



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
For The People & The Press



**CIRCLE**

The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement

# Youth Civic Engagement After 9/11/01

Results From a Survey of 1,500 Americans  
Conducted November 13-19, 2001

CIRCLE and the Pew Center for  
the People and the Press

January 9, 2002

# Summary

Since Sept. 11, Americans have come to realize — many perhaps for the first time — that news really does matter. The public's attentiveness to the news, which has generally remained low in recent years, spiked in response to the terror attacks and war in Afghanistan. Even young Americans, who traditionally lag well behind their elders in news attentiveness and knowledge of current events, have been drawn in large numbers to coverage of the attacks and the aftermath.

Americans under age 25 have been only somewhat less likely than older people to closely follow news on the terror attacks. More important, they are as well informed as older people on key aspects of the war on terrorism. But the widespread interest in and knowledge of this powerful issue among young people has not erased the long-standing generation gap on news awareness and civic engagement — indeed, in some areas, that gap is as wide as ever.

A nationwide survey of 1,500 Americans, conducted in mid-November by the Pew Research Center and the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), examined the ways in which Sept. 11 has affected young people's attitudes toward the news, government and social trust. A review of the survey's key findings shows that, while much has changed since Sept. 11, familiar patterns emerge:

Young Americans are as likely as older people say their overall interest in news has increased as a result of the terrorist attacks. However, Americans under age 25 still pay significantly less attention than older people to news on subjects *other than* terrorism, such as news on the economy.

Young people are about as well informed as their elders on facts relating to the war on terrorism. Roughly six-in-ten of those under age 25 were able to correctly identify Turkey (from a list that also included Pakistan and Russia) as a country that does not possess nuclear weapons. An overwhelming majority (83%) knew that skin anthrax is more difficult to treat than inhalation anthrax.

But barely half of young people (51%) were able to correctly identify Dick Cheney as vice president. Not only is that far lower than other age groups, it is significantly fewer than the number of those under age 25 who could identify Al Gore as vice president in 1994 (64%).

Young people have traditionally been less critical of the government than older Americans. After the terror attacks, all Americans became much more satisfied with the federal government (28% were content in June; 54% in November), and the generational difference disappeared.

Like other Americans, young people have expressed more interest in political and government-related news since Sept. 11. In June 2000, 57% of young Americans said that they were generally bored by what went on in Washington; the same percent said that they were *not* bored in November. This increase has not translated into more interest in local politics, however. Fewer than half (45%) say they are moderately interested in local politics, lower than any other age category. Young people are also the least interested in economic news, although their level of interest more than doubled between June and November.

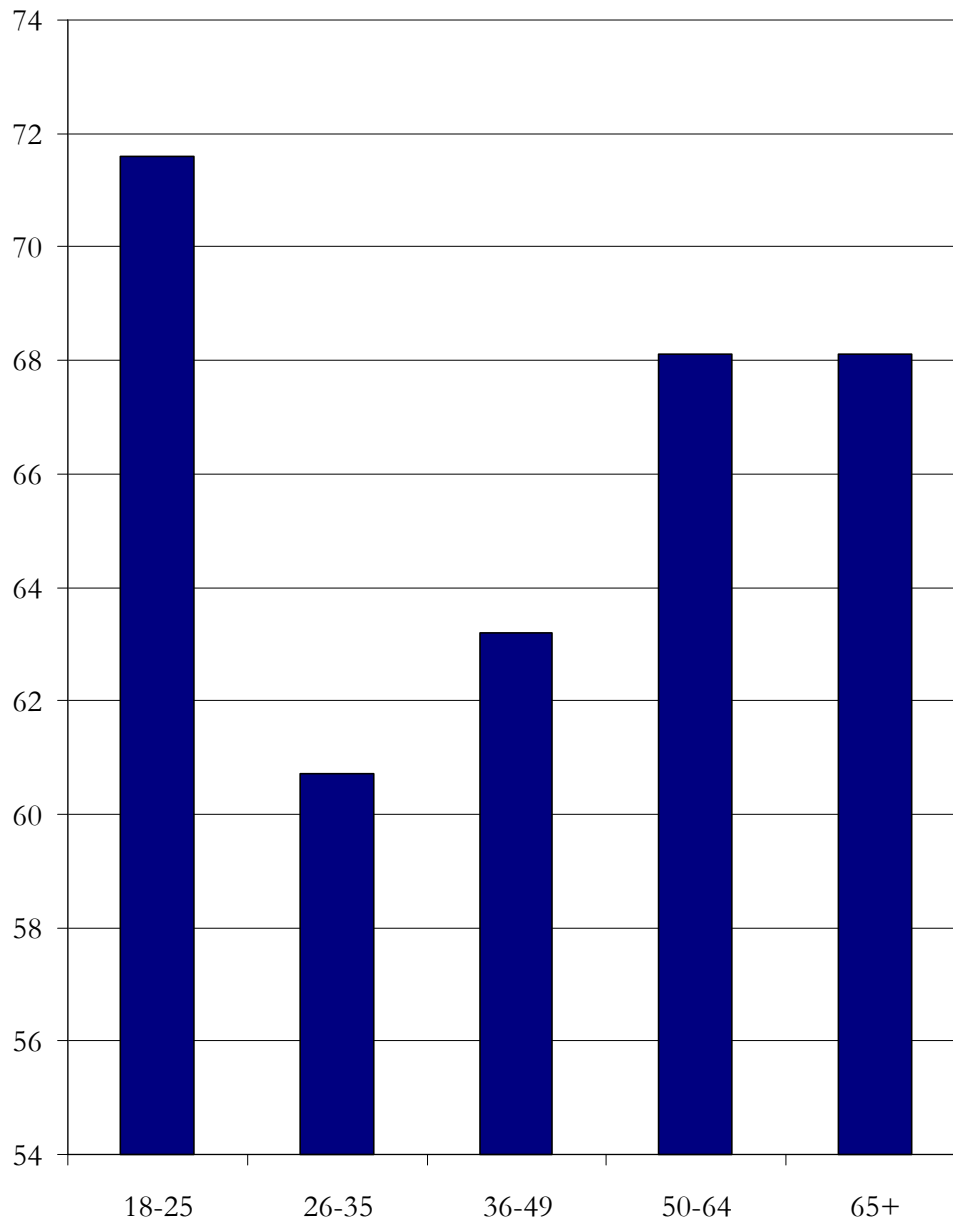
While the terror attacks have significantly increased public trust in government, they have had only a modest impact on Americans' attitudes toward trusting their fellow citizens. 42% said they can trust most people, compared with 36% in 1998. As in the past, young people are less trusting than older Americans; only about a third of those under age 25 said most people can be trusted.

While young people generally have a strong interest in news on terrorism, there is a significant gender gap in how they follow aspects of the story. Young women are far more interested than their male counterparts in the terrorism *attacks*—better than seven-in-ten women followed that story very closely, compared with only about half of men. Young men, by contrast, are more likely than young women to closely follow news about military action in Afghanistan.

