



Subject: Volunteerism, Education, and the Shadow of September Eleventh: A Survey of American College Students
A Study Commissioned by the Leon & Sylvia Panetta Institute for Public Policy

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This report analyzes the findings of a survey conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Leon & Sylvia Panetta Institute for Public Policy. The study consists of 804 interviews among a representative sample of college students at four-year institutions of higher learning throughout the country. The project was conducted to investigate students' involvement in civics and politics, the effects of September 11 on their mindset, and their perceptions of volunteerism. Interviews were conducted by telephone from April 1 through April 3, 2002. The margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$ for the overall sample and higher for specific subgroups.

Introduction

American college students constitute a unique subset of the American public. They occupy a special demographic place, enjoying the institutional and intellectual benefits of higher education as well as a personal and academic freedom that allows them significant self-determination with regard to their future. The universe of investigation is made up of individuals who are bringing their personal and generational values into adulthood. Many of these values will be challenged in the academic world of higher education. Concurrently, students face personal challenges that result from their social independence as a newly independent adult with new responsibilities and opportunities.

The broad goal of the current study for the Panetta Institute is to explore the values of contemporary American college students, especially to unearth opinions related to September 11 and to understand how this event fits into their lives and perspectives. The findings have been divided into the following topics: the shadow of September 11, volunteerism and the value of community, the importance of education and teaching, and college students' agenda for America.

I. The Shadow of September 11

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, stirred deep feelings in many segments of the population and catalyzed a series of political and social events that affected the lives of many Americans. Numerous

signs of patriotism and national pathos emerged in the post-September 11 environment, and this change was apparent in the opinions and attitudes of the public following these events. For example, an NBC News-*Wall Street Journal* poll conducted by Hart-Teeter in December 2001 found that dealing with terrorism was suddenly among the public's top two political priorities for the nation. However, the durability of such changes remains questionable.

The current study was conducted nearly seven months after September 11, and one of its goals was to measure college students' opinions in the aftermath of these events and to understand the extent to which these events had changed their attitudes and behavior. We find that while 9/11 has indeed changed the lives of some American college students in measurable ways and has sparked new issues in the political debate, little has fundamentally changed in the lives of average college students. Even more surprising, college students' view toward their government and related issues has changed very little. To a great degree, we find a return to normalcy on college campuses.

The Temporary Nature of Behavioral Changes

College students feel that the behavioral changes the nation has witnessed since 9/11 are temporary, not long-term. Specifically, majorities feel that the following phenomena will return to normal: the bipartisanship we have seen in Congress (77%), people's willingness to volunteer and participate in community activities (71%), changes people have made in response to the terrorist threat (71%), the greater respect for government employees (63%), and the unity (62%) and patriotism (62%) now exhibited in our country. Only one change since that date is expected to endure over the long-term: people being profiled or discriminated against because of their ethnic background. A majority (52%) of students believe this change is here to stay, while 44% consider it temporary.

When we compare the attitudes of American college students with those of the general public, we find that students are more skeptical about the nature of the change in Americans' behavior. Looking again at the NBC News-*Wall Street Journal* poll from December, 62% of all Americans felt that the country's greater unity was a long-term change, and 60% felt likewise about Americans' renewed patriotism. Yet, about as many college students now feel that these changes are only temporary (62% in both cases). The differences in opinions are more striking for other issues. Whereas 53% of the American public felt that people's greater willingness to help others was permanent, only half as many (25%) college students currently agree. This comparison requires a caveat, however, because of the lapse of time between the two studies. Responses to this question are based upon opinions about the temporal nature of behavioral changes since 9/11, and they are time-sensitive. It is likely that the gap between these opinions has narrowed as we distance ourselves from that date.

No Change in Career Plans or Interest in Public Service

The survey includes several questions designed to explore more concrete ways in which September 11 might have altered the lives of college students. For example, we ask them whether the terrorist attack forced them to consider changing the direction of their careers, and only one in ten (9%) say that they have considered doing so. The most common change they are contemplating is switching their major: 18% volunteer that they already have done so or are thinking about doing so.

