SFLA MEMO

TO: Democrat and Republican Leaders
FROM: Kristan Hawkins, Students for Life of America
RE: Young adults and their views on social issues and the 2012 elections
DATE: June 22, 2012

College age voters (18-24 year olds) are an oft-overlooked group in a Presidential election that many experts are expecting to swing narrowly in either candidate's favor. Common dismissals of the youngest generations' dwindling influence at the ballot box run counter to recent turnout trends.

In 2008, voter turnout among college-aged youth surged to its participation highest level in 16 years. Moreover, while other influential swing groups are parsed out from any and all possible angles, our knowledge of the newly-minted voter is comparatively meager – 43% of 18-24 year olds in the last Presidential election were first-time voters.[1]

Challenged to uncover the prevailing attitudes, opinions, and preferences of this under-studied subgroup, Students for Life of America commissioned one of the first-wide scale quantitative studies of 18-24 year olds in the 2012 election season.[2]

The survey research project, which garnered 800 responses, included a special focus on life issues, allowing young voters' own voices to cut through the 'conventional wisdom' and forge a new narrative. Indeed, survey findings showed little connection to the overwhelmingly liberal attitudes lazily ascribed to these voters – confirming an increasing pro-life trend among Americans while presumably giving Big Abortion heartburn over the battles ahead.

Our results tracked similarly to other national polls that have been released on abortion in recent years. Yet there are surprisingly few surveys of the 18-24 demographic with such a deep dive as that was commissioned by SFLA.

With skyrocketing student debt and grim unemployment prospects for those out of college, young voters' collective love affair with the President has abated. Results from the recent recall election in Wisconsin were consistent in showing a far less liberal voting bloc than the one four years and if that election is any indication , young adults are much more open to voting conservative in 2012 than they were in 2008. Our results speculate that when young adults learn more about the President's radical policies on abortion and the curtailing of religious freedom, their support for him drops. We found that more young adults are less likely to vote for a candidate who forces someone to go against their conscience or religious beliefs, which is part of the mandate included in the President's healthcare law.

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[1] http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_08_exit_polls.pdf
[2] 805 adults ages 18 to 24 in late May/early June

Here are our key findings:

The HHS Mandate carries negative political currency for two-fifths of young voters: The plurality of young Americans, including every major demographic and geographic group, said they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports forcing institutions to pay for procedures that violate their conscience or religious beliefs (42 % vs. 24%).

Young adults are going to vote in 2012: 18-24 year olds belie their disengaged reputation as an overwhelming majority (77%) predicted their participation in the fall elections. While survey respondents can be notoriously culpable of over-estimating their participation in "socially desirable" activities such as voting, the high levels of engagement suggest that young voters may more closely resemble 2008 (49% turnout among this subgroup) than the midterms elections of 2010 (24% turnout).

Youth are "pro-contraception" not "pro-abortion": While youth were much less likely to self-identify as pro-life than the public as a whole, there was also scant evidence of a desire for total and complete abortion on-demand, a characterization that seems to escape much of the major media narrative about this generation.

This nuance was particularly evident when a 27%-plurality selected "abortion should only be legal in the cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the mother" as the position most similar to their own on abortion. In fact, condensing the six positions showed near-parity between the two sides (45% pro-choice, 44% pro-life).

Support for Plan B in vending machines on college campuses, paired with the high percentage of Planned Parenthood supporters who are unaware of the organization's abortion offerings, suggest they are "Pro-Contraception," but not necessarily "Pro-Abortion."

Obama still leads among young adults, but they think he has done a bad job: Obama's popularity among youth voters has dimmed in the four years following his last election, but he still leads Romney 53%-25% lead on the ballot test. Few voters are paying close attention at this early stage of the race, suggesting the ballot test remains fluid. Nor should Obama's head-to-head advantage obscure his legitimate vulnerability on job performance: nearly one-half (49%) graded his tenure as "fair" or "poor".

Youth Signal Significant Opposition to Sex-Selective Abortions:
Nearly three-quarters (74%) of 18-24 year olds support making sex-selective abortions illegal in the United States. Students must be reminded that sex-selective abortions are not just a problem for foreign lands, but the crisis extends to their veritable backyards as well.

What they don't know is hurting them: College-age youth diets are the source of some notoriety – if not jealously – as the dubious nutritional offerings at dining halls and fast food chains across the country have many a concerned parent once again urging their child to "Take their Vitamins."

In our case, 18-24 seem to be suffering a Vitamin "F" deficiency – that is, an unhealthy diet of disinformation and 'comfort food' from the Left leaves many with distortion perceptions about the offerings of agencies like Planned Parenthood. Among the most telling responses included that nearly half (48%) of college-age adults did not know whether Planned Parenthood offered abortions to pregnant women.

The knowledge deficit also colored their perspectives on the Presidential candidates' positions on abortion. Nearly one-third failed to ascribe any view on abortion for each candidate (32% for Obama, 33% for Romney).

Young adults don't like Obama's socially liberal record: Reactions toward Obama's shocking vote against the Born Alive Protect Act while a State Senator in Illinois painted another perspective on information deficit, as this discovery carried a net -11 political currency and led one-in-three (34%) to become "less likely" to vote for the President this Fall. Obama's image suffered an even more pronounced slide among undecided voters (43% "less likely"), indicating that the ballot test may narrow if the President's personal popularity is tempered with a remembrance of his radical voting record from the not-too-distant past.

METHODOLOGY

Students for Life of America commissioned **the polling company, inc./WomanTrend** to conduct an online survey of 805 adults ages 18 to 24 from May 25 – June 1, 2012. Opt-in online panels of respondents were utilized and targeted specifically for adults ages 18-24, while also including controls for gender, race/ethnicity, and geographic region. **Sampling controls ensured that a <u>proportional and representative number of interviews</u> were collected,** as those characteristics are reported by the latest publicly available figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. Potential survey participants received an e-mail inviting them to participate and a URL address for them to link to the web-based questionnaire.

The original survey contained a total of 45 questions, including one screener, 27 substantive inquiries, and 17 demographic queries. 77% said there were likely to vote in the upcoming elections.

The margin of error for the survey is ± 3.4% at a 95% confidence interval, meaning that in 19 out of 20 cases, the data obtained would not differ by any more than 3.4 percentage points in either direction had the entire population of adults ages 18-24 in the United States been surveyed. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.