iraq (D+). Finally, 18-24 year olds seem to favor a swapping of majority parties in Congress, as a majority of likely voters (52%) said they favor a Congress controlled by Democrats following the November elections.

The IOP has been conducting regular polling of America's college students for six years highlighting key trends and issues related to politics and public service. For the first time, this fall's IOP poll has been expanded to look at the political views of all 18-24 year olds, whether or not they are attending a four-year college or university, providing an even more comprehensive look at a demographic critical to the outcome of the 2006 and 2008 elections.

"Voter turnout by young people approached record numbers in 2004 and our polling shows 18-24 year olds are engaged and ready to show up again in 2006," said Harvard's Institute of Politics Director Jeanne Shaheen. "Younger voters could make the difference in campaigns across the country – political parties and candidates can't afford to ignore them."

The online survey of 2,546 18-24 year old U.S. citizens conducted between October 4 and October 16, 2006 finds –

- ***Midterm election turnout among 18-24 year olds could approach record levels in 2006.***  
As we approach one of the most anticipated midterm elections in recent memory, 18 to 24 year olds appear energized to vote in greater numbers than they have in the last several midterm elections. Nearly a third (32%) of all 18 to 24 year olds reported that they will "definitely be voting" on November 7. Even with slight drop-off from this number, youth seem set to challenge the previous record for 18-24 year old midterm election turnout set in 1982 (26.6%). Indeed, over the last four midterm elections, turnout among 18 to 24 year olds averaged twenty-one percent, while turnout among those aged 25 or older averaged fifty-one percent (SOURCE: civicyouth.org – authors' tabulations from the CPS Nov. Voting and Registration Supplements, 1972-2004). Among all 18 to 24 year olds in our survey, the subgroup most likely to vote on November 7 are recent college graduates (45% say they will definitely vote), while those who have never attended college or are still in high school are the least likely.

- **President George W. Bush gets “C-” grade on seven key issues.** Asked to grade President Bush at the half-way point of his second term on seven key issues facing America – the campaign against terrorism, education, the environment, jobs and the economy, health care, illegal immigration, and the war in Iraq – the President averaged a “C-” grade, with the War in Iraq (D+) earning the worst mark of all. The President did not earn a grade higher than “C” on any of the seven issues. When asked their thoughts on the job George W. Bush is doing as President, sixty-eight percent say they disapprove while only thirty-two percent approved.
- **A majority of “likely voters” (those reporting they will “definitely be voting” on November 7) in the 18-24 year old age group favor Democratic control of Congress following the 2006 elections.** A majority of 18-24 year olds surveyed who are “most likely” to vote prefer the U.S. Congress be controlled by Democrats (52%) following the November elections, with a much lower amount favoring Republican control (29%). The remaining nineteen percent said they had no preference.
- **Young adults feel the country is off on the wrong track.** By more than a three-to-one margin, young people feel the country is off on the “wrong track” rather than headed in the right direction. Six in ten (60%) believe the country is off on the “wrong track,” while only eighteen percent believe the country is headed in the “right direction.”
- **A near-majority of young people favor total troop withdrawal from Iraq within the next year.** When asked which of four different plans dealing with the war in Iraq they preferred, ranging from complete withdrawal to sending more troops to the country, nearly half (46%) of 18-24 year olds said they preferred either withdrawing all troops immediately (16%) or within the next year (30%). A full third (33%) of young people also said they preferred troop withdrawal, but not until control can be given to the Iraqis.
- **Young adults are turned off by the current state of political discourse in Washington and skeptical about the motivations and priorities of today’s elected officials...** Nearly three in four young adults (74%) believe politics today has become too partisan. Almost eight in ten (78%) young adults also believe that elected officials today seem to be motivated by selfish reasons, and three in four (75%) feel that elected officials don’t seem to have the same priorities that they do.
- **...but still believe politics is relevant to their lives.** Despite this skepticism about the current political environment, young adults still have hope for politics. Attitudes toward the political process have soured in recent years, most likely due to government response to Iraq and Hurricane Katrina. Even so, seventy percent of 18-24 year olds, especially those older in the demographic (75% of 22-24 year olds) and those with a college degree (84%) still believe that “politics is relevant” to their lives.
- **18-24 year olds trust the military and the United Nations more than Congress and the federal government.** Less than a third of 18 to 24 year olds trust the President (31%), Congress (29%) or the federal government (28%) to do the right thing all or most of the time. For comparison – the media is the least trusted institution measured (12%), with the United Nations earning the trust of thirty-eight percent of young adults, the Supreme Court fifty percent and the United States military – still the institution trusted by more young people – at fifty-five percent.
- **Young adults “on campus” are more likely to be active in community service...** In the last 12 months, a majority of 18-24 year olds surveyed (51%) have volunteered for community service, with nearly six in ten (58%) volunteering about once a month or more. IOP polling seems to indicate our nation’s high schools and college campuses are acting as catalysts for community service activities, showing 18-24 year olds enrolled in high school, college and graduate school are more likely to be active volunteers than their counterparts not enrolled in school. Community service is even more likely to be

undertaken by 18 and 19 year olds (73%), those who attend a private university (65%), and young adults who say that religion is very important to them (64%).

- **...and in political organizations.** Although more than half of those in our survey have volunteered for community service in the last year, only nineteen percent have participated in a government, political or issues-related organization over the same time period. Indeed, young adults favor community volunteerism over political engagement as an effective way to solve important issues facing communities (81% to 70%). However, as with community service, the IOP poll showed the highest levels of political involvement among those “on campus,” with current four-year undergraduate (25%) and graduate students (29%) as being most active politically.

Harvard students designed the poll, in consultation with John F. Kennedy School Faculty Member David King and IOP Polling Director John Della Volpe, whose firm Prime Group, llc commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct the survey and collaborate on analysis of the data. Complete results and past surveys are available online at [www.iop.harvard.edu](http://www.iop.harvard.edu).

NOTE TO BROADCASTERS: A brief video-clip of Kennedy School Faculty Member David King discussing the poll’s results can be downloaded and viewed by accessing this link: <http://ksgvideo.harvard.edu:8080/ramgen/press20061026king.rm>.

The Harvard Institute of Politics survey of student attitudes was conducted online by Harris Interactive among 1,272 U.S. citizens ages 18 to 24 years old enrolled in four-year colleges and universities and 1,274 U.S. citizens ages 18-24 not enrolled in 4-year colleges and universities. The study was developed in collaboration with Prime Group, llc and fielded between October 4 and October 16, 2006. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, household income and region for these populations were weighted where necessary to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online. With a pure probability sample of 2,546, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/3 percentage points. With a pure probability sample of 1,272, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/4 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples would be higher and would vary. However, that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

Harris Interactive is the 12th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides research-driven insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for The Harris Poll, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what could conceivably be the world’s largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).

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*Harvard University’s Institute of Politics (IOP), located at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, 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 policymakers 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. More information is available online at [www.iop.harvard.edu](http://www.iop.harvard.edu).*