Interest in working for the government remains unchanged from one year ago. In March 2001, 57% of colleges students said that they were very, fairly, or just somewhat interested in working for the government, and that figure remains the same today. Overall, three in ten (30%) college students say that they are very or fairly interested in government work. Men (35%) are slightly more interested than women (27%), and Hispanics (38%) are more interested than blacks (22%) and whites (31%). Responses vary by region as well: students in the West (38%) and South (32%) are more likely to report interest than are students in the Northeast (28%) and Midwest (24%). Likewise, students from below-average-income families (36%) and students who identify themselves as Republicans (36%) are

also slightly more interested than average in government work.

Nor does 9/11 seem to have catalyzed interest in running for political office. Since last year, the proportion of college students interested in running for a local or state elected office remains steady: 33% of students in March 2001 said that they would be interested in running for city council or state legislator, while 34% claim such interest today. Similarly, the survey finds no increase in the proportion of students who report involvement in volunteer activities (see section two of the report).

"Our" Government vs. "the" Government

College students' perceptions of the government seem to have changed little over the past year. We ask students the following question: When you think and talk about government, do you tend to think of it more as *the* government or more as *our* government? About three in five (58%) say that they consider it more "the" government, whereas two in five (41%) think of it more as "our" government. In March 2001, those figures were 60% and 39%, respectively. We find some variation among subgroups, however. For example, African-American and Hispanic students more often think of government as "the" government by 71% and 69%, respectively. Partisan voting is also a factor in students' responses to this question. Two-thirds (67%) of students who intend to vote Democratic in the upcoming congressional elections say that they see it as "the" government, and one-third (32%) see it as "our" government. Among Republican voters, however, the distribution is reversed, 40% to 60%.

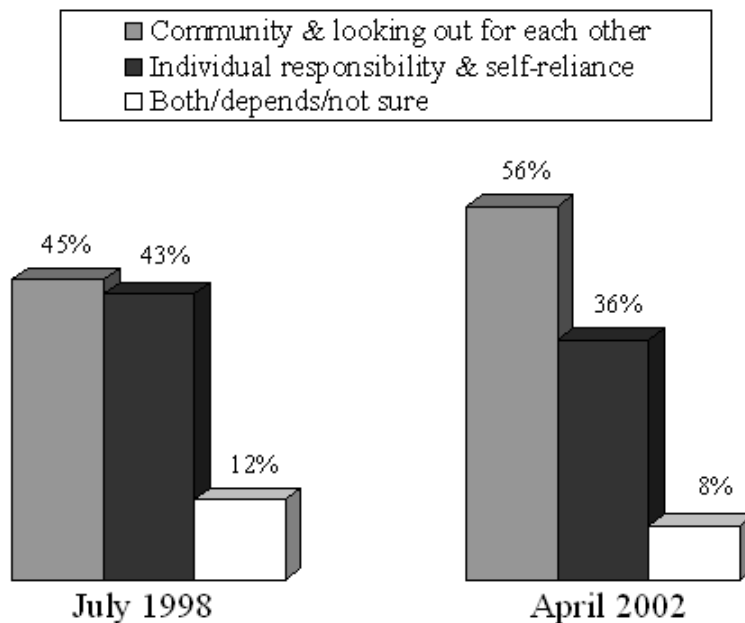
Changes in the Wake of 9/11

While it appears that 9/11 has not profoundly transformed the perspective or life plans of many college students, the survey does provide some evidence of attitude change. The first area where we notice some change is in the value of community versus the value of individualism. College students place significant importance on the value of "community" and looking out for each other. A 56% majority of students say that this value is more important than individual responsibility; only 36% disagree. The value placed on community may even have increased. In a July 1998 study, Hart Research found that the relative importance of these values was evenly split among college students, with 45% saying community was the more important value and 43% feeling that individual responsibility was more important. Whether this shift is a result of the events of September 11 remains uncertain, though the importance of community is clear. Those who say that they are very interested in working for a public-service organization (68%) are more likely than average (56%) to place a premium on community.

