

# **2018 Survey of America's College Students**

Conducted on Behalf of:  
**The Panetta Institute for Public Policy**

**By Hart Research Associates**

May 2018

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## I. Introduction

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This report summarizes the major findings of a survey among American college students conducted by Hart Research Associates for the Panetta Institute for Public Policy. Since 2001 the Panetta Institute has commissioned Hart Research to conduct an annual survey among college students in the United States. Because of the research's continuity and depth, it truly is one of the best barometers for measuring college students' attitudes. Hart Research is honored to have conducted this important research on behalf of the Panetta Institute. What follows is a summary of the key findings.

- Presented with a list of current issues, students choose preventing gun violence as their most important issue, with 55% choosing this as one of their three biggest concerns. Coverage of gun violence and the March for Our Lives is the news story that students have been following most closely (71% report following this very or fairly closely).
- More than two in five students (43%) worry a great deal or quite a bit about a mass shooting at their school.
- College students are also very concerned about the cost of college and student loan debt, with 65% saying they worry very or somewhat often about this—a record high in the survey's history and up from 56% last year.
- Students are not only worried about the cost of college, they are making many decisions with long-term implications to deal with the cost of college, including the following:
  - 37% say they have skipped meals because they could not afford it.
  - 36% have avoided a necessary medical or dental procedure because they could not afford it.
  - 34% work at least 20 hours a week in order to pay their tuition.
  - 23% have not eaten any food for at least a day because they could not afford it.
  - 20% have needed to take time off because they could not afford to pay tuition.
- Students are following the 2018 midterm elections more closely than prior midterm elections, with 61% saying they already are following the elections for Congress very or fairly closely.
- Democrats hold a 28-point advantage among college students (55% to 27%) in their vote for Congress, the highest Democratic advantage among students in a midterm election that we have recorded, topping the 26-point margin in 2006.
- A majority (52%) says that their vote for Congress will be to send a signal of opposition to Donald Trump.
- Donald Trump's job rating as president stands at 29% on campus, essentially unchanged from last year's survey (28%), with 46% strongly disapproving of the job that he is doing.

- While college students believe that Donald Trump has made things worse rather than better in a number of specific areas, the one place where opinion on campus is divided is the economy, where 29% say he has made things better and 30% say he has made things worse. This marks a significant improvement for Trump on the economy compared with last year's survey when, by a 15-point margin, students believed that he had made things worse on the economy.
- For the second year in a row, a majority (58%) of students say that the nation's economy is excellent or good.
- A majority (59%) of students believe that most of the problems their generation will face will be national in scope rather than international, up from 51% last year.
- On international issues, students generally want to see the United States become more involved in areas that prioritize diplomacy rather than conflict. Specifically, working with NATO and our allies (+32 more rather than less involved), limiting North Korea's nuclear weapons (+20), and preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons (+18).
- College students are closely following coverage about sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement, with 62% following this closely. Seven in 10 (71%) believe that this greater attention to addressing sexual harassment on campus and in the workplace will lead to long-term change.
- But still, 70% of women say that men treat them differently because they are a woman and 60% of women say they personally have experienced discrimination because of their gender.
- By 42% to 9% college students believe that there is not enough, rather than too much, regulation of Internet and social media sites such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter.
- Confidence in most government institutions is remarkably low (with the exception of the military). While 57% of students have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the military, just 33% feel similarly about the court system, the federal government (24%), Congress (22%), and the presidency (20%).
- Two in five (42%) college students are very or fairly interested in working for government, and 58% would be very or fairly interested in a program that provides grant or financial assistance for college in exchange for two years of national service after graduation.

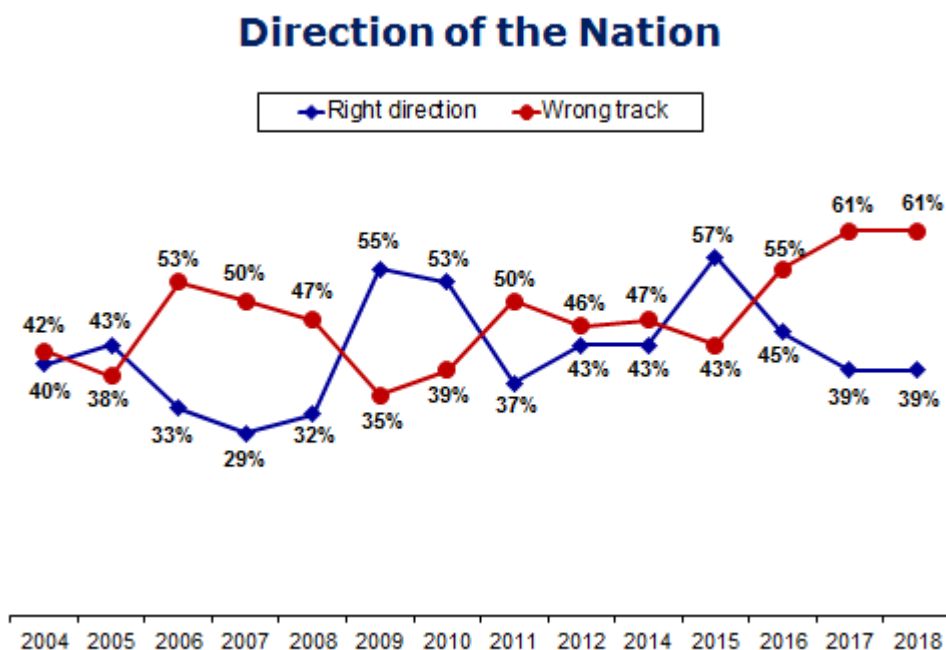
## **Methodology**

Hart Research contracted with an online survey vendor to administer the survey to a sample of people currently enrolled in some type of post-secondary institution that was drawn from the vendor's multi-million-member respondent panel. Screening questions limited participation to students who are enrolled in a four-year higher learning institution. A total of 801 interviews were completed online. All interviews were conducted from April 12 to 19, 2018. Some demographics were weighted to achieve representative samples of four-year college students nationwide.

## II. State of the Nation

Over the past several years, the proportions of college students who believe that the country is off on the wrong track and are pessimistic about the country's future have increased. This year's survey continues the trend, with Democrats much more convinced than Republicans that the country is headed off on the wrong track and much more likely to feel uncertain and concerned about the future of the country. On issues, students are still largely concerned with the cost of education and have also been closely following news on gun violence and gun control.

