



CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research
on Civic Learning & Engagement



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Young Voters Favor Kerry but Find Bush More Likeable ***Jobs & the Economy Top Issue Influencing Youth Vote Survey Shows***

A new survey of 18-29 year-olds released today shows a strong majority intends to vote, a plurality favor Kerry, and more than twice as many young registered voters are paying “a lot” of attention to the campaign this year compared to 2000. Young voters are paying about as much attention to the campaign as they were in 1992 – when youth turnout spiked. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), who released the poll along with MTV, there are nearly 41 million eligible 18-29 year-old voters, comprising one-fifth of the electorate.

If the election were held today, 46% of young voters say that they would vote for John Kerry with 40% saying they would vote for George W. Bush. Ralph Nader was chosen by 4%. However, as many as 20% of committed registered voters say they could change their minds by Election Day. In addition, young voters are slightly more likely to think they would like Bush as a person than they are Kerry.

Jobs and the economy rank as the top issue influencing the way young people vote, chosen by 35% of registered voters, 67% of whom see their job opportunities as only fair or poor. This issue exceeds terrorism and national security chosen by 22%, and the war in Iraq chosen by 15%. The economy is a particularly important issue to young voters who are not sure how they will vote. Among this group, 44% cite the economy as the most important issue, followed by terrorism & security at 15%, and education at 14%.

These are among the key findings of the poll conducted by CBS News of 876 18-29 year-olds on behalf of MTV and CIRCLE. The survey focused on young people’s views of this year’s Presidential election, candidates, and key issues including the economy, terrorism, and the war in Iraq.

Key findings include:

- 49% of young people disapprove of Bush’s performance as president and 44% approve.
- 82% of registered 18-29 year olds say they will definitely vote on November 2nd.
- 74% of all young people say that this will be one of the most important elections, if not *the* most important election, of their lifetime.
- 58% think that the country has gone seriously off track (compared to 52% of Americans of all ages).
- 49% think we did the right thing in taking action against Iraq, while 45% believe we should have stayed out.
- 54% of registered voters say President Bush does not share their priorities compared to 40% for Kerry.
- 41% of all young people say they would like to hang out with Bush for a day; 28% would like to hang out with Kerry.

“This survey shows that while young people are highly attentive and engaged this election year, their preferences are closely divided, and many are still making up their minds,” says William Galston, CIRCLE’s Director. “Presidential campaigns have an opportunity to mobilize young voters in very large numbers, but only if the candidates meet young people on their own ground, and talk specifically about the issues that concern them the most—especially the ability of the U.S. economy to generate enough good jobs.”

Young Voters Favor Kerry, Although Support is Weak

Although a plurality of young people back Kerry, some of this support seems to be rooted in a lack of alternatives. Among Kerry supporters, 29% say they support him because they dislike the other candidates, whereas only 5% of Bush supporters claim the same thing. While 55% of Bush supporters say they strongly support their candidate, only 33% of Kerry supporters qualify their support as strong. Moreover, 21% of Kerry supporters think Edwards would actually make a better president than Kerry, compared to only 4% of Bush supporters who think Cheney would make a better president.

Young People Prefer Bush Personally Over Kerry

Young people would rather hang out with George W. Bush than John Kerry, and 52% of young registered voters say they like President Bush as a person, compared to 47% who say they like Kerry. Young people would also rather have George W. Bush as a dad or as a boss, preferring John Kerry only in the role of teacher.

Young women, in particular, prefer Bush’s personality to Kerry’s, even though they are more likely than young men to intend to vote for Kerry. Roughly half of registered young women intend to vote for Kerry, compared to 39% who plan on voting for Bush. And yet, 52% of registered young women think they would like Bush personally while only 44% think they would like Kerry. Likewise, 41% of young women say they would choose Bush as a dad from among the presidential and vice presidential candidates, while only 26% say Kerry.

The poll was conducted from September 8-13, 2004. The margin of error for this survey is +/-3%. For a copy of the entire poll and additional information, please visit www.civicyouth.org.

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