When we ask students about the overall moral climate of the country, seven in 10 say that it is medium (40%) or fairly strong (30%). The results of a Hart Research study among college students in September 2000 found significantly different results: just 49% felt that the moral climate was medium or fairly strong. At that time, almost half (46%) said that the moral climate of the country was fairly or very weak, while just half that many (23%) feel the same today. While we cannot be sure that 9/11 accounts for all of this change, it seems likely that young people have been impressed by their fellow citizens' response to the terror attacks. Interestingly, in the current study, half (49%) of all Hispanic college students feel that the current moral climate in America is fairly or very strong.

The Value Of Community

Which is the more important value in our country?



Another change caused by 9/11 is that addressing terrorism and homeland security have become more important elements in college students' agenda for America. These findings are reviewed in section four.

Since 9/11, many students also report a heightened interest in what the federal government does. Eight in 10 say that their interest has increased, including one in five (21%) who say it has increased a great deal. Students who identify themselves as Republicans are especially likely to report a greater interest (89%). Interest in campaigns and elections since 9/11 has increased somewhat less, with fourteen percent of students stating that their interest in campaigns and elections has increased a great deal, while a majority (56%) say that their interest has increased somewhat. Students in lower grades are more likely than upperclassmen to report a heightened interest in campaigns and elections, with 76% of freshmen and 63% of seniors saying that the events of September 11 have given them a greater interest.

Overall, it seems clear that 9/11 has not fundamentally changed the behavior, values, or career plans of many students. At the same time, it has given them a greater appreciation of the value of community, and perhaps heightened their interest in following public affairs.

II. Volunteerism and the Value of Community

Another goal of this study was to assess students' attitudes toward and experience with volunteerism. The Bush administration has recently voiced appeals for American citizens to volunteer in their communities and has promoted domestic and international service programs such as the Peace Corps, VISTA, and AmeriCorps. The study finds that students are personally involved and interested in volunteering in a variety of ways, yet they are largely unaware of the government's efforts to promote public service and volunteerism. Furthermore, they express little interest in government programs

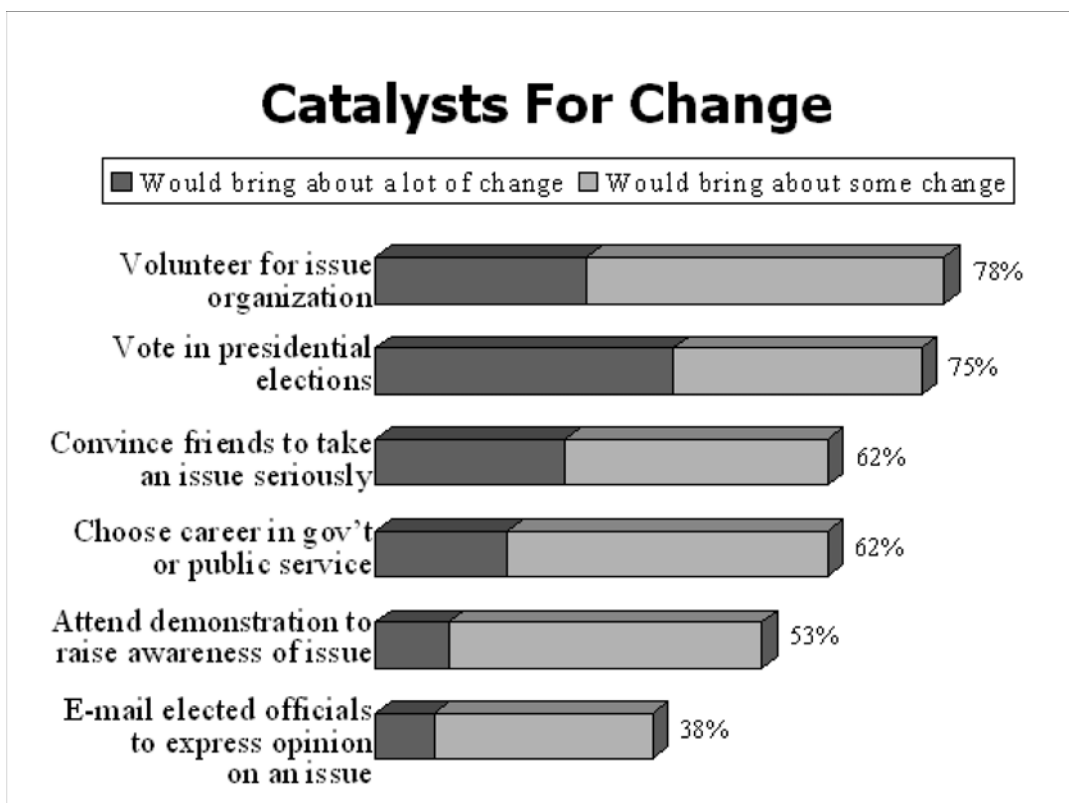
engaging in these activities.

