

The Candidates Go to College

George Bush, Bill Clinton beware: A new power of student voters may seal your fate on the road to the White House

Nobody paid much attention to voters like Nathaniel Beauchamp in 1988, the year a scant 36 percent of 18-to-24-year-olds went to the polls. Beauchamp, after all, was a member of one of the weakest voting blocks in the country, a group so disconnected from the political system that only one in five college-age students voted in state and local elections two years ago.

"Most of us feel we can't make a difference," says Beauchamp, a U. of South Florida graduate student. "The average 18-to-24-year-old doesn't watch the news. High school students can't find

the United States on a map. So I guess you could say politics don't play a big part in our lives."

In terms of voting, it certainly hasn't. In 1972, the first year 18-year-olds could vote, 49.6 percent of them cast their ballots. By 1988, the number of college-age voters had dropped 13.4 percent, more than twice the decline among all U.S. voters during the same period, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

But the times, Beauchamp says, are changing.

"More and more students are feeling they can make a change," he says. "They are starting to notice how things are messed up around them. And there are

more messages coming to them."

These are messages that candidates didn't bother sending in the past, says Cynthia Conrad, an assistant professor of public administration at the U. of Texas.

"The campaigns have tended to ignore people in that age group because there wasn't a big payoff," Conrad says. "They've been literally written off as wandering, non-voters."

But not this year.

"There seems to be more of a social conscience to get involved this year," Conrad says. "These people have a desire for change."

This may be the year 18-to-24-year-old voters force candidates to take notice of them, she says.

A U. *The National College Magazine* survey Aug. 24 of 1,052 college students on 41 campuses nationwide shows 86 percent of the students surveyed are registered to vote and 86 percent plan to vote.

Tyler Tysdal, president of the Georgetown U. Student Association, says students are starting to realize the value of their vote.

"In order for [the candidates] to pay attention, we have to vote," Tysdal says. "America right now has a feeling of desperation. Look at the budget deficit. Our past generations have taken out a charge account and we have to pay it off."

And that maxed credit card may have hit home this year for a lot of college students.

"I'm interested in the economy... because I'll be looking for a job," says Marciala Reyes, a senior at the U. of Illinois. "A lot of my friends are having trouble now finding a job."

Jeffrey Grasso, a junior at the U. of South Florida, is worried, too.

"As a college student, the economy concerns me the most so when I get out of college there will be a job for me," he says.

Enough college students, it seems, are having the same anxieties. The job market is the top issue for students responding to the U. survey.

In fact, college students are concerned about economic issues in general. Higher education, economic growth and health care follow the environment and abortion as subsequent issues most important to them.

EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE

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OF THE COLLEGE VOTE

Conrad says the candidates are starting to address new issues, ones important to college-age voters.

"These are issues they haven't really bothered with in the past," she says. "And that's a good indication."

It's a good indication indeed for students like Mitchell Cohen, a junior at North Carolina State U.

"There are a lot of issues that concern me like prayer in schools, helping people in our own country and homosexual rights," he says.

And though abortion is not a new issue to presidential elections, it's one 59 percent of the students surveyed say will affect their vote for president. Of the students surveyed, 17 percent consider themselves anti-abortion and 74 percent pro-choice.

"Abortion is a major factor," says Sandy Bost, a senior at Rutgers U. "I guess you could call it a litmus test of how I'll vote."

The U. survey indicates Clinton is leading among college students, with 53 percent in support of the Arkansas governor. About 23 percent plan to vote for Bush and 22 percent are undecided.

Ari Armstrong, a junior at Pepperdine U., is part of the 23 percent who selected Bush in the survey.

"I think Clinton's ideas are extremely destructive and I would hate to see him be president, so I'm voting for Bush as the lesser of two evils because I don't like what Bush has done either," he says.

But Reyes says Clinton appeals to her.

"From what I have read it seems like Clinton is a little more direct, taking a firmer position and offering a little more than George Bush on issues such as the economy."

In the end, experts hope college voters like Reyes will care enough to take their concerns to the polls, creating a strong student vote for the first time and setting a standard for the future.

"It depends on turnout," Conrad says. "If there is big turnout, a larger portion of 18-to-24-year-olds than ever before, in the future candidates will look at that group as a resource. A lot is riding on this election."

Jay Bennett, *The Daily Nexus*, U. of California, Santa Barbara, contributed to this story.

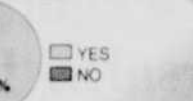
The Student Vote

1,052 students on 41 campuses were polled Aug. 24 and responded to the following questions:

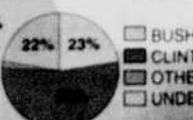
1 Are you registered to vote or will be registered by the Oct. 5 deadline?



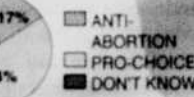
2 Do you plan to vote Nov. 3?



3 If yes, whom do you plan to vote for?



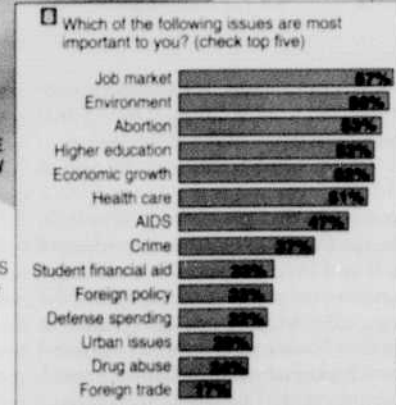
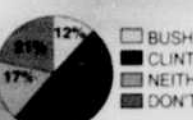
4 Do you consider yourself



5 Will this affect your vote for president?



6 Which candidate do you believe will look out more for your interests as a student in higher education?



This poll is not scientific. Percentages for each question are based on the number of respondents to that question.

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