# News Interest



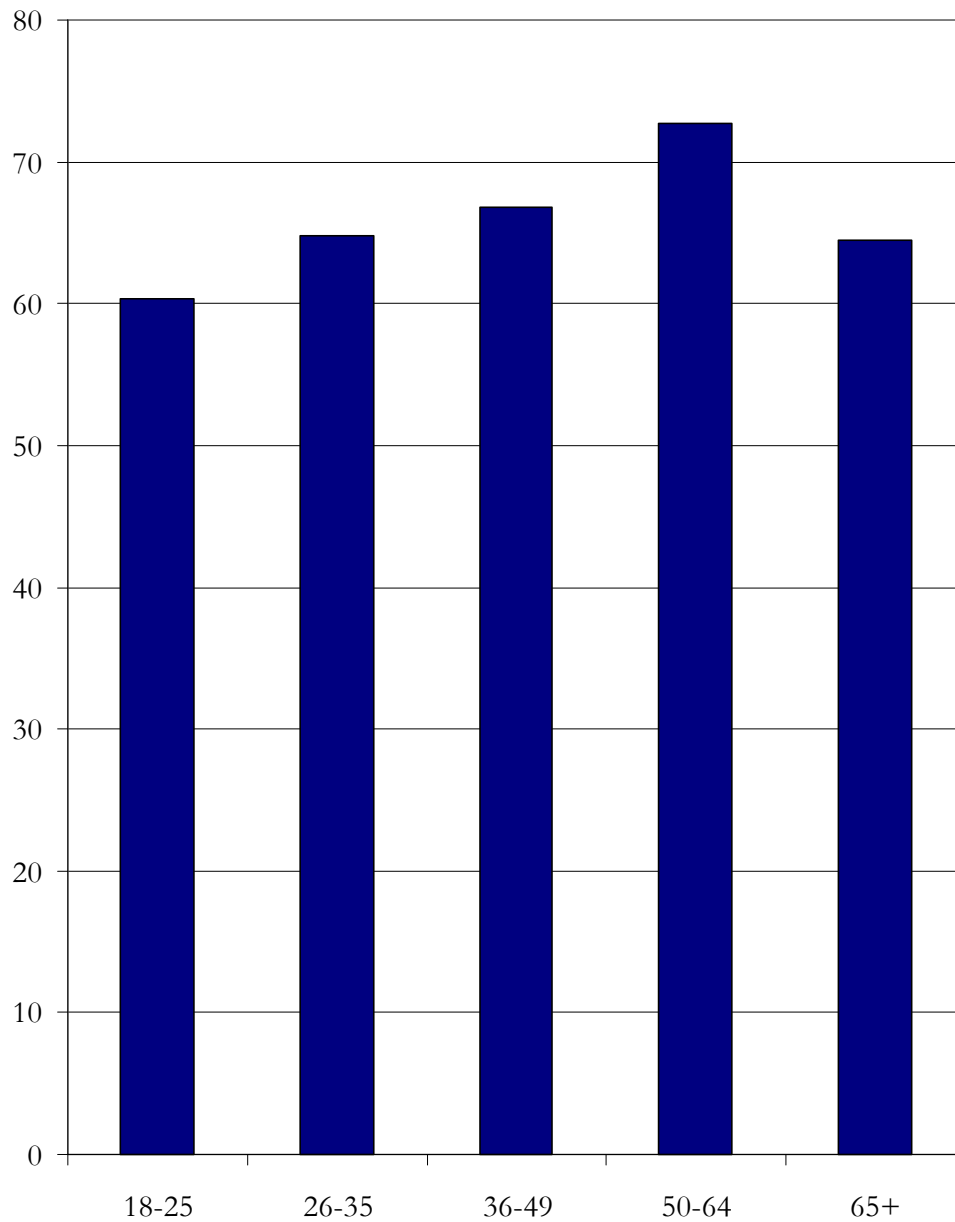
## Younger people report more interest in the news since 9/11



I am now generally more interested in the news than I was before the terrorist attacks.



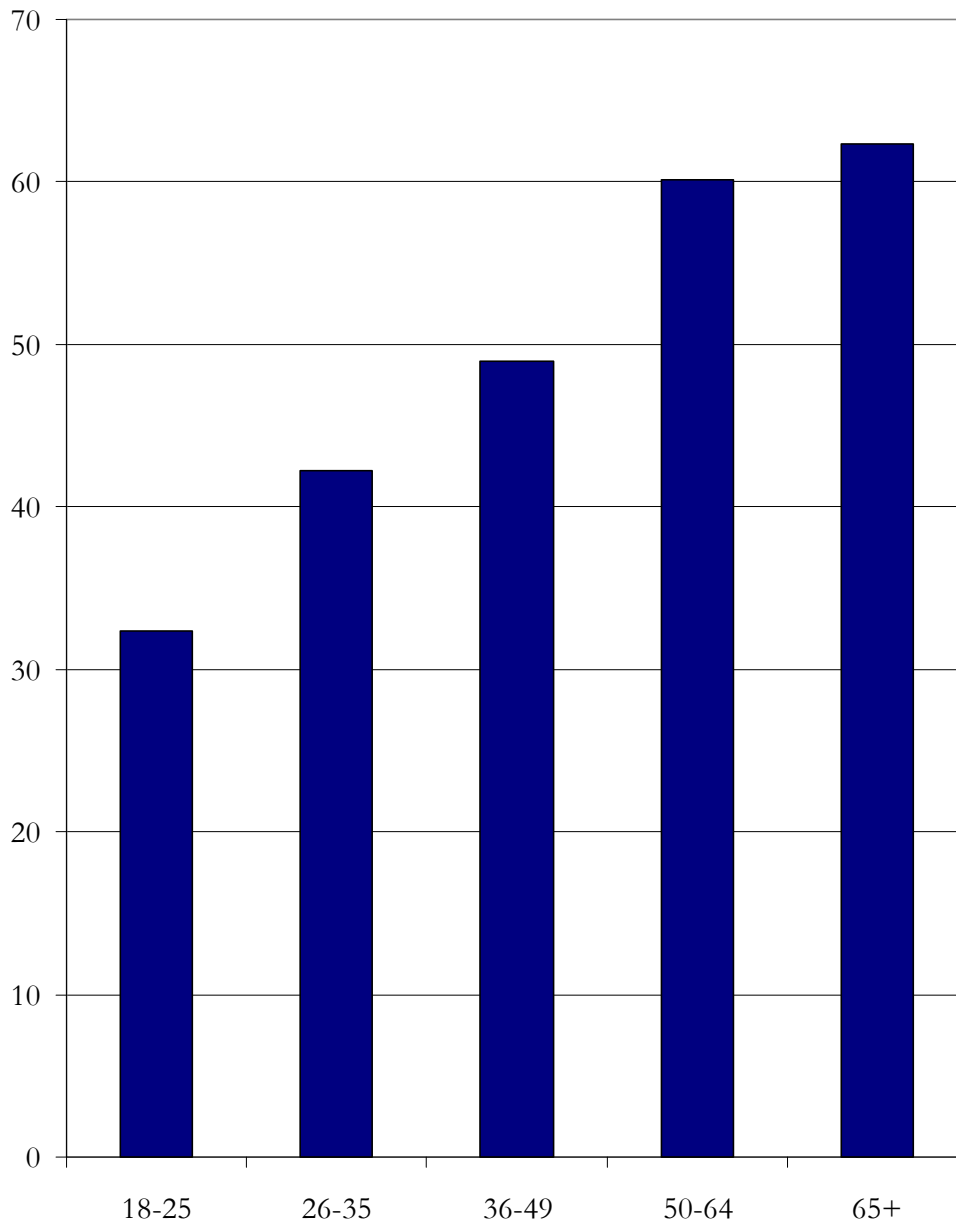
## And younger people are following the main story closely



Are you following the terrorism attacks on the U.S. very closely?



