

Report on the 2024 North Dakota Student Political Engagement Survey

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INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the Upper Midwest Regional Center on Public Policy at North Dakota State University (NDSU) sponsored the collection and analysis of survey data for the biannual North Dakota Student Political Engagement Survey. The researchers sent an invitation to participate in the survey via email to students enrolled at North Dakota University System public colleges and universities on November 6, the day after the 2024 elections.ⁱ A reminder was sent to students on November 13. The survey ended on November 20. Of 43,699 students invited to participate, 2,789 completed the survey for a response rate of 6.38%. 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, and 2022 elections. The results of those earlier surveys can be found on the Center's webpage.ⁱⁱ It should be noted that the 2024 survey was not based upon a random sample and, therefore, may not fully reflect the experiences of the general population of North Dakota undergraduate and graduate students.

PART I: OVERVIEW

Student Electoral Turnout and Vote

Students were asked, 'Did you vote in the 2024 election?' with three response options: 'Yes,' 'No,' and 'I attempted to vote but was unable to.' Of the 1,937 respondents who answered this question, 90.2% voted successfully in the 2024 election, 6.0% did not try to vote, and 3.8% attempted to vote but were unable to do so. Of the 3.8% who unsuccessfully attempted to vote, 69 respondents provided an explanation: 19 had problems with the absentee ballot; 11 were busy or didn't have enough time to vote on Election Day; 22 were from out of state; 10 had problems with proof of residency; and 7 had miscellaneous issues.

Of the respondents who successfully voted, 39.1% of respondents voted in person on Election Day, 28.6% mailed in a ballot, 29.0% voted in person before election day, and 3.3% dropped off their ballot.

The North Dakota Secretary of State reported that turnout for all voters across the state in 2024 was 62.6%.ⁱⁱ However, turnout varied considerably by county, ranging from a low of 38.5% in Sioux County to a high of 98.2% in Billings County. Cass County (home to North Dakota State University) reported 63.1% turnout in the 2024 general election while Grand Forks County (home to University of North Dakota) had 54.9% turnout.

1,021 respondents who reported how they voted in the 2024 US Senate race: 46.9% voted for the incumbent Kevin Cramer (R), 45.1% voted for Katrina Christiansen (D), 7.2% voted for some other candidate, and 0.8% reported skipping this part of the ballot.

1,004 respondents reported their vote in the 2024 race for US Representative. Of those, 46.1% voted for Julie Fedorchak (R), 35.9% for Trygve Hammer (D), 1.3% for some other candidate, and 16.7% skipped the race altogether.

1,029 respondents reported their vote on Measure 4, a proposal to eliminate property taxes across North Dakota. Of those, 24.9% voted in favor of Measure 4 and 67.3% voted against it while 7.8% skipped Measure 4 altogether.

1,033 respondents reported their vote on Measure 5, a proposal to legalize the possession of cannabis in North Dakota. Of those, 59.1% voted in favor of the measure while 38.0% voted against it. Some 2.9% skipped this measure altogether.

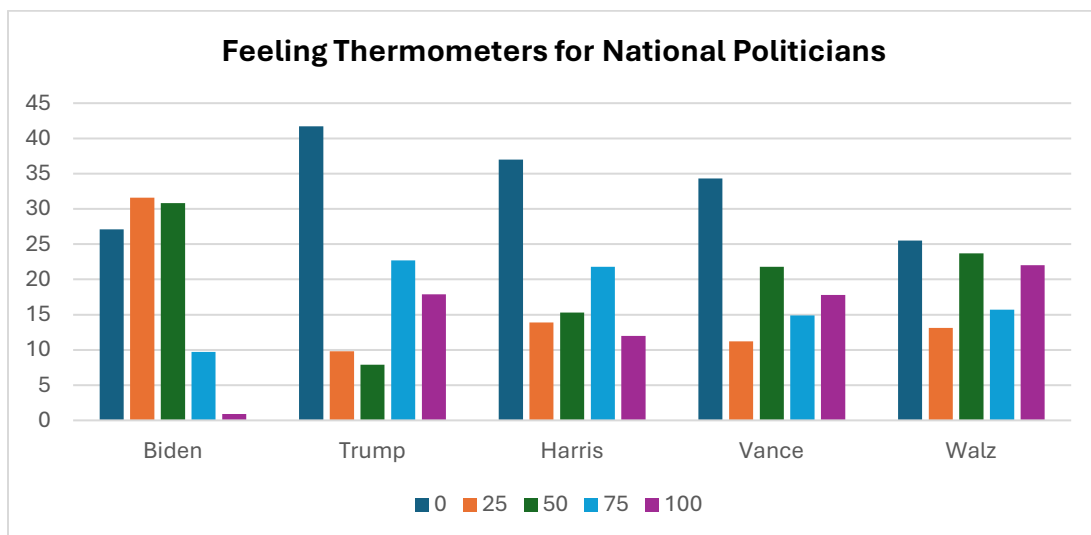
For comparison, the North Dakota Secretary of State's office reported that, amongst voters statewide, Cramer won the US Senate race with 66.3% of the vote while Christiansen got 33.4%. Statewide, 69.2% voted for Julie Fedorchak for US Representative while Hammer received 30.4%. Measure 4 failed with 36.5% of the vote statewide while Measure 5 failed with 47.5% support.

