



TO: Harvard University – Institute of Politics
FROM: John Della Volpe
DATE: October 20, 2003
RE: IOP Fall Survey -- U.S. College Students: Politically Untapped

Introduction

Working with members of the Institute of Politics, Schneiders / Della Volpe / Schulman conducted n=1,202 telephone interviews with college undergraduates from October 3 to October 12, 2003. The objectives of the survey were to measure and track opinions of college undergraduates regarding:

- Attitudes toward community volunteerism and political activism;
- Current plans on voting in the 2004 elections;
- Opinions and preferences in the 2004 Democratic primary and general election;
- Current events and the War in Iraq.

The margin of sampling error for this survey is ± 2.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence level, but is higher for subgroups.

Key Findings

1. President Bush could win the college vote despite opposition to his policies in Iraq

Compared with the general population, college students are:

- More likely to give the President a positive job rating;
- More likely to express trust in the President; and
- More supportive of the President in a match-up with a “generic” Democrat;

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and yet they are also:

- More critical of the President's Iraq policy;
- More likely to think that he has lied to them about that situation;
- More supportive of pulling all or some of our troops out of Iraq immediate.

These apparent contradictions appear to be based on college students' greater concern with the personal leadership qualities and experience of a President than with his positions on specific issues.

Compared to the benchmark established in the IOP Spring survey, the political standing of President Bush among college students appears to have remained steady and relatively strong over the last six months – despite concerns that many have about the Administration's policies in Iraq and the state of the U.S. economy.

Today, slightly more than three out of five (61%) college students still approve of the job that George W. Bush is doing as President – with 22 percent reporting that they “strongly approve.”

While the percentage of undergraduates who approve of the President's job performance has not changed since the April survey, there has been some downward movement from the “don't know” to the “disapprove” categories that should be monitored closely as the election approaches.

Table 1: George W. Bush Approval Rating

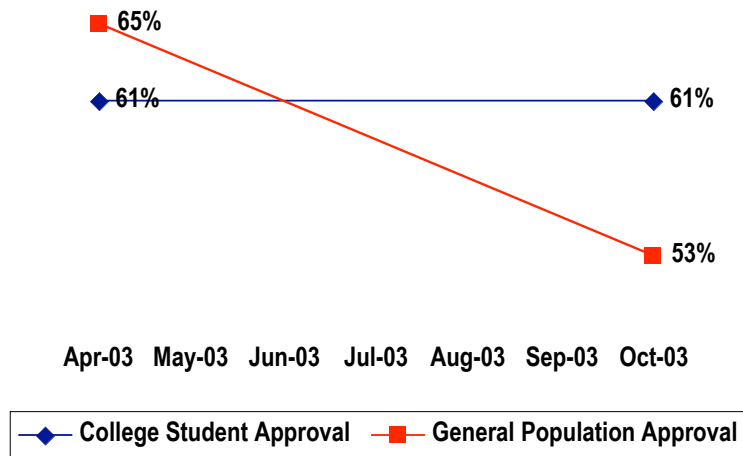
In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job that George W. Bush is doing as president?

	IOP October, 2003	IOP April, 2003
Approve	61%	61%
Disapprove	38%	32%
Don't know	2%	8%

While President Bush's job approval rating among college students has remained unchanged since April, 2003 – the Bush approval rating from the nation as a whole has decreased by 12 percentage points over that same time period.

**Figure 1: George W. Bush Approval Rating
Undergraduates vs. General Population**

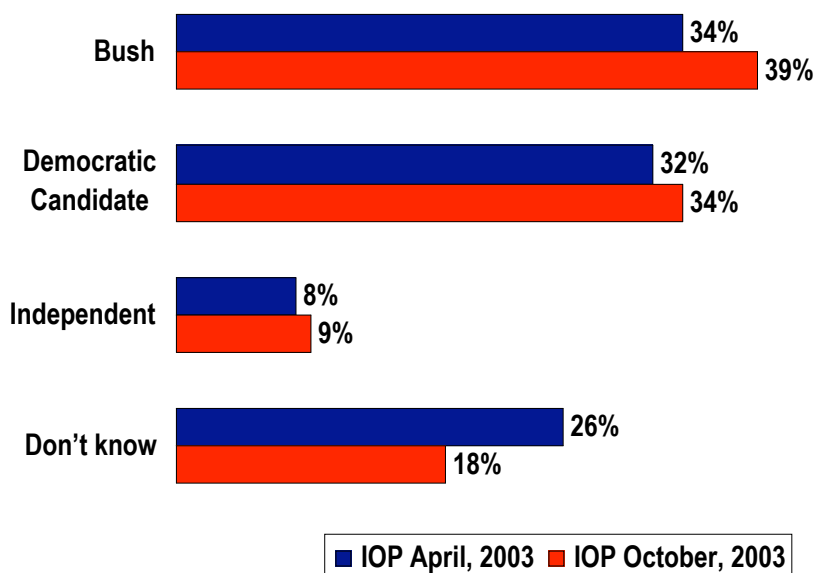
In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job that George W. Bush is doing as president?