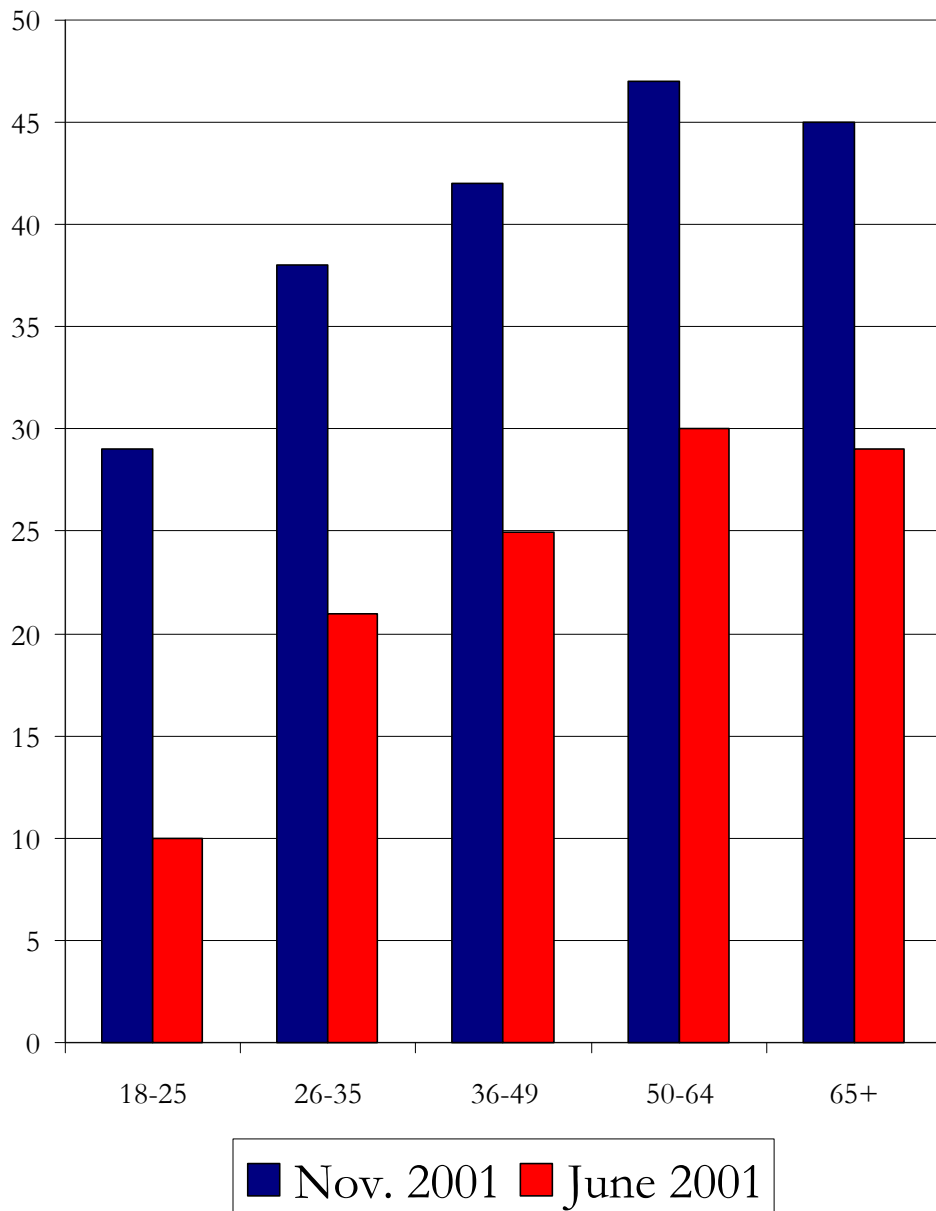
## But younger people are paying less attention than their elders to the full range of 9-11 news



People who say that they are tracking at least three of six major news stories related to terrorism or the war.



## Younger people have gained interest in economic news, but have not closed the gap with their elders

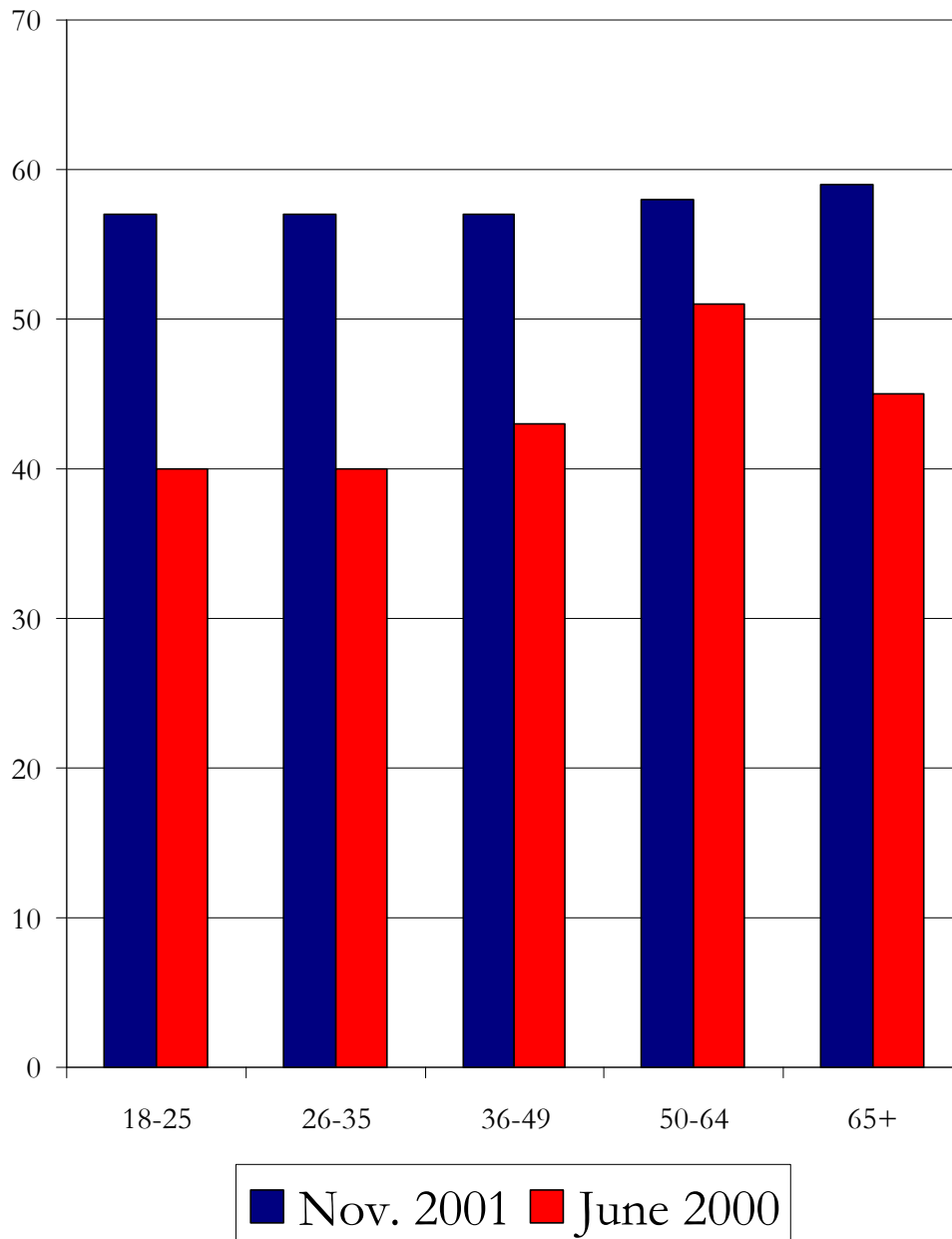


Are you following reports about the condition of the US economy very closely?