Student Attitudes Towards National Politicians and Political Parties

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,' '75' means 'Warm,' and '100' represents 'Very Warm.'

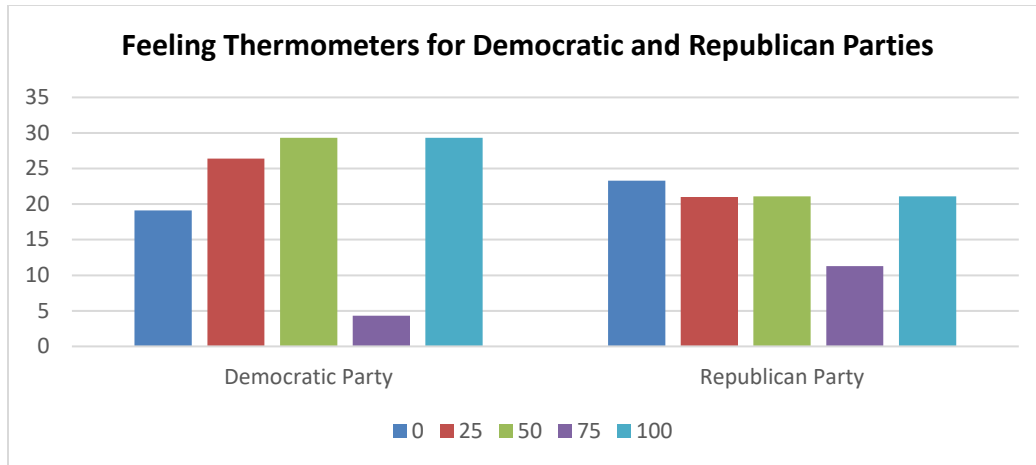
Some 27.1% of respondents felt 'very cold' towards President Biden while 37.0% felt the same about Vice-President Harris, 41.7% towards President Trump, 34.3% towards Vice-President nominee Vance, and 25.5% towards Vice President nominee Walz. The number of respondents who felt 'very cold' to the nominees is partially balanced by respondents who felt 'very warm' about these politicians, with 17.9% expressing such an attitude towards Trump, 12.0% towards Harris, 17.8% towards Vance, and 22.0% towards Walz. Notably, only 0.9% of respondents felt 'very warm' towards President Biden, indicative of his reduced status after withdrawing from the presidential contest.



There have been five North Dakota Student Political Engagement Surveys since 2016, which means there are enough data points to establish a timeline. The percentage of respondents who felt 'warm' or 'very warm' to Donald Trump and Joe Biden changed considerably across surveys. Trump received 30.5% in 2016, 26.6% in 2018, 35.4% in 2020, 33.5% in 2022, and 40.6% in 2024. Thus, Trump experienced declines in midterm election years but saw rises in 'warm' and 'very warm' feelings with the subsequent presidential election years.

The timeline for Biden starts in 2020 when 39.6% of respondents felt 'warm' or 'very warm' towards him. However, these scores dropped precipitously in subsequent surveys with 16.6% feeling this way in 2022 and 10.6% in 2024.

When respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the two national parties, a plurality held 'cold' or 'very cold' feelings towards the two parties, with 45.5% for the Democratic Party and 44.3% for the Republicans. In contrast, 33.6% held 'warm' or 'very warm' feelings towards the Democrats while 31.4% felt the same way about the Republicans. Notably, 29.3% of respondents felt 'neither warm or cold' about the Democratic Party while 21.1% felt the same way about the Republican Party.