The number of college students who feel the nation is off on the wrong track matches last year's low of 61%, with only 39% saying we are headed in the right direction. Seventy-six percent (76%) of both Democrats and liberals are concerned that the country is headed off on the wrong track. Republicans overwhelmingly believe the opposite; 34% think that the nation is off on the wrong track, while 66% believe that the nation is heading in the right direction.



While attitudes on the direction of the country are unchanged from last year, the proportion of students who say they feel "more uncertain and concerned" about the future of the country has declined slightly – from 72% in 2017 to 68% today. There is again a large partisan divide among students on this issue. While a

majority of both Democrats and Republicans are uncertain and concerned about the future of the country, Democrats (79%) are far more likely to report feeling uncertain and concerned than Republicans (51%).

On this question there is also a significant gender gap and shifts over the years. Today, 76% of women say they feel more uncertain and concerned about the country's future, as opposed to 59% of men. While the proportion of women who are concerned remains the same as it was in 2017 (76%) and has increased since 2014 (66%), the proportion of men who feel more uncertain and concerned about the future of the country has decreased from 70% in 2014 to 66% in 2017 to 59% today.

So, within just the past four years, college men and women have diverged significantly on their outlook. A number of factors could be at play here, including Donald Trump's defeat of Hillary Clinton, the Women's March in 2017, its anniversary marches in 2018, and the rise of the #MeToo movement.

Pessimism about the country's future runs high on campus, and a majority of students (59%) believe that it will be harder for them to achieve the American dream compared to their parents' generation. But the proportion of students who believe it will be easier for them to achieve the American dream than it was for their parents has increased over the past two years – from 11% in 2016 to 21% in this survey. In 2016, 73% of college students thought it was more difficult to achieve the American dream than it was for their parents' generation.

The improved outlook on achieving the American dream does not extend to college students who voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016, among whom just 17% think that the American dream is easier to achieve now. Seventy-two percent (72%) of Clinton voters believe that it is harder to achieve the American dream now than it was for their parents' generation. Significantly fewer Trump voters (43%) hold this belief.

The cost of college has always been a top concern for students, but this year's survey shows that concern increasing. Students this past year were more likely to follow news stories about proposals to provide debt-free college or reduce student loan debt (57%) than they were to follow news about the condition of the U.S. economy (56%), about Russia's relations with the United States (56%), or about the upcoming 2018 congressional elections (48%). Dealing with the cost of

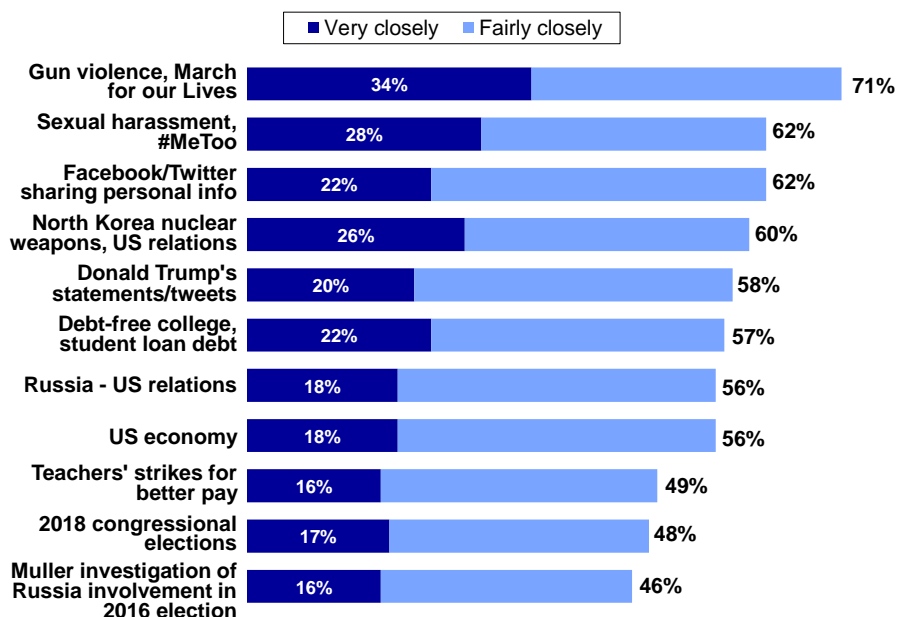
college education is the second highest ranked issue for college students (only preventing gun violence ranked higher), and 48% of respondents rate it as among their three most important issues. While one might expect this to be an issue for only lower- to middle-class students who rely more on financial aid and scholarships to pay for college, this issue transcends class. Seventeen percent (17%) of students who identified their families' class as upper to upper middle class, middle class, or lower class listed dealing with the costs of college education as their number-one issue.

The 2016 election of Donald Trump remains a major topic on campus. Students have been keeping a close eye on Trump in the news, with 58% saying that they follow news regarding his statements and tweets very or somewhat closely. A majority of college students (68%) who are extremely motivated to vote in the 2018 midterm elections follow news about the President's statements and tweets very or fairly closely. Among respondents who are leaning toward voting for a Democratic candidate, 67% follow this news very or fairly closely, more than those who lean toward voting for a Republican candidate (53%).

But the biggest issue on college students' minds is gun violence. Seventy-one percent (71%) say they followed the coverage of gun violence and the March for Our Lives protests very or fairly closely, and 34% say they followed this topic in the news very closely, making gun violence the top-ranked topic that students follow in the news. Coverage of sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement (62%), reports about social media companies sharing users' personal information (62%), and coverage of North Korea (60%) also rank high among the news stories followed closely on campus.



## I followed news about this closely:



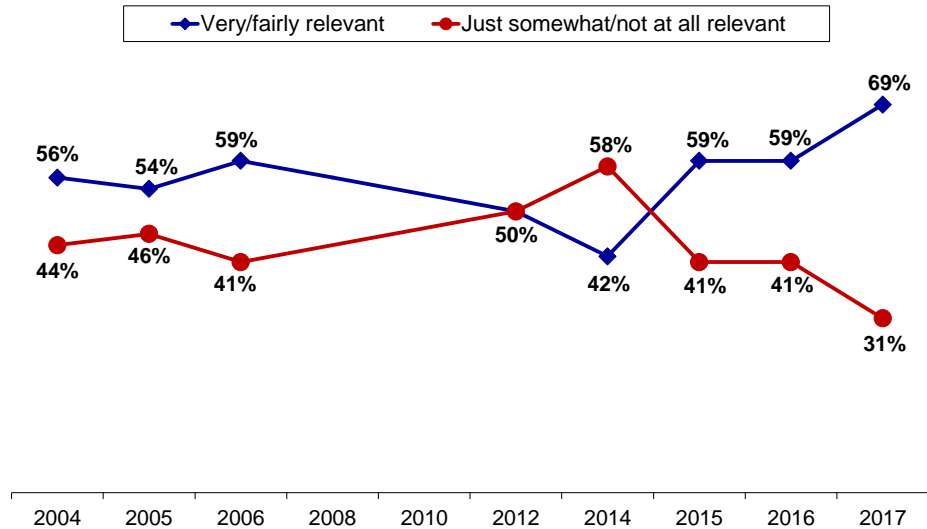
When asked to rank a series of issues by what is most important to them personally, 55% of college students choose preventing gun violence as one of their top three issues, and 22% choose this as their number-one issue, again the top-ranked issue overall. Among those who say that they are voting for a Democratic candidate, 81% say they have followed the topic of gun violence in the news very or fairly closely, and 84% of students who say they are extremely motivated to vote say they have followed this topic closely. The issues of gun violence and legislation surrounding gun control are likely to be at the forefront of these students' minds as they decide whether and how to vote in the 2018 elections.

