The Midterms: Report on the 2022 North Dakota Student Political Engagement Survey

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Introduction

The Upper Midwest Regional Center on Public Policy at North Dakota State University (NDSU) sponsored the collection and analysis of survey data in this study. The researchers sent an invitation to participate in the survey via email to students enrolled at the eleven North Dakota University System public colleges and universities on November 9, the day after the 2022 elections. Three reminders were forwarded to students before the survey ended on November 20. Of 44,253 students invited to participate, 1,228 completed the survey for a response rate of 2.8%.

Respondent demographics are found in the Appendix.

This is the fifth North Dakota Student Political Engagement Survey with previous efforts taking place after the 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020 elections. The results and analysis of those surveys can be found on the Center's webpage.[i] The 2022 survey was not based upon a random sample and, therefore, may not fully reflect the experiences of the general population of North Dakota college and university students.

Survey Findings

Student Electoral Turnout and Vote

Students were asked, 'Did you vote in the 2022 election?' with three response options: 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'I attempted to vote but was unable to.' Of the 1,194 respondents who answered this question, approximately 70.3% voted successfully in the 2022 election, 23.2% did not vote, and 6.5% attempted to vote but were unable to do so. Of the 6.5% who unsuccessfully attempted to vote, 71 respondents provided an explanation: 19.7% had problems with the absentee ballot; 33.8% were busy or didn't have enough time to vote on Election Day; 22.5% were from out of state; 16.9% had problems with proof of residency; and 7.0% had miscellaneous issues.

Of the people who successfully voted, some 50.4% of respondents reported voting in person on Election Day, 31.6% mailed in a ballot, 14.7% voted in person before election day, and 3.4% dropped off their ballot.

The North Dakota Secretary of State reported that turnout for all voters across the state was 42.9% in 2022.[ii] However, turnout varied considerably by county with a low of 25.0% in Christianson County and a high of 80.2% in Billings County. Cass County reported 41.1% turnout in 2022 while Grand Forks had 35.9% turnout.

506 respondents reported how they voted in the 2022 US Senate race. Of those, 46.8% voted for John Hoeven (R), 37.4% voted for Katrina Christiansen (D), 11.3% voted for Rick Becker (I), 2.0% voted for some other candidate, and 2.6% reported skipping this part of the ballot.

506 respondents reported their vote in the 2022 race for US Representative. Of those, 55.3% voted for Kelly Armstrong (R), 37.5% for Cara Mund (I), 1.8% for some other candidate, and 5.3% skipped the race altogether.

507 respondents reported their vote on Measure 1, a ballot proposal to create term limits for state legislators and the governor. 71.0% voted in favor of Measure 1 and 24.5% voted against Measure 1 while 4.5% skipped Measure 1.

507 respondents reported their vote on Measure 2, a ballot proposal to legalize the possession of cannabis. 67.7% voted in favor of the measure while 30.6% voted against Measure 1. 1.8% skipped this measure.