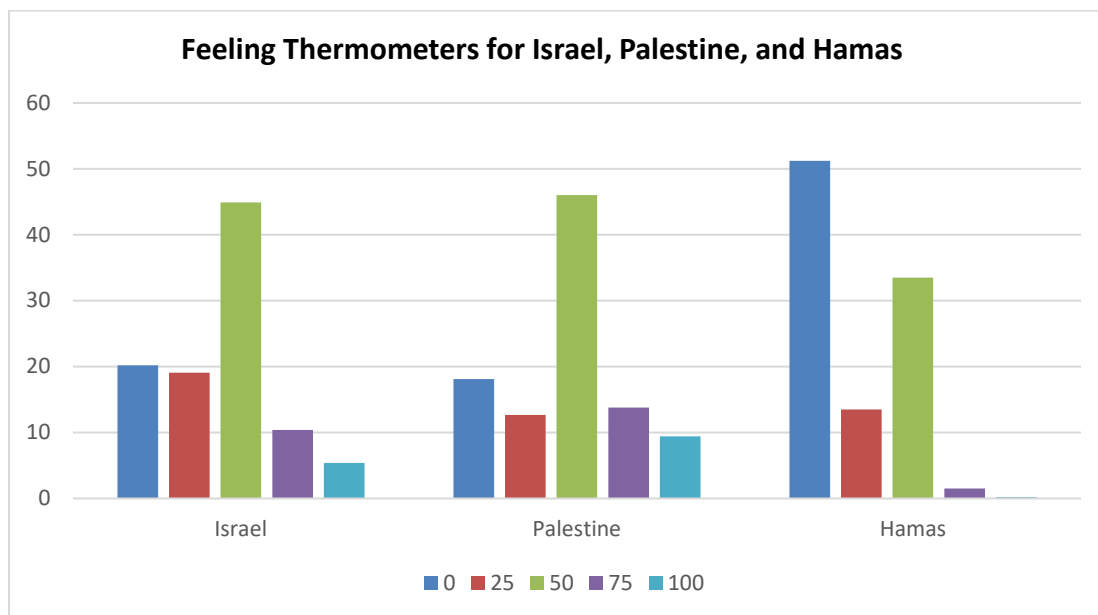


Student Attitudes on the War in Gaza and the War Between Russia and Ukraine

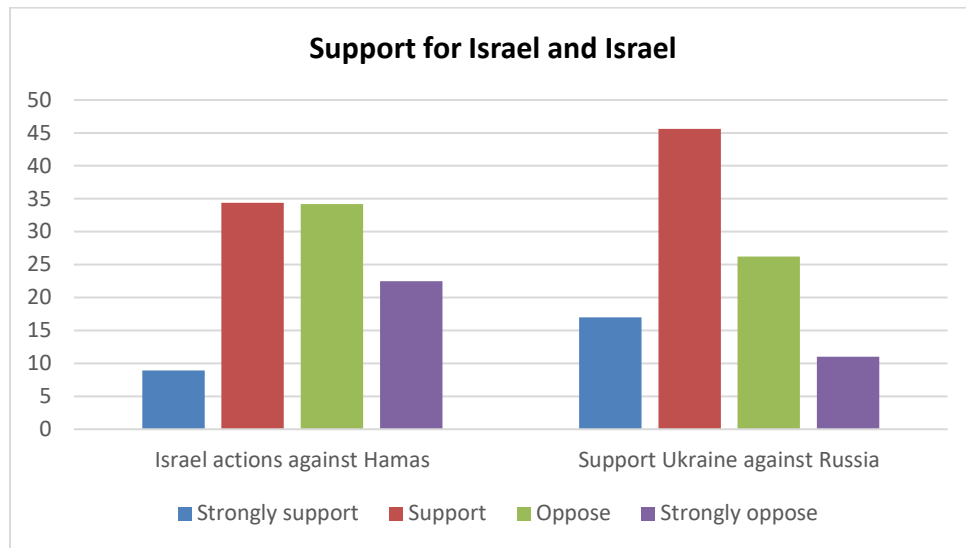
The Gaza War focused attention on the Middle East during the lead up to the November 2024 elections. Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the three primary actors of this conflict: Israel, Palestine, and Hamas. Sizable pluralities felt ‘Neither Warm nor Cold’ about each of these actors: 44.9% felt this way about Israel while 46.0% felt similarly about Palestine and 33.5% regarding Hamas. Such results may be indicative of a lack of knowledge or clarity about a subject matter.

While respondents who gave non-neutral answers tended to feel cold towards Israel and Palestine, they felt particularly harsh towards Hamas with 51.2% reporting ‘very cold’ feelings and 13.5% reporting ‘cold’ feelings. Only 1.7% felt ‘warm’ or ‘very warm’ towards Hamas while 15.8% expressed such feelings to Israel and 23.2% for Palestine.

Notably, the response rate for Israel was much lower than for the other actors: 1,770 respondents gave opinions on Hamas and Palestine while only 891 did so for Israel.



