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Contact: Esten Perez; 617-496-4009

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LOW MIDTERM TURNOUT LIKELY, CONSERVATIVES MORE ENTHUSIASTIC, HARVARD YOUTH POLL FINDS

President Obama improves; opinions on legalization of marijuana differ greatly by political party, race and age

Washington, DC – A new national poll of America’s 18- to 29- year-olds by Harvard’s Institute of Politics (IOP), located at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, finds low expected participation for the midterm elections as less than one-in-four (23%) young Americans say they will “definitely be voting” in November, a sharp drop of 11 percentage points from five months ago (34%). Among the most likely voters, the poll also finds traditional Republican constituencies showing more enthusiasm than Democratic ones for participating in the upcoming midterms, with 44 percent of 2012 Mitt Romney voters saying they will definitely be voting – a statistically significant difference compared to the 35 percent of 2012 Barack Obama voters saying the same.

The IOP’s newest poll results – its 25th major release since 2000 – also show notable differences in opinions on legalization of marijuana by political party, race and age. The poll also finds President Obama’s job approval rating has improved (47%) from a historic low noted five months ago (41%: Nov. 2013).

“The Institute’s spring poll shows 18- to 29- year-olds’ trust in public institutions at a five-year low – and their cynicism toward the political process has never been higher,” said Harvard Institute of Politics Director Trey Grayson. “To inspire the next generation to public service – and to improve our communities – our elected officials need to move past the bitter partisanship and work together to ensure progress and restore trust in government.”

“It’s been clear for some time now that young people are growing more disillusioned and disconnected from Washington,” said Harvard Institute of Politics Polling Director John Della Volpe. “There’s an erosion of trust in the individuals and institutions that make government work — and now we see the lowest level of interest in any election we’ve measured since 2000. Young people still care about our country, but we will likely see more volunteerism than voting in 2014.”

The KnowledgePanel® survey of 3,058 18- to 29- year-old U.S. citizens with a margin of error of +/- 1.8 percentage points (95% confidence level) conducted with the Government and Academic Research team of GfK for the IOP between March 22 and April 4 finds:

Millennial Interest in Midterm Voting Lags Behind 2010 Levels, as Conservatives Seem More Enthusiastic. Less than one-in-four (23%) young Americans under the age of 30 say that they will “definitely be voting” in the fall, a sharp decrease of 11 percentage points since November

2013 IOP polling (34%) and eight percentage points lower than seen during a similar time period prior to the 2010 midterm elections (31%: Feb. 2010). In addition, traditional Republican constituencies seem to be showing more enthusiasm than Democratic ones for participating in the upcoming midterm elections and are statistically more likely to say they will “definitely be voting.” For example, 44 percent of those who voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 say they will “definitely be voting,” a statistically significant difference compared to the 35 percent of 2012 Barack Obama voters who say the same. Additionally, self-identified conservatives (32%) are 10 points more likely to vote than liberals (22%); men (28%) are 9 points more likely to vote than women (19%); and young Whites (27%) are more likely to vote than African Americans (19%) and Hispanics (19%).

Not Quite Half of America’s 18- to 29- year-olds Support Legalization of Marijuana; Significant Differences By Party, Race and Age Emerge. Despite a solid level of support for legalization of marijuana (44%: support, 34%: oppose, 22%: unsure), April IOP polling finds a number of notable differences in Millennials’ opinions on the issue exist. For example, although more Democrats support legalization (49%) than oppose (28%), the opposite can be said for Republicans (32%: support, 50%: oppose). Younger Millennials ages 18- to- 24- years-old are less sure about legalization (38%: support, 39%: oppose, 22%: unsure) than 25- to 29- year-olds, who support legalization by a margin of 50 percent to 28 percent (21%: unsure). Whites support legalization 49 percent to 32 percent, while African Americans (38% support, 36% oppose) and Hispanics (37% support, 37% oppose) are close to even. When asked about legalization of marijuana for medical purposes, overall two-thirds (66%) would support with 14 percent saying they would oppose (19%: unsure).

President Obama’s Job Approval Rating Improves from Previous Low-Water mark. President Obama’s job approval rating has improved six-percentage points since fall 2013 IOP polling, going from a previous low-water mark of 41 percent five months ago to 47 percent today. Since November, the president has seen steady gains across most of the major 18- to 29- year-old subgroups analyzed, although in most every case his job approval rating remained below 50 percent – including on his handling of health care (39%: April 2014; 34%: Nov. 2013). President Obama’s approval rating is buoyed by the steady support of the African American community (83% approve) and the solid support of a volatile (i.e., nine-point swing in one year, 21-point swing in five years) Hispanic community (60%); among Whites between 18- and 29- years-old, the president’s approval rating is 33 percent. Compared to the first IOP poll conducted during the 2010 midterm election cycle, the president’s approval rating during this midterm cycle is down nine percentage points overall, down 12 points among young Whites and nine points among young Hispanics and Latinos – however, among African American voters there has been no change in approval over the same period.