Two-thirds (67%) of students say that during their time in college, they have been involved in activities to help their local communities, such as volunteering their time or helping to solve local community problems. This finding is no different from that of March 2001, when 68% of students said that they had engaged in such activities. Students majoring in the social sciences and humanities (74%) are more likely to have participated in community activities than are students in sciences and math (67%) or business and computer science (58%). African-American students report a higher than average rate of volunteerism, at 76%. Among those who have considered changing their careers after September 11, 84% say that they have participated in volunteer activities.

Catalysts for Change

American college students feel that volunteerism is an important catalyst for change. When presented with a series of activities that can effect change in society, volunteering topped the list: 78% say that volunteering with an organization that is concerned with a particular issue is a way to effect change. Voting in presidential elections places second, but it ranks first in the degree of change in which students feel it could make: 41% say that voting in presidential elections could bring about a lot of change, compared with 29% who say the same about volunteering. Students rank other activities as follows: convincing friends to take an issue more seriously (62%—26% a lot of change, 36% some change), choosing a career in government or public service (62%—18%, 44%), attending a demonstration to raise awareness of an issue (53%—10%, 43%), and e-mailing elected officials to express an opinion on an issue (38%—8%, 30%).

We would also note that with regard to nearly all of these approaches to making change, the proportion of students with confidence that needed change could be accomplished has decreased since 2001. This provides another indication that 9/11 has not oriented students toward public engagement in a new way.



Limited Knowledge of Governmental Programs

Despite widespread volunteerism among college students and a belief that this is an important catalyst for changing the world around them, there is little knowledge of government programs that promote volunteerism. When asked to assess how informed college students are about domestic and international service programs such as AmeriCorps, VISTA, and the Peace Corps, more than three-quarters of students surveyed respond that students are just somewhat (50%) or not (28%) informed. One in five (19%) say that college students are fairly well informed, but only 2% feel that students are very well informed. Students at schools in the Northeast (27%) are slightly more likely than students in other regions to believe that students are very or fairly well informed (South [22%], West [18%], and Midwest [17%]).