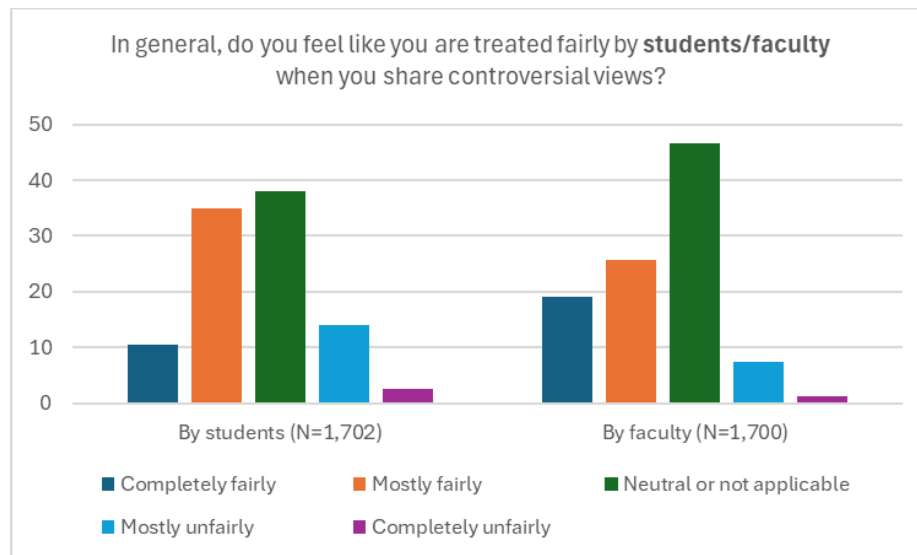
Students were also asked about their support for Israel in its actions against Hamas. In regards to “Do you support or oppose efforts to support Israel in military actions against Hamas,” 8.9% ‘strongly support’ and 34.4 ‘support’ those efforts while’ 34.2% ‘oppose,’ and 22.5% ‘strongly oppose.’



Survey respondents also gave their opinions on US support of Ukraine in its war with Russia. Regarding the question “Do you support or oppose efforts to support Ukraine in the war with Russia,” 17.0% ‘strongly supported,’ 45.6% ‘supported,’ 26.4% ‘opposed,’ and 11.0% ‘strongly opposed’ those efforts.

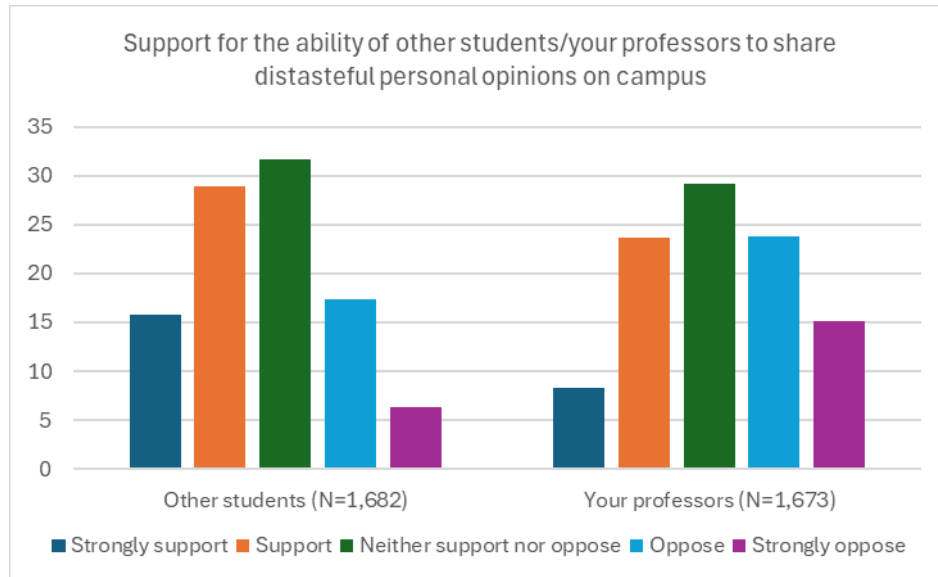
Student Attitudes on Freedom of Expression

We asked several questions regarding respondents' views on freedom of expression in the college environment. When asked, "In general, do you feel like you are treated fairly by [other students or faculty] when you share controversial views with them," nearly 46% said they felt other students treated them mostly or completely fairly, and 44.7% felt faculty treated them mostly or completely fairly. In addition, 38% of respondents reported neutral or undecided feelings about their treatment by other students and 46.5% by faculty. Finally, 16.4% felt they were treated mostly or completely unfairly by other students and 8.8% felt treated mostly or completely unfairly by faculty.

