

# **2017 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

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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.

- College students take the most negative view of the direction of the country in the poll's history (61% say the country is headed off on the wrong track) and 72% are more uncertain and concerned about the future of the country.
- At the same time, there is a sense of increased economic optimism, with 55% now characterizing the nation's economy as excellent or good, an 11-point increase from last year, and a record high in the poll's history.
- However, this economic optimism is tempered by college students' outlook for the next 12 months—just 23% say the economy will get better while 42% believe it will get worse.
- The 2016 presidential election has had a profound impact on the country, and its impact on campus is even greater. College students are more likely than the general public to report that they:
  - Have had a heated argument with family or friends who supported another presidential candidate (48% among college students, 31% among adults);
  - Have avoided talking politics with family or friends because they supported different candidates (47% among college students, 32% among adults);
  - Have been harassed for their political beliefs (35% among college students, 22% among adults);
  - And, have blocked or unfriended someone on Facebook or other social media because of the presidential election (33% among college students, 17% among adults).
- Most college students did not support Donald Trump for president and continue to disapprove of him. Trump's job rating stands at just 28% (compared with 75% for Barack Obama at the beginning of his presidency).
- On a similar note, a year ago, 48% of Americans were satisfied with the quality of the country's political leadership. Today, that number is just 29%.
- While there is strong anti-Trump sentiment and dissatisfaction with the election result among college students, this has not resulted in alienation from the political system on campus. The data reveal a more engaged and energized student body and a potential political force for both political parties to tap into in

the 2018 mid-terms and beyond. College students have become more rather than less engaged with politics. Today, 69% say that politics are either very or fairly relevant in their life—an all-time high, and up from 59% in 2016.

- Despite college students' dissatisfaction with Donald Trump, by nearly two to one (44% to 23%), college students say that his election has made them more rather than less interested in being involved in politics generally.
- For the first time since the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September eleventh, college students are nearly as likely to say that the challenges facing their generation will be international (49%) rather than national in scope (51%).
- Still, in general, college students would rather see the United States become less active than more active in world affairs (31% to 18%) with 51% saying that their preference is for the United States to stay as active as it is now.
- College students place a high priority on government addressing access to healthcare, reducing the burden of college student loans, and addressing global warming. A record proportion of college students (87%) say that global warming is a very or somewhat serious problem.
- Despite the incredibly partisan political climate, both Democrats and Republicans want their own party's respective leaders in Congress to make compromises to gain consensus on legislation rather than sticking to their positions even if this means not being able to gain consensus on legislation. This sentiment is held by partisans across the aisle by the exact same 59%-to-41% margin.
- While there are major partisan differences, majorities of college students believe that Congress should investigate contact between the Russian government and the Trump campaign, and believe that Russia's involvement in the election calls into question America's ability to hold free and fair elections.
- There is consensus across partisan lines in a low level of confidence in Congress to hold fair and impartial investigations into Russia's involvement in the election and, relatedly, a widespread bipartisan preference for an investigation to be led by a non-partisan independent commission rather than Congress.
- There is strong support on campus for keeping the Affordable Care Act in place. Seventy-two percent (72%) say that it was a good thing that Congress passed the bill and 69% favor keeping the law in place rather than repealing it. Both results show record high levels of support for the legislation.
- College students overwhelmingly believe that immigration helps more than it hurts the United States (71% to 29%) and 75% of students oppose the building of a wall along the US-Mexico border.
- College students are firmly on the side of protecting freedom of speech and most believe that their campus strikes the right balance. Students overwhelmingly believe that inviting controversial speakers to campus is a good thing even if they say things that are hurtful or offensive because it provokes thought and debate.

## **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 enrolled in a four-year higher learning institution. A total of 802 interviews were completed online. All interviews were conducted from April 27 to May 2, 2017. Some demographics were weighted to achieve representative samples of four-year college students nationwide.

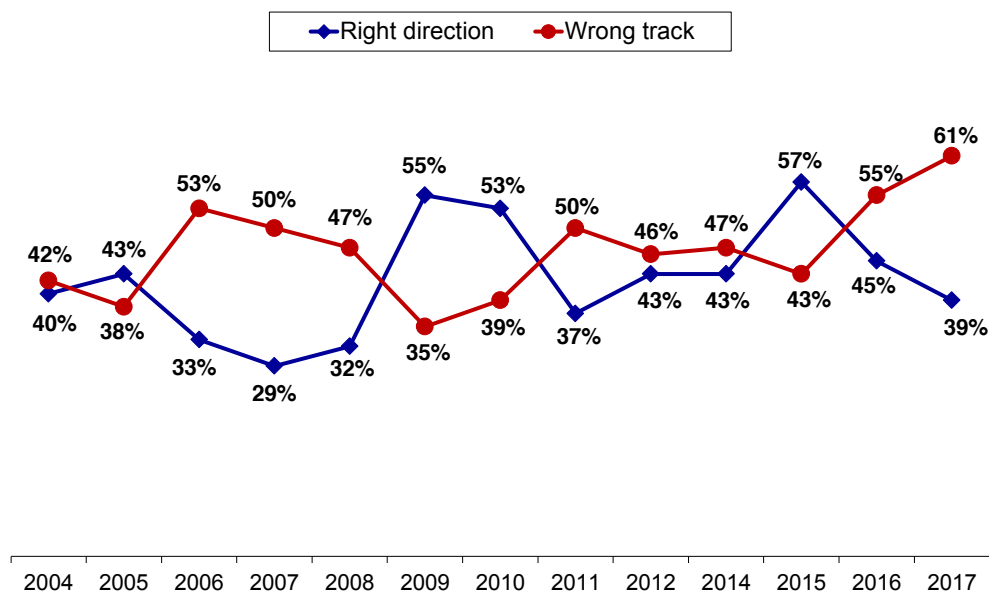
## **II. State of the Nation**

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The proportions of college students who believe that the country is off on the wrong track and that are pessimistic about the country's future both have increased from prior years. A great deal of the shift to a more pessimistic mood is driven by partisanship, with Democrats now being much more negative about the country's direction and outlook for the future. The 2016 presidential election has clearly had a profound impact on college students and many students report that they have been significantly affected by the election of Donald Trump. While college students indicate that they have gotten into heated arguments with family or friends, avoided talking politics with family, or blocked people on social media due to the election, in general, they are still talking politics with people who supported another presidential candidate.

College students are more likely to believe that the country is off on the wrong track compared with a year ago. Fifty-five percent (55%) said that the country was off on the wrong track in 2016, today that figure is up to 61%, a record level of pessimism in the history of the Panetta Institute poll. Compare this with the beginning of the Obama presidency, when the proportion who said that the country was headed in the right direction increased from the spring of 2008 (when George W. Bush was still in office) to the spring of 2009 (after Barack Obama's inauguration) from 32% to 55%.

## Direction of the Nation



What is particularly striking is the dramatic shift in partisans' attitudes, a phenomenon that we see across the survey on any number of questions related to the nation's psyche and outlook for the future. In 2016, Democrats were slightly more likely to believe that the country was headed in the right direction than off the wrong track by four points (52% right direction, 48% wrong track), but today Democrats are net negative by 48 points (26% right direction, 74% wrong track). The shift to a more negative attitude toward the direction of the country is nearly as substantial among college students that identify as liberals (a negative shift of 58 points). The psychological flip is even more pronounced among Republicans and conservatives, but in the other direction. Both groups were net negative by 35 points last year and have reversed their outlook to believe that the country is headed in the right direction by 35 points today—a 70-point bump in just one year. While partisans have recorded seismic shifts in their attitudes toward the country's direction, equally remarkable is that the middle has largely held, with independents and moderates becoming slightly more negative, but only by single digits.