For comparison, the North Dakota Secretary of State's office reported that, statewide, Hoeven won the US Senate race with 56.4% of all votes while Christiansen got 25.0% and Becker received 18.5%.[iii] Statewide, 62.2% voted for Kelly Armstrong for US Representative while Mund received 37.6%. Measure 1 passed with 63.3% of the vote while Measure 2 failed with 45.1% support.
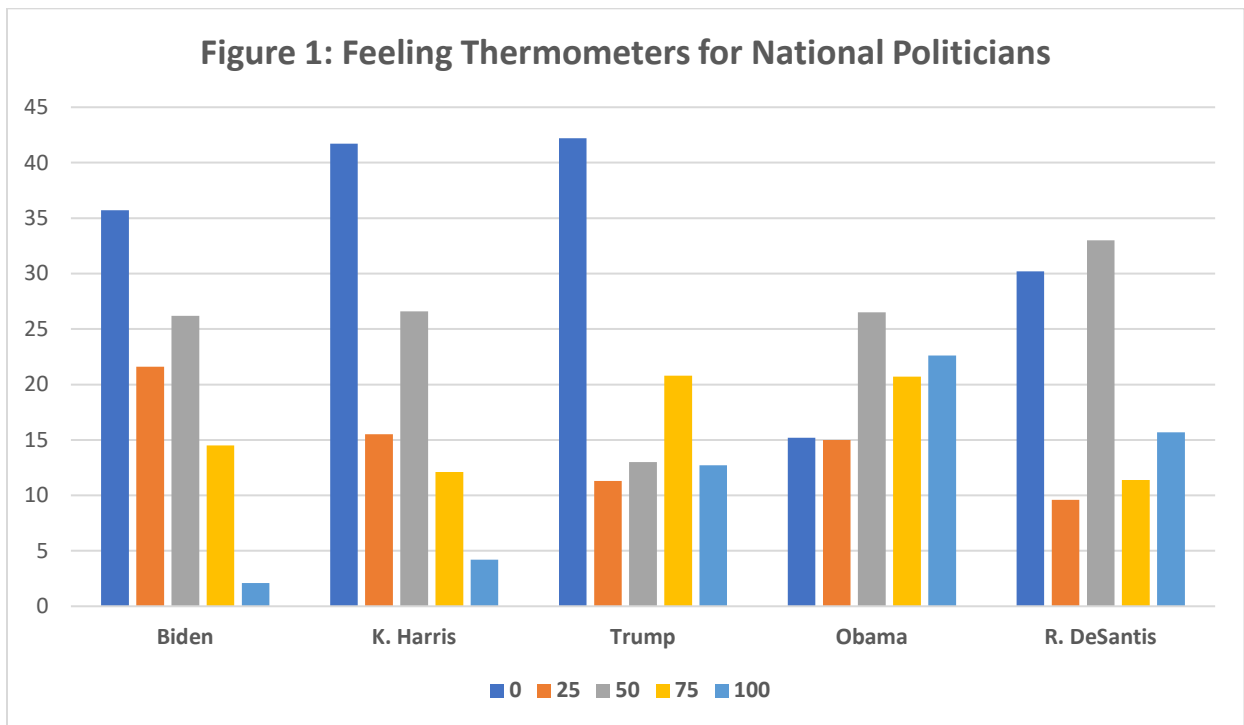
Finally, of the survey respondents who reported voting for Hoeven, 91.1% went on to vote for Armstrong and 4.6% for Mund. Of those who reported voting for Christiansen, 22.2% voted for Armstrong and 74.6% for Mund. Of those respondents who voted for Becker, 24.6% voted for Armstrong and 66.7% for Mund. Thus, support for Republican candidates was consistent across the two offices: these respondents were less likely to split their ticket. Christiansen supporters were a bit more likely to split their ticket. However, Becker

supporters were much more likely to support the independent candidate for the US House then the Republican candidate.

Student Attitudes Towards Politicians, Political Institutions, and Social Groups

Respondents were queried about their attitudes towards national politicians using a five-point feeling thermometer where a '0' represents 'Very Cold,' '25' indicates 'Cold,' '50' means 'Neither Warm nor Cold,' and '100' represents 'Very Warm.' The results are found in Figure 1.
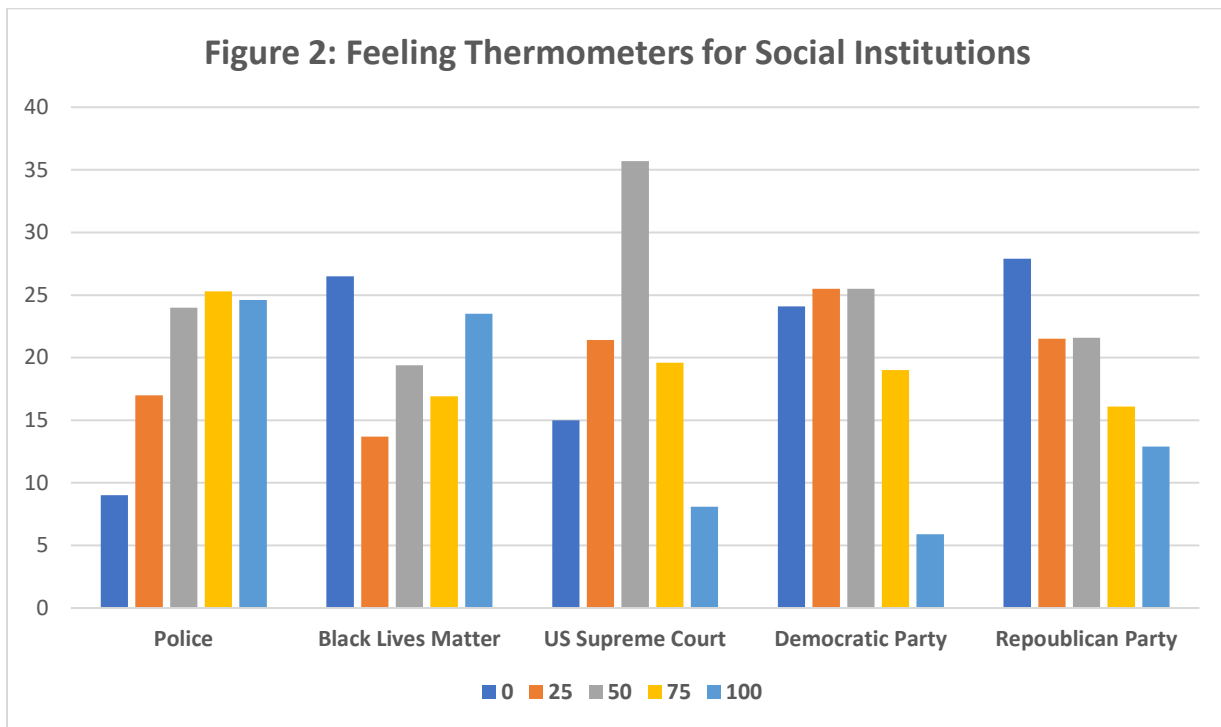
As can be seen, respondents had 'very cold' feelings towards active politicians with 35.7% feeling 'very cold' towards President Biden, 41.7% feeling 'very cold' towards Vice-President Harris and 42.2% feeling likewise towards President Trump. Some 30.2% felt 'very cold' towards Governor DeSantis, which seems to indicate a lower general dislike of him. However, this lower score might also be driven, in part, by a general lack of awareness of the Florida governor since 33.0% felt 'neither warm nor cold' towards him.