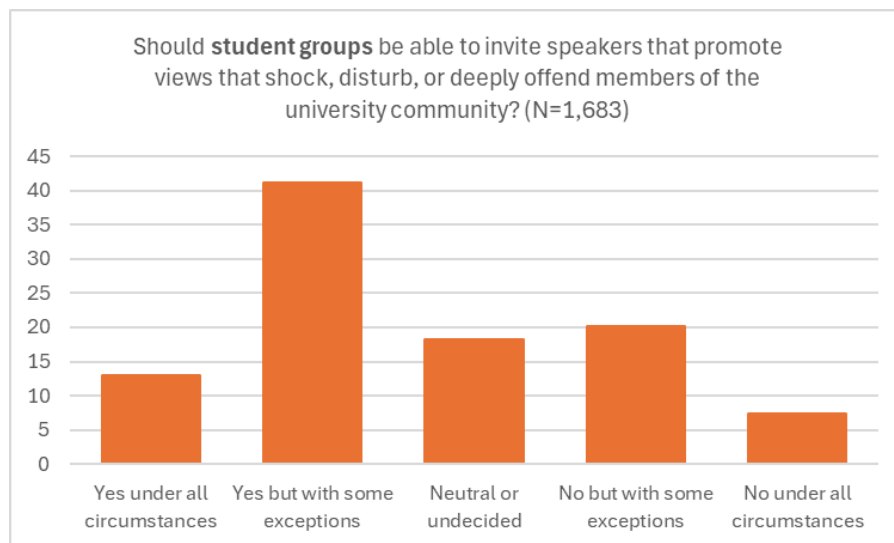


Students were also asked about support for the ability of others to share distasteful personal opinions on campus. They largely reported support or strong support, though it varied based on *who* might have this ability. When asked, "To what extent do you support the ability of other *students* to share personal opinions that a large portion of society finds distasteful, offensive, or even hateful on campus," 44.7% reported support or strong support, 31.6% reported neither support nor opposition, and nearly 23.7% reported opposition.

Respondents were less supportive when asked, "To what extent do you support the ability of *your professors* to share personal opinions on subjects within their expertise that a large portion of society finds distasteful, offensive, or even hateful on campus?" Just 32% supported or strongly supported this position, compared to 29.2% who reported neither support nor opposition and 39% who expressed opposition.



Respondents were asked, “Should student groups be able to invite speakers that promote views that shock, disturb, or deeply offend members of the university community?” and were generally supportive: More than 54% said this should be allowed with some exceptions (41.2%) or under all circumstances (13%). Of the 27.5% who oppose the ability of student groups to invite potentially offensive speakers, 20% believed there should be some exceptions; 18% of respondents were neutral or undecided on the issue.



Student Attitudes on Abortion and the Economy

Finally, 1,685 respondents answered a series of questions on abortion. When asked “Do you think abortion should be...”, some 32.8% answered ‘legal in all cases,’ 29.7% ‘legal in most cases,’ 28.4% ‘illegal in most cases,’ and 9.1% ‘illegal in all cases.’

When asked “Do you think it should be legal or illegal for pregnant people to access medical

abortion through the mail?”, 49.8% believed it should be ‘legal’ while 50.2% thought it should be ‘illegal.’ There were 1,700 responses.

When asked “Do you think it should be legal or illegal for pregnant people to cross state lines in order to access abortion?”, 79.8% believed it should be ‘legal’ while 20.2% thought it should be ‘illegal.’ There were 1,712 responses.

Finally, 1,780 respondents gave their thoughts on the state of the economy in 2024 across the United States. Some 19.3% thought the national economy was ‘very bad,’ 48.8% thought it was ‘bad,’ 21.1% ‘neither good nor bad,’ 10.0% ‘good,’ and 0.8% thought it was very good.

1,749 respondents reported on the state of the economy these days in North Dakota: 2.4% thought it was ‘very bad,’ 26.8% ‘bad,’ 44.0% ‘neither good nor bad,’ 24.4% ‘good,’ and 2.5% thought it was ‘very good’. While respondents were not happy, they generally felt the state’s economy was doing better than the rest of the nation.

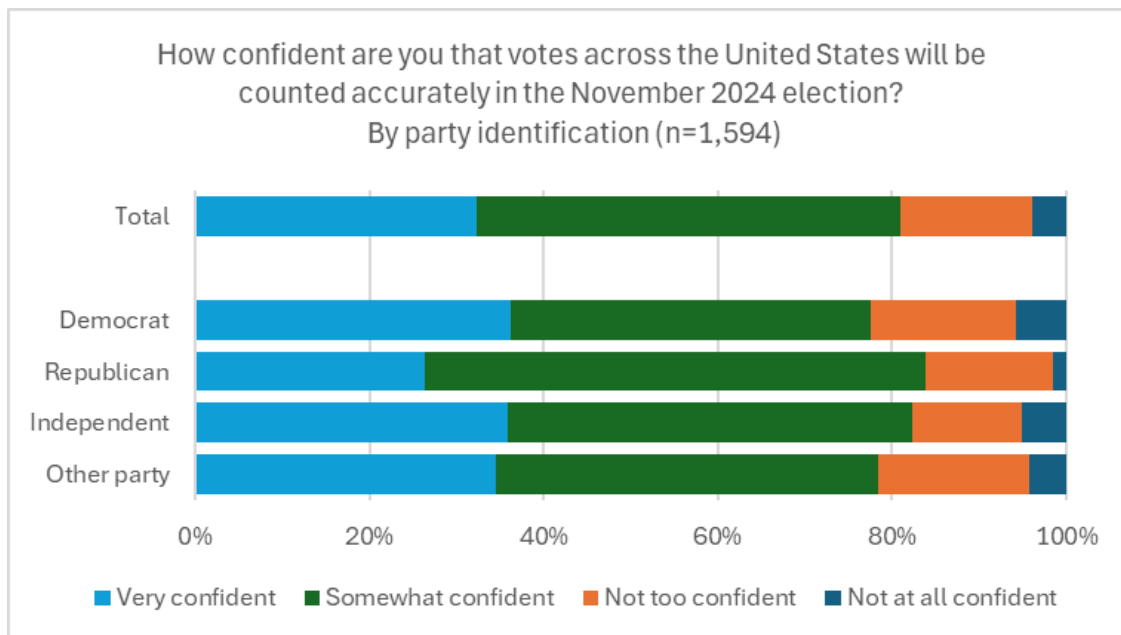
PART II: COMPARISONS BY PARTY IDENTITY

This section takes a closer look at the survey results by considering the relationship between a respondent's partisan identification and their responses.

