

Poll gives early context for 2012 presidential election results

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Americans believe higher education institutions and the federal government share almost equal responsibility for student loan debt in the country. This is one preliminary result from a comprehensive national research survey sponsored by two entities of the University of Arkansas System.

Among demographic groups, white, African American and Latino/Latina American respondents largely blame colleges and universities (31 percent) and the federal government (30 percent) for the large amount of student debt, which reached nearly \$1 trillion last year. Smaller percentages of these groups blame students (18 percent), state governments (7 percent) and parents (4 percent).

The nonpartisan academic poll was conducted by the Diane D. Blair Center of Southern Politics and Society at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service in Little Rock. An early look at the results shows public opinion regarding issues such as student loan debt, the killing of Osama bin Laden and the 2012 presidential election.

"In addition to in-depth findings about a wide array of topics, we wanted to sample issues that are relevant to some of the current political and public policy debates in the news today," said Clinton School Dean Skip Rutherford. "The findings are very interesting and should add to the conversation about issues such as the growing student loan debt problem in our country."

This is the Blair Center's second election year to administer the [national poll](#) and the first time it was conducted in partnership with the Clinton School. The project was founded by an interdisciplinary group of scholars from the Blair Center including Todd Shields, Angie Maxwell, Pearl Ford Dowe and Rafael Jimeno.

"These questions are only a glimpse into the findings of this comprehensive survey," said Shields, director of the Blair Center. "More in-depth findings will be released through a series of reports over the next several months, exploring in detail these issues as well others about immigration, community philanthropy, racial attitudes, religion and regional trends."

Several questions focused on presidential politics, including views on the 2012 election. Roughly half of the respondents said they voted for President Barack Obama and 42 percent said they voted for Gov. Mitt Romney, while the remainder did not respond. Men were more likely to have voted for Romney (46 percent), while women were more likely to have supported the president's reelection (56 percent).

Support for Romney was higher overall in the South than elsewhere, but results indicated significant racial and regional gaps.

Of the Southern respondents who reported to have voted in the election, 67 percent of whites, 2 percent of African Americans and 32 percent of Latinos indicated they voted for Romney, while 33 percent of whites, 98 percent of African Americans and 66 percent of Latinos in the South indicated they voted for Obama.

Of the respondents outside the South who reported to have voted in the election, 47 percent of whites, 2 percent of African Americans and 28 percent of Latinos indicated they voted for Romney, while 46 percent of whites, 95 percent of African Americans and 72 percent of Latinos

outside the South indicated they voted for Obama.

When respondents were asked to assign a percentage of credit to various political actors in the May 1, 2011, raid that resulted in the killing of Osama bin Laden, the largest share of the credit (44 percent) was given to the Navy Seal team that conducted the raid. President Obama was next (23 percent) followed by the U.S. intelligence agencies (22 percent), President George W. Bush (4 percent) and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (3 percent). While whites gave the Navy Seal team almost 50 percent of the credit and only 18 percent to Obama, African Americans gave Obama 45 percent of the credit compared to 27 percent for the Navy Seals.

A question about Romney's Mormon faith drew varying responses among [demographic groups](#). A roughly equal number of respondents believe that Romney is Christian (37 percent) as those who said they didn't know if he is a Christian (38 percent). More than half of those who identified themselves as Republicans said they believed Romney is a Christian while only 28 percent of Democrats and 26 percent of Independents did so.

The questions covered in this initial release of results account for only a small portion of the poll topics. Researchers with the Blair Center, Clinton School and other entities will use the data gathered in the full survey for a number of projects, including a series of reports on the 2012 presidential election that the Blair Center will release in the next few months.

"Because of the depth of this research, we will be able to analyze differences that emerge by gender, race, religion, political affiliation, socioeconomic status and the intersection of these characteristics," said Maxwell, an assistant professor of political science with the Blair Center. "It will be invaluable for scholars, journalists and students."

The Blair Center-Clinton School Poll, completed in mid-December, surveyed more than 3,600 people regarding issues related to politics, giving, regional identification, religion, racial discrimination, ideology and partisanship. The poll has a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

The poll was administered by GfK, formerly Knowledge Networks, the leader in web-based survey research. GfK's proprietary database features a representative sample of Americans, including representation of the roughly 30 percent of U.S. households that do not have Internet access. The database covers the growing number of cell phone-only households, recently estimated at 23 percent of all households, through address-based sampling. The survey was conducted in both English and Spanish.

Though national in scope, the poll uniquely included representative samples of traditionally under-pollled groups such as African Americans, Latinos and southern whites and measured their attitudes on a host of contemporary political and public policy issues. A full analysis of five newsworthy questions asked in the poll is attached.

Blair Center and Clinton School scholars will discuss the poll at a public program on Wednesday, Feb. 6, at the Clinton School. The program will mark the release of another report from the poll data on "The Year of the Woman," in which scholars analyze views on women's issues and women in politics.

More information: For more information about the Blair Center-Clinton School partnership, please visit blaircenterclintonschoolpoll.uark.edu or bccs.uark.edu.

Provided by University of Arkansas

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