<b>Differential: Right Direction – Wrong Track</b>			
	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Change</b>
All college students	-10	-21	-11
Democrats	+4	-48	-52
Independents	-18	-20	-2
Republicans	-35	+35	+70
Liberals	+13	-45	-58
Moderates	-20	-26	-6
Conservatives	-35	+35	+70

Record levels of college students also take an overwhelmingly negative view of the country's future. Fully 72% of respondents say that they are more uncertain and concerned about the country's future, while just 28% are more confident and secure. The proportion who are uncertain and concerned matches the highest level of concern previously reached in the 2012 survey. There are also deep partisan divisions here, with Democrats (85% more uncertain and concerned), liberals (84%), and Clinton voters (82%) all taking a deeply negative outlook of the country's future while Republicans (54% more confident and secure), conservatives (57%), and Trump voters (66%) take a more optimistic view.

The 2016 presidential election and Donald Trump's victory are having a profound impact on the nation's psyche and this extends to college campuses. When asked to choose from a number of events that college students consider to be the most influential of their lifetime, the election of Donald Trump (26%) rates just below the terrorist attacks of September eleventh, 2001 (28%), and the election of Barack Obama (30%). Democrats single out the election of Barack Obama as the most influential event of their lifetime (42%), but Republicans are much more likely to believe that September eleventh, 2001, is the most defining moment of their lifetime rather than the election of Donald Trump (46% to 26%). As more time goes by, it will be interesting to track the influence of the September eleventh terrorist attacks given that 36% of seniors mention this (their most influential event) compared with 25% for freshman (trailing both the election of Donald Trump and Barack Obama—34% and 29% respectively). Seventy percent (70%) of African Americans say that the election of Barack Obama was the most influential event of their lifetime.



### Most Influential Event of Lifetime

	<u>All college students</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Inde- pendents</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
	%	%	%	%
The election of Barack Obama as president	30	42	24	10
The terrorist attacks of September eleventh, 2001	28	22	24	46
The election of Donald Trump as president	26	23	31	26
The financial crisis of 2008	12	10	15	12
The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq	4	3	6	6

The 2016 presidential election was a very personal experience for many Americans, including many college students. In fact, compared with NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* polling conducted among the general public, college students are more likely to report being affected by the election in any number of ways than is the case for the general public. College students are much more likely than are adults to report that they:

- Had a heated argument with family or friends who supported another presidential candidate (48% compared with 31% among all adults).
- Avoided talking politics with family because they supported different candidates (47% compared with 32% among all adults).
- Have been harassed for their political beliefs (35% compared with 22% among all adults).
- Blocked or unfriended someone on Facebook or other social media because of the presidential election (33% compared with 17% among all adults).

Not only did college students experience the election in a more intense way than did the general public, but not all college students experienced the election in the same way. Democrats and Clinton voters are more likely to say that they have had a heated argument with family or friends who supported another presidential candidate and blocked or unfriended someone, while Republicans and Trump voters are more likely to feel that they have been harassed for their political beliefs. Female college students are more likely than male college students to say that they have avoided talking politics with family because they supported different candidates (53% to 42%) and that they have blocked or unfriended someone because of the presidential election (39% to 26%).

### Proportion Who Say Each Applies to Them Over Past Year

	All college students	Democrats	Independents	Republicans	Clinton voters	Trump voters
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A family member or friend shared with you a false news story that they believed to be true	56	61	46	55	57	60
You have had a heated argument with family or friends who supported another presidential candidate	48	53	39	45	53	47
You have avoided talking politics with family because you supported different candidates	47	49	49	43	49	46
You have been harassed for your political beliefs	35	31	32	44	32	55
You have blocked or unfriended someone on Facebook/social media because of the presidential election	33	38	27	27	41	31

Despite these findings, for the vast majority of college students, the election has not stopped their ability to talk politics in general with those who share their views, and more importantly for our democracy, with those who do not. Slightly more than four in five (83%) college students say that they have talked politics with someone who supported the same presidential candidate that they supported and a surprisingly high 79% indicate that they have talked politics with someone who supported another presidential candidate.

### III. The Political Landscape

Donald Trump won the presidency, but college students continue to have negative feelings toward him. At the same time, students hold steady in their positive views of Bernie Sanders, and Barack Obama is viewed overwhelmingly positively on campus, with his best ratings ever. College students have become deeply dissatisfied with the country's political leadership, a major drop from a year ago. But while dissatisfied with the election's outcome, college students are not dispirited or disengaged from politics. Quite the opposite, as a record level of college students now say that politics are relevant in their life and also are much more likely to say that Donald Trump's election has made them more interested in getting involved in politics than less interested.

Even after winning the presidency, college students view Donald Trump very negatively. Just 18% of college students feel positive about Donald Trump, while

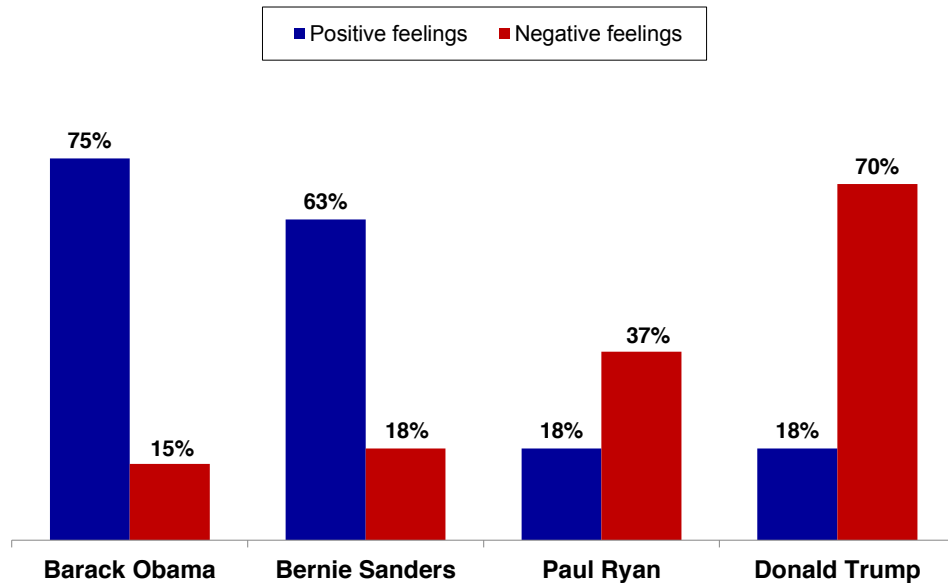
70% are negative, which is actually an improvement from last year, when he stood at 10% positive, 79% negative. Even among Republicans, his ratings are a relatively modest 55% positive, 25% negative. But Trump's standing among independents (12% positive, 70% negative) and Democrats (4% positive, 91% negative) is very poor. Female college students also view Donald Trump more negatively than do male students (13% positive, 77% negative compared with 24% positive, 63% negative).

Speaker of the House Paul Ryan is less well known than Donald Trump, but is viewed negatively by two to one (18% positive, 37% negative).

Bernie Sanders received strong support among college students in last year's Democratic primary and retains his strong standing on campus with a 63% positive, 18% negative rating (relatively unchanged from 62%, 21% last year). Among Democrats, Sanders stands at 85% positive, 3% negative.

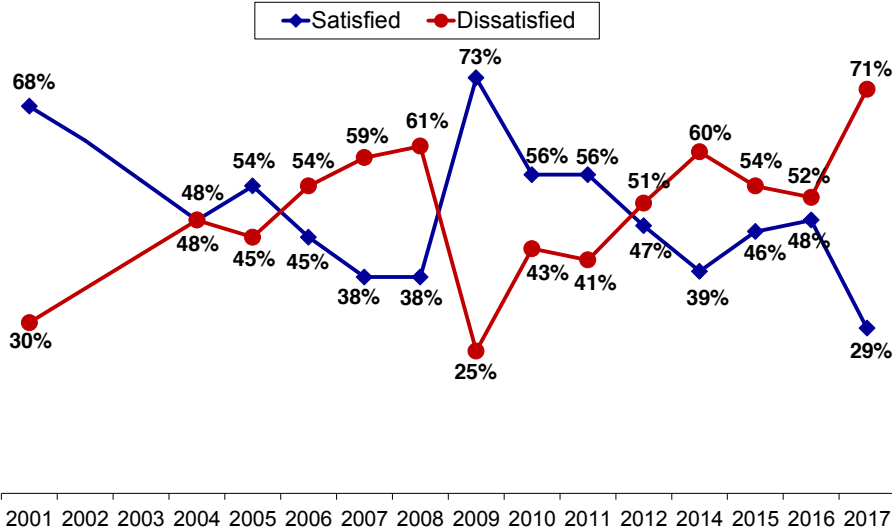
And while Donald Trump is decidedly not enjoying the honeymoon that incoming presidents typically receive, Barack Obama is enjoying a second honeymoon. College students are five times more likely to view the former president positively than negatively. His 75% positive, 15% negative rating is the best mark that he has received in the Panetta Institute's polling. Even Republicans offer a fairly mixed assessment of the former president (37% positive, 44% negative), while independents are largely positive toward him (64% positive, 14% negative), and Democrats almost universally embrace him (96% positive, 2% negative). Barack Obama enjoys a 94% positive, 2% negative rating among African Americans.