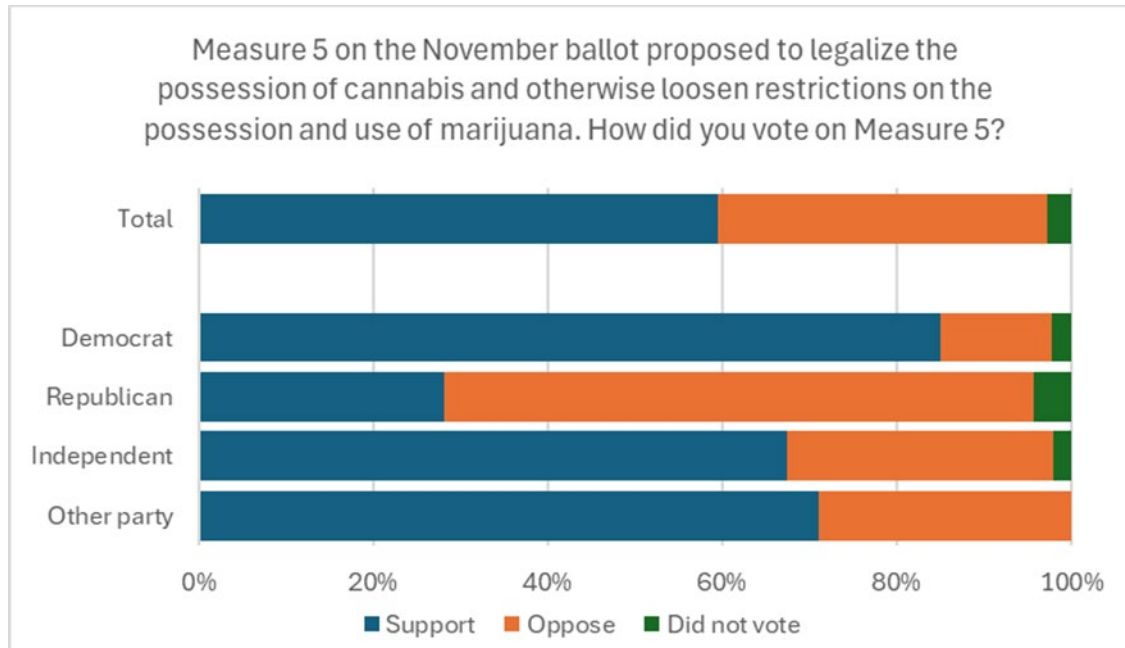
Of the 1,599 respondents who reported their party identity, 33.4% said they usually think of themselves as a Democrat, 36.8% said a Republican, 22.4% said Independent, and 7.4% said they think of themselves as some other party.

The 473 respondents who selected Independent and other party were also asked whether they consider themselves closer to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Nearly 44% of these respondents identified themselves as leaning toward the Democratic Party, 33% identified as leaning toward the Republican Party, and 24% did not identify as closer to either party.

Concerns about election integrity and vote count accuracy have long been a partisan issue in American politics. Some 80.3% of survey respondents were confident that votes were accurately counted in 2024. Although more Democrats than Republicans reported being very confident in the vote count (36% and 26%, respectively), more Republicans reported being confident overall compared to Democrats: 84% versus 78%, respectively. Similarly, 82.4% of Independents and 78.5% of those identifying with another party expressed confidence in the vote count.

