

2019 Survey of America's College Students

Conducted on Behalf of:
The Panetta Institute for Public Policy

By Hart Research Associates

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I. Introduction

This report highlights 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.

- More than six in 10 college students believe that the country is headed off on the wrong track, and at 64%, this marks an all-time low on this critical measure on the country's outlook.
- Yet at the same time, a record-high 59% describe the state of the nation's economy as excellent or good.
- Only 56% offer that democracy is working well in the United States, including only 9% who say it is working very well. And a similar proportion (55%) are confident that our system of checks and balances is working effectively. While receiving majority support is good news for a political candidate, it is not such good news when just a bare majority say they feel positive about our democracy.
- Addressing climate change is the most important issue for college students, with 41% saying this is a top priority for them.
- A record-high proportion of college students say that climate change is a very serious problem (60%), and overall 87% of students believe it is a very or somewhat serious problem.
- And 75% say that they are more concerned about the financial costs of failing to address climate change than the financial costs of regulations to address climate change.
- Of nine news stories tested, college students are least likely to be following Robert Mueller's investigation into Russia's involvement in the 2016 presidential election (53% following very or fairly closely). Students remain unsettled on the Mueller investigation—two in five (40%) believe that it proves Trump did something wrong, but one in three are unsure (33%), while only 27% say it does not prove Trump did something wrong. And among those who believe he did something wrong, a bare majority believe there is enough evidence for impeachment hearings now (53%).
- Turning to the 2020 presidential election, two in three (66%) students say they are already following this closely.
- Donald Trump continues to have low ratings both personally and professionally, and students clearly prefer a Democrat over Donald Trump regardless of whether the Democrat is a progressive or a moderate.

- Broadly speaking, college students want a candidate who will bring greater changes and propose larger-scale policy shifts even if these cost more and will be more difficult to accomplish.
- Seven in 10 (71%) college students are confident that they will be able to find an acceptable job upon graduation.
- But on campus, many students are facing major financial distress, with 46% saying they work at least 20 hours a week to pay tuition and 26% saying they have had to take time off because they could not afford tuition.
- And this distress will stay with many college students after graduation. About three in five (59%) students have taken out student loans, and of those, 90% expect to have debt upon graduation. The average amount of debt these students expect to have approaches \$40,000, which many expect will take years to pay off.
- Not only does this financial stress have an impact on students' bank accounts and their future ability to make major purchases, such as a home, but it is affecting careers, as nearly two in three (64%) students with loans say the debt will have a great deal or quite a bit of an impact on the job they pursue upon graduation.
- Interest in working in government remains steady, with two in five (42%) students reporting high interest. Interest in running for federal office like Congress is at a record high (35%). And three in five (63%) students are very or fairly interested in a program that provides them with a grant or financial assistance to help pay for college in exchange for two years of national service upon graduation—this also matches a record high.
- In getting their news about politics and civic affairs, fully 46% of college students rely most on social media such as Twitter and Facebook, which is higher than any other source, marking a dramatic shift in news consumption since the start of the Panetta Institute survey, when these platforms did not exist and 51% of students relied on television (now 34%).
- Despite their dependence on social media, with 87% reporting that they use social media at least once a day, students are mixed about its value. About half (49%) of college students have made efforts to limit their social media use. And most college students believe that time spent on social media is time wasted, rather than time well spent.

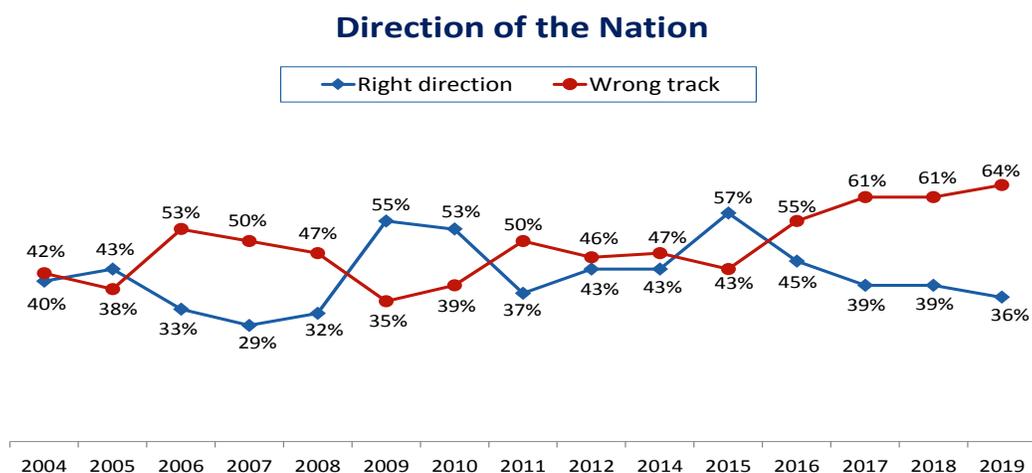
Methodology

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, which 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 805 interviews were completed online. All interviews were conducted from April 26 to May 2, 2019. Some demographics were weighted to achieve representative samples of four-year college students nationwide.

II. State of the Nation

A record-high proportion of college students believe that the country is headed off on the wrong track and most are concerned about the state of our nation. Students continue to report very low levels of confidence in many democratic institutions. And in evaluating our system of checks and balances, just more than half of students can say that this system is working well today.

Nearly two in three (64%) college students believe our nation is off on the wrong track, which is an all-time high in the Panetta Institute's history since this question was first asked in 2004. Since 2016, students are more likely to have negative rather than positive feelings about the direction of the country, and this proportion has increased nine points since then.



In assessing the country's outlook, college students are divided by political identification, with 68% of Republicans saying the country is headed in the right direction and 81% of Democrats saying it is on the wrong track. Independents take the more negative viewpoint as well (43% right direction, 57% wrong track). There is also a gender gap in assessing the direction of the country, with men more evenly divided on the question (47% right direction, 53% wrong track), while 74% of women feel that the nation is off on the wrong track (just 26% say right direction). A student's socioeconomic status is also a defining line here, as students who identify as upper/upper-middle class (47% right direction, 53% wrong track) have a more divided view of the country's direction than those who identify as lower/lower-middle class (23% right direction, 77% wrong track).

In thinking about the future of our country, about seven in 10 (69%) students report feeling uncertain and concerned. There is also a gender divide on this measure, with women (79%) feeling more uncertain than men (57%).

Confidence in Democratic Institutions

Students have a profound lack of confidence in many democratic institutions and many have doubts about how well our democracy is working. Just 56% can say democracy is working well in the United States, compared with 44% who say it is not working well. Not only are students questioning how our democracy is working now, but they have little confidence that our democracy might improve within the next 10 years: 69% say that our democracy will be working about the same or worse 10 years from now. And a bare majority believe that our system of checks and balances is working well. Only 55% say the system of checks and balances is working effectively, while 45% say it is not.

