

# VOTE HIGHER

ELECTION 2016

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EDUCATION  
MESSAGING  
TOOLKIT

Today, **43 million** Americans [hold some sort of student debt](#), America holds **\$1.3 trillion** in student loans, and the average student is graduating with almost \$30,000 in debt. Millennials know this is a crisis—they're experiencing it first-hand. Recent research [shows that it's the issues](#)—not the candidates—that will inspire the youth vote. And the results are in: student debt is not just an issue for Millennials, it's *the* issue.

When Millennials were asked what policies would be most likely to motivate them to get out and vote for a candidate, [three of the top five policies](#) they chose had to do with student debt and higher education. Millennials want their elected officials to address the rising costs of college, throw a lifeline to borrowers struggling with debt, and address an economy that continues to leave many young Americans behind. Still, **one in three Millennials don't feel as though candidates are talking enough about the issues** that matter to them. To fill that gap, we're giving you the facts, foundation, and framing proven to connect with Millennials on student debt—let's get to work.

## FAST FACTS

- The student debt burden surpasses [both credit card and auto debt](#) in this country, and is the only type of debt that has [increased since the Great Recession](#)
- Student debt originated in state disinvestment in higher education, passing the costs onto students
- Over the past 30 years, all but two states [have pulled money](#) out of their public higher education system
- The cost of college is rising: the price tag for tuition [has risen 1,100%](#) in the last 30 years
- For-profit colleges are [a big part of the problem](#):
  - 47% of students who have defaulted on their loans went to for-profit colleges
  - For-profit colleges only enroll 10% of all students, but receive 25% of federal financial aid dollars and [account for almost half](#) of all student loan defaults

## TALKING POINTS

- **The Problem:** The student debt crisis is a dead weight on the American economy. Student debt is keeping American students and families from getting ahead. College costs have spiraled, forcing more and more students and parents to borrow and leaving less and less money for families to put towards buying a house or saving for retirement.
- **The Solution:** Addressing the student debt crisis will jumpstart the American economy and expand opportunities exponentially for young Americans. Helping borrowers currently struggling with debt and ensuring that future students can graduate debt-free is the single best investment in our country's future we can make.
- **The Framing:** Affordable higher education isn't a radical idea. Thirty years ago college costs were low and Pell grants, coupled with a summer job, could allow students to graduate debt-free. Our parents were able to go to college without taking on crushing debt and we are asking for the same fair shot. We need to make higher education a public good again.

# HOW THE STUDENT DEBT CRISIS AFFECTS YOUR COMMUNITY

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## COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Student debt is a [racial justice issue](#) that disproportionately burdens people of color

- Zip codes with high African American and Latino populations [suffer disproportionately high student loan delinquency rates](#)
- Among minority populations, middle-income families are the ones who [default the most on student loans](#), demonstrating the presence of structural racism in higher education and credit and labor markets

## WOMEN

Women are more burdened than men by their student loans

- Women [make 82 cents for every dollar](#) a man makes, leaving them less able to pay back their student loans
- 53 percent of women versus 39 percent of men [have a high student loan debt burden](#)

## LGBTQ AMERICANS

LGBTQ Americans face increased barriers to financial security, making unwieldy student loan payments all the more unmanageable

- LGBTQ Americans [experience higher poverty rates and higher unemployment rates](#) than their peers
- LGBTQ people of color and transgender Americans [are especially likely](#) to live in poverty
- Many states still [lack explicit non-discrimination protection](#) on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, leaving LGBTQ Americans vulnerable to discrimination in employment

## FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

Though they've paid their time, many formerly incarcerated people are ineligible for federal financial aid and face worse employment outlooks, making student loans larger and harder to pay back

- Many formerly incarcerated people [are ineligible for federal financial aid](#) and Pell grants
- Formerly incarcerated people experience [unemployment rates 5 to 20 points higher](#) than their peers

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## SENIORS

Senior citizens often help younger generations finance their college educations, but pay a steep price

- Over 160,000 Social Security beneficiaries **have their monthly checks garnished** to pay off federal student loans
- The number of seniors who have had their **social security checks garnished** to pay for their student loans **increased six-fold** between 2004 and 2014
- From 2004 to 2014, the group with the **fastest growing student loan balance** was people over 60 — from \$6 billion to \$58 billion — and older debtors have the highest default rate of any age group

## STUDENT-PARENTS

Student-parents must simultaneously pay back their own student loans while saving for their children's college education, putting them in a financial bind

- 4.8 million college students — 26% of all college students — **are also parents**
- Student debt burdens are 12.6% **higher for student-parents** than non-parents

## UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Undocumented students face higher tuition costs and fewer financial aid options, making the cost of college even more unmanageable

- Undocumented students are **ineligible for federal financial aid**, Pell grants, and some forms of state financial aid, and therefore face predatory credit markets
- In 32 states, undocumented students are **ineligible for in-state tuition**

## VETERANS

Despite serving our country, veterans hold higher amounts of student debt than non-veterans and are often targeted by predatory for-profit colleges

- 26 percent of veterans receiving undergraduate education benefits **still need to take out loans** to finance their college degree
- The average veteran **takes out more in students loans** than the average student who has not served in the military
- Veterans are **more likely to have to take out student loans at for-profit schools** (37%) than at public schools (33%) and private non-profits (28%)

# THE REALITIES OF STUDENT DEBT

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## MYTH

## FACT

College students are the young, four-year liberal arts-educated, [partying](#), “traditional” picture we see in the media.

- Just [29% of all undergraduates are “traditional”](#)—full-time students of standard college age enrolled in four-year public or nonprofit colleges
- 75% of students are [college commuters](#), often juggling families, jobs, and school
- Only a [quarter of students are enrolled full-time](#) in residential colleges
- More than 40% of undergraduates are [enrolled in two-year institutions](#) like community college
- By 2020, [students aged 25 and older](#) are expected to make up 43% of all college students

The biggest student loan problems are the \$30,000-plus numbers that “traditional” students face.

- Borrowers with the lowest student loan balances [are the most likely to default](#) on their loan repayments because they typically face worse employment outlooks
- Part-time students—more than one-third of all undergraduates—tend to have lighter debt loads [but are less likely to graduate](#), making it harder to repay their loans
- Student loan default rates [are much higher at for-profit colleges](#) than other institutions

The availability of student loans drove up the cost of college—kids should just do what I did and work a summer job to pay for school.

- In 2012, state and local funding for higher education [reached its lowest point](#) in more than two decades
- To make up for funding cuts, many public colleges have [raised tuition and fees](#)
- The rising cost of college has [significantly outpaced increases](#) in the typical family income
- The price tag of a college education [has jumped significantly](#), increasing 2.5 times faster than the inflation rate since 1986