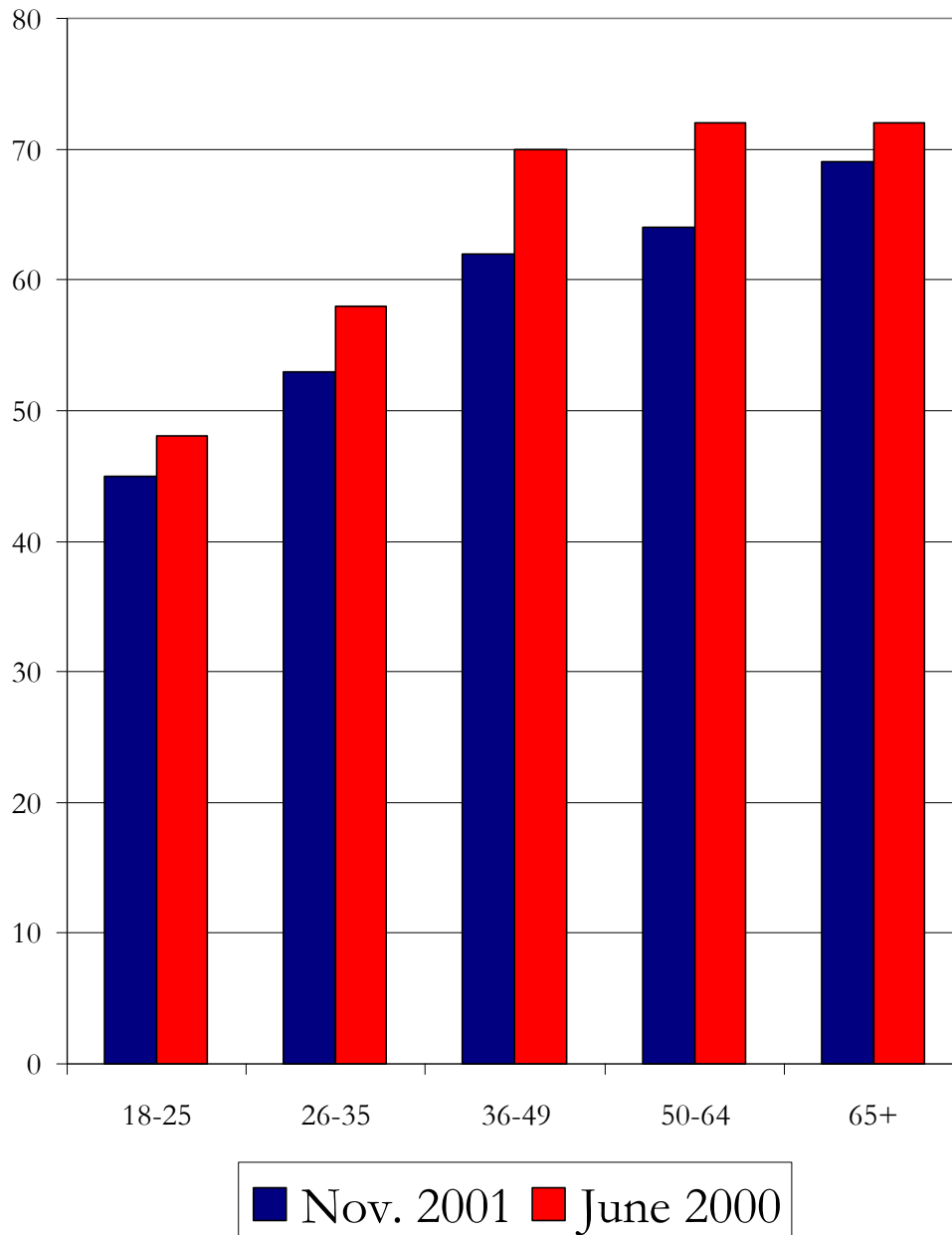
## Younger people are more interested in Washington news after 9-11



Percentage who say that they are *not* generally bored by what goes on in Washington.



## But younger people have not gained interest in local politics

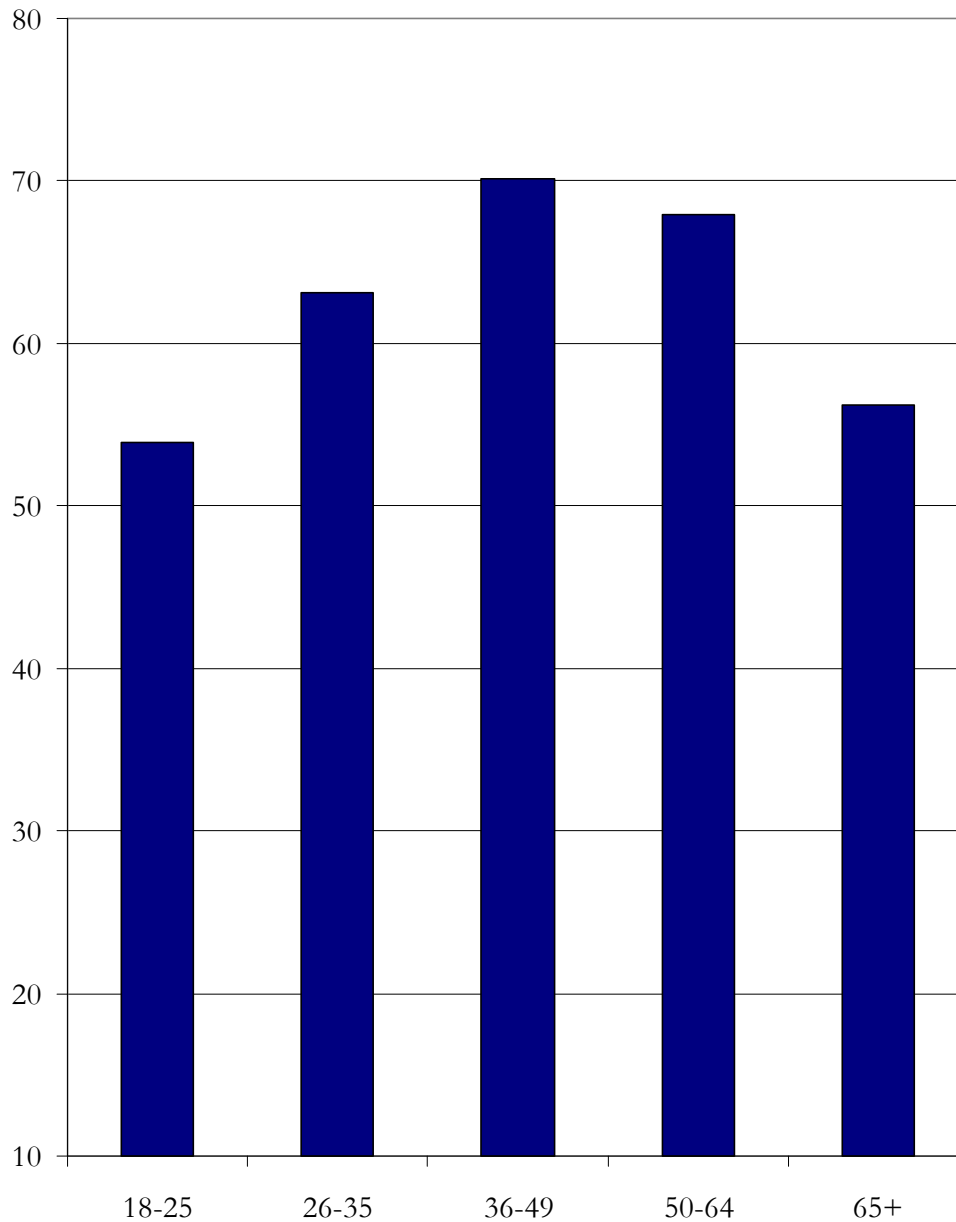


Are you pretty interested in following local politics?