The military is the one democratic institution in which a majority of college students continue to have high confidence. More than half (54%) of students have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the military.

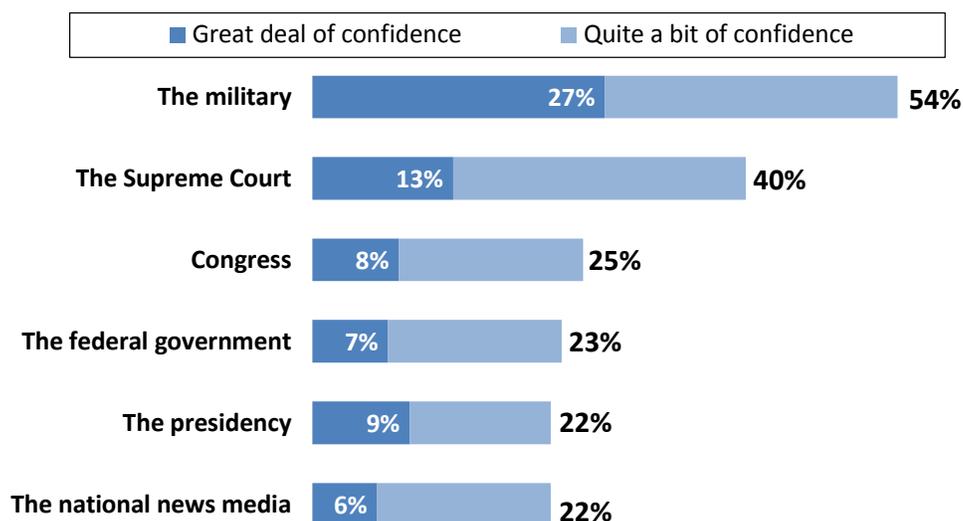
But several of the institutions we consider essential to American democracy are plagued by distrust. Only 40% of students have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the Supreme Court, while 21% have very little confidence or no confidence at all in it. And confidence in the Supreme Court is highly partisan: Trump voters are nearly twice as likely to have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the Court, compared with Clinton voters (56% Trump voters, 30% Clinton voters). Results by party tell a similar story: 33% of Democrats have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in the Supreme Court, and 58% of Republicans have the same level of confidence. Independent students align more closely with Democrats on this issue, with just 38% expressing a great deal or quite a bit of confidence.

While students do not have a lot of confidence in the highest court in the land, it remains a more trusted institution than the other two branches of government. Congress and the office of the president score significantly lower, with only 25% and 22% respectively saying they have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in them. Although these two metrics are similar, there is a different

story when looking at the percentage of students who say they have no confidence at all in the institution. Thirty-four percent (34%) of students say they have no confidence at all in the office of the president, while only 8% feel the same way about Congress. And 46% of Clinton voters say they have no confidence at all in the presidency compared with just 7% of Trump voters.

Overall, only 22% have high confidence in the news media, which matches high confidence levels in the presidency. When evaluating confidence in the national news media, there is a stark difference between students who voted for Hillary Clinton, of whom only 8% say they have no confidence at all, versus students who voted for Donald Trump, among whom 30% have no confidence at all.

Confidence in Institutions



The Mueller Investigation

Although student interest in the Mueller investigation is higher this year than it was last year, interest remains fairly low. Slightly more than half (53%) of students say they have followed news coverage of the investigation closely over the past semester, up from 46% of students in 2018.

On the issue of whether Russia's involvement in the 2016 election calls into question America's ability to have free and fair elections, nearly half (48%) of students say yes. Among students who voted for Clinton, 67% answer affirmatively, which is more than double the percentage of students who voted for Trump (28%).

Student reactions to the findings of the final Mueller report are mixed: 40% say it proves that Donald Trump did something wrong, while 27% say it does not prove this, and 33% say they are unsure. A majority (56%) of Democrats believe that Mueller's final report proves Trump did something wrong, while a majority (60%) of Republicans believe it does not. Still, significant proportions across the political spectrum say they are unsure about this, including 32% of Democrats, 25% of Republicans, and 44% of independents.

Of those who believe the report proves some wrongdoing on the part of the president, 53% feel that there is enough evidence for Congress to begin impeachment hearings now, while 43% want Congress to continue investigating.

III. The Political Landscape

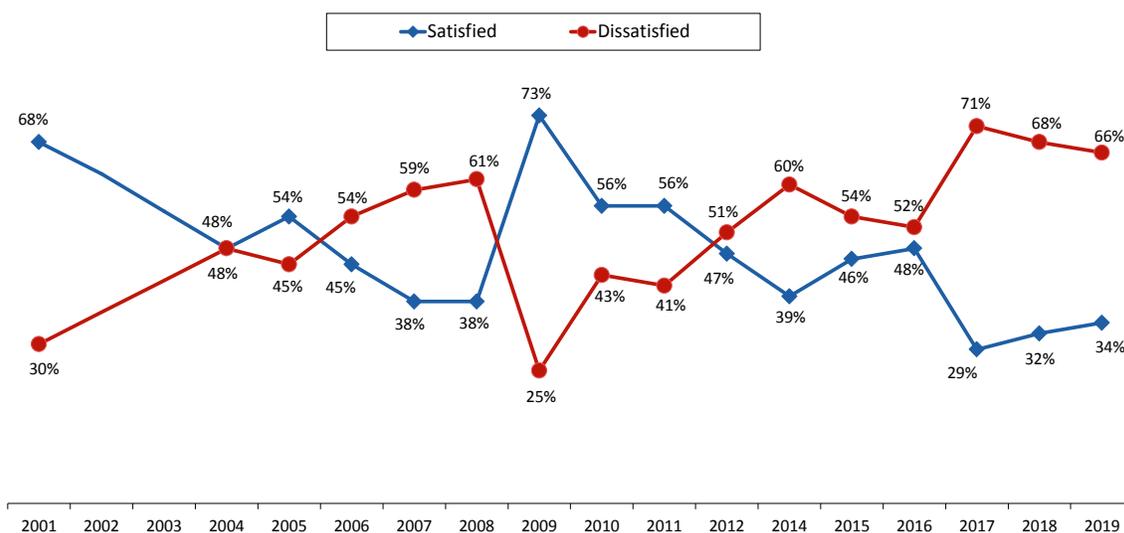
Politics and public policy have captured the attention of college students and we are recording levels of relevance and interest at among their highest levels since the survey's inception. But this increased connection to politics comes at a time when students continue to report among the highest levels of dissatisfaction with our country's leaders. Views of Donald Trump remain overwhelmingly negative on campus, and while their ratings do not approach his historically low levels, none of the congressional leaders, regardless of party, has positive ratings. However, these negative perceptions do not extend to a number of Democratic primary presidential candidates, who are viewed positively, in particular Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden.

College students continue to believe that politics is relevant to their life, and since Donald Trump took office this proportion has held above 60%, at a level that we had not previously measured. Today, 66% of college students say that politics is very or fairly relevant to them. And this view is shared by both Republicans (67%) and Democrats (70%), liberals (68%) and conservatives (63%), and women (62%) and men (69%).

