

# MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties

From: Mike Pierce & Persis Yu, Student Borrower Protection Center

**RE: Delivering Student Debt Relief Remains Popular Politics**

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## Overview

The Student Borrower Protection Center (SBPC) and Data for Progress (DfP) conducted a new poll which tests, for the first time, public attitudes toward action by President Biden in the face of a potential defeat by the U.S. Supreme Court in a pair of cases that purport to determine the legality of the Administration's plan to deliver up \$20,000 in student debt relief to lower- and working-class borrowers (student debt relief). **This new poll finds broad, durable support persists for the President's program.** It also finds strong popular support for President Biden to take executive action to extend the pause on student loan payments and to cancel student debt using separate legal authority should the high court strike down student debt relief.

As described in further detail below, a majority of voters overall, including a large majority of voters under 45, regardless of party, support the President taking action in the face of a loss at the Supreme Court. The support also holds across gender, race, education, and regardless of whether someone currently has student loans, paid off student loans, or never had student loans. This new polling affirms a trend that strategists and advocates have long identified—**the politics of student debt transcends party affiliation among young people**, presenting an opportunity for President Biden to firmly anchor his administration in the center of the electorate and improve the material welfare of tens of millions of people.

Delivering student debt relief also offers the Administration the opportunity to send a positive message about the role of government and tell a hopeful story about the future President Biden and Democrats want to build—a sharp contrast with the negative, pessimistic vision for America championed by the President's political opponents and the right-wing court.

## **Student Debt Relief Is Durably Popular, Spans Party ID Among Younger Voters**

In August 2022, President Biden promised Americans with student loan debt that he would eliminate up to \$20,000 for most student loan borrowers as part of his administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A new SBPC-DfP poll shows that this policy remains broadly and durably popular, even in the face of nearly a year of legal challenges and political attacks and even though the courts have blocked the Administration from implementing this program.

Among likely voters overall, the public continues to approve of this policy by nearly a 2:1 margin: 61 percent of likely voters support the President's student debt relief program while only 36

percent oppose. These results mirror findings in other national polls by other pollsters, including a February poll from [Fox News](#) and March polling by [Navigator](#).

To better understand public attitudes toward student debt relief among key segments of the electorate, DfP polled nearly 4,000 likely voters nationally.<sup>1</sup> This new poll finds that, among likely voters under 45 (younger voters), **support for student debt relief spans party affiliation**—supported by 77 percent of younger voters overall, including 88 percent of younger Democrats (+80), 76 percent of younger Independents (+58), and 57 percent of younger Republicans (+21).

Student debt relief also finds majority support among voters over age 45 (older voters), including majority support overall (+4), powered by overwhelming support by older Democrats (+67) and strong support among older independents (+8). Older Republicans alone oppose the President's debt relief plan, and do so by a large margin (-46).

### **New Poll Finds Broad, Diverse Public Support for Action in the Face of a SCOTUS Loss**

For the first time, we polled attitudes among likely voters about potential policy options should the Supreme Court strike down the President's student debt relief program later this month. Our findings reveal that when voters understand the stakes of these Supreme Court cases, majorities support President Biden taking action in the face of a loss.

As part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the bipartisan debt limit agreement signed by President Biden earlier this month, the Administration has committed to restarting the student loan system at the end of this summer. For the first time in more than three years, 40 million student loan borrowers will receive bills and be charged interest.

As the White House [has repeatedly touted](#) in the days surrounding this bipartisan debt limit deal, the FRA preserves the administration's legal authority to deliver student debt relief. This new poll finds that **the public broadly supports President Biden taking action to deliver student debt relief, even in the face of a loss at the Supreme Court.**

This new poll finds that, among likely voters under 45 (younger voters), **support for President Biden taking executive action using alternative legal authority to deliver student debt relief in the face of a SCOTUS loss spans party affiliation**—supported by 70 percent of younger voters overall (+49), including 84 percent of younger Democrats (+75), 66 percent of younger Independents (+43), and 50 percent of younger Republicans (+10).

Delivering student debt relief in the face of a SCOTUS loss also breaks even with voters over age 45 (older voters), 46 percent of older voters support action and 47 percent of older voters oppose (-1). Among older voters, support breaks down along party lines, with overwhelming

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<sup>1</sup> From May 26 to June 2, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 3,987 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ±2 percentage points. N=3,987 unless otherwise specified. Some values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

support among older Democrats (+62) and break-even support among older independents (-1). Older Republicans again oppose the President's debt relief plan, and do so by a large margin (-51).