In a similar trend, George W. Bush's percentage of the vote against generic Democratic and Independent candidates has remained relatively steady since April, 2003 -- while over the same time period his support among the general electorate has decreased by eight points, from a 13-point advantage (49%-36%) to a five-point advantage (49%-44%) against a generic Democratic candidate.

Figure 2: Bush vs. Generic Democratic and Independent Candidates

In 2004, do you think you will probably vote for President Bush, probably vote for the Democratic candidate, or probably vote for a candidate running from one of the independent parties?



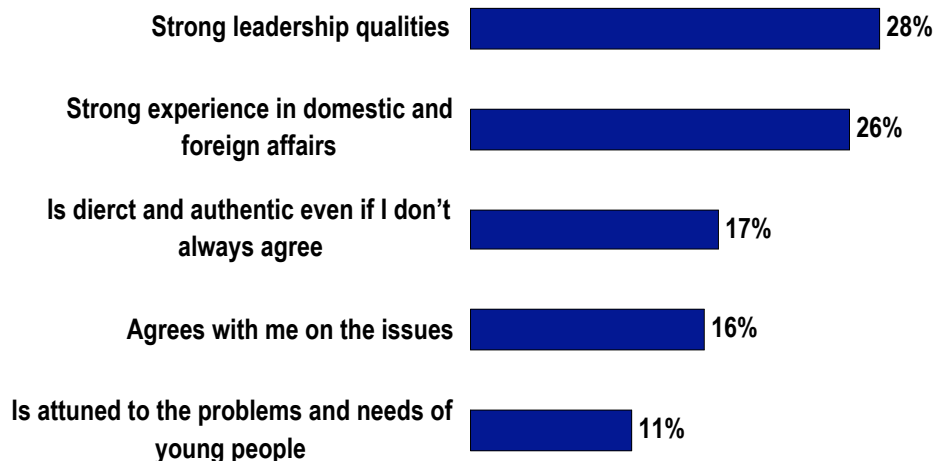
Significantly, overall trust in the President in the last year remains solid as well. Two-thirds (66%) of undergraduates report that they trust the President as much (49%) or more (18%) than they did a year ago. Thirty-two percent (32%) say that their trust has “gone down” over the same time period.

Currently, students seek leadership and experience in a President over a candidate who agrees with them on the issues

Continued support of the President, despite clear differences in opinion over his handling of the war in Iraq, perhaps is explained by the fact that leadership and experience are considered more important attributes than electing a President who agrees with them on the issues -- or is attuned to the needs of young people.

Figure 3: Qualities and Attributes Considered When Electing a President

Thinking about the qualities and attributes that people seek when electing a President – which of the following is most important to you?



Despite this solid base of support, by every measure in the survey, college students show significantly less support for the war in Iraq and the Administration's policies in its aftermath than the nation as a whole.

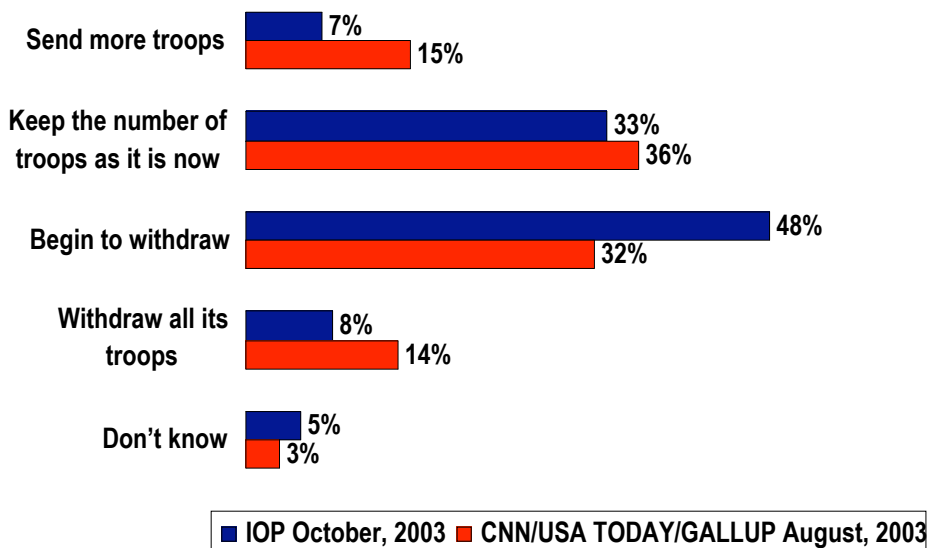
In April, when 78 percent of the nation was in support of the war -- 66 percent of college undergraduates indicated similar support (37% strongly, 29% somewhat).