# Knowledge



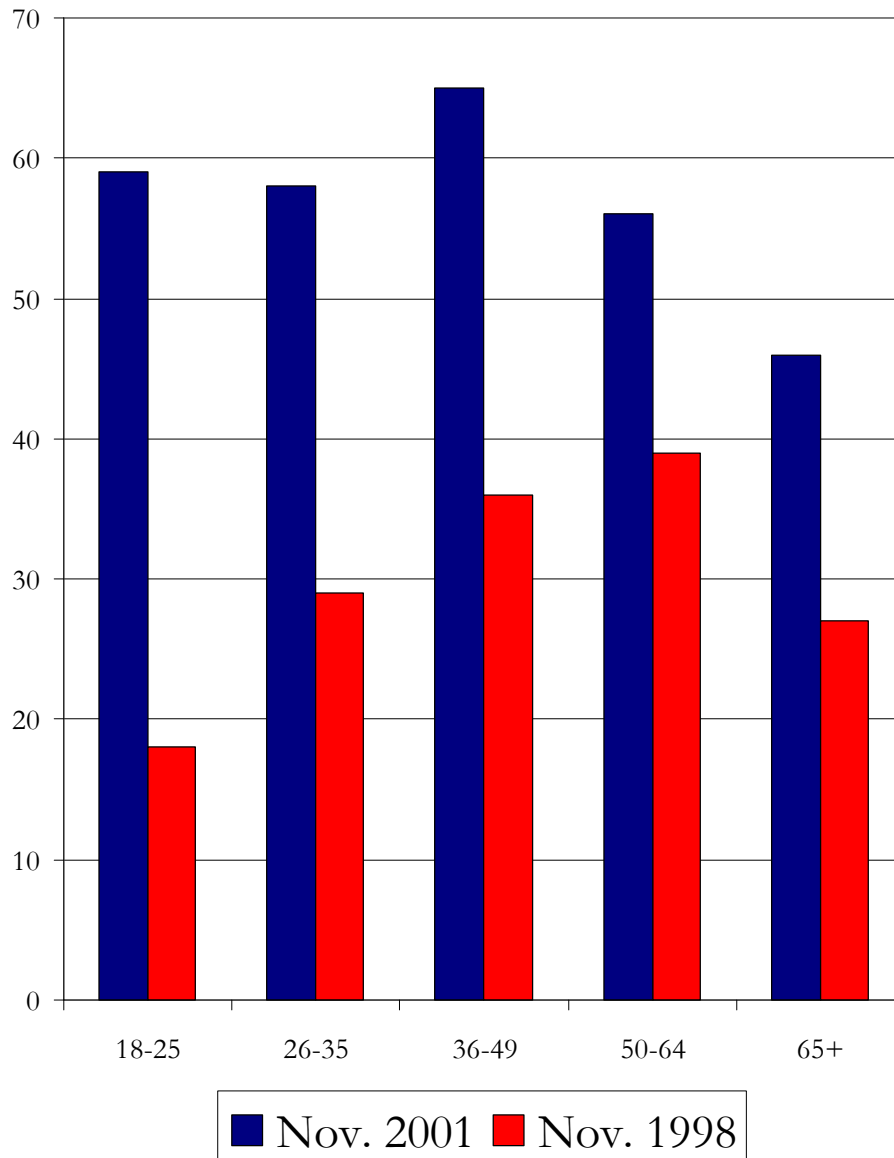
## Overall, younger people are less informed than older people are



Correctly answered three or four (out of four) factual questions about terror, anthrax, or war.



## Younger people have learned about nuclear proliferation

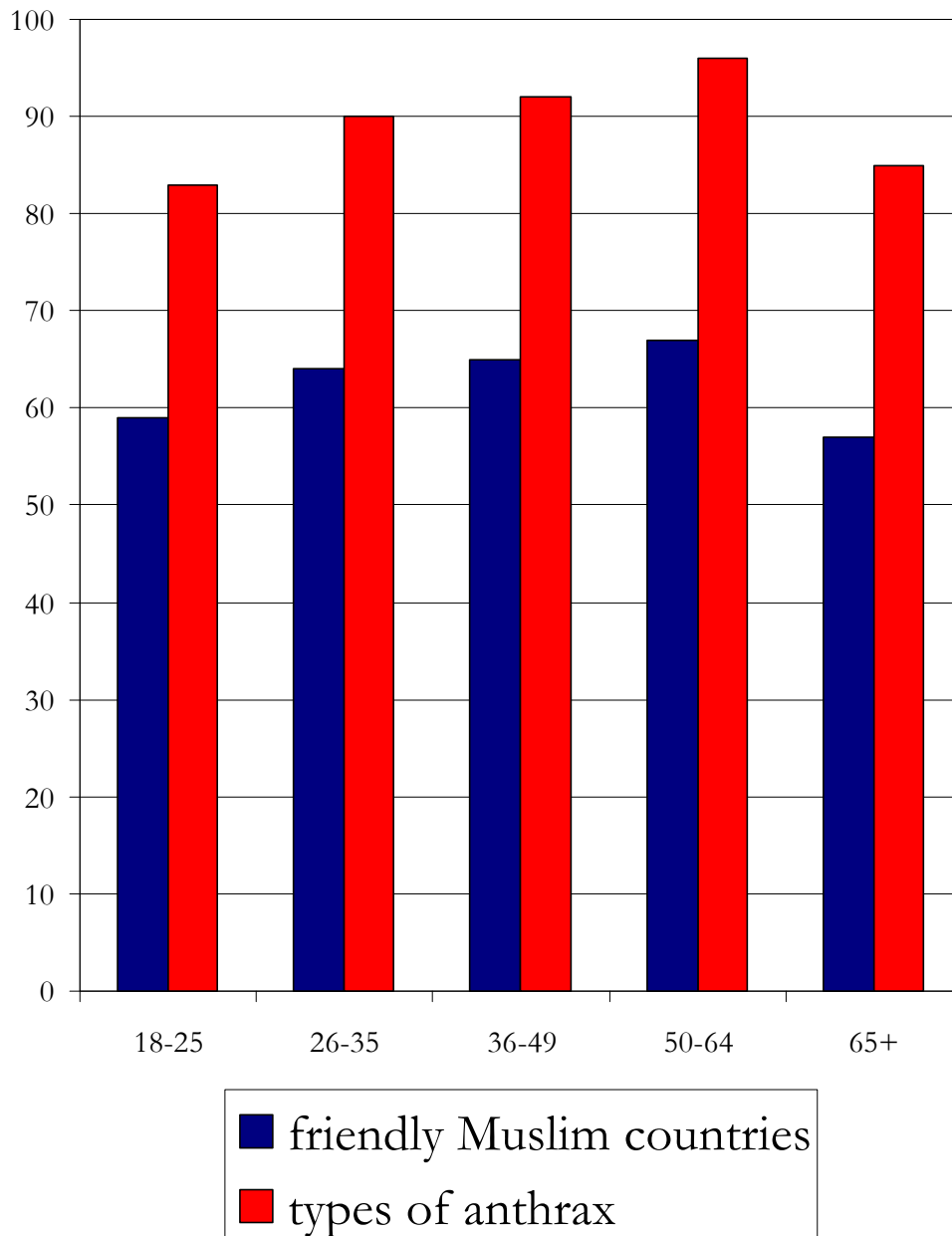


Nov. 2001: Which country does not have nuclear weapons? (Answer: Turkey.)