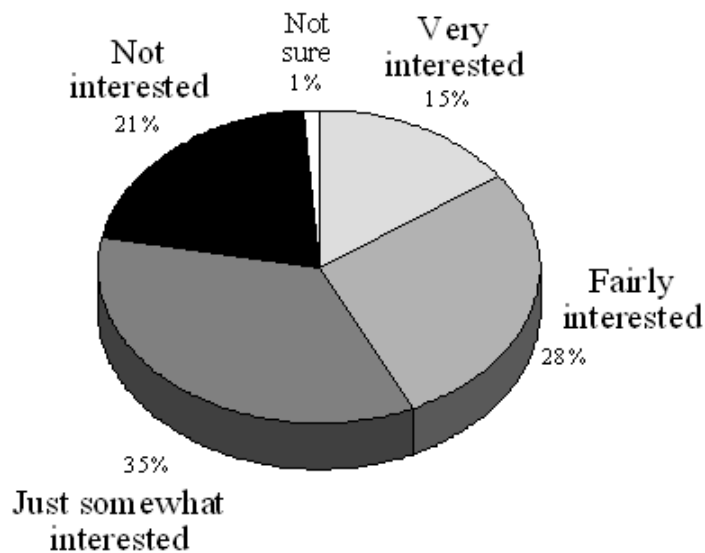
Furthermore, college students do not feel that increasing commitments to public service and volunteerism should be a very strong priority for the government. Half (47%) think that increasing this commitment should be a medium priority, and 15% feel that it should be a low priority.

Interest in Public Service

In a very encouraging finding, 43% of students say that they would be very (15%) or fairly (28%) interested in working for a public-service organization after graduating from college (about one-third say that they are just somewhat interested, and one-fifth that they are not interested at all). Interest in working for a public-service organization is significantly higher among Hispanic students, with 58% saying that they would be very or fairly interested in doing so. Interest also varies by party affiliation, as students who intend to vote Democratic (55%) are more interested than those who intend to vote Republican (34%). Notably, students who have considered changing their careers as a result of the terrorist attack show a strong interest in working with these organizations: 60% express interest in public-service work. Overall, women (46%) are slightly more interested than men (39%), and students in the social sciences (49%) are more interested than those in science and math (42%) and business and computer science (33%). In addition, students with a below-average household income are more interested than average in public service: 49% say that they are very or fairly interested.

Interest In Public Service

How interested would you be in working for a public-service organization after you graduate from college?



More specifically, the survey assesses students' interest in working with a variety of service organizations after college, including AmeriCorps, Habitat for Humanity, the Peace Corps, Teach for America, and VISTA. They express the most interest in working for Habitat for Humanity: 45% say that they are very or fairly interested in serving this organization. Teach for America places a close second at 39%, and is virtually tied for first (with Habitat for Humanity) among those students most interested in public service. There is significant interest in the Peace Corps (29%), but considerably less in AmeriCorps and VISTA, with a mere 18% and 10%, respectively, saying that they are very or fairly interested in working with these two programs.

Looking at subgroups, we find that women (53% very/fairly interested) are significantly more interested in working with Habitat for Humanity than are men (36%). Similarly, juniors and seniors are more interested in Habitat for Humanity than are underclassmen, and social science majors are more interested than science, business, or computer majors. Democratic students (38%) express more interest than Republican students (16%) in joining the Peace Corps. Students in the Northeast (50%) tend to be more interested in working with Teach for America than are students in the South (37%), Midwest (36%), and West (32%).

Promoting Service

To understand what factors might further pique students' interest in full-time public service after college, we ask them about a variety of incentives to participate in such work. Financial incentives are the most popular. Students say that receiving financial aid for college (80%) or college loan forgiveness (69%) would make them a great deal or fair amount more interested in public service; in fact, majorities (59% and 53%, respectively) say that these incentives would increase their interest a great deal. As one would expect, students with low or average household incomes are especially likely to say that such financial incentives would heighten their interest. Furthermore, three in five (58%) students would be more interested in public service if they received a stipend.

The most important non-financial incentive is a friend's involvement in a public-service program: 56% of college students believe that this would increase their own willingness to participate. Being encouraged to participate by a professor, mentor, or parent are less likely to increase students' interest in these programs, although a professor or mentor's suggestion (44%) is more influential than a parent's (36%).