Over the last six months, the base of support among undergraduates has decreased by eight percentage points (8%) as 58 percent (30% strongly, 28% somewhat) remain supportive with 37 percent (17% strongly, 20% somewhat) in opposition to the war in Iraq.

In addition, college students are significantly more likely than the nation as a whole to believe that the U.S. should either begin withdrawing some troops now or take them all out immediately. Summarizing the chart below, 40 percent of college students (compared to 51% of the nation) approve continuing the current peacekeeping policy, whereas a majority (56%) believes that the U.S. should begin withdrawing some or all troops now.

**Figure 4: Troops in Iraq
Undergraduates vs. General Population**

Which comes closest to your view about what the U.S. should now do about the number of U.S. troops in Iraq: The U.S. should send more troops to Iraq, the U.S. should keep the number of troops as it is now, the U.S. should begin to withdraw some troops, the U.S. should withdraw all its troops.

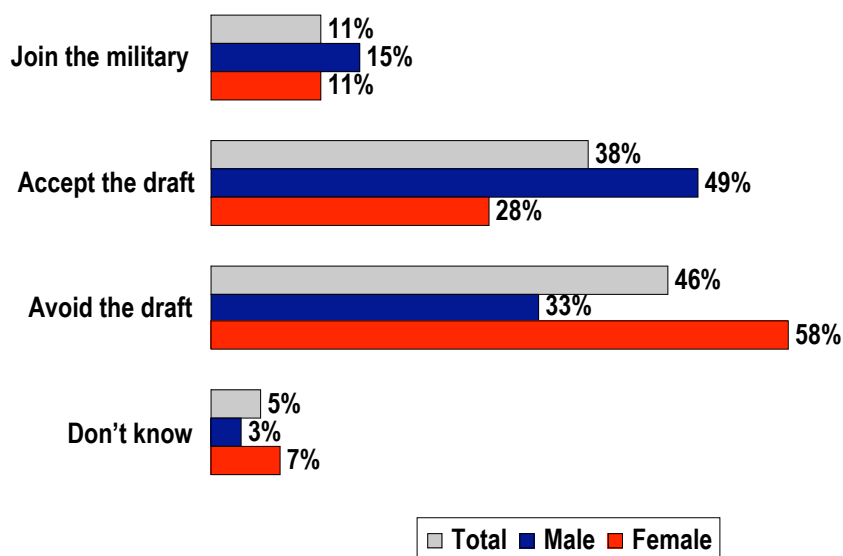


In a further indication of dissatisfaction toward the post-Iraq war policy, approximately half (46%) of all undergraduates indicate that they would “avoid the draft” if it were reinstated to “support the military campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places in the war on terror.” Slightly more than one in ten (11%) report that they would “join the military” if the draft were reinstated, while 38 percent say that they would “accept the draft.”

As we have seen in earlier studies, acceptance of the draft is largely driven by gender. While 58 percent of women would avoid the draft, one-third (33%) of men would also avoid the draft.

Figure 5: Acceptance of Draft by Gender

If it were decided that more troops were necessary to carry on the military campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places in the war on terror and a draft were reinstated – would you join the military, accept the draft, or avoid the draft?



Compared with a CBS News Poll taken between August 26-28, 2003, college students are somewhat less likely than adults nationwide to believe that members of the Bush Administration have been telling the entire truth about their dealing with Iraq and more likely to believe they have been hiding some or most of the truth.

Twelve percent (12%) of students believe that members of the Bush Administration have been telling the entire truth and 87 percent believe that the Administration has been hiding some things (66%) or mostly not telling the truth (21%).