Figure 1: Feeling Thermometers for National Politicians
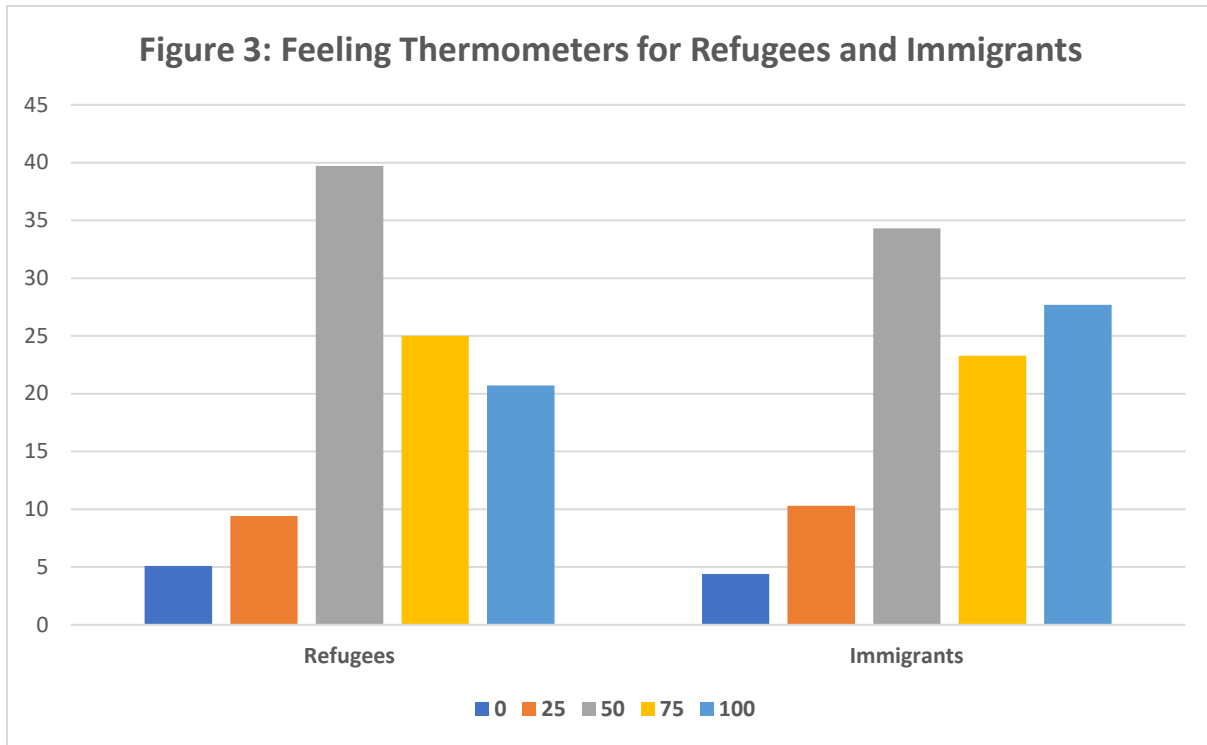
N=1,214 – 1,218

Feelings towards President Obama were more spread out across the categories than the other politicians, which may be due to his general popularity or the fact that he can't run for national office again and is, therefore, not as politically relevant.

