

NEWS RELEASE
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College Is More Important than Ever, But Harder to Afford, Say Nation's Young Adults Age 18-34

New Bi-Partisan Survey Finds Large Majorities Concerned about Student Debt, Opposed to Cutting Pell Grants and Loan Subsidies

While they believe that higher education is more important today than it was for their parents' generation, most U.S. adults age 18 to 34 also view college as harder to afford than just five years ago. They feel that people are leaving school with too much debt, and they oppose proposals to cut federal student aid, according to a survey released today by three national policy organizations. Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting conducted the bi-partisan national survey, which was commissioned by The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS), Demos, and Young Invincibles. Among the survey's key findings and themes:

Higher Education: More Important, Less Affordable, Too Much Debt

More than three in four (76%) young adults say that college has become harder to afford in the past five years, and nearly as many (73%) say that graduates have more student debt than they can manage. When asked about the importance of college and other education and training after high school, about eight in 10 say it is more important than a generation ago. Whether or not they have a college degree or student debt, most young people share these views and concerns.

Don't Cut Student Aid

Opposition to cutting access to Pell Grants, as has been proposed by some in Congress, is strong and crosses party lines. The same holds true for charging students interest on federal loans while they are still in school. Even when presented as ways to reduce the federal deficit, three in four (75%) young adults do not want to see Pell Grants cut, and 73 percent oppose charging students with financial need interest on their federal loans before they graduate.

Make Higher Education More Affordable

Young adults also believe that Congress should act to make education more affordable. In a [companion poll](#) released by Demos and Young Invincibles last week, 84 percent say making college and other education and training after high school more affordable should be priorities for Congress. At least 70 percent of young Republicans, Democrats, and Independents agree. More than two thirds of all young adults (68%) say college affordability should be Congress' top priority. Nearly nine in ten (88%) young adults also support making college and training more affordable as a way to strengthen the economy.

“This survey clearly shows how young adults view higher education today: it's more important than ever but also less affordable, and it comes with too much debt,” said Lauren Asher,

president of TICAS. “Whoever they are and whatever they earn, young adults share these concerns and see college affordability as a top priority for Congress and the economy.” Last week, a new [report](#) by TICAS’ Project on Student Debt found that two-thirds of the Class of 2010 graduated with student loans, and their average debt was \$25,250.

“Young adults today are the first generation, as a whole, facing downward economic mobility compared to their parents’ generation,” said Tamara Draut, vice president of policy and programs for Demos. “And today, as job quality has declined for all but those with college degrees, higher education is too often a debt-for-diploma system that puts an immediate obstacle in front of new graduates as they start their working lives, and makes it harder for many young people to complete their degrees.”

“Despite these tough times, young people do see a way forward for the economy as a whole and for their own shot at the American Dream,” said Jennifer Mishory, deputy director of Young Invincibles. “Young adults across party lines are looking for leadership from Congress and sending them a message: make college more, not less affordable. Protect the student aid that helps millions afford college and job training every year. Don’t cut access to Pell Grants or eliminate subsidies on student loans as ways to reduce the deficit.”

Views Cut Across Demographic and Political Lines

The survey found a high level of consistency in young adults’ views and concerns. Regardless of their race/ethnicity, education level, gender, or party affiliation, the majority of young people feel that higher education is more difficult to afford, student loan debt is too high and Congress should not cut student aid. For example, more than three quarters of African-American, Latino, and white young adults say higher education is harder to afford than five years ago. And significant majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents oppose cutting access to Pell Grants or charging in-school interest on student loans.

NOTE: The survey [results released today](#) were commissioned by all three organizations. The questions were included in a multi-issue survey conducted for Demos and Young Invincibles on the “State of Young America,” other sections of which were released last week. Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting conducted the nationwide survey of 872 adults age 18-34 from September 25 to October 4, 2011. Its margin of error is 3.32 percentage points.

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The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) is a nonprofit, non-partisan research and policy organization working to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. Its Project on Student Debt works to increase public understanding of rising student debt and the implications for our families, economy, and society. Visit www.ticas.org.

Dēmos is a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization working with advocates and policymakers around the country in pursuit of three overarching goals: a more equitable economy with widely shared prosperity and opportunity; a vibrant and inclusive democracy with high levels of voting and civic engagement; and an empowered public sector that works for the common good. Visit <http://www.demos.org>.

Young Invincibles is a national youth organization committed to mobilizing and expanding opportunity for all young Americans between 18 and 34 years of age. Young Invincibles is fiscally sponsored by the Center for Community Change, a 501(c)(3) organization. Visit www.YoungInvincibles.org.