Nov. 1998: Can you name any of the countries that recently exploded nuclear weapons? (Answer: India or Pakistan)



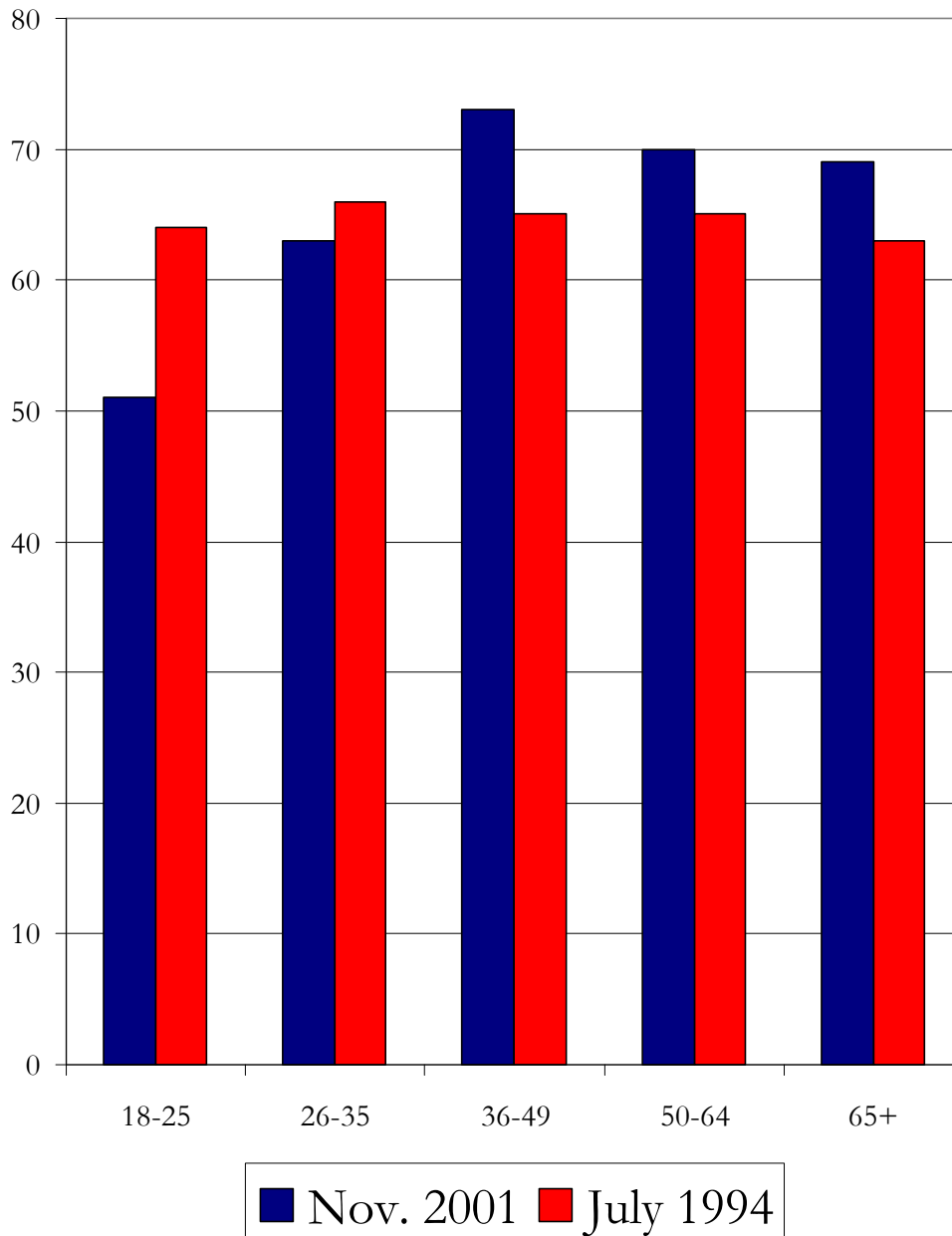
## Younger people are almost keeping up on some other issues



Correct answers to: Are any Muslim governments cooperating with the US? and Which kind of anthrax (skin or lung) is easier to treat?



## But their ability to identify the vice president is down since 1994



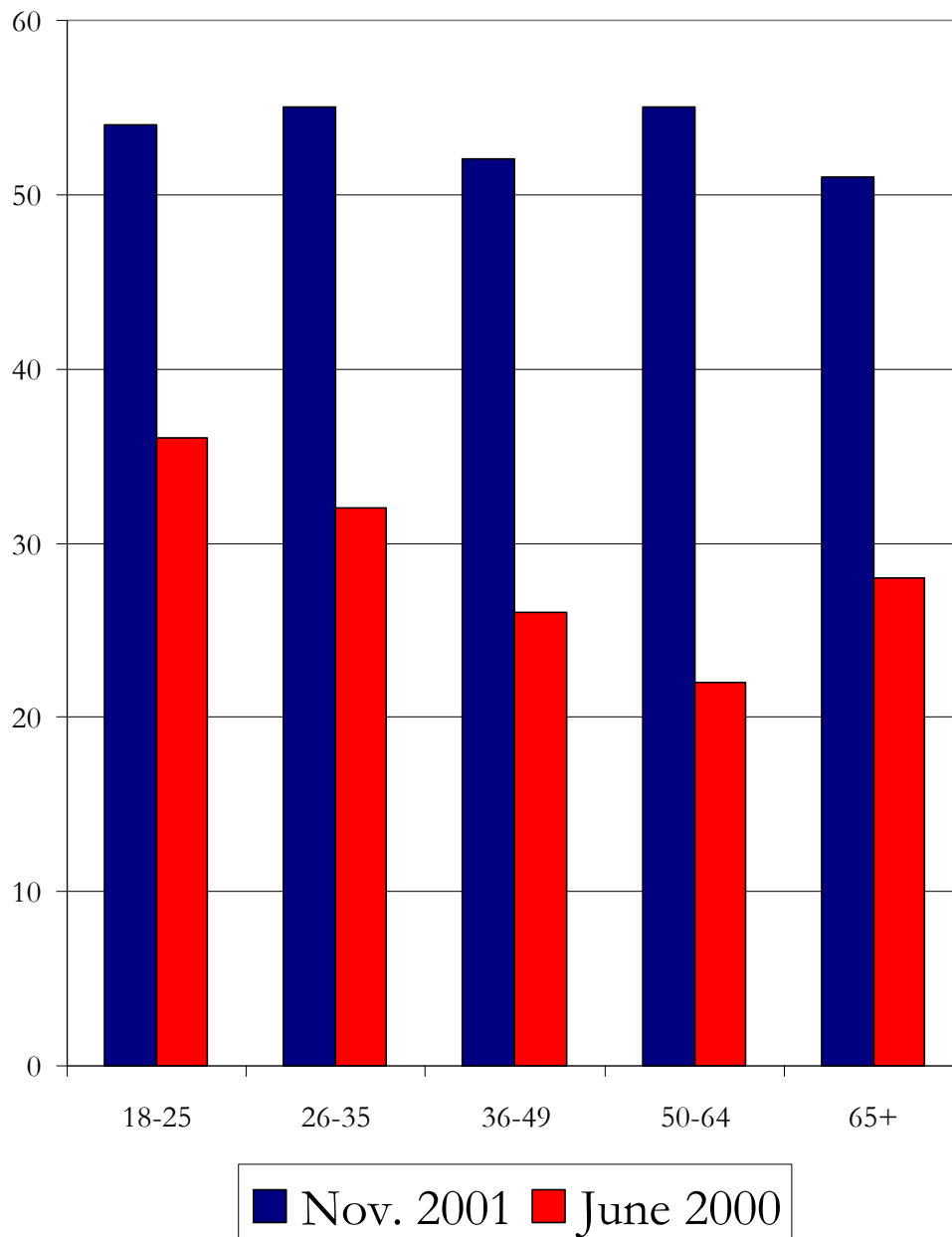
Correct answers to Who is the current vice president?

