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ELECTION INTEREST AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IS UP SHARPLY FROM 2000
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Young adults are substantially more involved in the 2004 presidential race than they were in the 2000 race. If the trend continues, higher turnout in November is nearly a certainty.

In our national survey the week of Super Tuesday in 2004, nearly half of adults between the ages of 18 and 30 said they had read, seen, or heard an election news story within the past day. In our survey during the same week in 2000, only slightly more than a third made this claim. Compared with 2000, younger adults were also more likely (39 percent versus 29 percent) to say they had talked about the campaign within the past day and more likely (43 percent to 26 percent) to say they had spent time in the past day thinking about the campaign.

	Voter Involvement			
	18-29		30+	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
News	36%	49%	48%	51%
Talk	29%	39%	30%	31%
Think	26%	43%	50%	54%

Campaign involvement among adults over 30 was also higher this year than during the comparable period of the 2000 campaign, but by only a small margin.

A key to understanding the heightened interest of young adults in this year's election is their belief that the stakes are high. At the time of the Super Tuesday contests, nearly three in five (57 percent) of younger adults felt the election would have "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of impact on the future of the country. In fact, younger adults were more likely than older adults (51 percent) to have this belief. In 2000, only a third (33 percent) of young adults felt that the election's outcome would have a substantial influence on the country's future.

Young adults account for much of the decline in electoral participation and interest during recent decades. Their turnout rate in the 1972 general election was nearly 50 percent. In 2000, it was barely above 30 percent. If the heightened interest young adults have shown so far this year should continue to November, they could help reverse the downward trend in voter turnout. Studies show that, if young adults vote in one of the first two or three presidential elections in which they are eligible, they are likely to vote with some frequency throughout the rest of their adult lives.

Another indicator that points toward higher turnout in November is that Independents are substantially more involved in this election than they were in the 2000 election. This year, Independents were about 10 percentage points more likely during Super Tuesday week to say they had been paying attention to election news and talking about the campaign.

Although the Independent voter is sometimes idealized, the fact is that Independents, as a group, are less politically informed, interested, and participatory than those who identify with the Republican or Democratic Party. It is no coincidence that the rise in the number of Independents in recent decades has overlapped with the longest sustained downturn in voter turnout in the

nation's history. Thus, a campaign that captures the imagination of Independents is one that could produce a sharp turnout increase in November.

As is true of young adults, Independents believe the stakes are higher in this year's election. In our 2000 Super Tuesday survey, only 19 percent of Independents said the election's outcome would have "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of impact on the future of the country. In our 2004 survey, 44 percent of Independents expressed this view.

With eight months still to go before the November election, higher turnout is not a certainty. The 1972 presidential election, which was also waged against the backdrop of a controversial war and a wobbly economy, had high turnout during the nominating phase but disappointingly low turnout in November. However, the 2004 election differs in important respects from the 1972 election. Then, the Democratic Party was deeply divided over issues of policy and leadership, and many Democrats chose to stay home on Election Day. Further, the 1972 election produced as a landslide victory for the Republican incumbent. In 2004, both parties are united behind their nominees and the polls, so far, indicate a tight race. Should these conditions hold, America's voters in November could go to the polls in resounding numbers.

The results reported here are from nationwide telephone surveys of approximately 1,000 adults conducted February 25-29, 2004. The surveys have a sampling error of $\pm 3\%$. The [Vanishing Voter Project](#) is a study by the [Joan Shorenstein Center](#) on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at [Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government](#).