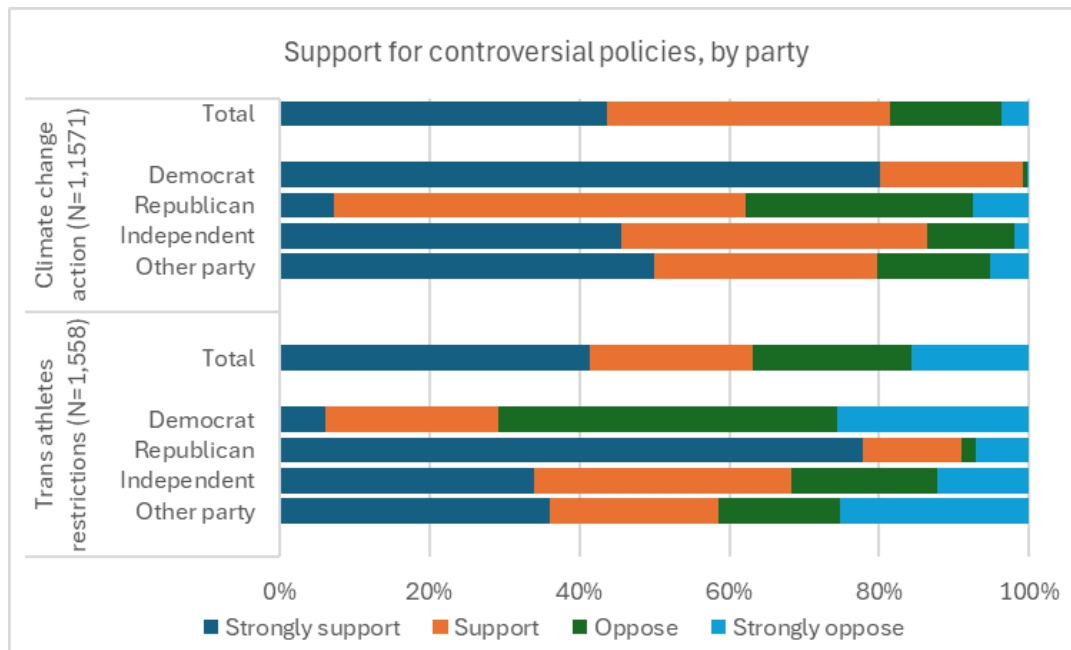


North Dakota voters were asked to consider initiated ballot Measure 5, which proposed legalizing the possession of cannabis and loosening restrictions on its possession and use. Some 59% of respondents reported voting to support Measure 5, while 38% voted to oppose it; 3% did not vote on the measure.



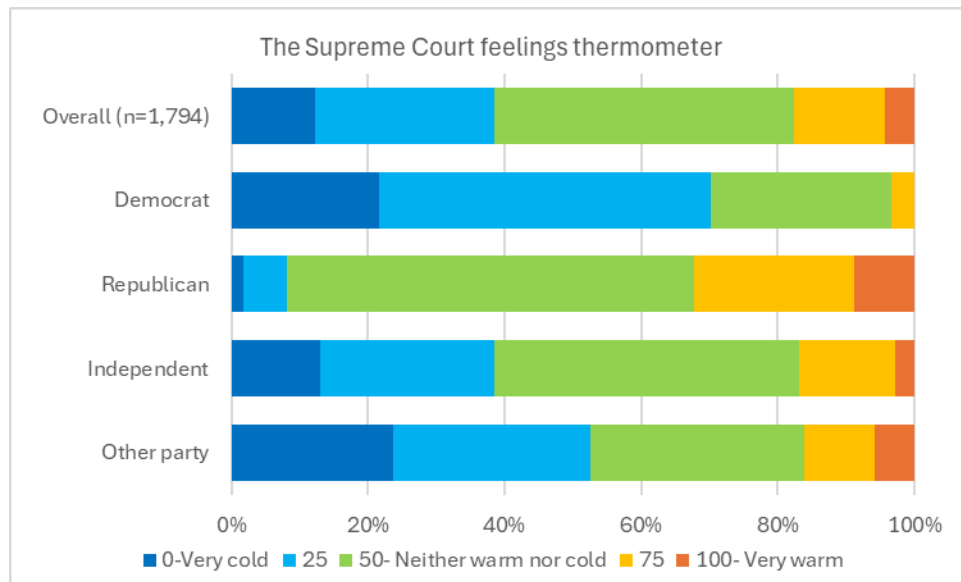
However, support for the measure differed by There was considerable variance based on partisan identity: 85% of self-identified Democrats voted in favor of Measure 5 as did 67% of Independents and 71% of those who identified with other parties. However, only 28% of Republicans voted for Measure 5.

Respondents overwhelmingly supported the federal government taking action on climate change, but Democratic respondents were much more likely to report support or strongly support. By comparison, 89.8% of those who identify with other parties and 86.5% of Independents support such measures, while only 62% of Republicans expressed support or strong support.