### III. The Political Landscape

More than three in five college students believe that politics is relevant to their life, but at the same time they are dissatisfied with the country's political leadership. Democrats hold a wide advantage in the midterm elections, with a majority of students saying that their vote will be to send a signal of opposition to Donald Trump, who remains extremely unpopular on campus.

In last year's survey, 69% of students reported that politics was very or fairly relevant in their life—a record high. While this number has declined to 61% in this year's survey, it still remains on the higher end that we have tracked over time.

#### How relevant is politics in your life?



College students remain largely dissatisfied with the quality of the country's political leadership, as was the case last year. Just 32% are very or fairly satisfied with the country's political leadership, up just slightly from last year's 29%. This marks a significant drop from the 2016 survey (48% satisfied), conducted during the spring when Barack Obama was still president. Satisfaction with the country's political leadership varies greatly by party identification, with a majority of Republicans indicating that they are satisfied (66%) while just 35% of independents and 13% of Democrats share this view. No doubt, a major factor in assessing the country's political leadership is the president. Among college students who say they voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election, 78% say they are satisfied with

the country's political leadership, but just 17% of Clinton voters say they are satisfied.

### **The 2018 Midterm Elections**

College students report an unprecedented level of interest in the 2018 midterm elections and are following coverage of the elections more closely compared with prior cycles. Overall, 61% are paying a lot or some attention to the midterm elections, a dramatic increase from 2014 (38%) and 2010 (44%). This comparatively high level of attention spans the partisan spectrum, as Democrats (62%), independents (59%), and Republicans (60%) are likely to report that they are paying attention to the elections. And 48% of college students say they are very or fairly closely following news about this year's congressional elections, which marks an increase from 25% in 2014.

College students are a Democratic-leaning group, with a majority of students identifying as Democrats (52%), 23% as independent, and 25% as Republicans. This is an important starting point in understanding both their evaluation of Democrats and Republicans in Congress and their preference for a candidate in the mid-term elections. Just 34% of college students approve of the job that Republicans in Congress are doing, compared with a 51% approval rating for Democrats in Congress.

The preference for Democrats is also seen in whom students plan to vote for in this year's congressional elections. Overall, they plan to vote for the Democratic candidate over the Republican candidate by a 28-point margin (55% to 27%). This is similar to the 32-point margin (60% to 28%) in 2016, a presidential election year, and is the highest Democratic advantage we have seen among students in a mid-term election year, topping the previous highest margin of 26 points (46% to 20%) in 2006. Across subgroups, the composition of the Democratic advantage looks very much as it did in 2016, with notable advantages over Republicans among independents and students of an average social class, generally seen as key swing electoral groups.

<b>Congressional Trial Heat by Subgroup</b>				
	<b>2018</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2016</b>
	<b><u>Democrat</u></b>	<b><u>Republican</u></b>	<b><u>Democrat</u></b>	<b><u>Republican</u></b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All students	55	27	60	28
Men	52	31	53	31
Women	58	25	67	25
Northeast	57	24	70	21
South	54	29	54	32
Midwest	56	31	56	31
West	54	26	62	27
Whites	48	36	51	38
Hispanics	62	19	74	18
African Americans	72	12	82	10
Asians	61	11	72	11
Social sciences	59	30	64	26
Humanities	61	22	57	24
Science/math/CS	58	26	65	24
Business	47	35	53	38
Democrats	86	5	94	3
Independents	35	14	36	19
Republicans	9	86	8	88
Social class: lower/lower middle	63	17	71	14
Social class: average	53	29	58	31
Social class: upper middle/upper	52	34	54	35

Donald Trump is a major factor in the November congressional elections. More than half of college students (52%) say that their vote will be to send a signal of opposition to Trump, while 17% say it will be a signal of support, and 31% say their vote is not a signal either way about Trump. However, unlike other instances across the survey where Democrats and Republicans match each other on interest in the election or margins on the congressional ballot, Democrats are much more likely to say that their vote will be a signal of opposition to Trump (74%) than Republicans are to say that their vote will be a signal of support for Trump (47%). And by 44% to 14%, independents are more likely to say that their vote will be a signal of opposition rather than support for Trump.

When asked what one message they would like to send to their country's leaders in Washington D.C., 11% volunteer that they would ask their leaders to impeach Trump. Another 4% of students list other concerns and criticisms of

Donald Trump as their number-one message. Anti-Trump sentiment is running strong among students as they contemplate voting in the 2018.

## **Donald Trump**

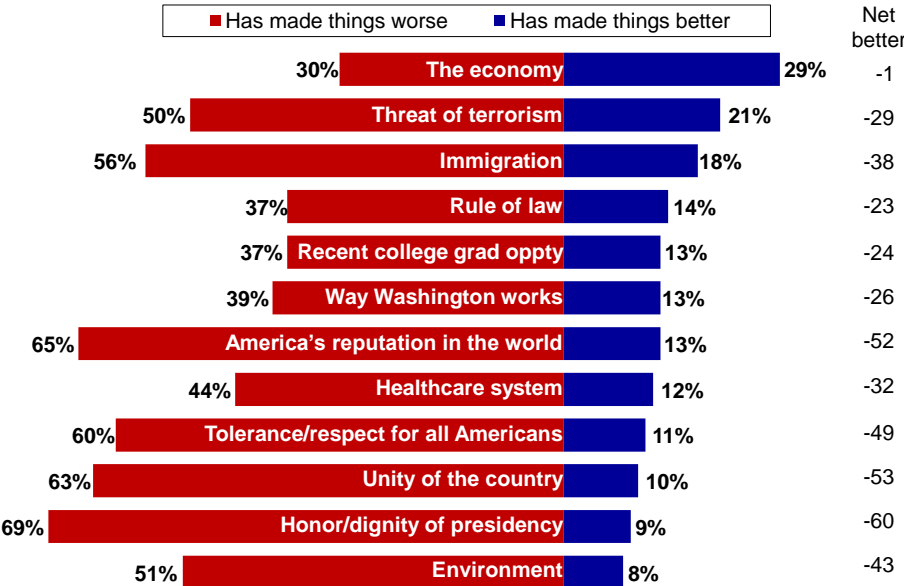
A year into his presidency, Donald Trump continues to receive very low ratings among college students both personally and professionally. Overall, just 19% of students have positive feelings toward Donald Trump while 68% hold negative views. This is a very slight change from last year's survey when 18% of students viewed Trump positively, and 70% viewed him negatively. Not only do students view Trump negatively, but these views are intensely negative, with more than half (52%) offering that they view Trump very negatively. Former President Obama's personal ratings are a reminder that college students do not view all political figures negatively. Two in three (67%) have positive feelings toward Barack Obama while just 17% have negative feelings toward him.

