

# Young Americans Are Leaning Left, New Poll Finds

By [ADAM NAGOURNEY](#) and MEGAN THEE

Published: June 27, 2007

Young Americans are more likely than the general public to favor a government-run universal health care insurance system, an open-door policy on [immigration](#) and the legalization of gay marriage, according to a New York Times/CBS News/MTV poll. The poll also found that they are more likely to say the war in Iraq is heading to a successful conclusion.

The poll offers a snapshot of a group whose energy and idealism have always been as alluring to politicians as its scattered focus and shifting interests have been frustrating. It found that substantially more Americans ages 17 to 29 than four years ago are paying attention to the presidential race. But they appeared to be really familiar with only two of the candidates, Senators [Barack Obama](#) and [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#), both Democrats.

They have continued a long-term drift away from the [Republican Party](#). And although they are just as worried as the general population about the outlook for the country and think their generation is likely to be worse off than that of their parents, they retain a belief that their votes can make a difference, the poll found.

More than half of Americans ages 17 to 29 — 54 percent — say they intend to vote for a Democrat for president in 2008. They share with the public at large a negative view of President Bush, who has a 28 percent approval rating with this group, and of the Republican Party. They hold a markedly more positive view of Democrats than they do of Republicans.

Among this age group, Mr. Bush's job approval rating after the attacks of Sept. 11 was more than 80 percent. Over the course of the next three years, it drifted downward leading into the presidential election of 2004, when 4 of 10 young Americans said they approved how Mr. Bush was handling his job.

At a time when Democrats have made gains after years in which Republicans have dominated Washington, young Americans appear to lean slightly more to the left than the general population: 28 percent described themselves as liberal, compared with 20 percent of the nation at large. And 27 percent called themselves conservative, compared with 32 percent of the general public.

Forty-four percent said they believed that same-sex couples should be permitted to get married, compared with 28 percent of the public at large. They are more likely than their elders to support the legalization of possession of small amounts of marijuana.

The findings on gay marriage were reminiscent of an exit poll on Election Day 2004: 41 percent of 18-to-29-year-old voters said gay couples should be permitted to legally marry, according to the exit poll.

In the current poll, 62 percent said they would support a universal, government-sponsored national health care insurance program; 47 percent of the general public holds that view. And 30 percent said that "Americans should always welcome new immigrants," while 24 percent of the general public holds that view.

Their views on [abortion](#) mirror those of the public at large: 24 percent said it should not be permitted at all, while 38 percent said it should be made available but with greater restrictions. Thirty-seven percent said it should be generally available.

In one potential sign of shifting attitudes, respondents, by overwhelming margins, said they believed that the nation was prepared to elect as president a woman, a black person or someone who admitted to having used marijuana. But they said that they did not believe Americans would elect someone who had used cocaine or someone who was a Mormon.

Mr. Obama has suggested that he used cocaine as a young man. [Mitt Romney](#), the former governor of Massachusetts and a candidate for the Republican nomination, is a Mormon.

By a 52 to 36 majority, young Americans say that Democrats, rather than Republicans, come closer to sharing their moral values, while 58 percent said they had a favorable view of the Democratic Party, and 38 percent said they had a favorable view of Republicans.

Asked if they were enthusiastic about any of the candidates running for president, 18 percent named Mr. Obama, of Illinois, and 17 percent named Mrs. Clinton, of New York. Those two were followed by [Rudolph W. Giuliani](#), a Republican, who was named by just 4 percent of the respondents.

The survey also found that 42 percent of young Americans thought it was likely or very likely that the nation would reinstate a military draft over the next few years — and two-thirds said they thought the Republican Party was more likely to do so. And 87 percent of respondents said they opposed a draft.

But when it came to the war, young Americans were more optimistic about the outcome than was the population as whole. Fifty-one percent said the United States was very or somewhat likely to succeed in Iraq, compared with 45 percent among all adults. Contrary to conventional wisdom, younger Americans have historically been more likely than the population as a whole to be supportive of what a president is doing in a time of war, as they were in Korea and Vietnam, polls have shown.

The nationwide telephone poll — a joint effort by The New York Times, CBS News and MTV — was conducted from June 15 to June 23. It involved 659 adults ages 17 to 29. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus four percentage points for all respondents.

The Times/CBS News/MTV Poll suggests that younger Americans are conflicted in their view of the country. Many have a bleak view about their own future and the direction the country is heading: 70 percent said the country was on the wrong track, while 48 percent said they feared that their generation would be worse off than their parents'. But the survey also found that this generation of Americans is not cynical: 77 percent said they thought the votes of their generation would have a great bearing on who became the next president.

By any measure, the poll suggests that young Americans are anything but apathetic about the presidential election. Fifty-eight percent said they were paying attention to the campaign. By contrast, at this point in the 2004 presidential campaign, 35 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds said they were paying a lot or some attention to the campaign.

Over the last half century, the youth vote has more often than not gone with the Democratic candidate for president, though with some notable exceptions. In 1984, [Ronald Reagan](#) won his second term as president by capturing 59 percent of the youth vote, according to exit polls, and the first President George Bush won in 1988 with 52 percent of that vote. This age group, however, has supported Democratic presidential candidates in every election since.

The percentage of young voters who identified themselves as Republican grew steadily during the Reagan administration, and reached a high of 37 percent in 1989. That number has declined ever since, and is now at 25 percent.

“I think the Democratic Party is now realizing how big an impact my generation has, and they’re trying to cater to that in some way,” Ashley Robinson, 21, a Democrat from Minnesota, said in an interview after she participated in the poll. “But the traditional Republican Party is still trying to get older votes, which doesn’t make sense because there are so many more voters my age. It would be sensible to cater to us.”

That a significant number of respondents said they were enthusiastic about just two of the candidates — Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton — to a certain extent reflects that both candidates have been the subject of a huge amount of national attention and have presented the country with historic candidacies. Mr. Obama would be the first black president and Mrs. Clinton the first woman. Other candidates could begin drawing attention from this group as the campaign takes a higher platform.

More important, though, at least for Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Obama is the impression this group has of them. In the poll, 43 percent of respondents said they held an unfavorable view of Mrs. Clinton, a number that reflects the tide of resistance she faces nationwide. By contrast, only 19 percent said they had an unfavorable view of Mr. Obama.