Table 2: Bush Administration and Openness with American People Concerning Iraq

When it comes to their dealing with Iraq, do you think members of the Bush Administration have been telling the entire truth, usually telling the truth but hiding some things, or have they been mostly not telling the truth?

	IOP October 2003	CBS News August 2003
Telling entire truth	12%	17%
Hiding some things	66%	61%
Mostly not telling the truth	21%	19%
Don't know	2%	3%

In addition to concern over the direction of the war in Iraq, undergraduates also appear anxious about the state of the economy. The percentage of students citing the economy as their biggest concern overall has grown from seven to 17 points over the last year – and more than 70 percent believe that it will be difficult for students in their class to find a permanent job upon graduation.

2. *Students poised to become active in the 2004 Presidential campaign (if asked)*

As in the April survey, more than four in five (82%) college students report that they will definitely (56%) or probably (26%) vote in the general election for President. Democrats (87%) and Republicans (87%) are expected to vote in roughly equal numbers, with Independents (80%) slightly less likely than their peers to vote.

Twenty-one percent (21%) of all students report that they have participated in a government, political or issues-based organization, an increase of seven percentage points (7%) since 2002. Not surprisingly, students that definitely plan to vote in the 2004 presidential election are much more likely to have participated in a political organization (29%) than students that do not plan to vote in 2004.

The percentage of students that have attended a political rally or demonstration peaked at 35 percent (currently at 26%) at the time of the Spring 2003 survey – likely due to the frequency of protests regarding the war in Iraq.

The groups of students most likely to have attended a political rally are also those more likely to vote against President Bush, opposed to the war in Iraq, and think that things in the country are currently on the wrong track.

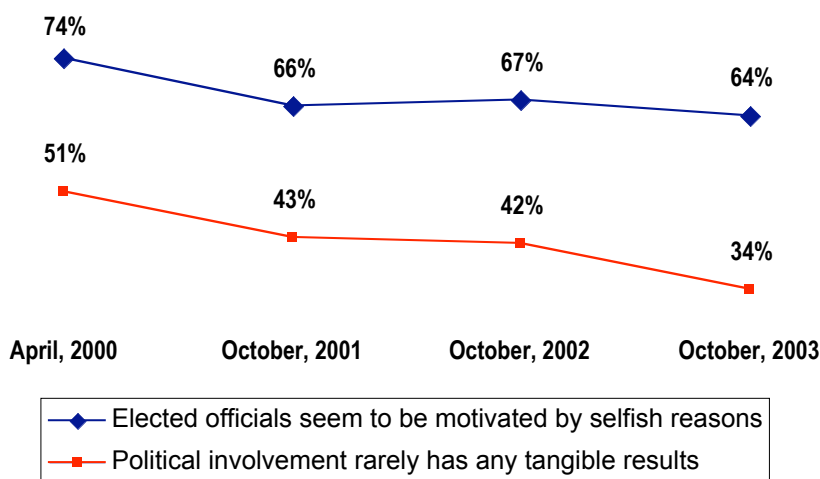
Overall, a significant number of college students are poised to become active in the political process this election season. For example:

- 65 percent of students indicate a willingness to attend a rally or demonstration if asked by a friend or peer;
- 64 percent of students said that they are either very (15%) or somewhat (49%) likely to volunteer on campus if the candidate they were supporting asked them. **Asked of Democrats only due to contested primary*

It is encouraging that as levels of political activism have begun to rise, two major attitudinal barriers to engagement have steadily declined since the initial IOP survey was taken in the Spring of 2000.

Figure 6: Barriers to Political Entry

Percentage of Students Who Agree with the Following Statements

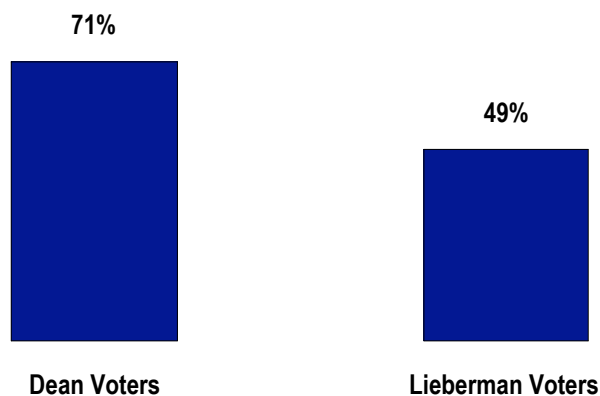


One possible method to generate additional student involvement in a political campaign is the use of on-line communication tools, such as the blog. A majority of students (58% of Democrats and 53% of Republicans) say that the ability to communicate directly with a favored campaign makes them more likely to become involved with that campaign.