In a potentially positive sign for civic engagement and voting on campus, a record-high 87% of students say that they are currently registered to vote. What is particularly encouraging about this result is that the greatest increase from last year (when 79% said they were registered) is the proportion of first-year students who report being registered. While there is an overall eight-point increase, among first-year students that doubles to 16 points (from 64% to 80%).

But at the same time, satisfaction with the country's political leadership remains near an all-time low. Just 34% of students are very or fairly satisfied. The partisan divisions on this question are stark, as a majority of Republicans are satisfied (74% satisfied), while majorities of independents (68% dissatisfied) and Democrats (83% dissatisfied) are dissatisfied. It is telling that Democrats are nearly twice as likely to say they are very dissatisfied (35%) with the country's political leadership as Republicans are to say that they are very satisfied (18%).

Satisfaction with the Country's Political Leadership



Driving this dissatisfaction with the country's political leadership is the fact that attitudes toward Donald Trump remain very negative on campus. Overall, 30% of college students approve of the job that Donald Trump is doing as president, while 70% disapprove. The proportion of students who strongly disapprove of the job that Trump is doing is greater than the total proportion of students who approve (48% to 30%). Trump's job rating is essentially unchanged since the 2017 survey, when it stood at 28%, compared with last year's 29%, and now 30%. Outside of Republicans, among whom 80% approve of the job that Trump is doing, all other subgroups are net negative by wide margins. And Democrats are more likely to disapprove than Republicans are to approve (92% of Democrats disapprove, 80% of Republicans approve). Fully 71% of independents disapprove of the job that Trump is doing.

Donald Trump's Job Rating as President			
	Approve	Disapprove	Differential
	%	%	±
All students	30	70	-40
Men	40	60	-20
Women	21	79	-58
Whites	33	67	-34
African Americans	17	83	-66
Hispanics	30	70	-40
Asians	28	72	-44
Social sciences	17	83	-66
Humanities	13	87	-74
Science/math/CS	37	63	-26
Business	41	59	-18
Democrats	8	92	-84
Independents	29	71	-42
Republicans	80	20	+60
Social class: upper middle/upper	40	60	-20
Social class: middle	31	69	-38
Social class: lower/lower middle	20	80	-60
Economy: Excellent/good	42	58	-16
Economy: Not so good/poor	13	87	-74

Students provide very different assessments of public figures. They are either net negative or divided on their feelings toward leadership in both parties. And the negative views are starkest for Donald Trump, for whom 22% have positive feelings and 68% are negative. While college students are much less likely to know them than Donald Trump, both Republican and Democratic congressional leadership figures are also net negative or receive mixed ratings, including Republicans—Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (17% positive, 30% negative) and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (14% positive, 14% negative). Democratic leaders do not fare any better, with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (15% positive, 22% negative) and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (30% positive, 31% negative) both viewed more negatively than positively. Of note for Pelosi is that while her negative ratings have remained essentially unchanged since last year's survey, her positive ratings have nearly doubled—up from 16% to 30% over the past year—with positive increases among both Democrats (18 points) and Republicans (13 points).

Democrats running for president are viewed very differently than those currently running Washington. Bernie Sanders, who received strong support among students in 2016, continues to receive high ratings, with 59% holding positive views and 22% viewing him negatively. While not viewed as positively as Sanders, Joe Biden also receives much more positive than negative ratings on campus (49% positive, 29% negative). Both Sanders and Biden are fairly well-known commodities for college students, while Kamala Harris and Pete Buttigieg are not yet on the same level; they are both viewed more positively than negatively.

Feelings toward Selected Public Figures among All College Students			
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Differential</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>±</u>
Bernie Sanders	59	22	+37
Joe Biden	49	29	+20
Kamala Harris	24	16	+8
Pete Buttigieg	19	12	+7
Kevin McCarthy	14	14	--
Nancy Pelosi	30	31	-1
Chuck Schumer	15	22	-7
Lindsey Graham	14	22	-8
Mitch McConnell	17	30	-13
Donald Trump	22	68	-46

The 2020 Primaries

Students who plan to vote in the Democratic primary mirror the student body overall in their desire for a candidate who will take on larger-scale proposals. And the desire for a candidate who reflects their views is expressed again when students are asked whether they prefer a Democratic nominee who comes closest to their views on issues or one with the best chance to defeat Donald Trump. By 61% to 39%, self-described Democratic primary voters prefer a candidate that comes closest to their views, and majorities across the ideological spectrum agree, including progressives (58%), liberals (60%), and moderates (65%).

Given the sheer size of the Democratic primary field of candidates, we did not test every candidate, but the personal ratings of a few selected candidates provide some insights into the relative strength of some of the candidates and how much ground newcomers such as Harris and Buttigieg must cover to introduce themselves to voters on campus.

Feelings toward Selected Public Figures among Democratic Primary Voters			
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Differential</u>
	%	%	±
Bernie Sanders	80	6	+74
Joe Biden	66	17	+49
Kamala Harris	33	14	+19
Pete Buttigieg	24	9	+15

Because Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders are currently at or near the top of very early presidential primary polls, we sought to understand how much of a role their gender and race play in an increasingly diverse Democratic primary field. Among Democratic primary voters overall, assuming that a candidate has the qualities and capabilities needed to be president, 37% say it is important that the nominee be a woman rather than a white man, including 20% who say this is very important to them. And 37% of Democratic primary voters feel the same about the nominee being a person of color rather than a white man, including 19% who say this is very important. While there is a little differentiation across subgroups regarding the importance of the nominee being a woman rather than a white man (35% of men say this is important, as do 38% of women), people of color are more likely than whites to say that it is important that the nominee be a person of color rather than a white man. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of white students say this is important, compared with 48% of Hispanics and 47% of African Americans.

Currently, there is little likelihood of a competitive Republican presidential primary, but at least on campus, Republican primary voters are fairly divided about whether they would prefer Donald Trump to be the nominee or a candidate who reflects more traditional Republican Party values and policy positions. Overall, 55% of Republican primary voters say they prefer Trump, while 45% would prefer a more traditional Republican. And women Republican primary voters are more likely to prefer a traditional Republican by 62% to 38%, while men prefer Trump by 68% to 32%. Still, the major challenge for any Republican challenger to Trump is his strong standing with that electorate. Among Republican primary voters, 83% approve of the job that Donald Trump is doing as president and 66% have positive feelings toward him.

The 2020 Presidential Election

Looking ahead to the 2020 presidential election, we first asked college students to tell us in their own words the most important thing to hear from a candidate in order to earn their support. Students provided us with a wealth of opinions on many subjects, but most prominent among these are how a candidate would address climate change and how the candidate plans to help the people, and in particular for college students, a discussion about student debt. In their own words, the following are representative of what college students are telling candidates they want to hear from them.