## Personal Ratings of Political Leaders



Satisfaction with the quality of the country's political leadership has plummeted since last year's survey. In 2016, 48% of college students indicated that they were satisfied with the country's leadership and today that proportion has dropped to 29%. Satisfaction with the country's political leadership is connected to views of the president. Among those who approve of the job that Donald Trump is doing as president, 79% are satisfied with the country's political leadership. But among those who disapprove of Trump's job performance, 91% are dissatisfied with the country's political leadership.

## Satisfaction with the Country's Political Leadership



There are major shifts along partisan lines in satisfaction with the country's political leadership compared with a year ago, with Republicans becoming much more satisfied while Democrats, and to a lesser extent independents, have become less satisfied.

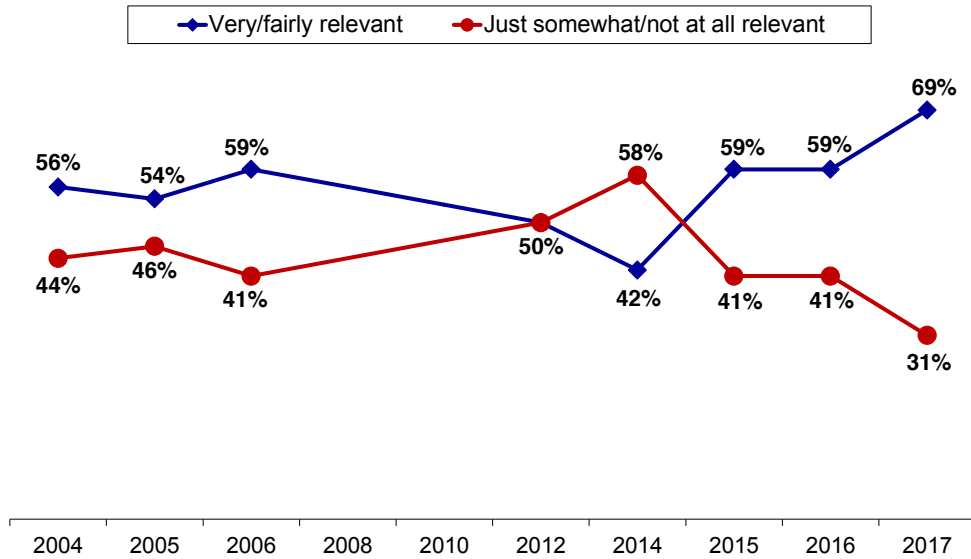
Change in Satisfaction of Country's Political Leadership			
	2016	2017	Change
All college students	48	29	-19
Democrats	60	12	-48
Independents	42	27	-15
Republicans	25	66	+41

This drop in satisfaction with the country's political leadership makes sense, because college students reported voting for Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump by 47% to 16%. So, not only do we see throughout the course of the survey how personally affected college students have been by the election, but just 16% of students saw their candidate win.

Given this, one might expect that after a disappointing and dispiriting election outcome for many, college students would take a step away from politics. But the results tell a different story; of an even more engaged and energized student body. During last year's presidential election, 59% of college students described politics as being very or fairly relevant to their life. Today, that proportion has increased to 69%, an all-time high in the history of the Panetta

Institute poll. Clinton and Trump voters find common ground here, with 77% of Clinton voters and 80% of Trump voters saying that they find politics to be very or fairly relevant.

### How relevant are politics in your life?



Across partisan lines, whether identifying as a Democrat, independent, or Republican, college students all say that politics have become more relevant to them than they were a year ago. And despite the Democratic nominee for president losing the presidential election, political relevance for Democrats increased more than for Republicans.

Proportion of College Students Who Say Politics are Very or Fairly Relevant			
	2016	2017	Change
	%	%	
All college students	59	69	+10
Democrats	62	74	+12
Independents	48	53	+5
Republicans	64	72	+8

College students have not embraced Donald Trump as president, but his election has made them more engaged and interested in politics. By 44% to 23%, students report that Trump’s election as president has made them more rather than less interested in being involved in politics, with 33% saying his election has made no difference either way. Both Democrats and Republicans are much more likely to

say that Trump's election has made them more interested in being involved in politics generally, with independents divided more evenly and more likely to say that this makes no difference to them. African Americans are much more likely than other college students to say that Trump's election has made them less interested in being involved.

<b>Interest in Being Involved in Politics Due to Donald Trump's Election</b>				
	<b>More interested</b>	<b>No difference</b>	<b>Less interested</b>	<b>More-Less, interested</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	
All college students	44	33	23	+21
Democrats	49	27	24	+25
Independents	30	42	28	+2
Republicans	44	41	15	+29
Clinton voters	46	26	28	+18
Trump voters	54	39	7	+47
Men	43	38	19	+24
Women	44	30	26	+18
Whites	48	35	17	+31
African Americans	28	27	45	-17
Hispanics	43	26	31	+12
Asians	38	45	17	+21

Those who say that Trump's election has made them more interested in being involved in politics are most likely to say that his election makes them want to be more involved in politics in order to know what is going on (19%), it makes them want to make change or make an impact (13%), and that they disagree with his views or stand on the issues (13%). The following are a few examples of what college students say about why they have become more interested in being involved in politics since the election of Donald Trump. The passion that is evident among both those who support and oppose Donald Trump, is striking and highlights that both political parties would be wise to pay more attention to college students. The 2016 presidential election changed a number of our expectations and preconceived notions, and one of these may be the truism that it is hard to engage college students in politics.

**"The election made me more interested in how our electoral system works, along with how desperate we as a country are for change. It made me research politics more and more and it made me want to be the change our country needed whether through politics or just educating others."**

**"It's made me want to be more involved because I'm more interested in what's going on and what his plans are for the country as a whole. Since his goals are controversial, I want to be more informed in what he wants to do"**

**and to know what I should do if I do not think that he is doing what's best for the country."**

**"I think he is putting the country on the right track and will be bold enough to say and do things others would not."**

**"Trump's decisions seem to be more active, rather than passive. In other words, they have greater affect, whether positive or negative, thus it seems to be more important to understand what's going on."**

**"Seeing the ideals Trump preaches and the actions he had taken on the campaign trail and as president has made me realize exactly how large an impact politics have on my life, something that hadn't quite been put in perspective before."**

**"It has made me more interested because our current president stands for almost everything I'm against. And I want to get involved so I can ensure a better future for myself and my family. I do not like the way things are going and it's not going to change unless I step in to try to change it myself. I would feel guilty if I just sat back and did nothing."**

**"I want to make informed decisions and help educate those I have influence with. I disagree with many things the president has said and done. Therefore, I want to be an informed citizen who knows what is happening and what powers government officials really have."**

**"He is doing great as president so far. He is following through with what he said during his campaign. I am more interested because he is moving the country in the right direction."**

Clearly the 2016 presidential election ignited passions across the country and on campus. One example of this is increased interest in changing the election of future presidents from the Electoral College to elections based upon the popular vote. In fact, 63% of college students would favor abolishing the Electoral College for future elections. However, this opinion is not universally shared by those of different partisan stripes. While 72% of Clinton voters favor the abolition of the Electoral College, 66% of Trump voters oppose this change. And majorities of Democrats (73%) and independents (62%) favor moving to the popular vote to elect the next president, but 61% of Republicans would oppose this.