Donald Trump's job rating as president is somewhat better than his personal ratings, but this too is essentially unchanged from last year's very low level. Overall, 29% of college students approve of the job that Donald Trump is doing, while 71% disapprove. Democrats overwhelmingly disapprove of the job that Trump is doing as president (91% disapprove) while Republicans' approval of Trump's job (72%) does not reach the same level. Just 27% of independents approve of the job that Trump is doing as president. And while perceptions of the economy remain a huge dividing line in determining students' views about Trump, even among those who say the economy is excellent or good, Trump receives a net negative job rating (43% approve, 57% disapprove).

<b>Donald Trump Job Rating as President</b>			
	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Differential</u>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>±</b>
All students	29	71	-42
Men	34	66	-32
Women	25	75	-50
Whites	36	64	-28
African Americans	15	85	-70
Hispanics	26	74	-48
Asians	14	86	-72
Social sciences	28	72	-44
Humanities	26	74	-48
Science/math/CS	28	72	-44
Business	35	65	-30
Democrats	9	91	-82
Independents	27	73	-46
Republicans	72	28	+44
Social class: lower/lower middle	18	82	-64
Social class: middle	32	68	-36
Social class: upper middle/upper	33	67	-34
Economy: Excellent/good	43	57	-14
Economy: Not so good/poor	10	90	-80

In nearly all areas tested, students are much more likely to believe that Donald Trump has made things worse rather than better. Specifically, students are more likely to believe that Trump has made things worse rather than better when it comes to perceptions about the country on specific issues, including the honor and dignity of the presidency (-60), the unity of the country (-53), America's reputation in the world (-52), and tolerance and respect for all Americans (-49). College students are still more likely to believe that Trump has made things worse rather than better on economic issues, but here he gets a bit more credit and has notched improvements compared with last year's data. While still net negative, Trump has improved eight points on providing greater opportunities for college students upon graduation (from -32 to -24 this year), and on the economy, Trump has improved by 14 points (from -15 last year to -1 now).

### President Trump’s Impact in Selected Areas



The investigation into Russia’s involvement in the 2016 presidential election looms over the Trump presidency. College students are more likely to believe that Russia’s involvement calls into question America’s ability to have free and fair elections, but many are taking a wait-and-see approach and say they do not know enough about the Mueller investigation. About half (49%) believe that Russia’s involvement in the 2016 election calls into question America’s ability to have free and fair elections while 23% say no, and 28% are not able to offer an opinion. This is similar to last year’s findings, with slightly more respondents saying they do not have an opinion. There is a huge divide on this question on partisan lines—64% of Democrats say this calls into question free and fair elections, while a plurality (41%) of Republicans say it does not, and independents are more likely to be on the side of calling into question our elections (37% yes, 27% no), but 36% are also not able to offer an opinion.

College students are even more likely to be unsure about the Mueller investigation at this time. Among all topics tested, the Mueller investigation is the news story that students are least likely to be following—just 46% say they are following the investigation very or fairly closely. Half of students (51%) are unable to say whether they approve or disapprove of the way that Robert Mueller is handling the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election, while those who offer an opinion are slightly more likely to disapprove (27%) than to

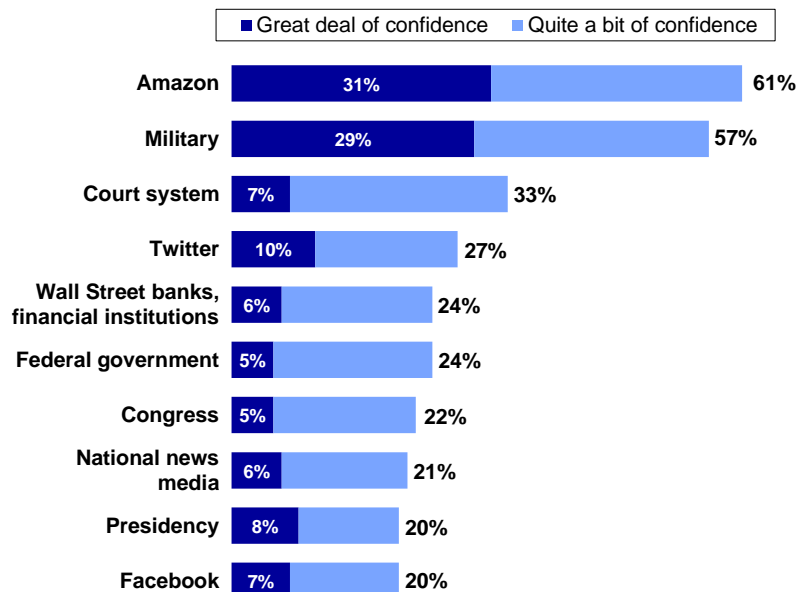
approve (22%). Here, Democrats who offer an opinion are divided (25% approve, 24% disapprove), while Republicans are more than twice as likely to disapprove as approve (32% disapprove, 14% approve).

## IV. Confidence in Institutions, Media, and Internet

College students lack confidence in a range of government, media, and financial institutions. Students do not have a lot of confidence in social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, but are increasingly turning to them for news.

Of all institutions tested, only Amazon and the military, have the confidence of a majority of students (61% and 57% respectively). Though confidence in all government and media institutions has increased, students still have very little confidence in these institutions overall. Confidence in the federal government increased six points from 18% in 2017 to 24% this year. College students even gained a little more confidence in Congress from 19% in 2017 to 22% now. Of all institutions, college students have the least confidence in both the presidency and Facebook (20%).