"I want a candidate that addresses climate change to the full extent. He/she should propose plans of action about climate change so we can start preserving the Earth. This candidate should also address the high college costs and come up with solutions that help us college students with our financial situation in regard to college tuition and fees."

"That they will take steps toward fixing climate change and that they understand the concerns of the younger generation when it comes to the climate and cost of college."

"I would want a person that is passionate about trying to improve the living situations for Americans in one way or another and someone who actively wants to try to help with climate change."

"I want to hear that they are going to be trying to help stop climate change. I plan on voting for the person who cares the most about climate change."

Not only do students want candidates to address issues like climate change, matters that affect them personally, and their economic standing, but they are looking for bigger changes both in a candidate's experience and how they will take on challenges facing America. When asked whether they prefer a candidate who is more experienced and would bring fewer changes to current policies or a candidate who will bring greater changes but is less experienced and tested, students prefer someone who will bring greater changes by nearly two to one (66% to 34%). And this desire for someone who will bring greater change among college students is not just an artifact of students' displeasure with Trump. Fully 66% of Democrats, 69% of independents, and 63% of Republicans say they want greater changes. Back in April 2016, 60% of college students also wanted a candidate who would bring greater change.

Students also want a president who will take larger-scale rather than smaller-scale approaches on issues such as healthcare, climate change, college affordability, and economic opportunity, even if this might cost more and be more

difficult to achieve. By 65% to 35% students prefer this bolder approach to a smaller-scale effort that might be easier to achieve and cost less. And while some gradations exist by party, majorities of Democrats (72%), independents (62%), and Republicans (53%) all prefer the larger-scale approach.

College Students Are Looking for Greater Change

Thinking about the 2020 presidential election, this is a time when it is important to look for:

A person who will bring **greater changes** to the current policies **even if he or she is less experienced and tested**

66%

A **more experienced and tested person** even if he or she brings **fewer changes** to the current policies

34%

Thinking about how a president approaches issues such as healthcare, climate change, college affordability, and economic opportunity, I prefer:

Someone who proposes **larger scale policies that cost more and might be harder to pass into law**, but **could bring major change on these issues**

65%

Someone who proposes **smaller scale policies that cost less and might be easier to pass into law**, but **will bring less change on these issues**

35%

In looking at types of candidates they would be enthusiastic or comfortable with as president, college students are generally likely to say they would be more enthusiastic or comfortable with most types of candidates than would the country at-large. Assuming that a candidate has the qualities and capabilities needed to be president, the biggest gaps between how college students assess their own comfort or enthusiasm with a candidate compared with the country as a whole are for a woman of color (students report their own comfort and enthusiasm levels as 19 points higher than they believe the comfort/enthusiasm of the country to be), Hispanic (19 points higher), and someone who is gay or lesbian (18 points higher). There are only two types of candidates tested for whom college students believe their enthusiasm or comfort would be lower than that of the general public—someone older than age 70 (five points lower) and a white man (13 points lower). However, it is worth noting again that Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, who qualify on both counts, are viewed overwhelmingly positively on campus, while Donald Trump, another white man older than age 70, is decidedly not. So, college students

are very discerning in their evaluations of individual candidates and this transcends these views on generic candidates with specific backgrounds.

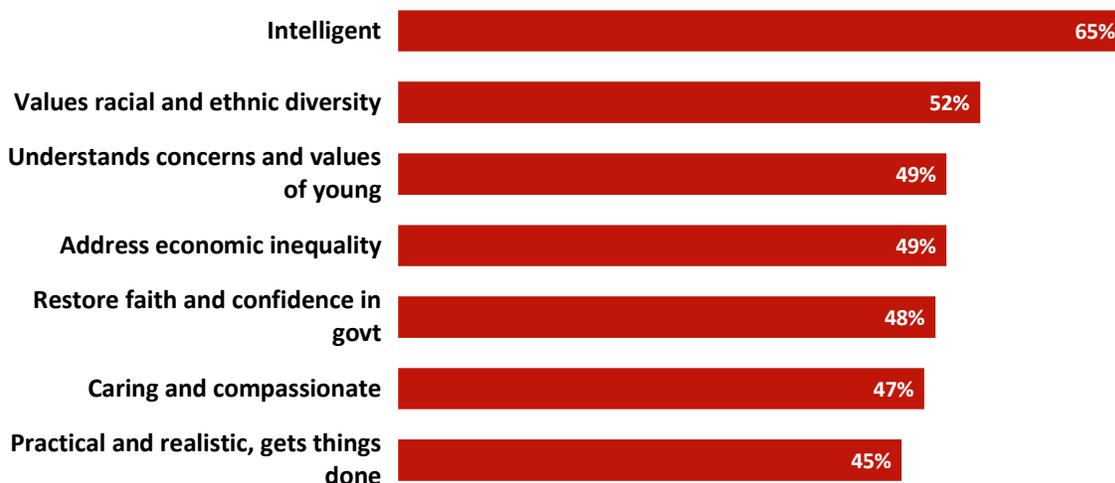
Perceived Enthusiasm or Comfort with Types of Candidates for President

	College	The Country	Differential
	Students		
	%	%	±
An African American	93	81	+12
A woman of color	89	70	+19
A woman	89	75	+14
A Hispanic	86	67	+19
Someone under age 40	77	60	+17
Someone who is gay or lesbian	75	57	+18
A white man	71	84	-13
Someone over age 70	41	46	-5

College students also are very clear about the kind of candidate they are looking for in a president. When presented with a series of qualities, a majority of students rate two of them as being very important, rising above the others—these are a candidate who is intelligent (65% very important) and a candidate who values racial and ethnic diversity (52%). Many students also place high importance on understanding the concerns and values of young people (49%), addressing economic inequality and the growing gap between the rich and poor (49%), restoring faith and confidence in government (48%), being caring and compassionate (47%), and being practical and realistic (45%).

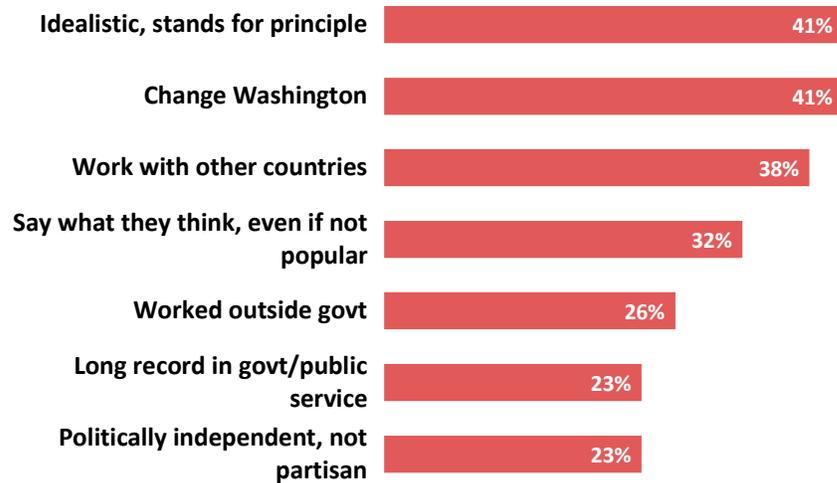
What College Students Want in a Presidential Candidate – Top Qualities

Proportions who rate each as very important (9-10 ratings on a 0-to-10 scale)



What College Students Want in a Presidential Candidate – Second Tier

Proportions who rate each as very important (9-10 ratings on a 0-to-10 scale)



We have also tracked a number of these qualities over time, some going back as far as 2001. Compared with the last time many of these qualities were asked in 2007, several have become more important to college students, including the greatest increases for: “caring and compassionate” (12-point increase since 2007), “will work to change the way things are done in Washington” (11-point increase), “understands the concerns and values of young people”, and “will address economic inequality and the growing gap between the rich and poor” (a 9-point increase respectively for both).