Figure 2 illustrates respondent attitudes towards a handful of social institutions. Respondents generally held warmer feelings towards Law Enforcement than Black Lives Matter. They were also more likely to have 'neither warm nor cold' feelings towards the US Supreme Court, which might indicate low interest or knowledge about the Court. Finally, respondents tended to have neutral, 'cold,' or 'very cold' feelings towards the two major parties. Indeed, only 5.9% had 'very warm' feelings towards the Democratic Party.

Figure 2: Feeling Thermometers for Social Institutions

N=1,214 - 1,218

Figure 3 illustrates respondent feelings towards refugees and immigrants. The respondents generally had warm feelings towards both groups, with 45.7% reporting 'warm' or 'very warm' feelings towards refugees and 51.0% towards immigrants. Only small proportions felt 'cold' or 'very cold' towards these groups. Finally, a plurality had 'neither warm nor cold' feelings, with 39.7% feeling neutral towards refugees and 34.3% towards immigrants.

Figure 3: Feeling Thermometers for Refugees and Immigrants
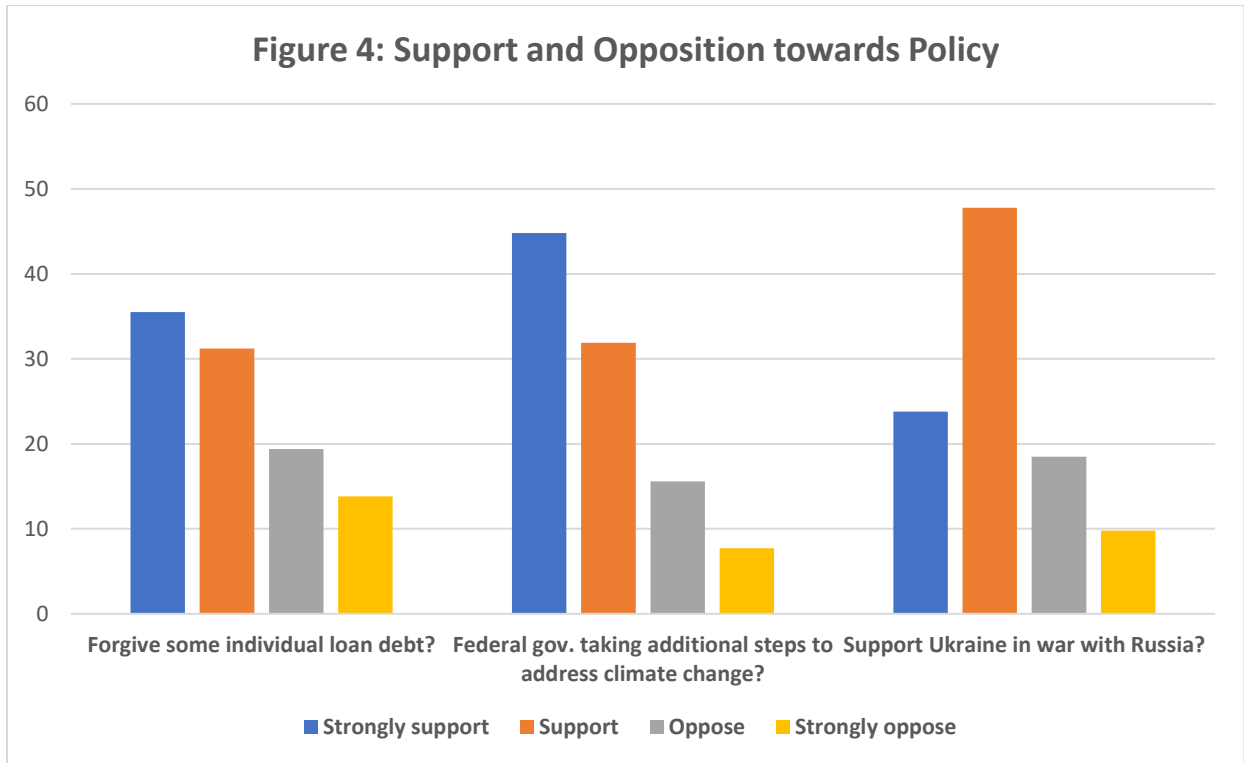
Legend: ■ 0 ■ 25 ■ 50 ■ 75 ■ 100

