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New Poll Shows College Students Prefer Biden By Almost A 4:1 Margin Over Trump



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I am a former university president who writes about higher education.

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A new poll shows that in the upcoming election, college students prefer Joe Biden over Donald Trump ... [+] GETTY

A new poll conducted by [College Pulse](#) with support from the [Knight Foundation](#) shows that college students prefer Joe Biden for President over

Donald Trump by nearly a 4:1 margin, 70% to 18%.

The nationally representative poll of 4,000 college students was conducted August 9-12. In addition to their voting preference, students were asked their opinions about the likelihood they would vote, the use of mail-in voting, the legitimacy of the election under certain conditions, and the most important issues facing the nation.

Here are the key findings of the survey, entitled *College Students, Voting, and the Covid-19 Election*:

Most college students (71%) say they're absolutely certain they'll vote in the upcoming election. Students identified as Democrats were most likely to say they were absolutely certain they would vote (81%), compared to self-identified Republicans (74%) and Independents (63%). And women were ten percentage points more likely than men to express certainty about their voting. If those numbers play out, it would result in substantially higher level of voting among young adults than has been seen in past elections.

Student prefer Biden over Trump by 70%-18%. Biden is viewed favorably by 49% of students, and unfavorably by 51%. Trump's favorability rating is deeply underwater - 19% view him favorably, compared to 81% who see him unfavorably.

Many students express doubts about the results of the presidential election under certain conditions. About half (49%) believe the elections won't be fair and open, and 55% say it won't be administered well. Half indicated that problems at polling places such as long lines or broken voting machines would cause them to have "major doubts" about the fairness of the election.

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Evidence of foreign interference would lead 48% to have major doubts about the results, followed by the election winner losing the popular vote (46%), low voter turnout (46%), and most ballots being cast by mail (31%). If it were to take weeks to tally the vote, 74% said they would have major or minor doubts about the fairness of the election.

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Women tended to have their confidence in the election affected more by such events than men.

Students favor mail-in voting, but with a substantial partisan difference. Among Democrat students, 63% indicated they would prefer to vote by mail or absentee, compared to 31% of Republican students. Among all students, 39% say they're planning to vote in person.

The largest percentage of students - one third - see the Covid-19 pandemic as the most serious issue facing America. Next in importance comes:

- race relations (22%)

- climate change (12%)
- inequality (7%)
- the economy (7%)
- White House leadership (6%)
- healthcare (5%), and
- education (2%).

Overall, the poll results provide an intriguing projection of college students' participation in the November election. On the one hand, their interest appears to be very high, and their support for Biden is overwhelming, at least at this point, much greater than the 34-point spread enjoyed by Biden among young voters (ages 18-34) reported in a [national poll](#) in early August.

But there is also considerable evidence that students may question the legitimacy of the election, particularly if there is a breakdown in normal voting procedures, foreign interference occurs, the electoral winner loses the popular vote, the results take weeks to determine, or there is a low voter turnout. Although Donald Trump has lambasted the fairness of mail-in voting on almost a daily basis, college students were less likely to see it as a reason to question the legitimacy of the outcome, and many indicated their intention to vote by mail.

The poll was commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and conducted by College Pulse, a survey research company that focuses on college students. It builds on [The 100 Million Project](#), a landmark survey of 12,000 American non-voters released in February that included a survey of 18- to-24-year-old eligible voters. At that time, which was before the pandemic, 59% of this young group said they were “absolutely certain” they would vote in November. By contrast, in the August poll, that number has increased to 71% of college students reporting they will vote in the presidential election. Should that occur, it would be a record-setting turnout.

What effect the pandemic will have on student voting remains a major question, but there are reasons to believe it might lower participation rates. If students are not on campus, they lose the benefit of college resources and student initiatives intended to boost voting. As a result, they face the tasks of registering or requesting absentee ballots on their own, a process that's even more difficult in those states that have intentionally made it harder for students to vote.

A group of Democrat senators have introduced the [National Student Vote Act](#), requiring colleges and universities to share information and resources that would enable students - even those displaced from campus - to exercise their options for voting. The likelihood that it will pass the Republican-controlled Senate is minuscule, but institutions still can - and should - voluntarily take those steps that will maximize student turnout.

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