## **Donald Trump**

Donald Trump begins his presidency with a historically low job rating among the general public and this is also the case with college students. On campus, students are uncertain or pessimistic about what the Trump presidency will mean for the country. And while college students provide slightly better ratings for Donald



Trump on the economy, in all of the specific areas tested, including the economy, students believe that Donald Trump will make things worse rather than better.

Not only do college students view Donald Trump negatively in personal terms, but his job rating stands at just 28%, with 72% disapproving. This rating stands near the record-low approval rating in the history of the Panetta Institute poll, which was George W. Bush's 25% recorded in 2008, at the tail end of his second term. The fact that Trump starts off at this low level, when most presidents have enjoyed more goodwill from the electorate, does not bode well. Consider that Barack Obama began his presidency with a 75% approval rating.

Donald Trump enjoys a positive job rating among Republicans (75% approve, 25% disapprove) but is net negative among independents (27%, approve, 73% disapprove), and Democrats nearly universally disapprove of the job that he is doing (7% approve, 93% disapprove). Trump struggles among college students overall, but is in worse shape among women compared with men, non-whites compared with whites, and those who plan to major in social sciences or humanities compared with those with plans in science/math/computer science and business. He also is in inferior standing among students from a lower socioeconomic class compared with students of a higher class, and those who believe that the economy is not good or poor provide Trump with a lower job rating.

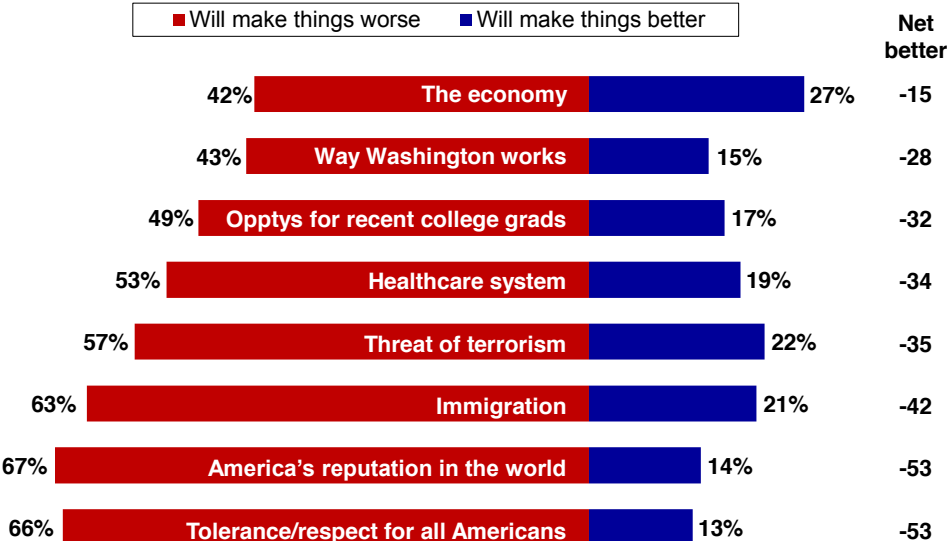
<b>Donald Trump Job Rating as President</b>			
	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>Differential</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>±</b>
All students	28	72	-44
Men	35	65	-30
Women	22	78	-56
Whites	36	64	-28
African Americans	10	90	-80
Hispanics	26	74	-48
Asians	13	87	-74
Social sciences	16	84	-68
Humanities	16	84	-68
Science/math/CS	34	66	-32
Business	39	61	-22
Democrats	7	93	-86
Independents	27	73	-46
Republicans	75	25	+50
Social class: lower/lower middle	18	82	-64
Social class: middle	28	72	-44
Social class: upper middle/upper	36	64	-28
Economy: Excellent/good	36	64	-28
Economy: Not so good/poor	18	82	-64

In evaluating Donald Trump, college students make some distinction between the overall job he's doing and what he's done on the economy and foreign policy, being slightly more likely to approve of the job that he is doing on the economy (25% approve) and somewhat less likely to approve on foreign policy (33% approve).

In their outlook on the Trump presidency, college students take a decidedly negative view. Half (50%) of college students say that they are pessimistic and worried, while another 28% are uncertain and wondering. Just 22% are optimistic and confident or satisfied and hopeful. While this is an increase from 12% who felt similarly last year during the presidential campaign, it is still remarkably low for a sitting president.

When presented with specific areas where Donald Trump could make an impact as president, there is no single area where college students believe he will make things better rather than worse. Even on perceived strengths for Donald Trump such as the economy (-15 worse rather than better) and the way that Washington works (-28), college students are more likely, by significant margins, to believe that Donald Trump will make things worse. And concerns that Trump will make things worse rather than better only increase from there, with the greatest negative gaps on tolerance and respect for all Americans (-53), America's reputation in the world (-53), and immigration (-42).

## President Trump’s Expected Impact in Selected Areas



While college students overall have doubts about Donald Trump’s ability to make things better on any number of issues, among students who voted for Trump, there is a belief that he will make things better on all issues tested—with the economy (+73) and the nation’s healthcare system (+60) topping the list. On the other hand, Clinton voters are most pessimistic about Trump’s net impact on immigration (-77), America’s reputation in the world (-78), and tolerance and respect for all Americans (-79).

<b>Differential: President Trump will make things better-will make things worse</b>		
	<u>Trump voters</u>	<u>Clinton voters</u>
The economy	+73	-46
The way that Washington, DC works	+46	-54
Greater opportunities for college students like you upon graduation	+43	-62
The nation’s healthcare system	+60	-68
The threat of terrorism	+56	-66
Immigration	+58	-77
America’s reputation in the world	+18	-78
Tolerance and respect for all Americans	+18	-79

College students were asked to write one message that they would like to send to Donald Trump about the country and what they feel is most important to address. Among those who approve of the job that he is doing as president (28%),

students are most likely to offer Trump praise and tell him that he is doing a good job and not to change. The following are these students' words.

**"I would say keep up the good work. This first 100 days has been very productive and although he does not get enough respect for being the president I believe he will be able to be a very successful president."**

**"I am very pleased to have a president who will say what he thinks and not be afraid of hurting people's feelings. We needed a strong confident leader who will worry about what's right not what's politically correct."**

**"Continue to make sure that our interests as a country are number one. The military needs to have the money to maintain status as the world's most powerful but be careful about choosing which foreign matters to interfere with."**

**"I think he is doing the best job he possibly can with what he's got. He walked into a mess and is having to clean it up. Unfortunately, every time Obama tried to clean up the mess, he had people pushing him the other way, and he seems to have chosen the easiest way out. Donald is at least standing up for this country and trying to do what is best for this country...I will simply support our president in what ways I can."**

The 72% of college students who disapprove of the job that Donald Trump is doing as president would send him a far different message. They are most likely to say that he should leave office, that he is not fit to lead the country, and more prospectively, that he should care for and look out for all people because he is president of all Americans. The following are some examples of messages that these college students have written to Donald Trump.

**"I hope you realize you were not prepared for the job you have been assigned, I'm glad you are admitting that it's not as easy as you thought it would be. It's hard at your age to change your views and beliefs on life....I hope you become more flexible and open to listening to others and stop believing you know everything. Keep opening up and listening to others' views and perspectives, one person can't do it all alone."**

**"I hope you rise to the challenge, I believe you want to succeed, no one starts something planning to fail—but you must acknowledge there is no us versus them, we are all people and America IS great. America was built on people; needless to say I think creating travel bans is a terrible policy. In this globalized world there is strength in cooperation; sure it's easier to just cut ties in the short term, but long term our nation is going to really be hurting if these actions are upheld."**

**"I am hopeful for you to do good things but your rhetoric is very inconsistent and tweets are disheartening. Truth does matter."**

**"Dear President Trump, while I do not think you intend to do harm, I do think you prematurely ran for president and didn't really know how much responsibility and work it was going to be. Please try to compromise with the policies that the majority of the American population wants (there's a reason you didn't win the popular vote). We do not hate you, as much as some might claim otherwise...Your policies are hurting many of the people that supported you...We are supposed to be the land of hope, we represent that to the rest of the world, please do not change that."**

One particularly sore subject for many college students is Donald Trump's use of Twitter. Fully 79% of college students say that his use of Twitter is bad because in an instant, messages can have unintended major implications without careful review, while just 21% say it is good because it allows a president to directly communicate to people immediately. Trump voters, his base, are barely more likely to say that his use of Twitter is a good thing rather than a bad thing (54% to 46%), while 90% of Clinton voters say it is a bad thing. Majorities across the political spectrum—Democrats (91%), independents (72%), and even 58% of Republicans—say that Donald Trump's use of Twitter is bad thing. About one in five (19%) college students reports that they follow Donald Trump on Twitter, and they are divided almost evenly, with 49% saying that they believe his use of Twitter is good and 51% saying it is bad. Overall, just 13% of college students say that they trust what Donald Trump says on Twitter a great deal or quite a bit.