# **Trust and Satisfaction**





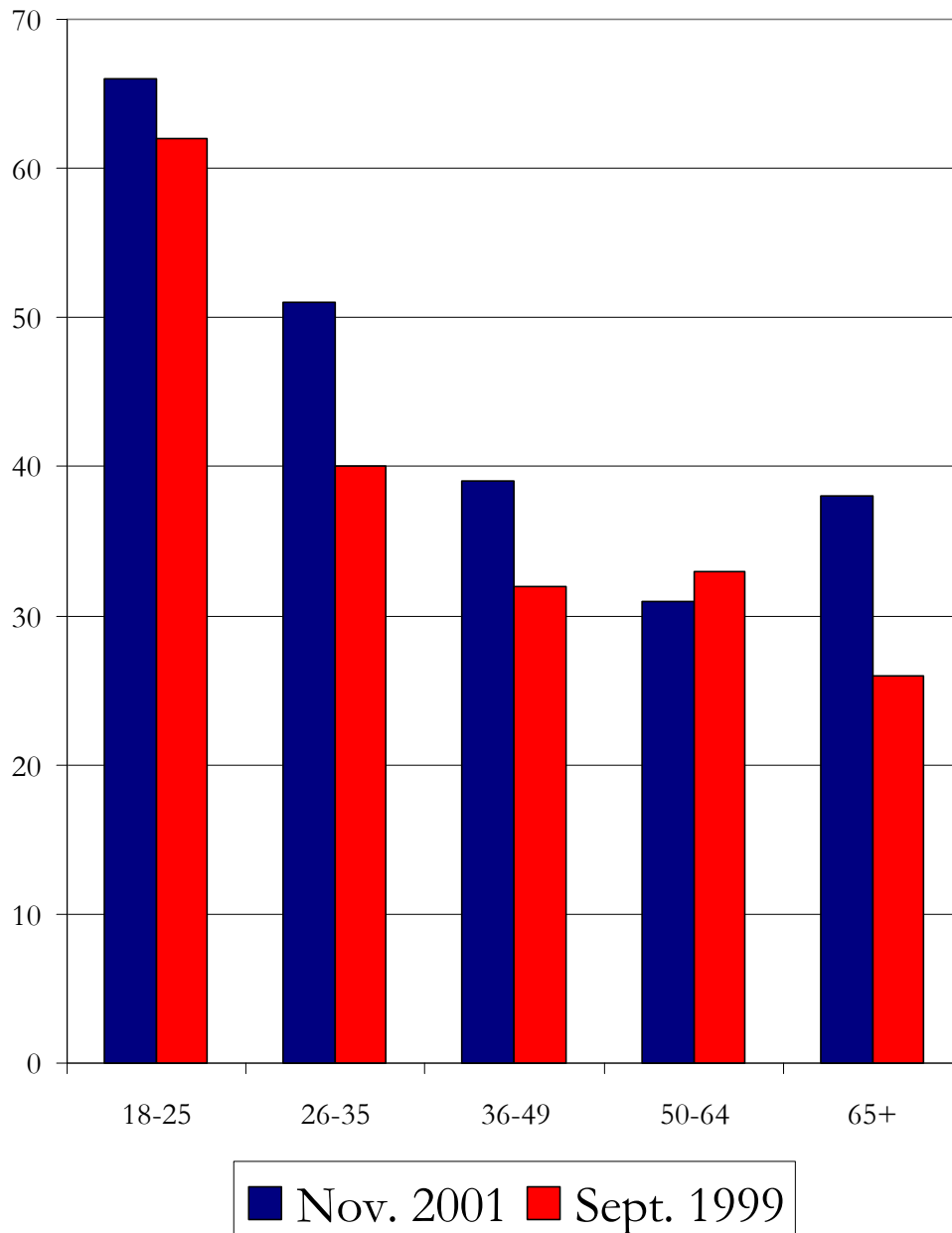
## Americans of all ages are more content with the Federal government after 9-11



Are you basically content with the Federal Government? (Other choices: frustrated or angry.)



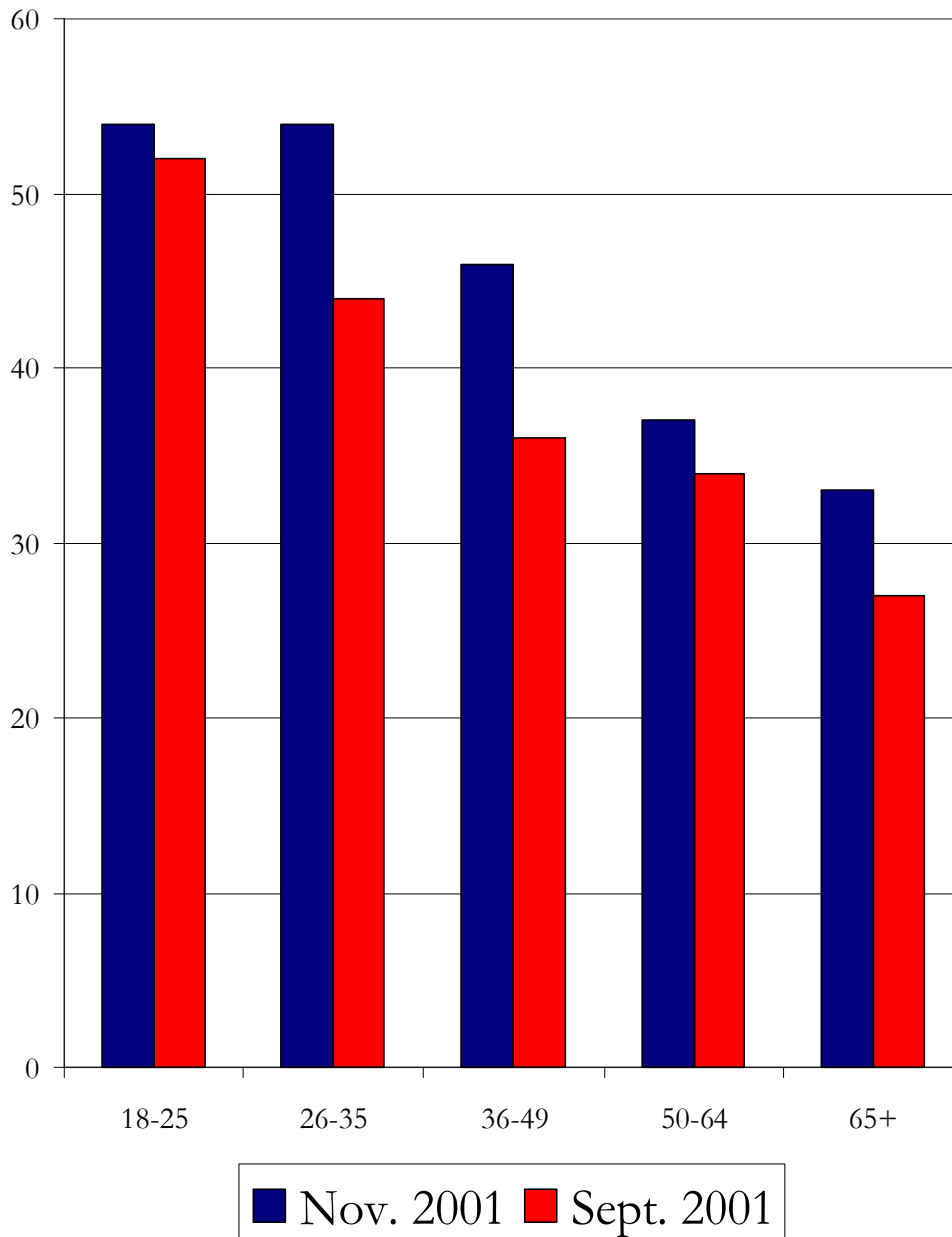
## Younger people are least likely to see government as inefficient



*Disagree* that the government, when something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful.