And college students have also de-emphasized some qualities they are looking for in a president. Most notably, “is practical and realistic, and knows how to get things done” (a 20-point drop since 2007), “will listen and work closely with other countries” (a 13-point drop), and “will say what he or she thinks, even if it is not popular” (also a 13-point drop).

It is also revealing to see what qualities Democrats and Republicans value most in a presidential candidate. On several qualities, there are large gaps between what Democrats say is most important in a presidential candidate and what Republicans say is most important, most notably on “values racial and ethnic diversity” (41 points) and “will address economic inequality” (38 points), with Democrats saying both are more important. On the other hand, Republicans are most likely to say that the most important quality for them is someone who “will

say what they think, even if it is not popular,” and this marks the greatest division on that side (25 points).

Qualities in a Presidential Candidate			
<i>Proportions who rate each as very important (9-10 on 0-to-10 scale)</i>			
	All		
	College		
	Students	Democrats	Republicans
	%	%	%
Intelligent	65	76	48
Values racial and ethnic diversity	52	66	25
Understands the concerns and values of young people	49	59	36
Will address economic inequality	49	65	27
Will restore faith and confidence in government	48	51	45
Caring and compassionate	47	54	32
Is practical and realistic, governs in bipartisan way	45	47	35
Is idealistic and stands up for principle	41	44	37
Will work to change Washington	41	44	41
Will listen and work closely with other countries	38	43	29
Will say what they think, even if it is not popular	32	25	50
Has worked outside of government/fresh perspective	26	20	42
Has long record working in government/public service	23	27	17
Politically independent, not partisan	23	21	24

Given the growing field of 2020 Democratic presidential candidates, rather than testing individual candidates against Donald Trump, we wanted to get a read on two different types of Democratic candidate and how they would measure up against Trump. While there is little differentiation, “a moderate Democratic candidate” fares marginally better against Trump (leading him by 70% to 19%) than “a progressive Democratic candidate” (66% to 22%). There is little difference across subgroups between both types of Democratic candidate, though independents prefer the moderate over the progressive against Trump by 10 points (58% for the moderate Democratic candidate, 48% for the progressive Democratic candidate).

IV. Media Consumption, the Internet, Social Media, and Regulation

Every year, students are becoming more and more reliant on the Internet, and social media in particular. Majorities of students are using many different social media platforms, and while most say they are in control of technology, many are trying to limit their use. Not only are many students trying to regulate their use of technology, they also are more likely than not to want more rather than less regulation of technology companies, but they do not want these companies to be broken up altogether. And specific to social media, while it is a dominant force on campus, students remain divided about its benefits.

When the Panetta Institute survey first began tracking media consumption among college students, television was king, as 51% reported that it was the source they turned to for information about politics and civic affairs. Today, that proportion has dropped to 34%. Conversely, in 2001, 29% said that they relied most on Internet news websites; now websites have overtaken television and 43% of college students cite this as the source they rely on most. But both television and websites have been overtaken by a source that was not even on the landscape back in 2001. Now the most popular source for college students to get their information about politics and civic affairs is social media, like Twitter and Facebook (46%). Democrats are more likely to rely on social media while Republicans are more likely to turn to television.

Top Media Consumption by Party Identification

	All College Students	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%	%
Internet social media such as Facebook and Twitter	46	53	41	36
Internet news websites	43	46	41	40
Television	34	31	34	41

Among those who rely on television most, top outlets include broadcast network news (42%), CNN (28%), FOX News (21%), and MSNBC (9%). While broadcast television is fairly uniform in its reach, Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to turn to CNN (36% to 13%), while Republicans are even more likely to turn to FOX News than Democrats (44% to 9%).

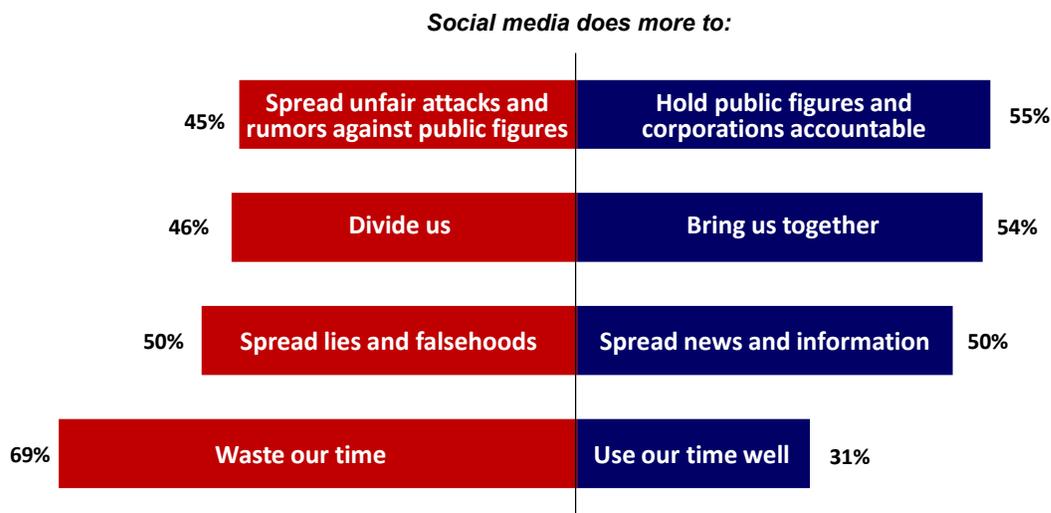
More than seven in 10 (73%) students say that they are in control of the technology that they use. However, this does not mean that they are not aware of technology's impact on their time. More than half (52%) say they have made an effort to limit how often they use their smartphone, and a nearly equal proportion (49%) report that they have made an effort to limit or quit social media in the last year or two. In fact, 87% report using social media at least once a day or more often, and large majorities have accounts on Facebook (83%), Instagram (81%), Snapchat (76%), and Twitter (66%). More college students report playing a multiplayer video game like Fortnite than have used an online dating app or website (49% to 41%). Among men, this is even more pronounced, with 67% playing Fortnite and 43% using a dating app or website.

