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## 18- to 29-year-olds more likely to be liberal and less likely to follow presidential campaign very closely, Annenberg survey shows

Young adults 18 to 29 years of age are more likely to describe themselves as liberal in comparison to other age groups, according to recent data collected by the Annenberg Public Policy Center's National Annenberg Election Survey. Thirty-four percent of 18- to 29-year-olds called themselves "liberal" or "very liberal," while only 27 percent of 30- to 44-year-olds, 25 percent of 45- to 64-year-olds, and 18 percent of those 65 years and older described themselves the same way.

The youngest cohort of potential voters is also less likely to describe itself as following the 2008 presidential campaign "very closely" in comparison to older cohorts. While 24 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds said that they are following the campaign very closely, 33 percent of 30- to 44-year-olds, 44 percent of 45- to 64-year-olds, and 48 percent of those 65 years and older stated that they are following the campaign very closely.

"Senior citizens, those age 65 and older, are twice as likely as young adults ages 18 to 29 to report that they are following the presidential campaign very closely," said Kate Kenski, a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor of communication at the University of Arizona.

Other differences between the generations appeared in the data. "In comparison to other age cohorts, 18- to 29-year-olds perceived the presidential candidates' ideologies differently," said Kenski. "These younger adults were less likely to describe Senator Barack Obama as very liberal in comparison to those 45 years and older. They were more likely to describe Senator John McCain as very conservative."

Differences between the age groups did not reach statistical levels of significance on their assessments of the way that George W. Bush is handling his job as president. Across the age groups, twice as many respondents disapproved as approved President Bush's handling of his job.

When it came to assessing the U.S. Congress on the handling of its job, assessments were negative overall. Older citizens, however, were even more likely to disapprove of the U.S. Congress's handling of its job than were younger citizens. Eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds were twice as likely to disapprove of Congress's job performance as approve of it. Those 45 years and older were about four times as likely to disapprove as approve of Congress's handling of its job.

Young adults ages 18 to 29 were also more likely to support full marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples (45 percent) than were other age groups. Thirty-six percent of 30- to 44-year-olds, 26 percent of 45- to 64-year-olds, and 15 percent of those 65 years and older favored full marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples.

Data for this study were collected between March 3, 2008 and July 13, 2008 from 16,255 citizens. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 0.8 percentage points for the sample overall. For subsamples within the study, the margins of sample error are larger, depending on the sample sizes of the groups being analyzed. For many of the analyses, there were 1,247 18- to 29-year-olds yielding a margin of error of 2.8 percent, 3,450 30- to 44-year-olds yielding a margin of error of 1.7 percent, 7,273 45- to 64-year-olds yielding a margin of error of 1.1 percent, and 4,133 citizens aged 65 or older yielding a margin of error of 1.5 percent.

Table 1. Ideology by demographic characteristics

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Don't Know	Refused	Sample Size
Total	38.4%	32.0%	25.8%	3.2%	0.6%	16,255
Men	41.4%	32.0%	23.0%	3.0%	0.6%	9,374
Women	35.8%	32.0%	28.4%	3.4%	0.5%	6,881
High school or less	39.6%	32.3%	22.3%	5.0%	0.8%	5,023
Some college	38.8%	32.5%	25.9%	2.2%	0.5%	4,606
College degree or more	36.3%	31.0%	30.8%	1.6%	0.3%	6,521
18-29 years old	31.8%	29.6%	34.3%	3.9%	0.3%	1,247
30-44 years old	36.7%	33.0%	27.0%	2.8%	0.5%	3,450
45-64 years old	39.6%	32.4%	25.0%	2.4%	0.6%	7,273
65 and older	44.3%	31.9%	18.2%	4.9%	0.7%	4,133
Household income below \$35,000	36.0%	31.7%	26.3%	5.4%	0.7%	3,708
\$35,000 to less than \$75,000	40.2%	31.1%	26.1%	2.1%	0.5%	4,838
\$75,000 and over	39.2%	32.5%	26.4%	1.7%	0.2%	5,738
Whites	40.3%	31.6%	24.9%	2.8%	0.5%	13,684
Blacks	31.2%	34.2%	28.9%	4.9%	0.8%	1,338
Hispanics/Latinos	32.5%	33.7%	29.0%	4.0%	0.9%	855
Asians	24.5%	32.4%	39.4%	3.7%		172
Native Americans	34.0%	28.1%	32.8%	4.7%	0.4%	182
Married	43.1%	31.2%	23.0%	2.3%	0.5%	9,789
Living as married	23.8%	35.1%	35.5%	5.3%	0.4%	411
Widowed	39.1%	32.5%	21.0%	6.0%	1.4%	1,766
Divorced	33.6%	33.2%	28.2%	4.1%	0.8%	1,987
Separated	28.2%	37.2%	30.6%	3.7%	0.3%	288
Never married	27.4%	32.6%	34.9%	4.6%	0.4%	1,950
Northeast	31.7%	34.4%	29.8%	3.4%	0.6%	3,512
Midwest	39.1%	31.1%	26.0%	3.1%	0.7%	4,142
South	42.8%	31.0%	21.8%	3.8%	0.5%	5,322
West	37.1%	32.1%	28.2%	2.1%	0.4%	3,279
Urban	34.3%	32.4%	29.1%	3.5%	0.6%	4,620
Suburban	39.2%	31.9%	25.7%	2.7%	0.5%	8,300
Rural	42.4%	31.8%	21.1%	4.2%	0.5%	3,335
Republican	67.5%	23.5%	7.1%	1.6%	0.2%	4,707
Democrat	20.2%	33.9%	42.4%	3.2%	0.3%	5,787
Independent	34.0%	38.8%	23.9%	2.8%	0.5%	4,476