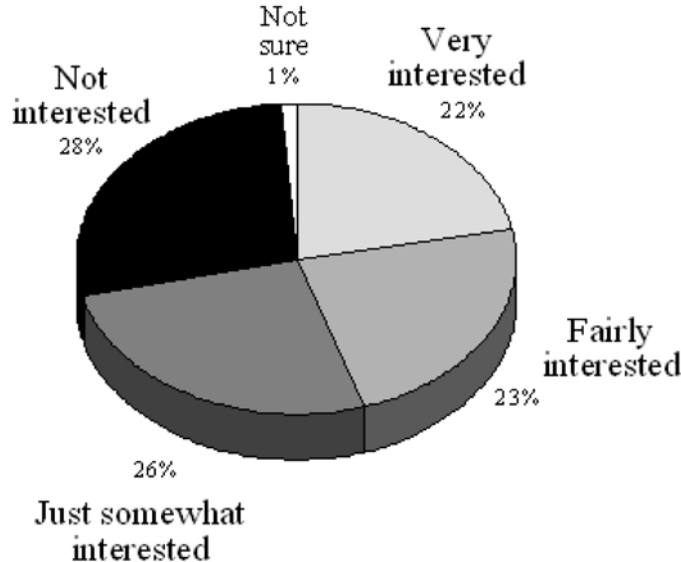
American college students' penchant for participating in community activities, the dearth of information on public-service organizations, and students' extreme interest in program incentives all make for a potentially successful marriage between college students and the programs that the Bush administration has been promoting as of late. Yet, a great deal of work is needed to meld these common interests.

III. The Importance of Education and Teaching

One area holds particular promise for attracting young people to public service—education. Nearly half of all students state that they are very (22%) or fairly (23%) interested in teaching as a profession. Among the most interested students are Hispanics, social science majors, and Westerners: 57% each say that they would be very or fairly interested in teaching after they graduate.

Interest In Teaching

How interested would you be in working as a teacher after you graduate from college?



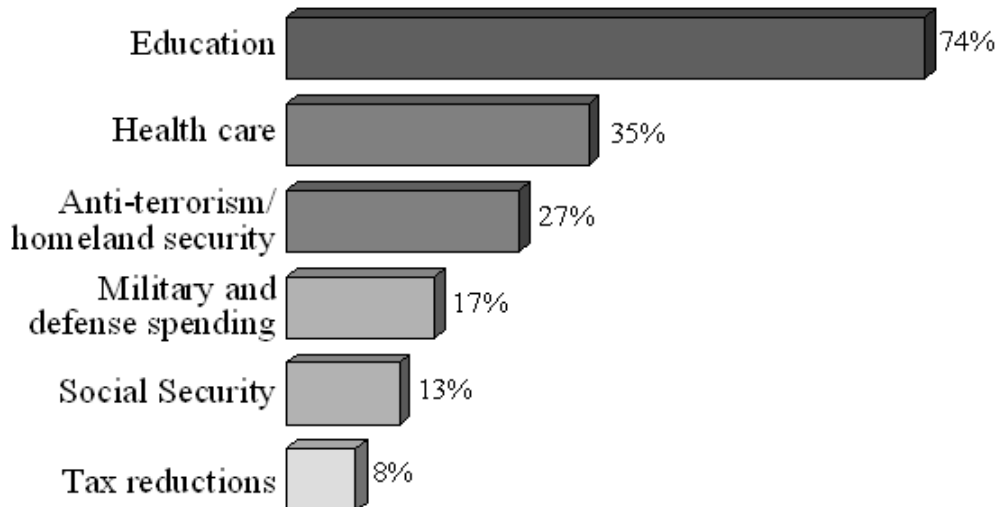
When we ask students about the benefits of teaching as a profession, a majority (55%) believe that improving people's lives is the biggest advantage of the job. Another quarter (24%), especially African Americans (35%), feel that working with children is the biggest benefit. Fifteen percent of all students say that the personal rewards of the profession is the biggest benefit, and 6% say the same about having summers off.