Students remain divided about whether they see the Internet as a public space with the expectation that everything said online is available (52%), or that there should be limits on what can be shared to protect privacy (48%). For the past three years this has essentially been a split decision. However, students continue to believe by a wide margin that there is not enough regulation rather than too much regulation of Internet and social media sites like Google, Facebook, and Twitter (46% to 12%)—with 42% feeling that there is about the right amount of regulation. Here, students provide a measured view of what they want to see in terms of regulation. By 62% to 38% they would rather not break up these companies, and this viewpoint is shared, albeit more narrowly, even among those who believe there is not enough regulation currently (53% say these companies should not be broken up).

Social media is a dominant source in the lives of college students, and one in which students provide a mixed view. Not only have nearly half of students made at least an effort to limit or quit social media in the past year or two, but fully 69% of students are more likely to say that social media is a waste of time rather than something that uses our time well (31%). And while majorities take the more positive perspective on social media for holding public figures and corporations accountable (rather than spreading unfair attacks and rumors) and bringing us together (rather than dividing us), for such a pervasive part of their lives, it is striking how ambivalent students are about it. And perhaps the perfect proof point

of this is that students are totally divided over whether social media does more to spread news and information or more to spread lies and falsehoods (50% each).

College Students Assess Social Media's Impact



V. Domestic and International Issues

College students are more likely to believe that challenges facing their generation will be national rather than international in scope. But in identifying their most important issues, students identify a domestic challenge, healthcare, and a more global challenge, climate change, as the issues of greatest importance to them.

There is a broad consensus among college students regarding the severe risk climate change poses. Since 2010, the number of students who see climate change as a very serious problem has increased from 35% to 60%. Meanwhile the proportion who say it is not a problem has fallen from 12% to a mere 3%. Even among Republicans, 69% view climate change as a serious problem (compared with 94% of Democrats and 90% of independents).

Beyond simply identifying climate change as a problem, students are set upon addressing it. About three in four (74%) college students favor enacting legislation that would combat the effects of climate change even if it means paying more in taxes or cutting federal spending. This support is reflected in students' awareness of climate change-focused proposals, such as the Green New Deal; 64% of students say that they have been closely following the proposed legislation in the news over the past semester. Students see this obligation to combat climate

change as one that extends beyond the legislative branch of government. When asked to identify the most important thing they would need to hear from a 2020 presidential candidate in order to support them, their most common response is the candidate's plans for how he or she will address climate change.

Students are not nearly as concerned about the potential economic costs imposed by increased environmental regulations as they are the financial costs of weather-related events caused by climate change. By 75% to 25%, students say they are more concerned about the financial costs of failing to act on climate change rather than the costs of regulations to address it.

When viewed through the lens of party identification, it becomes clear that Democratic and Republican students feel quite differently about the most important issues to address, with Republicans highlighting immigration, the job situation and national debt, and Democrats emphasizing healthcare, climate change, and preventing gun violence.

The Issue Agenda, by Party Identification
Proportions who select each as one of the top three issues for them personally

	All College Students	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%	%
Improving the healthcare system	45	52	41	33
Addressing climate change	41	51	37	23
Preventing gun violence	39	48	32	24
Dealing with the costs of college education	33	36	37	26
Dealing with immigration	31	25	25	51
Improving the job situation	31	23	39	44
Income inequality	30	30	32	27
The national debt	26	16	34	44
Dealing with North Korea	12	7	13	20
Trade with other countries	12	7	13	23

Although immigration is the number-one topic students report following in the news, with 72% of students following immigration issues at the border closely, it is third on their list when asked to choose their most important issue. And 70% of students say that immigration helps the United States more than it hurts it, a number that has remained fairly consistent since it was first tracked in 2006, having stayed within a seven-point range (66% to 73%).

Of the seven policy proposals students were asked to favor or oppose, building a wall along the Southern border with Mexico ranked the lowest. Only 32% of students favor building such a wall.

Partisan Reaction to Policy Proposals
Proportion who say "Strongly Favor" or "Somewhat Favor" each

	<u>All College Students</u> %	<u>Democrats</u> %	<u>Independents</u> %	<u>Republicans</u> %
Enacting comprehensive legislation to combat the effects of climate change, even if it means requiring most Americans to pay more in taxes or cuts in federal spending	74	86	62	58
Providing universal healthcare coverage for all Americans through a program run by the federal government, even if it means requiring most Americans to pay more in taxes or cuts in federal spending	73	86	67	48
Making college debt free, even if it means requiring most Americans to pay more in taxes or cuts in federal spending	72	85	67	47
Providing a public healthcare option for Americans to buy into federal government-run healthcare programs, even if it means requiring most Americans to pay more in taxes or cuts in federal spending	71	81	67	49
Making college tuition free at four-year public colleges and universities for families making up to \$125,000 and make community colleges free for all, even if it means requiring most Americans to pay more in taxes or cuts in federal spending	70	81	63	48
Repealing the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, even if it means that people with pre-existing conditions could be denied coverage and young adults under the age of 26 could no longer stay on their parents' healthcare plan	37	23	41	67
Building a wall along the Southern border with Mexico to address immigration	32	16	34	68

College students show less interest in global matters than domestic ones, a trend we have measured over time. On the question of whether the problems facing their generation are more international or national in scope, there has been little change in responses over the past five years.

A majority (60%) of students consider the problems facing their generation to be national in scope. This sentiment is felt by students across the political

spectrum, including Democrats (58%) and Republicans (62%). Similarly, 57% of students believe the United States should be less actively involved in world affairs due to a need to focus more on issues here at home, while 43% want the United States to become more involved.

VI. On Campus

On campus, students are grappling with high tuition costs and feeling the financial strain in their day-to-day lives. It is at the forefront of their minds in policy priorities regardless of their families' social class. Students are also closely following the continued coverage of college bribery stories, but reacting to these stories without surprise. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, college students see adequate efforts made by their colleges and universities to prevent sexual assault and harassment on campus, although a third of students still do not think this is enough, and the majority of students say there have been cases on campus of sexual harassment.

Students face significant financial stress in the face of a continuing rise in college and university tuition costs. The proportion of students who say that they have needed to take time off of school because they could not afford to pay their tuition has risen to 26% of students, up from 20% in 2018. The number of students who report that they are working at least 20 hours a week to pay their tuition also has increased by 12 points, from 34% in 2018 to 46% in 2019.

Given this, it should come as no surprise that college tuition ranks high on the list of policy issues students would like to see their political leaders and candidates address, coming in second only to combating climate change. A clear majority (72%) of students are in favor of making college debt free, even when the tradeoff is paying more in taxes or cutting federal spending elsewhere. Another policy option of making tuition at four-year public colleges and universities free for families making less than \$125,000 annually and making community colleges free for all also is appealing to students, 70% of whom favor this proposal even at the cost of higher taxes or cuts in federal spending. Even 61% of students from an upper-class or upper-middle-class family are in favor of either policy approach. When asked to rank what policies would help them the most personally, 22% of

students cite the policy of making college tuition-free at four-year public colleges first, more than any other policy, and they rank making college debt free second.