### Confidence in American Institutions



### Confidence in the News Media and News Consumption

Confidence in the national news media remains quite low at 21% (basically unchanged from 20% in 2017). Democrats are just marginally more likely than



Republicans to trust the national news media (22% and 18% respectively), while confidence among independents in the national news media has risen seven points since 2017, from just 17% to 24%. Among Trump voters, confidence in the national news media has actually increased from 14% in 2017 to 20% in 2018.

Despite their low level of confidence in social media, 41% of students still get their news from social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook, even more than in 2017 (34%). For the first time, students are more likely to get their news from social media than from an Internet news website. Forty percent (40%) still say they get most of their information about politics and civic affairs from Internet news websites, yet this is a 10-point drop from 50% in 2017.

In 2017 we found that many college students do not get their news and information on politics and civic affairs from sources that they trust. This trend remains evident today. Even though more students than ever before report getting their news from social media sites, just 17% say that they trust these sites as sources of information on politics and civic affairs all or most of the time. Family and friends are the most trusted sources of information about politics and civic affairs (48%), but only 28% of students say they get most of their information from family and friends. Republicans are the least likely to trust social media sites like Facebook and Twitter as a source of news. Just 10% of Republicans trust these sites all or most of the time. By comparison, 20% of Democrats trust these sites all or most of the time.

Students' dependence on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter for information is likely due to the fact that large majorities use these sites. Eighty percent of college students (80%) have a Facebook account and 59% have a Twitter account. This is far more than the 20% of students who have a subscription to either a printed or online newspaper.

### **Social Media and the Internet**

Despite the widespread use of social media as a source of information on political and civic affairs, only 18% of college students say they use social media as a major source for this. Students are far more likely to use social media as a means to keep up with friends and family (53%) or to stay informed about events and activities sponsored by organizations (30%).

Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have been in the news recently with questions about how much they should be regulated and privacy protections for their users. This is a story that college students are following—fully 62% say they are following reports about social media companies sharing users’ personal information very or fairly closely. Among the 80% of students who have a Facebook account, 50% say that they reviewed the privacy settings on their account within the past month. Of that 50%, 22% have reviewed their privacy settings in the past week.

Privacy online has become a growing concern for students. Fifty-two percent (52%) agree that “The Internet is a public space but you should also expect that there are limits to what can be shared so your privacy is protected.” College students want to see social media sites like Google, Facebook, and Twitter provide more information and privacy options to their users. When presented with two statements about how social media sites use personal information, about three-quarters of students (74%) agree with the following statement that takes a more restrictive view of what these platforms should be allowed to do with personal information: “These platforms collect the personal information of millions of people with the expectation that the information will be used by the platform, but this information should not be available for sale to companies without greater transparency provided to the user and greater ability to opt out.”

College students are divided fairly evenly as to whether the current level of regulation is sufficient or if more regulation is needed to create the greater transparency and privacy online that they want. Most think that the current amount of regulation on sites like Google, Facebook, and Twitter is about right (49%), but 42% want to see more regulation, compared to only 9% who think there is too much regulation. This is a relatively non-partisan issue. Forty-one percent (41%) of both Democrats and Republicans think there is not enough regulation, and only 12% of Republicans, compared with 9% of Democrats, think there is too much regulation.

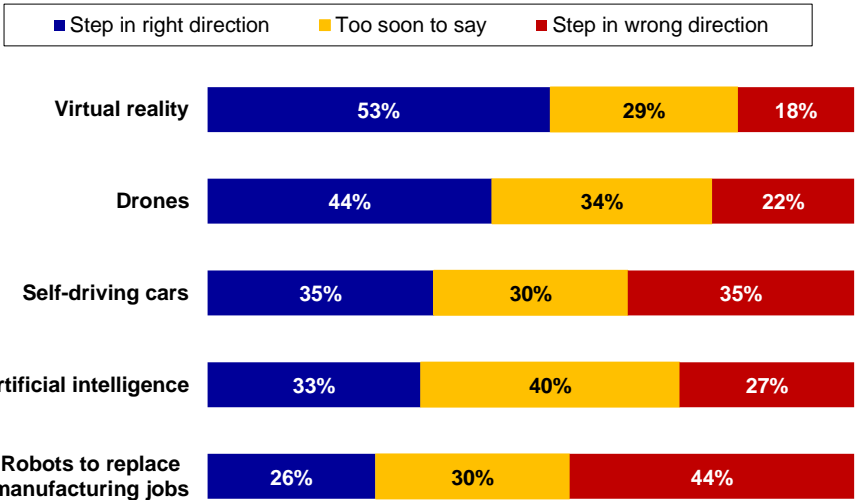
### **Technological Advances**

Technological advances are generally embraced by college students, but there has been a drop in the proportion that sees these advances as a good thing. While 33% of students worry often about losing a job to a computer or robot, or to artificial

intelligence, a majority think that the increased use of these technologies are a good thing for today’s economy. Fifty-four percent (54%) of students overall, including 63% of students in business and science, math, or computer science majors, agree that the increased use of computers, robots, drones, and artificial intelligence will “improve our quality of life and create new job opportunities that are not even possibilities in today’s economy.” This is a drop from 2017 when 61% of students agreed with this statement. Students of the social sciences and humanities are more likely to disagree with this statement (53% and 63% respectively), because they believe these technologies “will eliminate the need for many jobs...and unintended consequences of these technologies will do more harm than good.”

Students are especially concerned about the use of robots in replacing manufacturing jobs. When asked whether replacing manufacturing jobs with robots is a step in the right or the wrong direction, 44% of students say it is a step in the wrong direction, and 30% say it is too soon to say either way. Students are divided more evenly on self-driving cars; 35% believe this is a step in the right direction, 35% believe it is a step in the wrong direction, and 30% say it is too soon to say. Forty percent (40%) also believe that it is too soon to say whether technological advances in artificial intelligence are a step in the right or the wrong direction.

### Attitude toward Recent/Soon-to-Be Technological Advances



## V. International Issues

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Compared with a year ago, college students are less likely to believe that the problems facing their generation will be international. Students overwhelmingly continue to believe that the United States is less respected than it has been in the past. On specific foreign policy issues, they generally want the United States to become more involved in policies focused on diplomacy and reducing the potential for conflict, while they want the United States to be less involved in policies that would mean greater use of the military to achieve those goals.

In a shift from last year, students are more likely to say that most problems their generation will face are national in scope (59% versus 51% in 2017) than say international (41% compared to 49% last year). This is back on track with what we saw in 2016 and 2015, when students were at 42% international, 58% national and 43% international, 57% national respectively.

