



College Students and the Republican Party:
An In-depth Analysis

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First Release

Written Report

[Data Tables Here](#)

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I. Executive Summary

This study offers an in-depth assessment of how college students view the Republican Party. To date, the study has surveyed 1,000 college students from schools across the country, asking students which specific policies of the Republican Party they like and dislike. This data can be found in the accompanying section to this report, available at www.RKResearch.org.

In the coming months, the study will survey 4,400 more students from a representative selection of American colleges and universities. These results will be aggregated and released every three months. From these reports, it will be possible to discern why – in terms of policy positions – college students like or dislike the Republican Party.

Before presenting the data, this report briefly offers three premises: First, college voters now favor the Democratic Party by a considerable margin. Second, college voters have not always been solidly Democratic. And third, college students are electorally important. These premises are reviewed briefly in the following pages, but will be explored in greater detail in forthcoming RK Research reports. From these premises, the report concludes that a detailed survey of the policy preferences of college students in relation to the Republican Party should be of great interest to strategists of both parties and to students of American voting trends and youth politics.

Thank you for your interest in this data. Should you have any questions about this project, or should you wish to support this project, please contact info@rkresearch.org or visit www.RKResearch.org.

II. Young Voters (18-29)

College students can be said to be the intersection of two groups: *young voters* and *voters that have taken college classes*.

The college vote is particularly well-reflected by the American youth vote. According to 2005 U.S. Census information, 39 percent of 18 to 24 year olds had either completed college or were enrolled in a degree granting institution, and a July 2010 report from The Center For Information & Research on Civil Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) claims that approximately 55% percent of Americans between 18 to 29 have enrolled in a college class.¹ Added to this, college educated youth are twice as likely to vote as their non-college educated peers, and they therefore make up a disproportionately large share of the American young adult population.²

Concerning the young adult population, it is often said that they are intrinsically Democrat—“they have always voted Democrat; they will always vote Democrat.” However, the table below shows that this is not the case. In the past ten presidential elections, the Republican Party has **won the youth vote three times** (1972, 1984, 1988) and **has been very close in three instances** (1976, 1980, and 2000). Only in 1992, 1996, 2004, and 2008 did the Republican Party lose the youth vote by substantial margins. These loses, however, represent four of the past five presidential elections (*see next page*).

¹ “Electoral Engagement and College Experience.” Amanda Nover, Surbhi Godsay, Emily Hoban Kirby, and Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg. July 2010.

² Id.

Presidential election data from *The New York Times* on 18 – 29 year olds

Year	Democrat	Republican
1972	46	52
1976	51	47
1980	44	43
1984	40	59
1988	47	52
1992	43	34
1996	53	34
2000	48	46
2004	54	45
2008	66	32

Presidential election data from Reuters

Year and Age Group	Democrat	Republican
1976. (18-21)	49	51
1976. (22-29)	56	44
1980. (18-21)	45	44
1980. (22-29)	44	44
1984. (18-24)	39	61
1984. (25-29)	43	67
1988. (18-29)	47	53
1992. (18-24)	46	33
1992. (25-29)	41	46
1996. (18-24)	55	35
1996. (25-29)	54	36
2000. (18-24)	47	47
2000. (25-29)	49	46
2004. (18-24)	56	43
2004. (25-29)	51	48
2008. (18-29)	66	32

III. Voters With a College Degree

The same Democratic-friendly trend that characterizes the young American voter can be applied to voters with college experience: Though they have not historically favored the Democratic Party, in recent years, they've become increasingly Democratic.

Voters with some college education (*The New York Times*).

Year	Democrat	Republican
1972	NA	NA
1976	NA	NA
1980	35	55
1984	38	61
1988	42	57
1992	41	37
1996	48	40
2000	45	51
2004	46	54
2008	51	47

Voters with a college degree

Year	Democrat	Republican
1972	NA	NA
1976	NA	NA
1980	NA	NA
1984	NA	NA
1988	37	62
1992	39	41
1996	44	46
2000	45	51
2004	46	52
2008	50	48

Voters with a post graduate degree

Year	Democrat	Republican
1972	NA	NA
1976	NA	NA
1980	NA	NA
1984	NA	NA
1988	48	50
1992	50	36
1996	52	40
2000	52	44
2004	55	44
2008	58	40

IV. Why College Students Are Politically Important

As noted by Karl Rove in a *Newsweek* article, the Republican Party “must regain ground among critical voting groups.” College students and recent college students represent one of these critical groups. Although they make up only approximately 12 percent of the voting population, college students are:

- At the age of political malleability, after which—political science literature shows—voting habits are likely to remain the same.
- The future political, business, and scientific leaders;
- Active and vociferous campaigners;
- Especially apt with new online campaigning and fundraising;
- Especially populous in swing states;
- An increasingly large population (more and more Americans are going to college);

All of these factors will be explored in more detail in future RK Research reports.

Given the political importance of college students, a thorough understanding of the group’s policy preferences should be of interest to election scholars and commentators, in addition to the Republican and Democratic parties.

V. Methodology

To achieve a representative sampling of college students, RK Research will survey students from colleges throughout the country. When selecting these colleges, RK Research will take into account the institutions:

- Geographic location,
- Private/public status,
- Religious/secular status,
- Size, and
- Competitiveness of admission.

At each school, 120 students will be surveyed. Given this small population, data for this study will only be assessed in aggregate.

Participants are selected randomly by asking all passerby in the student center or student union if they are interested in taking a survey in exchange for a candy bar. The potential respondent will not be told anything about the nature of the survey (so as to avoid a selection bias). The student completes the survey and returns it to the administrator. No data is linked to the individual respondent.

VI. Finances

RK Research is 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit research organization. If you wish to support this project, [you may make a donation to RK Research](#) specifically for its study of college students and the Republican Party. Estimated costs for this specific project are detailed here:

- Survey administration (\$100 per administrator) = **\$4,500.00**
- Survey costs (\$120 per school for pens, photocopying, candy bars) = **\$5,400.00**
- Data analysis software = **\$2,000.00**
- Printing for physical distribution of findings = **\$500.00**
- Website for display and promotion of findings = **\$1,500.00**
- Corporate costs = **\$900.00**
- Mailing for distribution = **\$200.00**
- Overhead (estimated at 5 percent) = **\$750.00.00**
- **Estimated total cost of project = \$15,750.00**

To date, the project has incurred the following costs:

- Website design = **\$346.86**
- Website domains = **\$3.45**
- Corporate = **\$472.00**
- Fundraising = **\$45.00**
- Corporate = **\$1,711.38**
- **Total costs incurred to date = \$2,628.69**

To date, RK Research has raised the following revenue for this study of college students and the Republican Party:

- Organizations = **\$3,500**
- Foundations = **\$0**
- Individuals = **\$1,067.00**
- **Total revenue raised = \$4,567.00**

To date, all RK Research staff time has been **donated**.

VII. Data

The first release of RK Research data [can be seen here](#).