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**TRENDS IN POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND VOTING BEHAVIOR AMONG COLLEGE FRESHMEN & EARLY CAREER COLLEGE GRADUATES: WHAT ISSUES COULD DRIVE THIS ELECTION?**

Voter registration efforts and voter awareness campaigns have reached a fever pitch in this election year that many consider a critical juncture in the modern history of this country. Many of these efforts are aimed at encouraging young people—especially non-registered voters, college-age voters, and recent college graduates—to exercise their constitutional right to vote. In a tight election year, with issues at stake that may affect the 18-29 year old age group, their presence at the polls this November may be more influential than ever before. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA has released a report on the 18-29 year old population, utilizing trend data over the last three presidential cycles in political attitudes of college freshmen now eligible to vote. The report also includes an analysis of the views of early career college graduates and their likelihood of voting. For the complete research report and its methodology, access the HERI website at [www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html).

The report reveals several key findings:

Entering College Freshmen Over the Last Three Presidential Election Cycles

- Support for increases in military spending among entering college freshmen has declined to 39% since a peak of 45% in 2002, indicating concern regarding military involvement is a key issue for this population. Solid majorities have typically opposed military spending in the past.
- In states where the marital legal status for same-sex couples is on the ballot, college students can have a decisive vote since the majority (59% in 2003) and a growing number of entering college students support this view since HERI began monitoring the item in 1997.
- Support for abolishing the death penalty has been growing steadily in the past decade to the point where one third now support abolition from a low of 21% in 1994.

Early Career College Graduates

- Results show majority support for increasing federal initiatives to control environmental pollution (75%) and maintaining the legal right to an abortion (65%), but these are not the issues that determine the difference between frequent, occasional, or non-voters among early career college graduates.
- On tax issues, occasional voters share the view with frequent voters that the wealthy should pay a larger share of the taxes than they do now, an aspect of the Kerry-Edwards plan for financing health care reform and other domestic programs.
- Occasional voters are more likely than frequent voters to support the view that a national health care plan is needed to help meet everybody's costs.

- Three quarters of entering college students support federal control over the sales of handguns. Occasional voters and non-voters are more likely than frequent voters to strongly support this view, however.

“The Institute has monitored these attitudes among college students for years and we see that many are issues where occasional voters, many of whom are women, and college students can make a difference when they go to the polls next week”, says Sylvia Hurtado, Director of HERI and Professor, “those who have a history of voting are likely to turn out again, but it is also possible that new voters will turn out in greater numbers.”

Alexander Astin, principal investigator of the study on early career college graduates and founding director of HERI, says “the attitudes of young college graduates provide insight into a group who may be more invested in specific policies such as taxes, health care, and other issues that generally gain center stage for adults in their late twenties. We are studying the civic engagement of this cohort to get a better handle on their experiences during and after college”. In the study of early career college graduates, frequent voters were those who reported they regularly turn out for local and state elections or frequently voted in national elections, occasional voters do not regularly turn out for any type of election but indicated they had voted since entering college, and others who reported they never voted were classified as non-voters.

The report builds on the annual collection of data on entering college students and subsequent follow-up studies as part of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the nation’s longest running survey of college students. Since 1966, the CIRP has monitored college freshman trends through its annual freshman survey, collecting data from more than 1,800 institutions and 11 million students over the years.

To access the full report, visit the HERI website at <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri>. The longitudinal research of early career, college graduates was funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies (USA) Inc., a three-year study that continues the work of HERI to understand how service learning is affecting students and faculty in higher education. The findings in this research report do not reflect, nor are intended to reflect, the views of the foundation.

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