Movement on this question varies by students' major course of study. Those in the social sciences and the humanities shifted to a national focus (53% and 42% respectively in 2017 to 63% and 52% in 2018), while those studying business had the largest increase for national in scope at 14 points, going from 47% in 2017 to 61% this year. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of those in science, math, and computer science areas of study say national in scope and 42% say international in scope, compared with 52% national and 48% international last year.

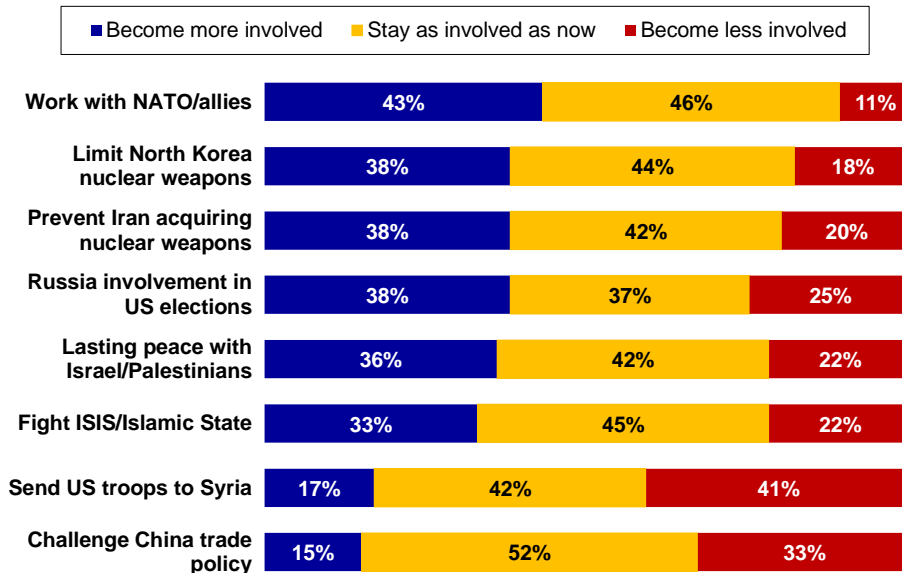
College students continue overwhelmingly to say that the United States is less respected by other countries than it used to be. Seventy percent (70%) in this survey say the country is less respected, with 12% saying more respected, only a slight improvement since 2014, when 73% said less respected and 8% more respected. There is a partisan divide here, with 81% of Democrats and 63% of independents saying America is less respected, and just over half of Republicans (54%) saying this is the case.

Students were asked to rank a list of foreign policy areas by whether they want the country to become more involved in, less involved in, or stay as involved in that area. At the top of the list, students rank working with NATO and our allies as something they want America to become more involved in – with 43% saying more involved in that area, 11% saying less involved, and 43% wanting involvement to stay the same. Students are less likely to want the United States to

become more involved in challenging China on its trade policies, at only 15% more involved and 33% less involved, as well as becoming less involved militarily in Syria—41% less involved, 17% more involved.

College students want the United States to become more involved in challenging Russia and its involvement in our elections (38%), with 25% saying less involved and 37% wanting the same level of involvement. Democrats are most likely to want the United States to become more involved rather than less involved by 46% to 21% (33% stay as involved), but Republicans also want the United States to become more involved (35%) rather than less involved (22%), with 43% saying they want to maintain the current level of involvement. Independents differ in this area and are most likely to want the United States to become less involved rather than more (38% to 25%), with 37% saying we should keep to the current level.

### Attitude toward US Involvement in Selected Foreign Policy Areas



## VI. Domestic Issues

When it comes to issues facing America at home, college students tend to be fairly progressive, with majorities viewing global warming as a serious problem, seeing immigration as something that helps the United States more than it hurts it, and wanting to continue the DACA program.

More than half of students (54%) still view global warming as a very serious problem and 84% see it as a very or somewhat serious problem (a slight downtick from 87% last year). There are stark differences in this belief by party, with 71% of Democrats, 46% of independents, and only 27% of Republicans seeing global warming as a very serious problem. While Democrats and Republicans remain stable in their views of global warming as a very or somewhat serious problem (97% and 65% respectively in 2017 compared with 97% and 64% this year), independents who say that global warming is a very or somewhat serious problem dropped 11 points (from 87% in 2017).

Two-thirds of college students view immigration as something that helps the United States more than it hurts (66% say it helps more than it hurts and 34% say it hurts more than it helps). This is down slightly from last year, when 71% of students said immigration helps more than it hurts. About eight in 10 (79%) Asian students believe that immigration helps the United States more than it hurts, and three quarters of Hispanic students (75%) see immigration as helping, compared with white students and African American students, who see immigration helping more than it hurts by 61% and 63% respectively.

About seven in 10 students (69%) believe that Congress should vote to continue the DACA program, including 79% of Hispanic students. Students from lower-class families also overwhelmingly favor DACA's continuation (80%).

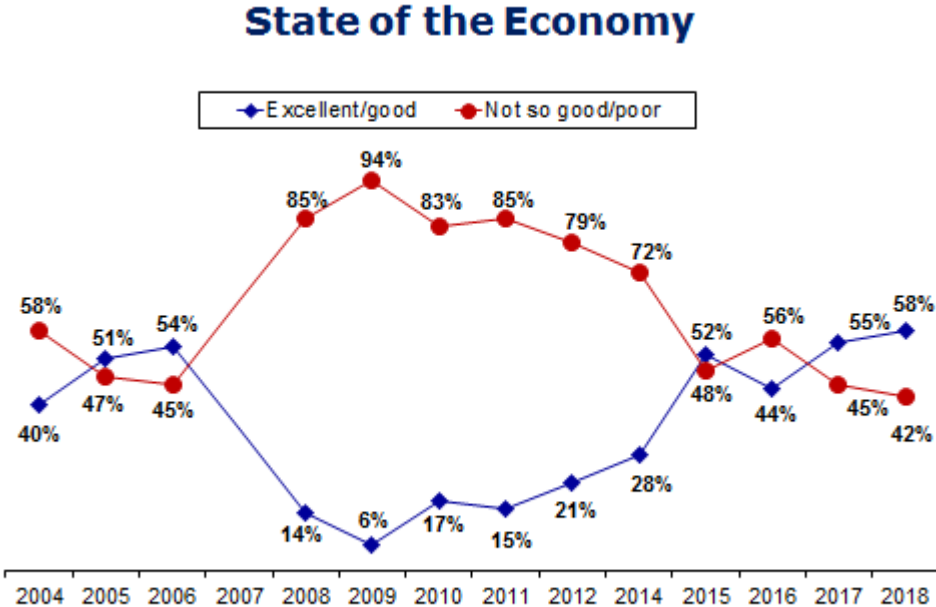
On the issue of guns, two-thirds of students (66%) say they are more concerned that the government will not do enough to regulate access to firearms, while 34% are more worried that the government will go too far in restricting the rights of citizens to own guns. Fully 84% of Democrats and 59% of independents are more concerned about government not doing enough, while 67% of Republicans are more concerned that government will go too far.