N=604-610

Student Attitudes on Policy

1,208 respondents gave their thoughts on the state of the economy in 2022 across the United States. Some 28.1% thought it was 'very bad,' 45.3% 'bad', 20.9% 'neither good nor bad,' 5.4% 'good,' and 0.3% thought it was very good. In addition, 1,183 respondents reported on the state of the economy these days in North Dakota. 3.9% thought it was 'very bad,' 23.6% 'bad', 53.6% 'neither good nor bad,' 18.1% 'good,' and 0.8% thought it was very good.

1,212 respondents answered the query "How confident are you that votes across the United States were counted accurately in the November 2020 election?" Approximately 44.6% were 'very confident' votes were counted accurately 22.9% 'somewhat confident,' 19.2% 'not too confident,' and 13.3% 'not all confident.'

Figure 4 illustrates respondent attitudes towards prominent policy issues from the 2022 elections. As shown, respondents were quite supportive of the Federal government taking

additional steps to address climate change. They also supported Ukraine in its war with Russia. Indeed, 76.7% supported more action on climate change and 71.% supported Ukraine. However, respondents were a little less supportive of forgiving some individual debt with 66.7% supporting or strongly supporting of such a policy.
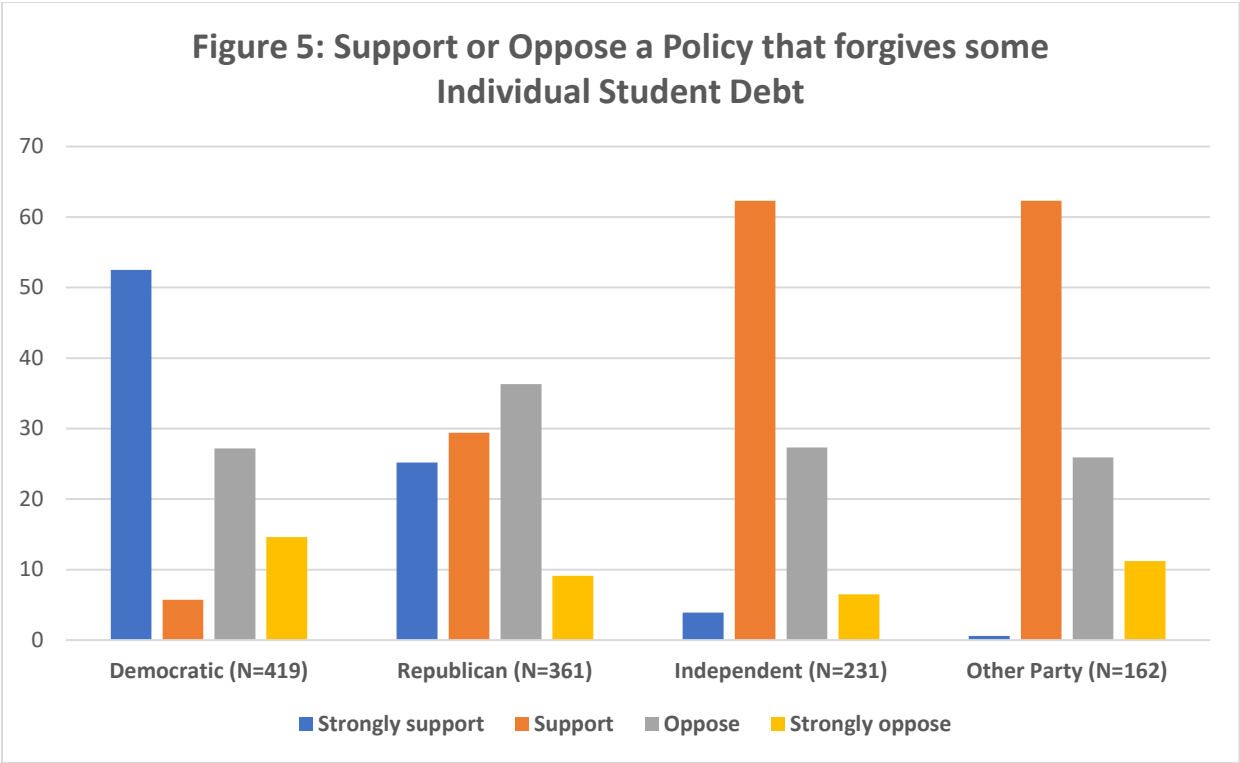