Most students have been following coverage of the emerging college bribery scandals. Seven in 10 (71%) students say they have closely followed “news about wealthy and powerful parents allegedly bribing colleges to help their children get into elite schools.” While 66% of students say that these stories bother them either “a great deal” or “quite a bit,” a large majority (78%) are not surprised by them and agree that “this sort of thing happens all of the time.”

An alarming 60% of students report that there have been cases of sexual harassment on their school campus. Nearly two-thirds (58%) of students believe that their college or university is addressing the prevention of sexual assaults on campus adequately. The other third of students disagree and think their college or university is not doing enough to address it. Women are much more likely to think that their college or university is not doing enough to prevent sexual assaults on campus (41%) than their male peers do (28%). Students are also likely to say that their college or university is doing enough to prevent sexual harassment on campus (60%), though again women are much more likely to think their college or university is not doing enough to prevent sexual harassment (39%) compared with men (25%). Overall, students see the focus on addressing issues of sexual harassment on campus and in professional settings as leading to long-term change (73%).

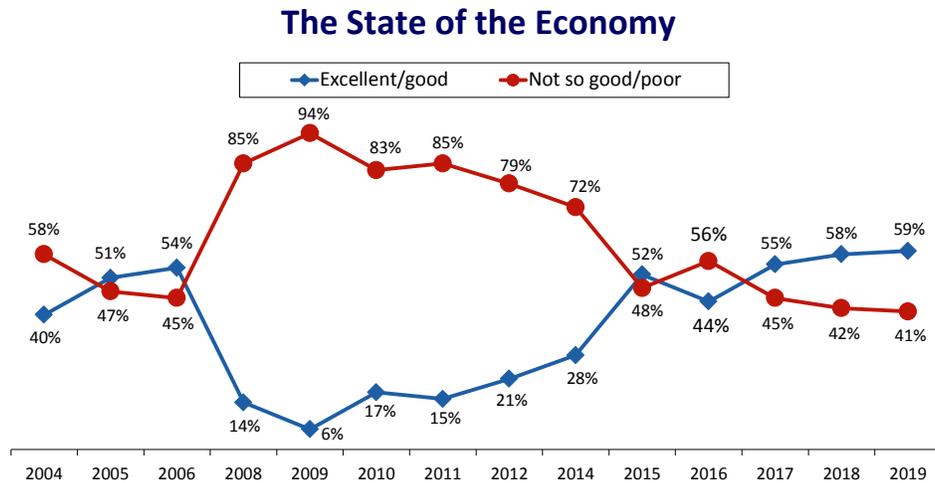
VII. Economic Outlook

For the third consecutive year, a majority of college students offer a favorable view of the nation’s economy, and students remain confident in their own ability to find a job after graduation.

Overall, 59% of students describe the nation’s economy as either “excellent” or “good.” Students’ economic outlook is essentially unchanged from last year, when 58% of students rated the economy as either excellent or good, and almost half of students (48%) today are confident that the nation’s economy will stay the same, a nine-point increase from 2018.

There is a gender gap in evaluating the nation’s economy that could also be colored by politics, with women being more likely to identify as Democrats. More

than seven in 10 (73%) men describe the economy as either “excellent” or “good” but just 46% of women agree. And 52% of Democrats and 76% of Republicans describe the economy as “excellent” or “good.”

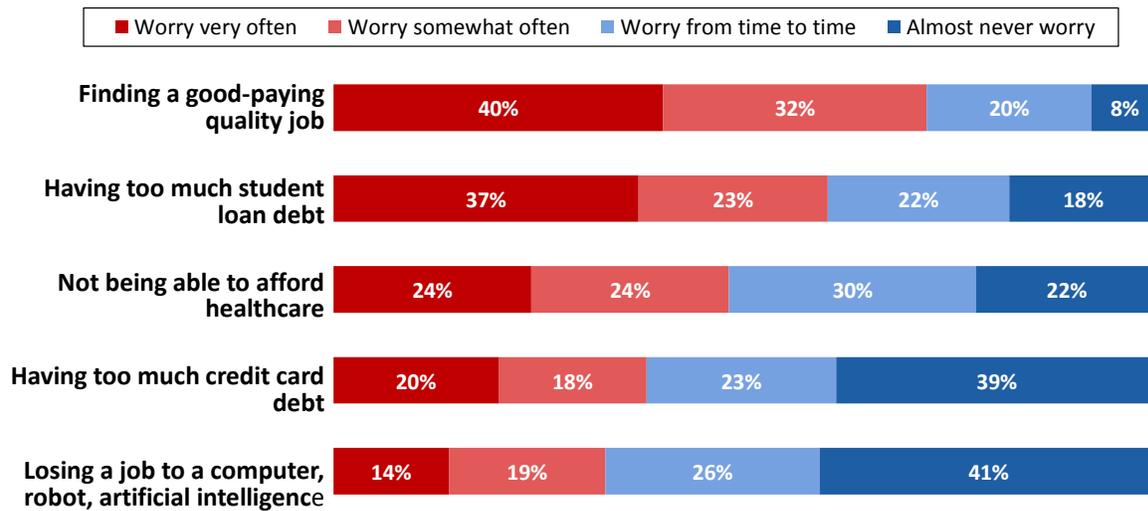


But despite their economic optimism, a majority of students (56%) view the economic system in the United States as unfair. Student’s outlook on the economy is significantly divided along gender and partisan lines. While 71% of Democrats say the U.S. economic system is unfair, 74% of Republicans say it is fair. Not only are students divided along party lines, there’s a large gender gap: 57% of men say the economic system is fair, and only 33% of women say the economic system is fair.

Most students continue to be confident in their ability to find a job that is acceptable to them. Seven in 10 (71%) students are confident that they will be able to find a job, a slight increase from 68% in 2018.