## **Russia**

College students want an investigation into whether there was contact between the Russian government and the Trump campaign and believe that Russia's involvement calls into question America's ability to hold free and fair elections. While there are deep partisan divisions on these questions, college students across partisan lines have low confidence in Congress to carry out this investigation and overwhelmingly prefer an investigation led by a non-partisan independent commission to an investigation led by Congress.

A majority (56%) of college students want Congress to investigate whether there was contact between the Russian government and the Trump campaign, while 21% do not want this, and 23% say that they do not know enough to offer an opinion. And a majority (52%) also believe that Russia's involvement in the presidential election calls into question America's ability to have free and fair elections, with 25% saying that it does not, and 23% not offering an opinion either way. However, on both questions there are vastly different opinions by partisanship, with Democrats being far more concerned about Russia's involvement than are Republicans.

**Congress Should Investigate Contact Between  
Russian Government and Trump Campaign**

	<u>Yes</u> %	<u>No</u> %	<u>No opinion</u> %
All college students	56	21	23
Democrats	73	10	17
Independents	45	24	31
Republicans	30	42	28

**Russia's Involvement in Presidential Election Calls  
Into Question America's Ability to have Free and  
Fair Elections**

	<u>Yes</u> %	<u>No</u> %	<u>No opinion</u> %
All college students	52	25	23
Democrats	73	11	16
Independents	37	30	33
Republicans	22	51	27

Even though college students want Congress to investigate contact between the Russian government and the Trump campaign, across the political spectrum there is not much confidence that Congress can conduct a fair and impartial investigation. Overall, 61% of college students have only a little or no confidence at all in Congress to conduct a fair and impartial investigation, and majorities of Democrats (63%), independents (67%), and Republicans (53%) share this view. Given the choice between an investigation led by Congress and an investigation led by a non-partisan independent commission, 77% prefer an independent commission and just 23% prefer Congress. Again, there is widespread consensus across partisan lines with 76% of Democrats, 75% of independents, and 81% of Republicans preferring an investigation led by a non-partisan independent commission rather than Congress.

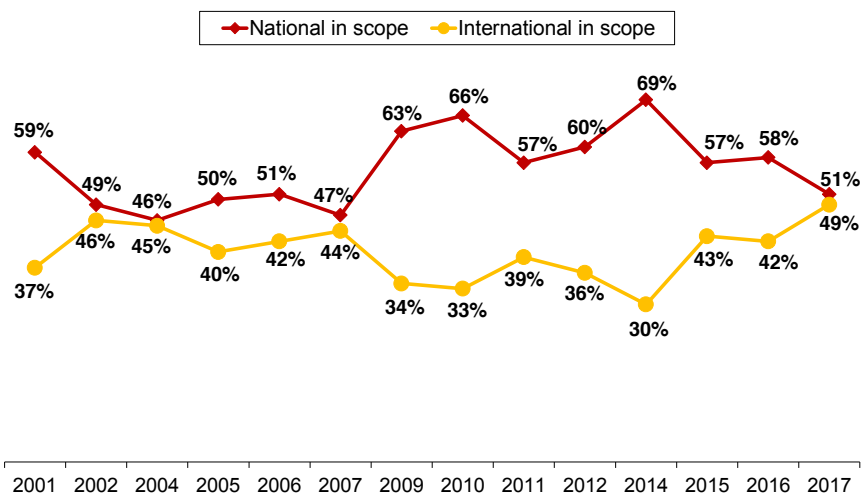
### **The Issue Agenda**

For the first time since the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September eleventh, college students are nearly as likely to say that the challenges their generation will face will be international as they are to say that they will be national. College students are most likely to place the highest priority on addressing greater access to healthcare, reducing the burden of college student loans, and global warming as areas they want to see Congress and the president

address. On both sides of the aisle, college students want congressional leaders to make compromises to gain consensus on legislation rather than sticking to their positions.

Throughout the Obama years, college students, by wide margins, believed that the problems their generation would face would more likely be national than international in scope, but just as in the years immediately after September eleventh, there has been an increase in the proportion of students who believe that the problems they will face will be international in scope. Today, 51% still say that the problems that they will face will be national in scope while 49% now say international. In last year's survey, 58% said that most of the problems their generation would face would be national in scope and 42% said international. In this year's survey, Democrats (51% international, 49% national) and independents (49% international, 51% national) are divided virtually evenly, while Republicans are more likely to say national in scope by 57% to 43%. The proportion of Democrats who believe that the problems their generation faces will be international in scope has increased from 41% last year to 51% now, accounting for much of the overall increase.

### Most of the problems my generation will face are:



College students say that the highest priorities for Congress and the president to address are providing more Americans with access to healthcare (77% very top priority or high priority), helping reduce the burden of college student loans (72%), and addressing global warming (70%). But priorities differ

significantly across partisan lines, with Democrats highlighting the same top three priorities while Republicans' focus is on dealing with immigration, bringing jobs back from overseas, and strengthening the military and improving preparedness.

### Proportions of College Students Who Say This is a Very Top Priority or High Priority for Congress and the President to Address

	<u>All college students</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Independents</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
	%	%	%	%
Providing more Americans with access to healthcare	77	88	72	61
Helping reduce the burden of college student loans	72	83	62	56
Addressing global warming	70	85	67	40
Dealing with immigration	59	54	50	82
Reforming the tax system	58	56	54	66
Bringing jobs from overseas back to America	56	44	60	74
Strengthening legal protections for gays and lesbians	53	69	50	19
Renegotiating trade deals with other countries	48	45	52	53
Strengthening the military and improving preparedness	45	36	43	69
Changing the way that Washington works	45	41	48	53
Reducing government regulations	40	33	38	61
Reducing spending on domestic programs such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Education	33	26	30	50

We are living in unprecedentedly partisan times and while college students cite somewhat different priorities for the federal government to address based upon their party affiliation, one thing is clear—they want their leaders to make compromises to get things done. Democrats, by 59% to 41%, say that they want Democratic leaders in Congress to make compromises to gain consensus on legislation rather than sticking to their positions even if this means not being able to gain consensus on legislation. By the same margin (59% to 41%), Republicans want exactly the same thing from their leaders in Congress.

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

College students maintain a strained relationship with many institutions that are foundational elements of our society. Students lack confidence in government at all levels, mirroring recent results among Americans as a whole. While college students view the media at large with equal cynicism as the general public, students tend to trust the news they personally consume to a somewhat higher



degree. And many express concerns surrounding the rise of the Internet as an institution, and the implications it has on privacy.

Students lack confidence in a wide range of societal institutions, but among the least trusted are those associated with government or the media. The federal government itself rates the lowest, with only 18% of college students saying that they have a great deal or quite a bit of confidence in Washington. Congress earns the confidence of only 19% of college students, while Twitter, Facebook, and the national news media all garner similarly low ratings (19%, 20%, and 20%, respectively.) At the higher end of the confidence scale are campus institutions such as professors and presidents at respondents’ own schools (69% and 53%), and the military (57%).

