



THE TARRANCE GROUP

MEMORANDUM

To: The Center for Democracy and Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government
The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

From: Lake Snell Perry & Associates
The Tarrance Group

Subject: Findings from a Recent National Survey Among 15-25 Year Olds¹

Date: January 15, 2004

POLITICALLY UP-FOR-GRABS

American youth are nearly evenly split when it comes to relating to political parties, and perhaps of greatest importance, most currently say they are independents. *They are, clearly, susceptible to appeals from both political parties as they are only now developing political opinions and few are drawing strong partisan conclusions.*

- Overall, 32 percent say they are Democrats, including 12 percent who are strong Democrats. Comparatively, 28 percent identify as Republicans, including 8 percent who are strong Republicans. A quarter of youth are independents (25 percent), and 15 percent say they do not know which party they identify with.
- Democratic partisanship increased slightly from last cycle, while Republican partisanship held steady. Most movement toward partisanship from last cycle to now is driven by groups moving toward the Democratic Party; which is not surprising given the recent focus on the Democratic Presidential Primaries.
- Those most likely to move Democratic include students, younger women, and married women. Those most likely to move toward identifying as Republicans include older youth – especially older men, white men, and married men.

¹ Methodology: Lake Snell Perry & Associates and The Tarrance Group designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached 1,000 people between the ages of 15 and 25. The survey was conducted from November 17th through the 24th, 2003. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-3.1%.

Other demographic trends include:

- ***There is a significant gender gap. Democrats have a +7 percentage point gap among women (36 percent of women are Democrats compared to 29 percent of men), while they have a -9 percentage point gap among men (32 percent of men are Republican compared to 23 percent of women).*** These differences, however, are smaller than they are among older voters. Young men and women equally identify as independents (24 percent and 25 percent, respectively).
- ***Age matters as well.*** Not surprisingly, the youngest cohort – those ages 15 to 17 – is the least partisan (26 percent independent, 19 percent Republican, 16 percent Democrat), but it should be noted that most 15-17 year olds do not know which party they identify with (39 percent). Among youth who are old enough to vote, 40 percent of men age 23-25 are Republican, compared to 37 percent of women who are Republican in that same age group. Among all 23-25 year olds partisanship is strongest; 39 percent are Republican and 36 percent are Democrat.
- ***Racial and ethnic differences are not as large among young people as they are among older voters. In some areas young people reflect older members of their ethnic groups, but the high number of youth who do not know what party they identify with creates strong opportunities to change the traditional patterns.*** Latino youth reflect youth overall: 31 percent Democrat, 25 percent independent, 24 percent Republican (21 percent do not know). African American partisanship stands at 43 percent Democratic, 16 percent Republican, 23 percent independent and 19 percent do not know. White youth divide at 30 percent Democratic, 31 percent Republican, and 25 percent independent (14 percent do not know).
- ***Married youth are among the most likely to be partisan and gender differences are also reinforced here.*** Fifty-two percent of married men are Republican (27 percent Democrat) compared to 41 percent of married women who are Democrats (39 percent Republican). Unmarried women are strongly Democratic (35 percent Democrat, 20 percent Republican), while unmarried men are equally Democratic and Republican (29 percent, each).
- Frequent churchgoers (36 percent Republican) and Born-Again Christians (40 percent Republican) are much more likely to be Republican.
- The most Democratic region is the Mountain Region (45 percent Democrat, with a sample size caution), while the most Republican region is the East South Central area (42 percent Republican).

Not surprisingly, partisans of both parties are more likely to register to vote. Overall, 77 percent of Democratic youth are registered, compared to 83 percent of Republican youth and only half of independent youth (56 percent). Among those who are registered to vote 42 percent are Democrats, 37 percent are Republicans, 19 percent are independent. Not surprisingly, more than a third of unregistered youth consider themselves independent (36 percent), 30 percent are Democrat, and only 17 percent are Republican.

ENGAGEMENT AND EFFICACY

Given the election year, it is not surprising that there is an increase in voter registration. Last cycle, 66 percent of youth were registered to vote, this year 70 percent are registered to vote. Registration is up slightly among Republicans (83 percent now, 76 percent last cycle), and has remained steady among Democrats (77 percent now, 78 percent last cycle) and independents (56 percent now, 58 percent then). Three in four men are registered (74 percent), while only two in three women are registered (66 percent). Youth are less likely this year than last cycle to think they personally can make a difference in their community. On the other hand, they hold consistent feelings on the importance of voting and are slightly more likely to be registered to vote this year than last cycle.

As the table below shows, 38 percent of youth think they can personally make a difference in their community, including only 8 percent who feel they can make a great deal of difference.

<i>Thinking about the problems you see in your community, how much difference do you believe YOU can personally make in working to solve problems you see...</i>	2002 Cycle	2004 Cycle
A great deal	11	8
Some	35	30
TOTAL CAN	46	38 [-8]
TOTAL CANNOT	52	62 [+10]
A little	31	34
Almost no difference	17	19
No difference at all	7	8

Conversely, almost two-thirds (62 percent) doubt they can make a difference. Efficacy is down 8 percentage points from last cycle when 46 percent said they could make a difference and 52 percent said they could not. It has decreased the most among men age 21-22 (from 49 percent to 31 percent), white men (48 percent to 38 percent), and conservatives (from 54 percent to 36 percent).

Other data in this year's survey reflects further that the mood of America's youth has changed. And, while it is not fair to say it is a dark mood, it is fair to say young people continue to have questions about the direction of the country and doubt that there are good plans in place to solve our problems. ***Youth are less trusting of the government now than they were last cycle, and this lack of faith in the government may contribute to their own doubts that they can be effective in addressing their community's problems.*** Their cynicism remains unabated.