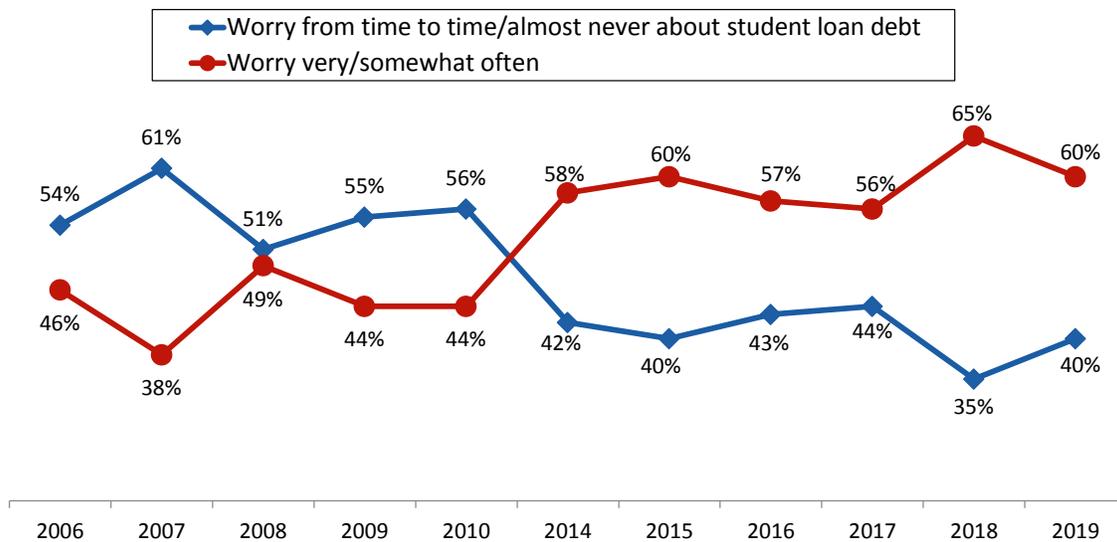
Students are confident that they will be able to find a job that is acceptable to them, but that does not mean they do not have concerns. Just as many students who report being confident that they will be able to find a job (72%) worry very or somewhat often about finding a good-paying job, with 40% worrying about this “very often.” Students worry about this more than about having too much student loan debt (60% worry very or somewhat often), not being able to afford healthcare (48%), having too much credit card debt (38%), or losing a job to a computer, robot, or artificial intelligence (33%). Concern about finding a job is highest among those studying the humanities (88%), those who identify their families as lower or lower-middle class (80%), and women (80%).

Students Worry Most about Finding a Job



While concern about student loan debt has decreased slightly since 2018, the concern among students is still high (65% in 2018, 60% today).

Concern about Student Loan Debt



Nine in ten (90%) students who have taken out loans expect to have student loan debt after graduating from college. A majority (64%) say that their student loan debt will have either a great deal or quite a bit of an impact on the type of job they will pursue after graduation. And 64% say this debt will take them six years or longer to pay off. On average, students expect to leave college with student loan debt of \$38,778. And there are signs that this is a growing problem, as the

average expected debt for first-year students upon graduation is even higher at \$43,674. There is also a large gap between state school students (\$35,164) and private school students (\$49,886), as well as between men (\$34,728) and women (\$41,538).

Students who expect to have student loan debt upon graduation describe their feelings about this burden in their own words:

“It’s a constant weight that hangs over me. Every purchase I make, every additional hour I work, it seems like I can never keep up. It feels unfair that tuition and living expenses have grown so high that it will impact me for the rest of my life.”

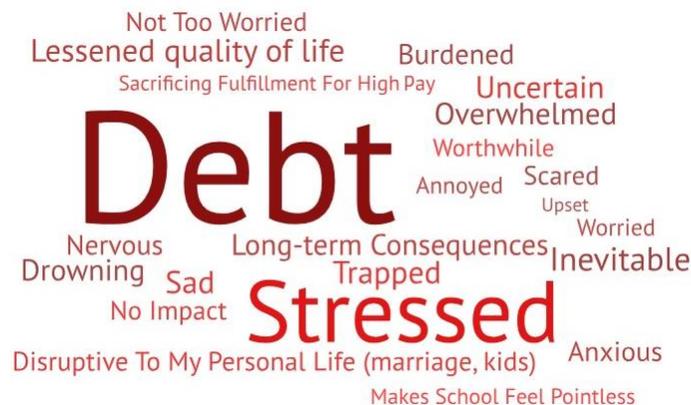
“It doesn’t affect me too much as it will not be too high, but it does annoy me that other nations have universal postsecondary education, placing American graduates at an international disadvantage.”

“Knowing that I am already starting in the negative discourages me significantly and makes me ponder if I will be able to get a job and start a life.”

“It makes me try to value my time that I spend at school more and makes me resentful when that time is wasted or if I feel I am not learning or receiving what I am already paying for. I believe it will be a great motivator for me to find work but it will also be a thorn in my side until it is paid off.”

“It makes me want to drop out of school before it gets to that amount and I feel like it will be a constant thing that will be in the back of my mind until it’s paid off.”

Impact of Student Loan Debt, in Students’ Own Words



VIII. Public Service

While college students are negative about the country's direction and its political leadership, their interest in working for the government has not wavered, and their interest in running for public office has increased. A clear majority of students have studied their government and their role as a citizen and are confident in their knowledge. Students have also continued to volunteer their time to help their community and express increasing interest in entering a program to exchange two years of national service for financial assistance to pay their college tuition.

Student's interest in working in the private sector has increased seven percentage points in the last year to 62%. This ranked above working for a not-for-profit community organization or foundation (52%), working for the government (42%), teaching in a public school (31%), and serving in the military (19%). Students are also more interested in working for a not-for-profit community organization or foundation than in previous years, registering a seven-percentage-point increase since 2018 and the highest level of interest ever seen among students in this poll.

Two in five (42%) students are interested in working for government, the same proportion as in 2018, and among the higher levels we have recorded. Seniors (48%) and juniors (47%) are more interested in working for government than are other college students, and men are more interested than women (51% to 36%). A majority of Hispanics (57%) also are interested in government service.

The number of students who are interested in running for a federal elected office, such as a member of Congress or senator, rose to 35% of students, the highest this poll has recorded. Men are much more likely than women to be interested in running for the United States Congress or Senate, with 46% of men and just 25% of women indicating that they would be interested. A slightly higher proportion (38%) of students indicate that they would be interested in running for state or local elected office, such as their city council or state legislature.

The number of students who say that they have been spoken to about getting involved in politics or public service has stayed almost constant at 44% (45% in 2018). Students who study the social sciences or the humanities are more likely to be asked about getting involved in politics or public service (53% and 58% respectively) than students studying business or math and science (45% and 41%).

In addition to students expressing an interest in running for office, 79% of students report having taken a class, either in high school or in college, on our democracy, government, and their role as a citizen.

While 63% of students say they feel like they know a great deal or quite a bit about democracy, government, and how to be a good citizen, just 37% believe that most college students know a lot about democracy, government, and how to be a good citizen.

A majority (69%) of students report that they have been involved in activities to help their local community, such as volunteering their time or helping solve a local community problem while enrolled. College students who are more likely to be involved in their local community include progressives (83%) and students who say their families are upper class or upper-middle class (75%).

Students' interest in a program that provides them a grant or financial assistance to help pay for their college tuition in exchange for two years of national service after graduation increased five percentage points from 2018 (58%) to 63%. The majority of students across the board are interested in a program like this including both Democrats (67%) and Republicans (64%). Hispanic (76%), African-American (72%), and Asian (67%) students also are among those who are more interested, as are students studying science, math, or computer science (71%).