### **Delivering Student Debt Relief is the Only Path Forward**

By agreeing to House Republicans' demands to restart the student loan system, President Biden risks being the President who turned on a broken student loan system against the wishes of the American people and without providing the debt relief he promised. This new polling shows the political risks for the President in the weeks ahead but also provides a path forward to win the politics of student debt. It is clear that delivering on student debt relief—ensuring that borrowers promised relief actually see their loan balances decline—is good policy and necessary politics. Inaction is simply not an option.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

**Tab 1:** Data for Progress, *Student Debt Poll Crosstabs* (Fielded May 26 to June 2, 2023)

From May 26 to June 2, 2023, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 3,987 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ±2 percentage points.

NB: subgroups with a n-size less than 50 (<50) are not shown on these cross-tabs. We choose not to display N<50 subgroups because the sample is too small to have statistical significance. We did, however, take samples of these subgroups for representational and weighting purposes to accurately reflect the electorate makeup. Some values may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

N=3,987 unless otherwise specified.

**[1]** Last year, the Biden administration announced a plan to provide up to \$20,000 in student loan debt relief for low-income and working-class student loan borrowers.

Do you support or oppose the administration providing student loan debt relief?

Response	Topline	Democrat	Independent / Third party	Republican	Under 45	45+	No College	College	Asian	Black or African American	White	Latino/a	Current borrower	Past borrower	Never a borrowr	Democrat under 45	Democrat 45+	Independent under 45	Independent 45+	Republican under 45	Republican 45+
Strongly support	40	64	36	17	54	32	38	43	34	64	34	53	69	36	30	70	59	48	29	30	12
Somewhat support	21	21	25	17	23	19	22	19	31	18	21	22	18	21	22	18	23	28	23	27	14
Somewhat oppose	11	7	12	15	9	13	11	11	6	7	12	9	5	12	13	5	9	10	14	14	15
Strongly oppose	25	4	22	48	9	34	24	25	25	4	30	10	6	28	30	3	6	8	30	22	57
Don't know	4	4	4	3	5	3	5	2	3	7	3	6	2	2	6	5	3	5	4	7	2
SUPPORT (TOTAL)	61	85	61	34	77	51	60	62	65	82	55	75	87	57	52	88	82	76	52	57	26
OPPOSE (TOTAL)	36	11	34	63	18	47	35	36	31	11	42	19	11	40	43	8	15	18	44	36	72
SUPPORT (NET)	+25	+74	+27	-29	+59	+4	+25	+26	+34	+71	+13	+56	+76	+17	+9	+80	+67	+58	+8	+21	-46
Weighted N	3,987	1,462	1,114	1,411	1,455	2,532	2,557	1,430	116	441	2,935	545	827	1,004	2,156	666	796	419	695	371	1,040

**[2]** The Biden administration announced a plan to provide up to \$20,000 in student loan debt relief for low-income and working class student loan borrowers, using emergency legal authority related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some experts expect the Supreme Court to strike down the Biden administration's student debt relief plan in a ruling this summer. If this happens, Biden administration officials can provide the student loan debt relief using a different legal authority that is unrelated to the pandemic, the Higher Education Act.

Would you approve or disapprove of the Biden administration providing student debt relief using a legal authority unrelated to the pandemic?

Response	Topline	Democrat	Independent / Third party	Republican	Under 45	45+	No College	College	Asian	Black or African American	White	Latino/a	Current borrower	Past borrower	Never a borrowr	Democrat under 45	Democrat 45+	Independent under 45	Independent 45+	Republican under 45	Republican 45+
Strongly approve	30	50	28	12	41	24	28	35	23	45	27	40	59	27	21	54	47	39	22	22	9
Somewhat approve	24	31	25	16	29	22	25	23	39	32	23	27	23	25	24	30	31	27	25	28	12
Somewhat disapprove	12	8	14	14	10	12	12	11	11	8	12	13	5	15	13	6	10	13	15	15	13
Strongly disapprove	26	5	24	50	11	35	27	26	22	6	32	9	7	29	32	3	6	10	33	25	59
Don't know	7	7	8	7	9	6	9	5	6	10	6	11	5	5	9	7	6	12	6	10	7
APPROVE (TOTAL)	54	81	53	28	70	46	53	58	62	77	50	67	82	52	45	84	78	66	47	50	21
DISAPPROVE (TOTAL)	38	13	38	64	21	47	39	37	33	14	44	22	12	44	45	9	16	23	48	40	72
APPROVE (NET)	+16	+68	+15	-36	+49	-1	+14	+21	+29	+63	+6	+45	+70	+8	0	+75	+62	+43	-1	+10	-51
Weighted N	3,987	1,462	1,114	1,411	1,455	2,532	2,557	1,430	116	441	2,935	545	827	1,004	2,156	666	796	419	695	371	1,040