Figure 4: Support and Opposition towards Policy

N=1,214 for loan debt, 1,211 for climate change, and 1,198 for Ukraine War

Respondents answered a series of questions on abortion. When 1,181 respondents were asked "Do you think abortion should be…" some 36.9% answered 'legal in all cases,' 28.5% 'legal in most cases,' 25.4% 'illegal in most cases,' and 9.2% 'illegal in all cases.'

1,193 respondents were asked "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for pregnant people to access medical abortions through the mail?" 45.6% said it should be 'illegal' while 54.4% said it should be 'legal.'
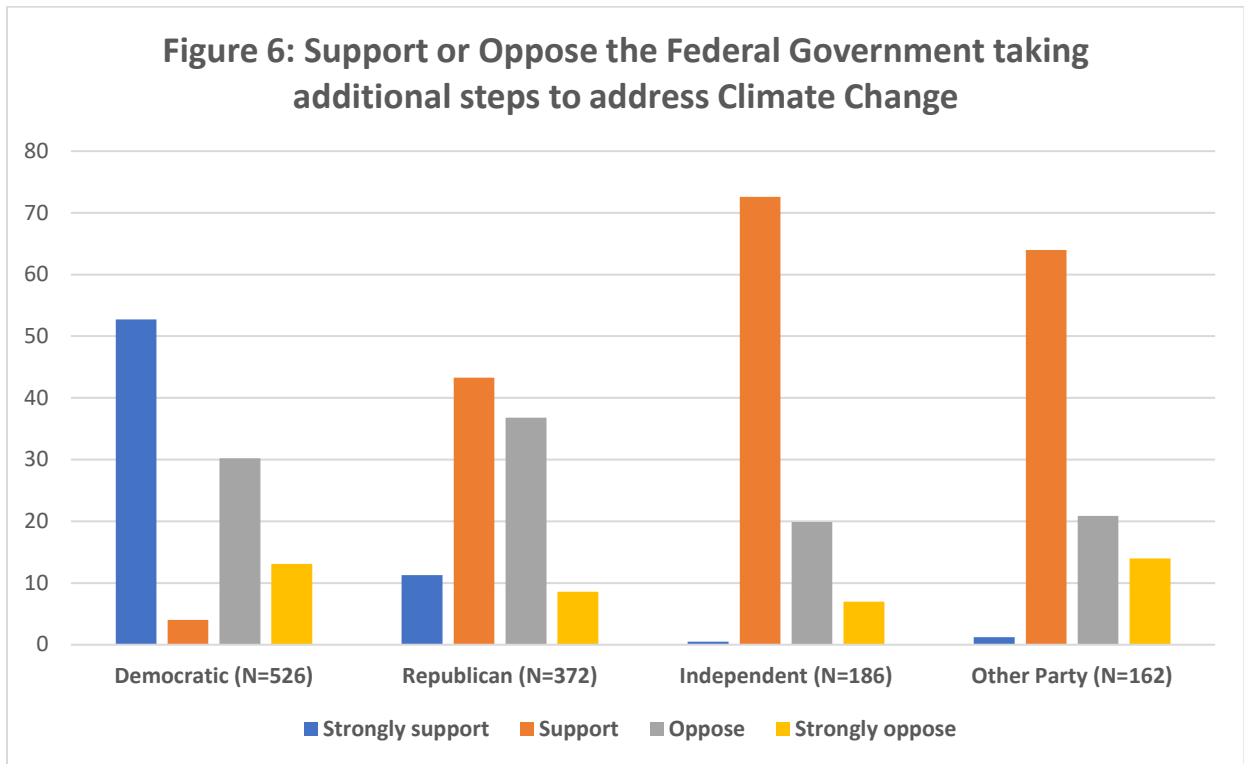
Finally, 1,209 respondents were asked "Do you think it should be legal or illegal for pregnant people to cross state lines in order to access abortion?" Some 79.0% said it should be 'legal' while 21.0% said it should be 'illegal."