NOTE: The reported sample sizes are from the unweighted data. The reported percentages, however, are based on weighted data.

Table 2. Attention to 2008 presidential campaign and perceptions of candidate ideologies by age

		18-29 years old	30-44 years old	45-64 years old	65 and older
How closely are you following the 2008 presidential campaign?					
	Very closely	23.9%	32.6%	44.2%	48.4%
	Somewhat closely	52.1%	49.3%	43.0%	36.9%
	Not too closely	16.1%	11.8%	8.9%	8.9%
	Not closely at all	7.5%	5.8%	3.7%	4.7%
	DK	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.9%
	Ref	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
Which of the following best describes the views of Barack Obama?					
	Very conservative	6.8%	4.1%	4.1%	4.3%
	Somewhat conservative	8.4%	9.0%	8.5%	8.3%
	Moderate	19.3%	22.6%	21.0%	20.0%
	Somewhat liberal	35.6%	34.1%	31.4%	25.7%
	Very liberal	23.2%	23.8%	28.9%	30.3%
	DK	6.5%	6.0%	5.7%	10.4%
	Ref	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.8%
	Sample size	1,216	3,389	7,113	3,953
Which of the following best describes the views of John McCain?					
	Very conservative	22.9%	18.4%	17.3%	16.5%
	Somewhat conservative	36.9%	38.5%	39.6%	35.3%
	Moderate	20.4%	23.3%	25.4%	26.2%
	Somewhat liberal	8.1%	8.4%	9.3%	8.8%
	Very liberal	3.9%	4.4%	3.0%	3.8%
	DK	7.3%	6.5%	4.9%	8.6%
	Ref	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%
	Sample size	1,176	3,340	7,101	3,952

NOTE: The reported sample sizes are from the unweighted data. The reported percentages, however, are based on weighted data.

Table 3. Presidential approval, congressional approval, and attitudes about Iraq and taxes by age

		18-29 years old	30-44 years old	45-64 years old	65 and older
Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?					
	Approve	26.9%	28.8%	30.7%	30.8%
	Disapprove	65.5%	65.2%	63.4%	62.2%
	DK	5.4%	4.4%	4.3%	5.0%
	Ref	2.1%	1.6%	1.6%	1.9%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is handling its job?					
	Approve	27.7%	23.2%	18.5%	17.2%
	Disapprove	56.7%	67.6%	74.0%	71.1%
	DK	14.2%	7.7%	6.4%	10.6%
	Ref	1.4%	1.5%	1.0%	1.1%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
I'm going to read you some plans for United States policy in Iraq. Please tell me which one comes closest to your own position					
	The US should withdraw all troops from Iraq as soon as possible,	32.2%	28.9%	26.7%	29.5%
	The US should set a deadline for withdrawing its troops if the Iraqi government doesn't show definite progress	38.8%	39.5%	37.0%	31.3%
	The US should keep its troops in Iraq until a stable government is established	26.0%	27.7%	32.5%	32.7%
	None of these options (volunteered)	1.7%	2.3%	2.3%	2.9%
	DK	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	3.1%
	Ref	0.2%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
All in all, do you think the situation in Iraq was worth going to war over, or not?					
	Yes, worth it	33.8%	30.9%	32.4%	26.0%
	No, not worth it	60.4%	64.0%	62.0%	65.4%
	DK	4.1%	4.3%	5.1%	8.2%
	Ref	1.8%	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%
	Sample size	622	1,680	3,629	2,096
Please tell me which one comes closest to your view on what we should be doing about federal income taxes.					
	Taxes should be cut.	32.2%	35.5%	38.6%	33.8%
	Taxes should be kept pretty much as they are.	41.0%	39.9%	36.9%	37.9%
	Taxes should be raised if necessary in order to maintain current federal programs and services.	21.5%	17.2%	15.0%	15.4%
	None of these options (volunteered)	3.1%	5.6%	7.7%	7.9%
	DK	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	4.1%
	Ref	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%	0.9%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133