As for the disadvantages, low salary is clearly the biggest drawback of the profession, according to a three-in-five majority of students. This helps to explain the overwhelming support students give to increasing salaries for public school teachers to attract more qualified teachers (see section four). Other problems cited are little room for career advancement (14%) and a lack of prestige or rewards (10%).

The great importance of the education issue to college students becomes apparent when we ask them to think about the federal government's budgetary spending. Three in four (74%) cite education at the top of their list of priorities, more than twice that of the next-highest budgetary priority, health care, which is most important to only 35% of students. Despite the importance students attribute to anti-terrorism and homeland security in other survey questions, only three in 10 (27%) believe it should be one of the top two budgetary priorities.

Priorities For The Federal Budget

Which one or two areas are most important in terms of spending?



Poorly Performing Schools Are A Bigger Threat than Terrorism

Perhaps the most dramatic evidence of college students' deep concern about the state of public education emerges when we ask whether they think terrorism or poorly performing schools is the bigger threat to the future of the United States. A strong three-in-four (74%) majority say that poorly performing schools troubles them more, as opposed to 24% who worry more about terrorism. Students who say they intend to vote Republican are more likely than average to see terrorism as a more serious threat, though like the rest of students, a majority (66%) feels that poorly performing schools is a more significant threat. We find evidence throughout the survey that college students are adamant about the importance of education, but this particular finding - coming after September 11 - leaves little doubt that education has a privileged place in their hierarchy of concerns.

IV. College Students' Agenda for America

Homeland security and the fight against terrorism are very high priorities in the eyes of American college students. Almost three in four (72%) say that fighting terrorism should be a high or top priority for Congress and the President to address, and 65% say the same about homeland security. Presumably because of 9/11, students now attach much higher priority to strengthening the military and improving preparedness. Whereas 34% of students said last year that this was a high or top priority, now 52% feel that way - an 18-point increase. In contrast, student interest in forgiving third world debt has declined slightly (from 35% to 31% saying high priority), and their support for increasing foreign aid is rather tepid (42% high priority). It seems that the terrorist attacks have served to strengthen hawkish sentiments on college campuses more than leading students to favor a more generous approach to the developing world.

Even though students place great importance on the issue of terrorism, another is still more important to students: Four in five (79%) feel that the government should place a high or top priority on

increasing salaries for public school teachers to attract more qualified applicants. Given the current prominence of terrorism and homeland security, this relatively low-profile issue emerging as the highest priority proves yet again how much college students value education.

Other priorities for the national agenda are a mix of issues. Majorities of students believe that the following should be high or top priorities: providing assistance to low-income families with children (65%), promoting human rights abroad (61%), strengthening and preserving Social Security (60%), and strengthening regulations that protect workers' 401(k) and other retirement plans (53%).

Students' Suggested Priorities for Congress and the President*

	<u>Very top priority</u> %	<u>High priority</u> %	<u>Medium priority</u> %	<u>Low priority</u> %
Increasing salaries for public school teachers to attract more qualified teachers	30	49	19	2
Fighting terrorism	33	39	22	5
Homeland security	23	42	26	7
Providing assistance to low-income families with children	17	48	30	5
Promoting human rights abroad	19	42	31	7
Strengthening and preserving Social Security	12	48	33	6
Strengthening regulations that protect workers' 401(k) and other retirement plans	13	40	37	9
Strengthening the military and improving preparedness	17	35	34	13
Increasing foreign aid to poor countries	10	32	44	12
Paying down the national debt	10	32	41	16
Addressing global warming	10	31	36	21
Increasing commitment to public service and volunteerism	7	31	47	15
Expanding trade with other nations	6	31	42	18
Providing an across-the-board reduction in income taxes	8	24	44	21
Forgiving the debt of third-world nations	8	23	45	22

**This table has been ranked by the proportion who say very top or high priority.*

In looking at the agenda of college students, it is also interesting to note the relative importance of national issues compared with international issues. As one of the goals of the study is to ascertain college students' attitudes in the post-September 11 landscape, we ask them whether the problems their generation will face are more likely to be national or international in scope. Compared with a year ago, the results are now skewed more toward international issues. In March 2001, 37% of college students said that their generation would face more international problems, and 59% said that the problems would mostly be national ones. Today students are evenly divided: 46% anticipate the problems to be international, while 49% expect the problems to be national.