There is little variation between races (Latinos 39 percent can make a difference, African Americans 37 percent, whites 40 percent). Democrats are slightly more likely than Republicans or independents to believe they can make a difference (42 percent, 37 percent, 35 percent, respectively); and women are more likely than men (41 percent compared to 35 percent).

It appears that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, along with the continuing war on terrorism, have contributed to an increase in parent-child communication on political and governmental issues. Last cycle, only 50 percent said they often or sometimes spoke with their parents about politics, government, and current affairs (40 percent did not regularly, including 19 percent never). Today, 59 percent say they do so often or sometimes (40 percent do not regularly do so, including 9 percent never). The largest differences between this year and last cycle exist among Democrats and Republicans. Last cycle, Republicans were more likely to discuss issues with parents (60 percent Republican often or sometimes, 54 percent Democratic), this year Democrats are slightly more likely (Democrats 70 percent often or sometimes, Republican 65 percent) – but both groups have experienced an increase. Liberals, churchgoers, and independents have also seen an increase in topical discussions with parents. By contrast, Latinos, and non-college youth are among the most likely to show a decrease.

ISSUES- WHAT YOUTH CARE ABOUT

More than ever, America's young people are reflecting the same concerns as older adults. One in five young people express concern with jobs and the economy (20 percent) and one in seven (14 percent) are concerned with the war in Iraq (11 percent) or terrorism (3 percent). Other volunteered issues include drug use (9 percent), crime and violence (8 percent), the quality of public schools (7 percent), and having secure health care (5 percent). The economy is clearly a dominant issue, especially among young men (men 24 percent concerned, women 16 percent concerned). Men age 21-22 are the most economically concerned demographic group (37 percent), followed by non-college graduate men (28 percent), Democratic men (28 percent), and married men (27 percent). Women's concerns are more diffuse and this is especially true of their economic concerns where other research tells us they see health care as an economic issue as well as a family issue.

Not surprisingly, the youngest women cohort (age 15-17) is less concerned with the economy and jobs (only 9 percent volunteer the issue), and instead the war in Iraq (19 percent) and drug use (14 percent) dominate their issue concerns. ***White youth and African American youth share similar concerns (both place the economy first: 21 percent and 26 percent, respectively), while Latino youth weigh the economy and the war in Iraq equally (14 percent and 13 percent, respectively).***

When asked slightly differently, young people rate the creation of good paying jobs as their top issue and voting concern. That issue is followed closely by access to affordable health care and college, and the war in Iraq and safety from terrorism. The table below illustrates how youth rank key issues.

<i>ISSUE: I would like you to rate each issue on a scale from 0 to 10.</i>	Something You Care About	When Deciding to Vote
The creation of good paying jobs	9.2	9.0
Access to affordable college and higher education	8.9	8.7
Access to affordable health care	8.5	8.2
The war in Iraq	8.3	8.2
Safety from terrorism	8.2	8.0
Drug and alcohol use	7.9	7.6
Taxes	7.8	7.7
Tolerance for those who are different	7.8	7.5
Discrimination and prejudice	7.7	7.8
Gun violence	7.6	7.5
Sexual health issues like HIV and AIDS	7.5	7.3
Issues of morality	7.5	7.4
The growing federal deficit	7.3	7.2
Retirement security	7.3	6.9
The environment	7.3	7.1
Teen pregnancy	6.9	6.9
Abortion	6.8	6.7
Privacy for things like regulating the Internet/email	6.4	6.1
Gay and lesbian issues	5.6	5.5

- Youth who rate the creation of good paying jobs first include non-college graduates (9.3 concern), working men and women (9.3 and 9.4 concern, respectively), independents (9.4 concern), parents (9.4 concern) and Latinos (9.4 concern).
- Women (9.1 concern) – especially women age 15-17 (9.2 concern) and age 21-22 (9.3 concern) – and working students (9.3 concern) are particularly concerned with access to affordable college.
- Health care seems to be a larger concern among older youth and those who are likely family providers: women age 21-25 (9.0 concern), part-time workers (9.1 concern), and parents (9.2 concern).
- Iraq ranks highest as an issue among Independent men and Democratic women (8.6 concern, each), Latinos (8.8 concern), and non college graduates with a post-high school education (8.7 concern)

Overall, there is little variance between the ratings young people give to the issues they care about and the issues they will use as voting factors; and the rank order is relatively consistent. It is fair to say that the issues young people are passionate about are the same issues they use when deciding how to vote or who to support. Clearly, the economic concerns including health care and affordable college rank at the top. Iraq and terrorism rank a close second. These issues dominate the issue agenda. *Young people are expressing doubt about the direction and solvency of these problems. On the top issues (the war and the economy) it is now less likely that a candidate needs to express different messages to attract support from young people.*

READY, IF ASKED TO VOLUNTEER

Young people are ready to work on issues, if asked. Overall, 54 percent of young people say they would be either very likely (15 percent) or somewhat likely (38 percent) to volunteer on an issue important to them, while slightly more than a third (38 percent) said they would be unlikely, though only 13 percent would be very unlikely to do so. Women are more likely than men to volunteer to work on an issue (58 percent likely compared to 49 percent), and women drive many of the other demographic groups who are more likely – women age 15-17 (62 percent) and age 21-22 (59 percent) and Democratic women (63 percent). Frequent churchgoers and Born-Again Christians are also among the most likely to volunteer (65 percent and 68 percent, respectively). Not surprisingly, both strong Republicans and strong Democrats (64 percent and 69 percent, respectively) are more likely to volunteer than their less partisan colleagues (weak Republicans 47 percent, weak Democrats 51 percent).

###