Among the Democratic candidates tested in the survey, the campaign of Howard Dean is comprised of the most committed supporters. In the survey, Governor Dean (16%) and Senator Lieberman (17%) are in a statistical tie for first place among Democratic voters. Wesley Clark receives nine percent (9%), followed by Al Sharpton (8%), John Kerry (6%), John Edwards (5%), Carol Mosley-Braun (4%), Dick Gephardt (3%) and Dennis Kucinich (2%). Thirty-one percent (31%) of the Democrats in the survey were undecided.

**Figure 7: Likelihood to Volunteer on Campus in Democratic Campaign
by Dean and Lieberman Voters**

If the campaign (you are supporting) called and asked you to volunteer on campus, would you be very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely or not at all likely to volunteer?



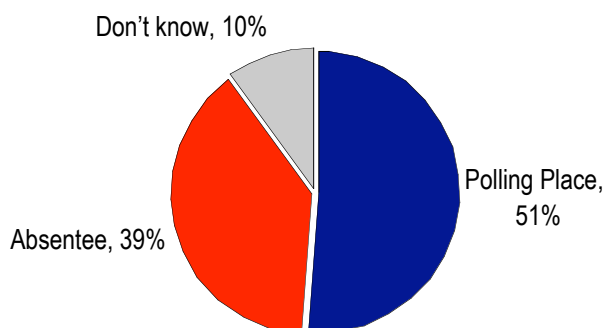
3. *One quarter of students who plan on voting don't know how*

In an effort to better gauge the likelihood of student voting in 2004, some additional questions dealing with the mechanics of the process were added to the Fall survey.

Fifty-one percent (51%) of students planning to vote said that they would do so at their local polling precinct, 39 percent reported that they would vote via an absentee ballot, and 11 percent were unsure.

Figure 8: Preferred Voting Method

Do you plan on voting in your polling place or do you plan on casting an absentee ballot?



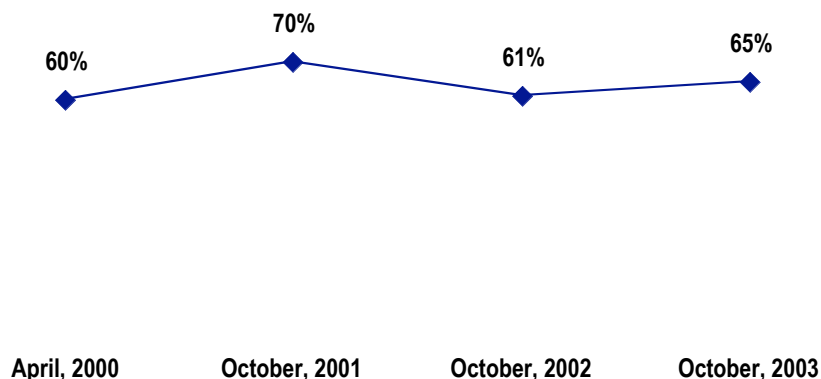
However, of those who indicate a willingness to vote – one-quarter (26%) say that they don't know or "aren't sure" where their polling place is (19%) or how to vote by absentee ballot (34%). The biggest single predictor of those who are unsure of how to vote is age. Forty-two percent (42%) of first-year students under the age of 18 are unsure or don't know how to vote.

4. *Level of community activism remains strong among college students – community involvement seen as preferred method of public service*

One of the most consistent findings of our research dating back to the Spring of 2000 has been that a large majority of college students consistently give up their free time to volunteer in their communities. Today, 65 percent of all college students report that they have volunteered for community service at least once in the last year – with 74 percent of those indicating that they volunteer at least once per month.

Figure 9: Level of Community Activism

Have you volunteered for community service in the last 12 months?
Percent indicating “yes.”



The level of commitment for community service is solid throughout all demographic groups in the survey and is not contingent upon political ideology, race, religion or gender.

Although there are several indications throughout this research that political activism and involvement is on the rise, students continue to overwhelmingly choose to affect change in their local communities, rather than in the political arena. Eighty-five percent (85%) of students still agree with the assertion that “volunteering in the community is easier than volunteering in politics.”

Looking ahead to the future, students plan to continue serving their communities – with 75 percent saying that they plan to be more active in their community than their parents.