The War on Terrorism

American college students are generally supportive of the war on terrorism. A majority (57%) say that they mainly or totally support the Bush administration's approach to the war. Three in 10 (30%) say that they have mixed feelings about it, and about one in 10 (12%) are opposed. As with many other

issues in the survey, race and party identification are key variables in determining attitudes toward the war on terrorism. A majority of African Americans (65%) and Hispanics (51%) say that they have mixed feelings or oppose the war on terrorism. Almost as striking are differences based on students' intentions in the upcoming congressional elections. Students who intend to vote Republican are overwhelmingly supportive, as more than half (57%) say that they totally support the war on terrorism and an additional third (31%) say that they mainly support the war. Democratic students are reversed, with only 13% expressing total support for the war, 24% saying that they mainly support it, and 63% saying that they have mixed feelings or are in total opposition.

If one compares students' feelings about the war on terrorism with those of the general population, college students seem to have much more mixed feelings. The identical question was posed to the American public in the December 2001 NBC News-*Wall Street Journal* poll. At that time 62% of all adults totally supported the war on terrorism, while fewer than three in 10 (27%) students now say that they totally support the war. Similarly, 42% of students say that they have mixed feelings or oppose the war, compared to just 18% of the general public.

The survey also investigates the incidences of demonstrations on college campuses related to the war on terrorism. One-third of students report there has been a demonstration in opposition to the war on their campus (33%). However, a substantial 23% say that their campus has witnessed *pro-war* demonstrations, another signal that 9/11 has shifted the mood on at least some of the nation's traditionally anti-war campuses.

Trust in American Corporations

American college students are fairly confident that major corporations are conducting their businesses honestly and fairly. A majority (56%) say that they have a fair amount of confidence in American corporations, while 8% say that they have a great deal of confidence. Yet, a significant minority are not so confident. More than a quarter (27%) say that they have little confidence that corporations are conducting their business fairly, while one in 10 (9%) say that they have no confidence that they are doing so. Republican students (76%) are more likely to have confidence than are Democrats (61%) and independents (54%).

Media Consumption

The sources from which students get information about politics and civic affairs is rather diverse. About half (46%) say that television is their chief source, whereas a quarter get most of their information from either the Internet (26%) or their local newspaper (25%). Family and friends (19%) are also a significant source of information, as are campus newspapers (11%).

As for specific stories covered by news organizations, most students tell us that they paid close attention to news of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. More than three in four (78%) say that they followed this story very or fairly closely. Another development in the Middle East has also captured students' attention—the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (70%). Both these stories beat out the Winter Olympics and the NCAA basketball tournament, which placed third and fourth respectively on students' lists of stories followed, although majorities still followed both topics closely. In addition, half (48%) mention following the collapse of Enron very or fairly closely.

In a separate question, we ask students how closely they follow news about events in other parts of the world. Half (50%) say that they follow this news very or fairly closely, whereas the other half (50%) say that they follow it just somewhat or not closely at all. If we compare these results with those from a study of the general public (conducted by Hart Research for CARE, March 2002), we find that college students do not follow international news as closely as the rest of the American public. In that study, 78% of all voters said that they followed world events very or fairly closely.

2002 Congressional Elections

Students who say they are registered to vote were asked whether they intend to vote for the Republican or Democratic candidate in the upcoming congressional elections. At this point Democrats lead in the generic trial heat with 34%, while 27% vote Republican and a 39% plurality are undecided. While Democrats have an edge, many college student votes are clearly up for grabs in this election.