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**Table 4. Attitudes about abortion, gay marriage, and immigration by age**

		18-29 years old	30-44 years old	45-64 years old	65 and older
Please tell me which of the following statements about abortion comes closest to your own view					
	Abortion should be available to anyone who wants it.	26.2%	30.1%	30.3%	23.3%
	Abortion should be available, but with stricter limits than it is now.	20.5%	21.2%	19.8%	14.6%
	Abortion should not be permitted except in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the woman is at risk.	35.9%	32.7%	33.5%	42.5%
	Abortion should not be permitted under any circumstances.	15.5%	12.5%	12.4%	14.4%
	None of these options (volunteered)	0.9%	1.5%	2.0%	2.5%
	DK	0.5%	1.1%	1.0%	1.8%
	Ref	0.5%	1.0%	1.0%	0.9%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
And, there has been much talk recently about whether gays and lesbians should have the legal right to marry someone of the same sex. Which of the following options comes closest to your position on this issue?					
	I support full marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples.	44.6%	35.7%	26.2%	14.8%
	I support civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not gay marriage.	22.1%	25.0%	28.9%	26.9%
	I do not support any form of legal recognition of the relationships of gay and lesbian couples.	30.0%	35.2%	40.6%	52.4%
	None of these options (volunteered)	1.5%	1.4%	1.9%	2.2%
	DK	1.7%	1.9%	1.5%	2.4%
	Ref	0.1%	0.8%	0.9%	1.3%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
Provide a path to citizenship for some illegal aliens who agree to return to their home country for a period of time and pay substantial fines.					
	Favor	58.4%	52.3%	50.5%	48.2%
	Oppose	35.9%	41.2%	42.2%	37.0%
	DK	5.0%	5.6%	6.0%	13.2%
	Ref	0.6%	0.9%	1.3%	1.6%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133
Increase border security by building a fence along part of the US border with Mexico.					
	Favor	57.0%	59.4%	59.2%	55.1%
	Oppose	40.4%	37.3%	37.6%	36.2%
	DK	2.2%	2.9%	2.7%	7.9%
	Ref	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.9%
	Sample size	1,247	3,450	7,273	4,133

**NOTE:** The reported sample sizes are from the unweighted data. The reported percentages, however, are based on weighted data.

The analysis for this release was conducted by Kate Kenski, Ph.D., a senior analyst for the National Annenberg Election Survey and an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Arizona.

### **About the Survey**

The National Annenberg Election Survey (NAES) is a survey conducted each presidential election by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. It is the largest academic election survey being conducted during the 2008 campaign. It ultimately will include between 45,000 and 50,000 rolling cross-section telephone interviews (one interview per respondent) and almost 100,000 web interviews (including up to five interviews with the same person) as the campaign evolves. The first web wave began in October 2007; the final interviews will be completed following the general election, November 4, 2008.

National Annenberg Election Surveys also were conducted in 2000 and 2004.

The 2008 survey, as with past NAES polls, will examine a wide range of political attitudes about candidates, issues, and the traits Americans want in a president. It will also place a particular emphasis on the effects of media exposure through campaign commercials and news from radio, television, newspapers and the internet. Additionally, the survey measures the effects of other kinds of political communication, from conversations at home and on the job to various efforts by campaigns to influence potential voters.

### **Methodology**

Data for this analysis comes from the NAES rolling cross-sectional telephone survey. The field period ran from March 3 through July 13, 2008. The total number of respondents interviewed during this period was 17,026. The analyses presented in this study are based on the 16,255 respondents who identified themselves as citizens.

The results have been weighted to take account of household size and number of telephone lines into the residence and to adjust for variation in the sample relating to geographic region, sex, race, age and education.

In addition to sampling error, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey of public opinion may introduce other sources of error into the poll. Variations in the wording and order of questions, for example, may lead to somewhat different results.

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