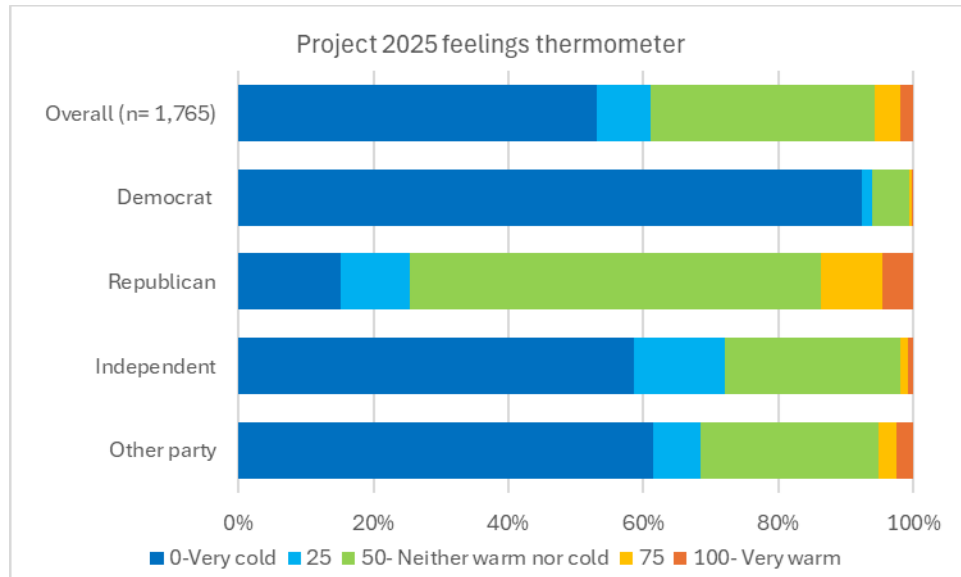


There were substantial differences in respondent support for policies requiring trans athletes to compete on teams matching their sex assigned at birth. Some 91% of Republican respondents support or strongly supported restricting trans athletes, compared to 29% of Democratic respondents, 68.3% of Independents, and 58% of those who identify with other parties.

National polls indicate that opinions about the US Supreme Court have become increasingly politicized over the past decade.ⁱⁱⁱ Respondents seemed to follow this pattern: just 18% of all respondents reported warm or very warm feelings about the Court, and 44% reported feeling neither warm nor cold. Respondent attitudes toward the Supreme Court differed significantly by party, with 32% of Republicans reported warm or very warm feelings, compared to 18% of Democrats and 17% of Independents. Instead, 70% of Democrats and 38% of Independents expressed cold or very cold feelings, compared to just 8% of Republicans.



The Heritage Foundation's policy prescription, *Project 2025: Presidential Transition Project* dominated popular discourse about the 2024 Presidential campaign and expectations for a second Trump presidency. Sixty-one percent of all respondents reported cold or very cold feelings about Project 2025.



Respondent feelings about the Project broke along party lines. Approximately 94% of Democrats reported very cold or cold feelings toward it while 72% of Independents, and 78% of respondents identifying with Independents and other parties reported very cold or cold feelings. Only 26% of Republicans felt the same way.

61% of Republicans reported neither warm nor cold feelings about Project 2025. This suggests that they were either unaware of Project 2025 or did not have strong feelings about it. By comparison, only 5.5% of Democrats reported neither warm nor cold feelings, suggesting they were very aware of Project 2025. This suggests the relative salience of Project 2025: It was not a big deal for Republicans, but a very big deal for Democrats.

APPENDIX

Demographics

1,631 respondents gave their year in school. 22.1% were Freshmen, 15.9% were Sophomores, 18.1% were Juniors, 19.7% were Seniors, and 24.1% were Graduate or Professional students.

Of 1,162 respondents, 18.4% reported spending the most time before college in an Urban community, 45.7% in a Rural community, and 35.9% in a Suburban community.

Of 1,756 respondents, 2.7% reported as Native American, 2.7% as Asian, 2.6% as Black, 4.1% as Latina/Latino, 0.2% as Pacifica Islander, and 85.1% as White.

Of 1,599 respondents, 33.4% thought of themselves as a Democrat, 36.8% as a Republican, 22.4% as an Independent, and 7.4% as affiliated with some Other party.

1,616 respondents placed themselves along an eight-point scale of political views such that 10.5% said they were very liberal, 19.7% liberal, 13.4% slightly liberal, 14.4% moderate, 13.6% slightly conservative, 22.0% conservative, and 6.4% very conservative.

1,485 respondents answered the question “what is your gender or sex?” 57.4% identified as female, 39.8% identified as male, and 2.8% gave some other answer.

Responses by institution, 2024

Bismarck State University – 142 (5.4% of total responses)

Dakota College at Bottineau – 20 (0.8%)

Dickinson State College – 79 (3.0%)

Lake Region State College – 21 (0.8%)

Mayville State University – 1 (0.0%)

Minot State University – 224 (8.5%)

North Dakota State College of Science – 105 (4.0%)

North Dakota State University – 830 (31.3%)

University of North Dakota – 1,059 (40.0%)

Valley City State University – 111 (4.2%)

Williston State College – 57 (2.2%)

Endnotes

ⁱ Mayville State University was unable to submit its student emails on time and, consequently, had to be excluded from the analysis.

ⁱⁱ See the Upper Midwest Center on Public Policy webpage at: <https://www.ndsu.edu/centers/publicpolicy/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Annenberg Public Policy Center (2024, October 2). Trust in the Supreme Court continues to sink. <https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/trust-in-us-supreme-court-continues-to-sink/>; Copeland, J. (2024, August 8). Favorable views of Supreme Court remain near historic low. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/08/08/favorable-views-of-supreme-court-remain-near-historic-low/>; Jones, J.M. (2024, October 3). Party divisions in views of Supreme Court keep ratings low. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/651527/party-divisions-views-supreme-court-keep-ratings-low.aspx>.