Two in five (43%) students worry a great deal or quite a bit about a mass shooting occurring at their school, and 41% believe that the March for Our Lives to change the country's gun laws is very or fairly likely to bring real change to the nation's gun laws.

## VII. Economic Outlook

The outlook on the economy among college students is mixed, but shows slight signs of growing optimism among a generation that was raised in the midst of an economic crisis. A majority of students now describe the nation’s economy as good or excellent. The proportion who believes that the economy will get worse in the next 12 months has decreased since 2017 and more students think they will either fare better or about the same as their parents financially. However, this growing optimism is a cautious one. More students than ever in this poll report worrying about concerns such as finding a good-paying job, having too much student loan or credit card debt, or losing their job to a computer or robot, or to artificial intelligence.

The proportion of students who describe the state of the nation’s economy as excellent or good increased to 58%, from 55% in 2017 and 44% in 2016. Trump voters and Republicans are among the most optimistic groups, with 83% and 76% respectively rating the economy as excellent or good. Men (69%) are far more likely than women (48%) to report that the economy is excellent or good -- a 21-point gap.

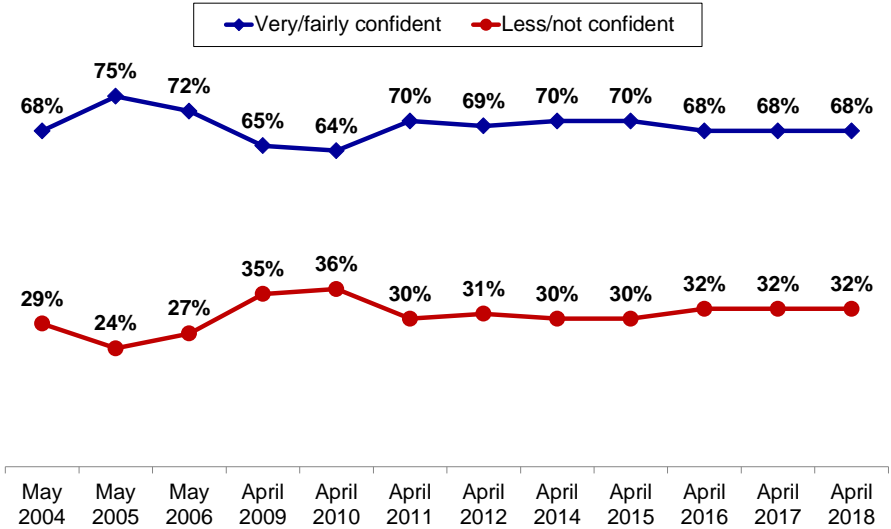


College students are slightly more hopeful than they were in 2017 that financially they will end up better off or about the same as their parents. Forty

percent (40%) of students say that they think they will be financially better off than their parents (39% in 2017) and 34% say that financially they will be about the same as their parents (compared with 30% in 2017). Students enrolled in business courses are among the most likely groups to say that they think they will be financially better off than their parents.

Students remain confident in their ability to find a job that is acceptable to them after they graduate. Overall, 68% are very or fairly confident in their ability to find an acceptable job, matching last year’s survey. Republicans (80%), freshman (73%), and those majoring in business (75%) are among the groups that are more confident in finding a job. And views on the country’s economic outlook impact confidence in one’s ability to find a job. Among those who say the economy is excellent or good, 76% are confident in their own ability to find a job, while among those who believe the economy is not so good or poor, 57% are confident. What is remarkable is how stable student confidence levels on this subject have remained from year to year, through good and bad economic times. Even in the difficult years following the 2008 financial crisis, students remained fairly confident in their ability to find a job.

### Confidence I Will Be Able to Find an Acceptable Job After College Graduation



While college students are confident in their ability to find a job, they are uncertain about the new tax law. Overall only 22% think the new tax bill signed into law by President Trump is a good idea, while 39% believe it is bad idea, and

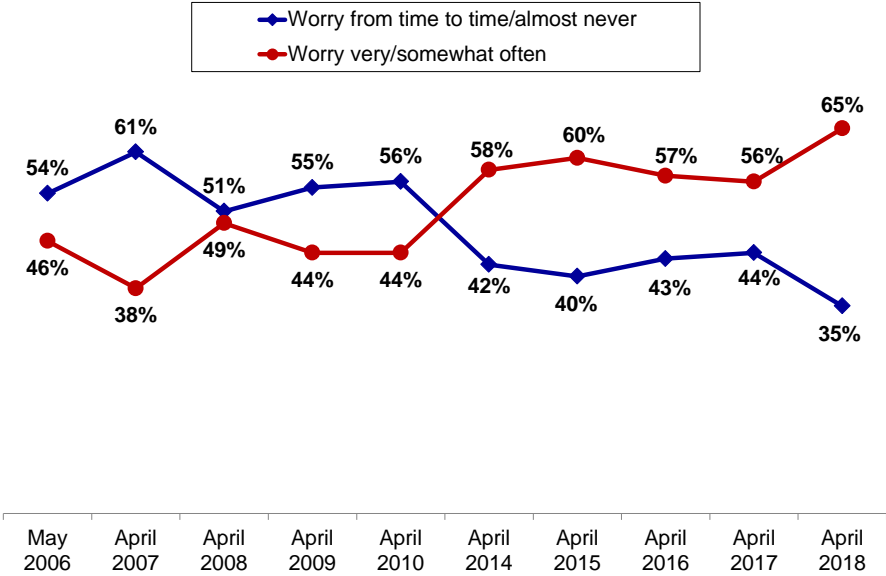


39% say that they don't have an opinion either way. A majority of Democrats (57%) say the law is a bad idea while a majority of Republicans believe it is a good idea (53%). Independents are fairly evenly divided, with 28% saying the new tax reform bill is a bad idea, 25% calling it a good idea, and a large plurality not being able to offer an opinion either way.

Students' personal financial worries have increased. A greater proportion than in any previous iteration of this poll worry very or somewhat often about every financial concern tested. Despite their previously noted confidence in finding a job after they graduate, 72% of students still do worry about finding a good-paying quality job. Eighty-four percent (84%) of social science majors and 82% of those who are very interested in a government career worry very or somewhat often about finding a good-paying quality job.