While it may be tempting to cast these students as the next generation being disaffected from the older establishment, recent research among the general public suggests that college students’ lack of confidence is also representative of the country at large. A December NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* survey found an equally low level of trust in the government and the media among all adults. The institutions for which college students register significantly less confidence than adults overall are the military, though still quite high (57% of students and 73% of adults) and law enforcement (44% of students and 59% of adults).

<b>Great Deal or Quite a Bit of Confidence in Institutions</b>				
	<b>Law Enforcement</b>	<b>Electoral System</b>	<b>Federal Government</b>	<b>News Media</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All college students	44	24	18	20
Democrats	30	11	12	23
Independents	44	24	19	17
Republicans	74	52	33	14
Whites	50	25	18	15
African Americans	23	21	14	30
Hispanics	46	28	25	24

Confidence in law enforcement is sharply divided along racial and political lines. While half (50%) of white students report that they trust law enforcement agencies a great deal or quite a bit, less than a quarter (23%) of black students say the same. In an even more stark contrast, fully 74% of Republican students say that they trust law enforcement to only 30% of Democrats who say the same.

Last year’s presidential election may have had a sizable impact on students’ trust in governmental institutions. While 24% of students trust the country’s

electoral system a great deal or quite a bit, Republicans, coming off a victorious presidential campaign, are nearly five times as likely (52% to 11%) to report confidence in that institution as Democrats. Similarly, one in three (33%) Republicans report having confidence in the GOP-controlled federal government compared with just 12% of Democrats. Ironically, conservatives, also at 33%, now trust the federal government the most of any ideological group.

### News Consumption

As the media landscape continues to evolve in the age of the Internet, college students are adjusting their media consumption habits and provide varying levels of confidence in news sources.

Internet news websites continue to be college students' top source for news on politics and civic affairs, with 50% saying they get most of their information from online news. Just over four in 10 (42%) college students say that they get most of their news on TV, and 34% say that their go-to news source is social media, such as Twitter or Facebook.

Supporters of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in last year's presidential election differ in the sources they draw upon for political news. Clinton voters are 15 points more likely than Trump voters to find their news on Internet news sites (56% to 41%). Meanwhile, 38% of Trump voters identify friends and family as a top news source, significantly more than do Clinton voters (22%) or college students as a whole (26%).

<b>Most Information about Politics and Civic Affairs</b>				
	<b>Internet News Websites</b>	<b>Television</b>	<b>Social Media</b>	<b>Family or Friends</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All college students	50	42	34	26
Trump voters	41	49	29	38
Clinton voters	56	43	36	22

College students do not have high confidence in their news sources, reflecting their overall lack of confidence in the media as an institution. While individual media maintain better images than the national news media as a whole, students' trust is soft, and many students indicate that they trust even their preferred news sources just some or very little. For example, community or city newspapers are the most trusted news source, with 54% of students saying they

trust such publications a great deal or quite a bit. However, only 12% indicate that they trust local newspapers a great deal, while fully 46% of students indicate that they trust them just some or very little. Family and friends, the source that students were most likely to say they trusted a great deal, still only garner this response from 16% of respondents.

Students do not necessarily stick to the sources they trust the most when they seek out political news. While the most relied upon news source, Internet news websites, ranks among the most trusted, with 51% saying they trust them a great deal or quite a bit, students also rely on media that they do not rate as particularly trustworthy. Social media sites, the third most relied upon source (for 34% of college students), are rated as trustworthy by only 20%. Meanwhile, some of the most trusted news sources are some of the least used. Community and city newspapers are trusted a great deal or quite a bit by a majority of students, but just 7% actually rely on them the most for their news.

<b>Most Information about Politics and Civic Affairs</b>			
	<b>Most Used News Source</b>	<b>Trusted a Great Deal or Quite a Bit</b>	<b>Differential</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>±</b>
Community or city newspaper	7	54	47
Campus newspaper	4	45	41
Magazines	3	21	18
Family or friends	26	49	23
Television	42	44	2
Internet news websites	50	51	1
Internet blogs	8	18	10
Social media	34	20	-14

While a third of college students name social network sites as a source of political information, even they are fairly unlikely to trust those sites as a news source. Only 31% of those students say they trust sites such as Facebook and Twitter a great deal or quite a bit. This is, however, a higher rate of trust in social media than among college students as a whole, 20% of whom trust these sites as news sources. Social media is the least trusted source of political news, while the most trusted are the community or city newspaper (54%) and Internet news sites (51%).

As the Internet continues to become more pervasive in our daily lives, college students are contending with the challenges that arise from this. Half (50%) of students say that they worry about the amount of information about them that is available on the Internet and an equal proportion say that people should expect some limits on what information can be shared. However, the way college students perceive the right to privacy on the Internet appears to be changing. In 2012, students were divided evenly on whether employers and universities should consider applicants' online presence in their decision-making processes, with 49% saying they should and 49% saying they should not. This year, 63% say applicants' online activity should be a consideration, including a slight majority (53%) of those who say people should expect a limit on what can be shared on the Internet.

Students are overwhelmingly troubled by Congress's new law enabling Internet service providers to sell customers' information to third parties without consent. A majority (51%) say that this law bothers them a lot, while 36% say it bothers them a little, and just 13% say it does not bother them.

## **V. International Issues**

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Broadly, college students continue to prefer that the United States become less rather than more involved in world affairs, with a slim majority feeling that the United States should remain as active as it is now. When asked about specific foreign policy issues, college students are most likely to prefer that the United States stay as involved as it is today, but make exceptions for limiting North Korea's nuclear weapons and preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, issues on which they would like to see more involvement. College students take the opposite view and are more likely to want the United States to become less involved in sending troops into Syria and challenging China in its aggressive behavior in Asia.

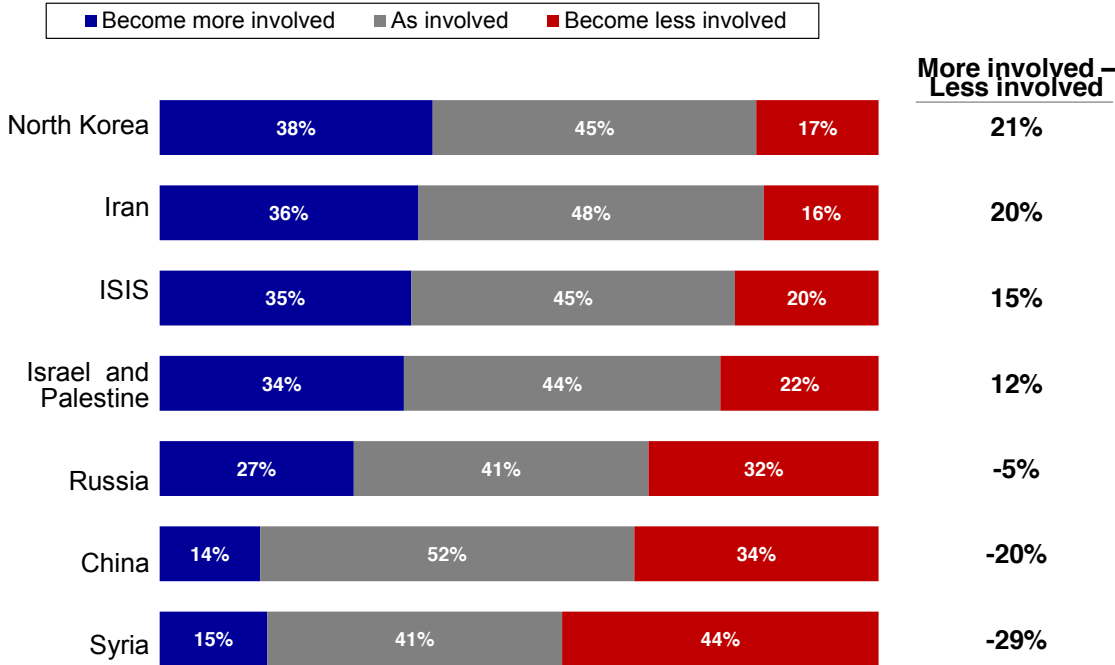
When asked whether the United States generally should become more or less active in world affairs or stay as active as it is now, a slim majority (51%) say that the United States should remain as active as it currently is. Thirty-one percent

(31%) say we should become less active and 18% say we should become more active. These results are relatively steady from last year's survey.