Majority of Young Americans Believe Income Gap is a Major Problem, Parties Divided on Root Cause. April IOP polling found sixty-four percent (64%) of Millennials overall and a solid majority of young Democrats and Republicans believe that the gap between “the rich and everyone else in America” is greater today than when they were born. A majority (52%) said they consider this gap to be a major problem, while an additional 20 percent consider the issue to be a minor problem (13%: “not a problem”; 14%: “unsure”). However, an example of what appears to be a fundamental difference between young Democrats and Republicans is the way

each thinks about the potential root causes of income disparity. For example, forty-four percent (44%) of Democrats believe that the gap in income is more the “result of factors outside one’s control” compared to 29 percent of Republicans who believe the same. 47 percent of Republicans believe that the gap is more the “result of certain people working hard and making smart choices,” compared to just 29 percent of Democrats. While a plurality (44%) of Democrats seem willing to pin most of the political responsibility for the income gap on the Republican Party, only 16 percent of Republicans blame Democrats – and the poll also finds Republicans (44%) far more likely to shoulder some responsibility and “blame both parties equally.”

Looking Ahead, Hillary Clinton’s Favorability Rating Stands at 52 Percent – Chris Christie’s at 21 Percent. April IOP polling included two questions each about possible 2016 presidential candidates former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie. Sec. Clinton holds a favorable rating of 52 percent (15% very favorable, 37% somewhat favorable) and an unfavorable rating of 42 percent (19% very unfavorable, 23% somewhat unfavorable). IOP polling also found a ten-point gender gap, as Sec. Clinton’s favorability rating among 18- to 29- year-old women stands at 57 percent (38% unfavorable) and 47 percent among men (47% unfavorable). Gov. Christie’s favorable rating stands far lower at 21 percent (3% very favorable, 18% somewhat favorable), with an unfavorable rating nearly twice as high at 39 percent (13% very unfavorable, 26% somewhat unfavorable). The poll also asked whether Millennials’ opinion of Christie and Clinton had changed over the past year. More than two-thirds (67%) of those familiar with Sec. Clinton said that their opinion of her has stayed the same, with approximately equal numbers saying it had gotten better (17%) as had gotten worse (16%). Alternatively, more than five times as many familiar with Gov. Christie said their opinion of him had gotten worse (43%) than said better (8%) – with a plurality (49%) reporting it stayed about the same over the same time period.

Trust in Public Institutions Slides Across the Board; Cynicism About Elected Officials and Efficacy of Politics Increases. Millennials’ level of trust in most American institutions tested in IOP polling continues to decline, even below historically low numbers seen last spring. Over the past twelve months, trust in: the President has decreased from 39 to 32 percent; the U.S. military has decreased from 54 to 47 percent (the first time below a majority); and the Supreme Court has dipped from 40 to 36 percent. In addition to a consistent and across-the-board drop in trust levels, IOP polling has also noted a similar pattern on issues relating to the efficacy of the political process more generally. Since 2010, the Institute has observed a consistent six percentage point increase in the proportion agreeing with a number of statements on this topic, including: “elected officials seem to be motivated by selfish reasons” (62%: 2014; 56%: 2010) and “political involvement rarely has any tangible results” (29%: 2014; 23%: 2010). IOP polling has also tracked a seven-point increase in the number of Millennials agreeing with the statement: “elected officials don’t seem to have the same priorities I have” (58%: 2014; 51%: 2010).

Political Party Playing a Role in Social Networking Preferences. Google+ (52%: Dem., 36%: Rep.), Twitter (46%: Dem., 38%: Rep.) and Tumblr (18%: Dem., 7%: Rep.) are social networking platforms preferred by young Democrats, while Pinterest (32%: Dem., 40%: Rep.) is preferred by young Republicans. Facebook (87%: Dem., 87%: Rep.) and Snapchat (24%: Dem., 23%: Rep.) defy political differences.

Methodology

The goal of the project was to collect 3,000 completed interviews with young Americans between 18 and 29 years old. The main sample data collection took place from March 22 through April 4. A small pretest was conducted prior to the main survey to examine the accuracy of the data and the length of the interview.

Six thousand, eight hundred and eighty nine (6,889) KnowledgePanel members were assigned to the study. The cooperation rate was 46.3 percent resulting in 3,058 completed interviews. Seventy (70) interviews were conducted in Spanish with the remainder done in English. The web-enabled KnowledgePanel® is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. Persons in selected households are then invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the web-enabled KnowledgePanel®. For those who agree to participate, but do not already have Internet access, GfK provides a laptop and ISP connection at no cost. People who already have computers and Internet service are permitted to participate using their own equipment. Panelists then receive unique log-in information for accessing surveys online, and are sent e-mails throughout each month inviting them to participate in research. More technical information is available at <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp/reviewer-info.html> and by request to the IOP.

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Harvard University's Institute of Politics (IOP), located at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, was established in 1966 as a memorial to President Kennedy. The IOP's mission is to unite and engage students, particularly undergraduates, with academics, politicians, activists, and policymakers on a non-partisan basis to inspire them to consider careers in politics and public service. The Institute strives to promote greater understanding and cooperation between the academic world and the world of politics and public affairs. More information is available online at www.iop.harvard.edu.

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