Student loan debt is a growing concern for college students as college tuitions continue to rise. Sixty-five percent (65%) say they worry about this very or somewhat often, an increase of nine points since 2017. Though students are cautiously optimistic about the state of the economy, they are concerned about what the future economy looks like and how it will affect them.

### Concern about Student Loan Debt



While college students continue to believe that the education they have received is a good value based on the cost, there has been erosion on this question over time, from 89% in 2006 to 83% in 2011 to 78% in this year's survey.

Students from a lower socioeconomic class are less likely to believe that their college education is a good value compared with those from upper or upper middle-class backgrounds (73% compared to 82%).

## **VIII. On Campus**

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College students face many challenges regarding their future, but even more concerning are financial and social stresses that they are dealing with on campus. Many students are facing significant financial stress in dealing with the cost of tuition and are making painful tradeoffs to help them pay for college. The #MeToo movement also has reached campus, and most students see this as an appropriate response that will bring long-term change to gender-related issues that have been ignored for too long. At the same time, many also believe that there are major differences between how men and women are treated on campus.

One of the more striking findings in this year's survey is how many college students are facing financial stress and the toll it takes on them as they try to get an education. Thirty-eight percent of students (38%) say they were accepted at another school that they wanted to go to but could not afford to attend. And while enrolled, 34% are working at least 20 hours a week to pay tuition, with 20% saying they have had to take time off from college to be able to afford tuition. These financial stresses are playing out in very real ways, with 37% skipping meals because they cannot afford them and 23% saying they have not eaten food for at least a day because of this. Another 36% of students say they have avoided a necessary medical or dental procedure because they could not afford it. Not surprisingly, these stresses are having an outsized impact on students from lower socioeconomic classes.

### Does this apply to you?

	<u>All College Students</u>	<u>Lower Class</u>
	%	%
You were accepted at another school that you wanted to go to but could not afford it	38	46
You have skipped meals because you could not afford it	37	53
You have avoided a necessary medical or dental procedure because you could not afford it	36	50
You work at least 20 hours a week in order to pay your tuition	34	35
You have not eaten any food for at least a day because you could not afford it	23	33
You needed to take time off because you could not afford to pay tuition	20	24

When it comes to issues of sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement, students are not only following the news coverage but believe that the issue is important to address on campus. Overall, 68% say that the increasing attention to sexual harassment on campus and in the workplace is an appropriate response, while 32% say it has gone too far. College students also believe that this greater focus will lead to a long-term change of attitudes, with 71% feeling this way.

Clearly, there is much work to be done on gender issues, as 46% of students report that they have experienced discrimination because of their gender. Female students are twice as likely as their male counterparts to report gender discrimination (60% to 30%).

There are additional significant divisions between men and women on campus when it comes to experiences based on gender. Overall, 53% of college students believe that opinions of men are taken more seriously than women, with 64% of women feeling this way compared to 41% of men. And 70% of women believe that men treat them differently because they are a woman, while 40% of men feel that women treat them differently because they are a man. A much lower percentage of students (28%) believe that professors treat them differently because of their gender, with virtually no difference between men (28%) and women (29%).

## IX. Public Service

Despite college students holding largely negative attitudes toward Donald Trump, there continues to be no drop-off since he took office in interest in public service,

running for office, and working for the government. Most students report that they have been involved in community activities during their time in college, and a majority of students would be interested in a national service program that provides grants of financial assistance for college tuition.

Still, compared with past surveys, students are more likely to think about government as THE government rather than OUR government. In this year's survey, we find that 76% of students think more about THE government than OUR government (24%), which is higher than we recorded in 2009 (62%) and 2001 (60%). Democrats (82%) are more likely to say THE government, but majorities of independents (72%) and Republicans (67%) are also likely to think this way about government.

When asked about different jobs or careers that they may be interested in after graduation, students remain relatively stable in their interest across the various choices. However, there has been a five-point increase in those who say they are very or fairly interested in working for government, rising from 37% in 2017 to 42% in 2018. Republicans (54%) and students majoring in the social sciences (52%) are among those who are more interested in working in government, while Democrats (37%) and independents (38%) are less interested. College students are most interested in working in the private sector, with 55% saying they are very or fairly interested in doing so.

More students are interested in running for a local or state elected office such as city council member or state legislator (38%) than in running for a federal elected office such as member of Congress or senator (32%). Interest in running for a local or state elected office also has increased by three points since last year and is the highest it has been since 2014. Thirty-one percent of students (31%) have considered pursuing service-oriented experiences after they complete their undergraduate degree, such as Teach for America, VISTA, or AmeriCorps. This includes 41% of independents who say they have considered such a service-oriented experience, higher than both their Democratic and Republican counterparts (29% and 28% respectively).

Fewer students report being spoken with during their time as a high school or college student about getting involved in politics or public service, at 45%, down four points from last year.

Nearly eight in 10 students (77%) report having taken classes that educated them on our democracy, government, and their role as a citizen. This includes 84% of students whose major course of study is in the social sciences and 83% of upper-middle-class students. And at 64%, most students say they know a great deal or quite a bit about our democracy, but just 18% say they know a great deal, compared with 46% who say quite a bit. There are significant differences among students on this question based on their major course of study; 84% studying in the humanities say they know a great deal or quite a bit about our democracy, government, and how to be a good citizen, while only 59% of students studying science, math, and computer science say the same thing. Those who are registered to vote also are more likely to say they know about or democracy, at a rate of 68%, while just 49% of those who are not registered to vote say the same thing.

There has been an increase in the proportion of students who say they have been involved in activities to help their local community during their time in college, up three points from 2017 to 71%. The proportion of students from lower-class families who report being involved in activities to help their community has increased to 71% – up 10 points from last year.

Students' confidence in being able to make a difference in society has decreased since the last time we asked the question, in 2004. While the proportion saying they have the ability to make a big difference remains relatively the same (30% in 2004, 29% this year), those saying that they do not have the ability to make a difference has nearly tripled (from 9% in 2004 to 26% this year). The proportion of men who say they can make a difference dropped 17 points from 2004, to 70%. Senior-year students also are much less optimistic about their ability to make a difference (91% in 2004, 72% in 2018).

Finally, college students remain interested in a program that would provide them with a grant or financial assistance to help pay for their college tuition in exchange for two years of national service after they graduate. Fifty-eight percent (58%) report being very or fairly interested. Students who voted for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election (65%), students who are extremely motivated to vote (65%) and Hispanic and Latino students (66%) all reported higher interest in such a program.