Students who say that they are very interested in a career in government are more likely to want the United States to become more involved in world affairs—30% say they want the United States to become more involved, 22% say less involved.

While college students prefer that the United States remain at its current level of involvement on most specific foreign policy issues, there are some exceptions. College students are more likely to want the United States to become more rather than less involved when it comes to limiting North Korea's nuclear arsenal (more involved by 21 points), preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons (more involved by 20 points), fighting ISIS (more involved by 15 points), and working with Israel and the Palestinians to form a lasting peace in the area (more involved by 12 points). On the other hand, college students are less rather than more likely to want the United States to be involved in sending troops to Syria (less involved by 29 points) and challenging China on its aggressive behavior in Asia (less involved by 20 points). College students are less clear about their preference for how the United States should deal with challenging Russia in Crimea, Syria, and its involvement in our elections. While 32% say they want the United States to be less involved in dealing with Russia, 27% want the United States to become more involved.

# Involvement in Foreign Policy Areas



There are also significant partisan differences on many foreign policy measures. In particular, there are wide gaps on limiting North Korea’s nuclear weapons, preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and fighting ISIS. Both Democrats and Republicans land on the side of the United States becoming more involved in these issues, but Republicans do so to a much greater extent. Both Republicans and Democrats say they want the United States to be less involved in sending troops to Syria, but Democrats feel this way by a greater margin.

## Proportion of College Students Who Want United States to be More Involved-Less Involved

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Limiting North Korea’s nuclear weapons	+17	+9	+41
Preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons	+16	+7	+43
Fighting ISIS or the Islamic State	+8	+6	+42
Working with Israel and the Palestinians to form a lasting peace in the area	+16	-4	+16
Challenging Russia in Crimea, Syria, and its involvement in our elections	+6	-19	-17
Challenging China on its more aggressive behavior in Asia	-23	-27	-6
Sending US military troops to Syria	-33	-36	-14

## VI. Domestic Issues

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College students are increasingly more progressive when it comes to their positions on various policies relating to domestic issues. The number of students who view global warming as a serious problem continues to increase. A strong majority of students still believes that immigration helps more than it hurts, and opposes building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. College students also increasingly support the Affordable Care Act and favor keeping it in place.

The majority (87%) of students view global warming as a very or somewhat serious problem (on par with last year's 86% total serious problem). This belief is held across partisan lines—almost universally among Democrats (97%), but also among strong majorities of independents (87%), and Republicans (65%).

Seventy-one percent (71%) of college students believe that immigration helps the United States more than it hurts, while about three in 10 (29%) believe that immigration hurts more than it helps.

Fully three-quarters of college students oppose building a wall along the US-Mexico border to try to stop undocumented immigrants. There are partisan divides on this issue, with nine in 10 (90%) Democrats opposing the wall, and more than half (55%) of Republican students supporting the wall. Other groups who strongly oppose the building of a wall are students studying social sciences (90% oppose) and the humanities (85% oppose), lower-class families (83% oppose), and Asians (87% oppose). Hispanics (75% oppose) are on par with college students overall.

When it comes to the deportation of undocumented immigrants in the United States, nearly half (47%) of college students believe that only undocumented immigrants who have committed a serious crime should be deported. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of students think that undocumented immigrants who have committed any crime should be deported, while 18% think that all undocumented immigrants should be deported and 7% believe that no undocumented immigrants should be deported. Echoes of the election can be heard here, with 51% of Trump voters saying that all undocumented immigrants should be deported, and 60% of Clinton voters believing that only undocumented immigrants who have committed a serious crime should be deported.

Support for the Affordable Care Act continues to rise, with more than seven in 10 (72%) students saying that it was a good thing that Congress passed the bill, a seven-point increase from 2015.

Despite recent Congressional attempts to replace the Affordable Care Act, support among college students for keeping the healthcare law, rather than repealing it, increased to 69% (up 12 percentage points since 2015). There is a partisan divide here, with 89% of Democrats wanting to keep the law in place and 68% of Republicans saying it should be repealed.

Seven in ten (70%) students are still on their parents' health insurance. Trump voters (82%), upper/upper-middle-class students (77%), Republicans (78%), and white students (81%) are more likely to report that they are still on their parents' health insurance.

## **VII. Freedom of Speech**

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College students are more likely to believe that there is too much prejudice in the United States than that there is too much political correctness. However, when it comes to free speech on campus, students favor protecting free speech, even when it offends people, including inviting controversial speakers on campus.

Demographic and ideological groups vary widely on whether American society is too prejudiced or too politically correct. One of the most striking features of these disparities is the yawning 40-point gender gap between women, who are more likely to say the United States is too prejudiced by 34 points, and men, who say the country is too politically correct by 6 points. While majorities of all racial and ethnic groups agree that the country is too prejudiced, the difference in magnitude is stunning: whites agree more with this statement by six points, while Hispanics agree by 20 points and African-American students agree by 42 points.



### Too Prejudiced or Too Politically Correct

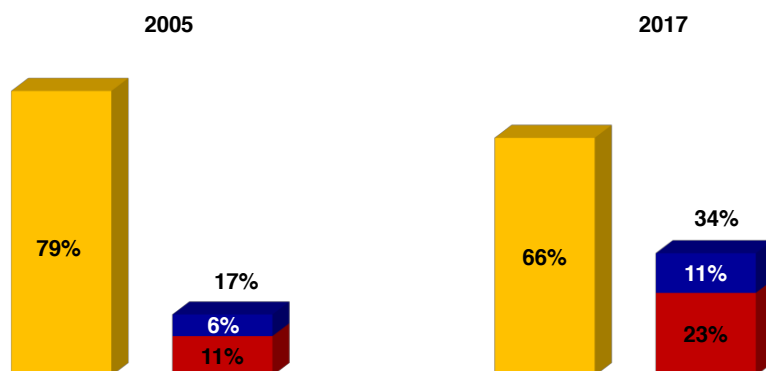
	<b>Too Politically Correct</b>	<b>Too Prejudiced</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All college students	42	58
Men	53	47
Women	33	67
Whites	47	53
Blacks	29	71
Hispanics	40	60
Trump voters	78	22
Clinton voters	28	72
Democrats	24	76
Independents	53	47
Republicans	73	27
Liberals	20	80
Moderates	50	50
Conservatives	70	30

Supporters of President Trump in last year's election are the most likely group to agree more with the statement that the country is too politically correct at 78%, while 72% of Clinton voters have the opposite perspective, that the country is too prejudiced. A similar divide is evident between Republicans (73% too politically correct) and Democrats (76% too prejudiced). Independents fall somewhere in between, with a slight majority (53%) agreeing that the United States is too politically correct.

Even while some campuses are accused of being too politically correct and student reactions to guest speakers spark national controversy, fully two-thirds (66%) of college students say that both liberals and conservatives have an opportunity to express their views. This is down, however, from the last time the question was asked in 2005. That year, about four in five (79%) students said that both ends of the political spectrum could express their views on campus. As in 2005, about two-thirds of those who said one side could not express their views believed that conservatives were more likely to be affected. Eleven percent (11%) of college students indicated this in 2005, compared with 23% today.

## Do Liberals and Conservatives Both Have an Opportunity to Express Their Views?

■ Both can express views
 ■ Conservatives can't express views
 ■ Liberals can't express views



College students overall have become more likely to think that one side or the other is not fully free to express their views on campus since 2005, but a large part of the movement is among conservatives and Republicans. In the 2005 survey, 71% of Republicans reported that both sides could express their views. Today, a bare majority (52%) of Republicans do. While 23% of conservatives in 2005 said that conservatives could not express their views on campus compared with 68% who said that both sides enjoyed freedom of expression, now a slim plurality of conservatives feels that conservatives are impacted in this way (47% to 46%).