A breakdown of respondent attitudes on student loan debt forgiveness by partisan identification is found in Figure 5. As can be seen, majorities support some form of student loan forgiveness no matter their party: even respondents identifying as Republican support or strongly support this policy by a 54.6% to 45.4% margin. However, debt forgiveness remains polarizing across the two major parties with some 41.8% of Democrats opposing or strongly opposing debt forgiveness as do 45.4% of Republicans. Surprisingly, Independents are most supportive with 66.2% supporting some form of debt forgiveness, while respondents identifying with some third party are close behind at 62.9%.

Figure 5: Support or Oppose a Policy that forgives some Individual Student Debt

Respondent attitudes on the federal government taking additional steps to address climate change by partisan identification is found in Figure 6. As with student debt forgiveness, majorities support or strongly support this policy no matter how they identify politically. However, there is considerable variation in this support: 52.7% of Democrats strongly support this policy compared to 11.3% for Republicans, 0.5. for Independents, and 1.2% for supporters of Other Parties. Yet only 4.0% of Democrats voice more

moderate support. In contrast, 43.3% Republicans, 72.6% Independents, and 64.0% Other Party indicate support, though not strong support.

Figure 6: Support or Oppose the Federal Government taking additional steps to address Climate Change

Finally, 43.4% of Democrats oppose or strongly oppose greater federal action on climate change while 45.4% Republicans, 26.9% Independents, and 34.9% Other Party felt the same way. Thus, respondents who identified as Democrats tended to support or oppose federal action by nearly the same margin as Republican respondents. It was the intensity of this support or opposition that varied.

Conclusion

There are four general findings in this report. First, the survey respondents supported Democratic candidates in the 2022 elections at higher rates than did all voters across North Dakota.

Second, students believe North Dakota's economy is in much better shape than the national economy: whereas 73.4% felt the national economy was 'bad' or 'very bad,' only 27.5% felt the same way about North Dakota's economy. However, only 19.9% felt the state economy was 'good' or 'very good.'

Third, Democratic and Republican support and opposition on student debt and climate change policies were very similar in the aggregate. Where they varied was in their intensity of support or opposition of these policies.

Finally, respondents largely supported the availability of abortion. Only 9.2% said it should be illegal in all cases.

APPENDIX

Respondent Demographics

Demographics

1,221 respondents gave their year in school. 21.9 were Freshmen, 19.4% were Sophomores, 15.6 were Juniors, 19.9 were Seniors, and 23.1% were Graduate or Professional students.

Of 1,221 respondents, 18.6% reported spending the most time before college in an Urban community, 45.9% in a Rural community, and 35.5% in a Suburban community.

Of 1,227 respondents, 4.2% reported as Native American, 3.6% as Asian, 2.2% as Black, 2.5% as Latina/Latino, 0.5% as Pacifica Islander, and 93.7% as White.

Of 1,179 respondents, 27.4% thought of themselves as Democrat, 31,9% as Republican, 29.9% as Independent, and 10.9% as some Other party.

1,211 placed themselves along an eight-point scale of political views such that 13.2% said they were very liberal, 15.7% liberal, 13.6% slightly liberal, 17.3% moderate, 14.0 slightly conservative, 19.8% conservative, and 6.4% very conservative.

1,221 respondents responded to the statement "Growing up, I would consider myself to be…" with 2.0% saying Upper class, 25.7% Upper middle class, 46.6% Middle class, 20.0% 'Lower middle class, and 7.7% Lower class.

1,211 respondents answered the question "what is your gender or sex?" 56.2% identified as female, 49.4% identified as male, and 3.1% gave some other answer.

Responses by institution, 2022

Bismarck State College – 75 (6.1% of total survey responses)

Dakota College at Bottineau – 12 (1.0%)

Dickinson State University – 29 (2.4%)

Lake Region State College – 18 (1.5%)

Mayville State University – 22 (1.8%)

Minot State University – 83 (6.8%)

North Dakota State College of Science – 46 (3.8%)

North Dakota State University – 414 (33.8%)

University of North Dakota – 471 (38.5%)

Valley City State University – 35 (2.9%)

Williston State College – 19 (1.6%)

Endnotes

[i] See https://www.ndsu.edu/centers/publicpolicy/
[ii] See https://results.sos.nd.gov/Default.aspx?map=Cty&mode=0
[iii] See https://results.sos.nd.gov/ResultsSW.aspx?text=All&type=SW&map=CTY