Other measures on free speech have remained steady since last year. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of students feel that protecting freedom of speech is a more important priority than making sure that people do not feel hurt, while 32% believe the opposite. Last year, students favored protecting speech by 70% to 30%. Students also continue to feel that their schools are striking the right balance between protecting free speech and preventing hate speech, with 64% holding this view (compared with 66% in last year's survey).

When it comes to inviting controversial speakers to campus, more than two-thirds (69%) of college students say that it is a good thing because it stimulates debate and thought, while just 31% say that controversial speakers should be avoided to make sure that all students feel safe. The sentiment that it is a good

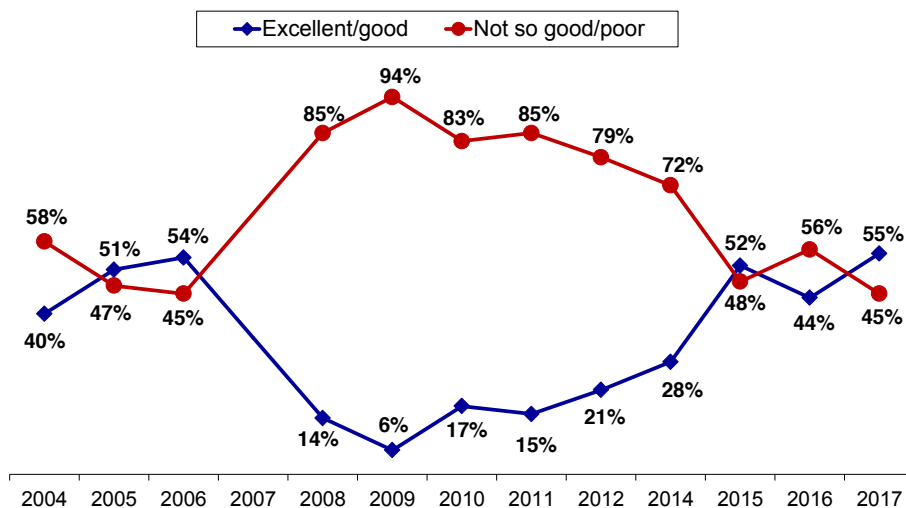
thing to invite controversial speakers to campus is shared across ideological groups. Fully 82% of Republicans say that controversial speakers visiting campus is a good thing, compared with 61% of Democrats and 72% of independents who say the same. Similarly, 81% of conservatives say it is a good thing, while 58% of liberals share this view.

## VIII. Economic Outlook

While the country’s right direction numbers are at an all-time low, college students give the state of the nation’s economy the highest rating this survey has ever recorded. Despite this optimism, the bulk of students believe that the economy will worsen over the next 12 months, and they are less hopeful about their own financial standing than has been recorded in the past.

Feelings on the current state of the economy continue to rise and a record high (55%) proportion of students say excellent or good, an 11-point increase from last year. Seniors getting ready to enter the job market and business majors are among the most optimistic, with 62% and 67% respectively saying good/excellent. Trump voters also give the economy a high rating, with 68% saying good/excellent.

### State of the Economy



In a reversal from last year, white students are now more likely than students from other racial groups to rate the economy positively. Last year only 40% of white students rated the economy as excellent/good, while this year their rating rose to 59%. By contrast, the proportion of African Americans and Asians who rate the economy as excellent/good have all dropped, and are now at 46% and 49% respectively (compared with last year, at 54% and 62%).

Despite positive views about the current state of the economy, students are pessimistic about the direction it will be heading in over the next 12 months. Twenty-three percent (23%) of college students say the economy will get better, while 42% say it will get worse, and 35% say it will stay about the same. Faith in the economy is particularly low among those studying the social sciences and Democratic students (54% and 52% say will get worse respectively). Trump voters are one of the few groups who are positive (67% say will get better).

College students also are more negative when comparing their own finances with the financial standing of their parents. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of students see themselves being better off than their parents, a seven-point drop from 2010. More students see themselves as being worse off than their parents (14% in 2010, 31% today), while 30% say they will be the same (39% in 2010).

Despite this, students remain confident about their ability to find a job that is acceptable to them upon graduation; 28% are very confident that they will find a job (up four points from last year), and 68% say they are very or fairly confident with their job prospects, which is unchanged from last year. However, belying this confidence, 68% of students say they often worry about finding a good-paying quality job (on track with 69% last year).

In addition to worrying about finding a job, students also are worried about having too much student loan debt (56% total worry often) and not being able to afford healthcare (50% total worry often).

When it comes to the increased use of computers, robots, drones and artificial intelligence in the economy, 61% of college students view this as a good thing that will improve quality of life and create new job opportunities rather than a bad thing that will eliminate the need for many jobs that currently exist. Among those who view this as a good thing, only 18% worry about losing a job to a computer (compared with 26% of college students overall).

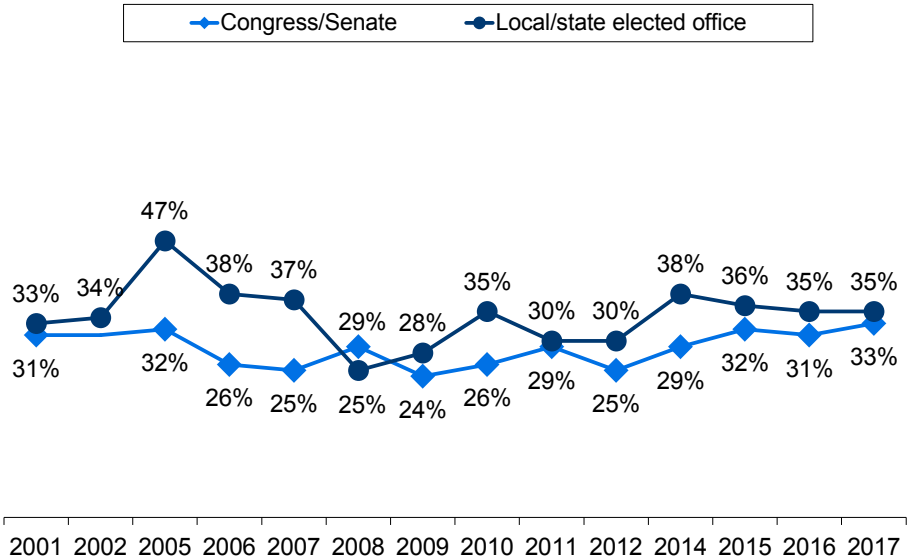
As has been true in prior years, students remain most interested in careers in the private sector (57% say very/fairly interested compared to 61% last year) and working for a not-for-profit community organization or foundation (44% very/fairly interested). The proportion of college students who are interested in working for the federal government has declined from 42% last year to 37% today, which continues a decline from 47% who were interested in government work in 2015. Republicans report being more interested in working for government compared with a year ago (up from 37% to 40%), while Democrats (from 44% down to 37%), and independents (from 43% down to 35%) are less interested in doing so.

## IX. Public Service

There is a slight uptick in interest in public service. Perhaps related, a higher proportion of students report that someone has talked to them about getting involved in politics or public service. A majority of college students have high interest in pursuing a two-year national service program upon graduation.

College students' interest in running for a federal elected office has increased by two points since last year, with 33% of students interested today. Interest in running for local or state office remains the same as it was last year (35%).

### Interest in Running for Office



College students have slightly increased enthusiasm about pursuing service-oriented experiences such as Teach for America, VISTA, and AmeriCorps than last year, up two points to 29% who have considered such programs. College students' involvement in community activities during their time in college, while unchanged, remains high at 68% who report that they have been involved.

The proportion of college students who say that someone has spoken to them about getting involved has increased from 44% last year to 49% today. Some of the largest increases in those who say someone has spoken to them about getting involved from last year include those studying the social sciences (47% last year to 65% this year), those who believe that we should become more active in world affairs (54% last year to 69% this year), and those who name the newspaper as their primary news source (55% last year to 63% this year).

When college students were asked how interested they would be in a program that provides them with a grant or financial assistance to help pay for their college tuition in exchange for two years of national service, 59% say they are very or fairly interested in this, up a point from last year. African American students and Hispanic students are more interested in this type of program, with 71% and 63% respectively saying that they are very or fairly interested.