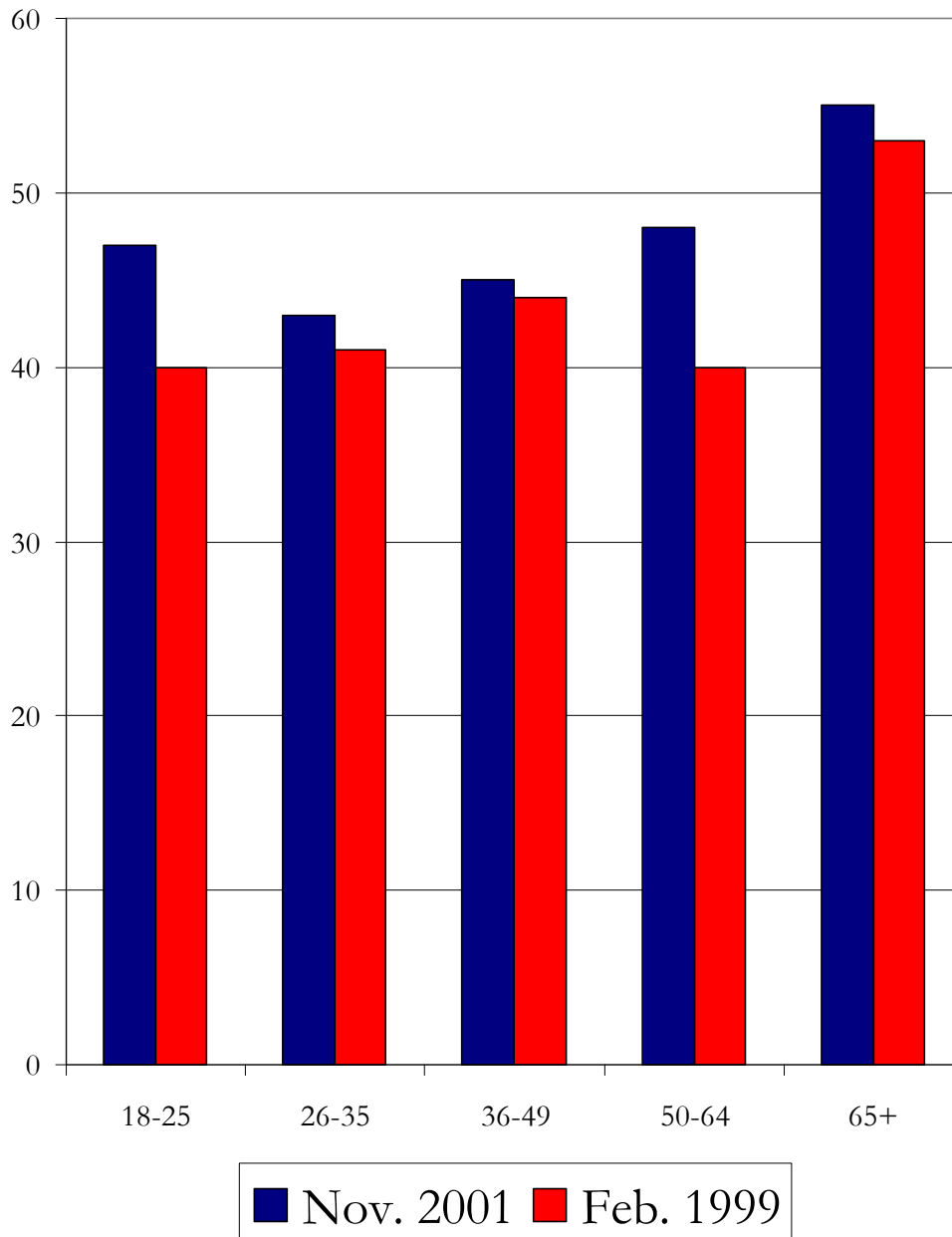
## Younger people are least likely to see government as too controlling



*Disagree* that the Federal government controls too much of our daily lives.



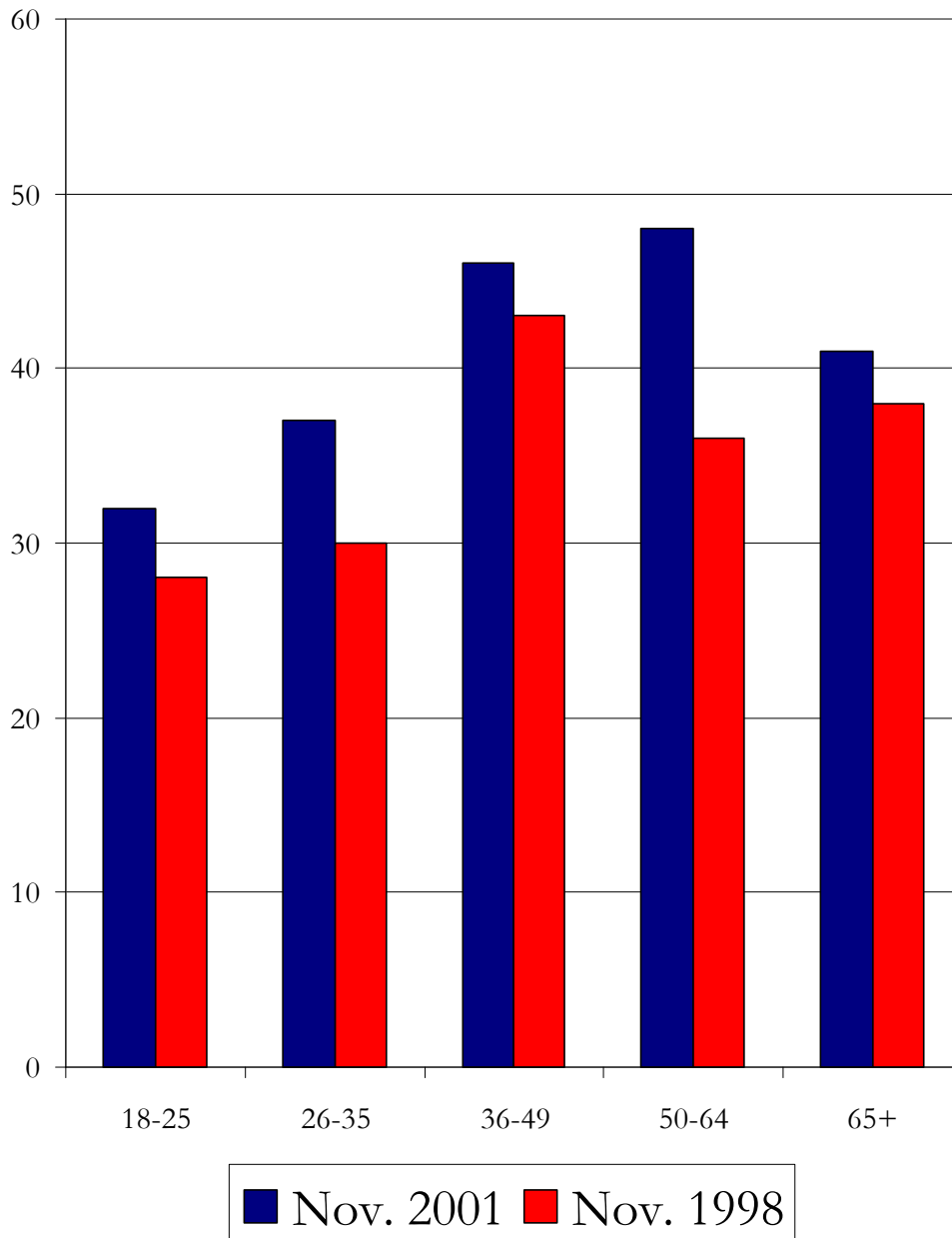
## Trust in elected officials is up only modestly after 9-11



Most elected officials are trustworthy.



## Trust in other people has not increased much after 9-11. And youth are the least trusting

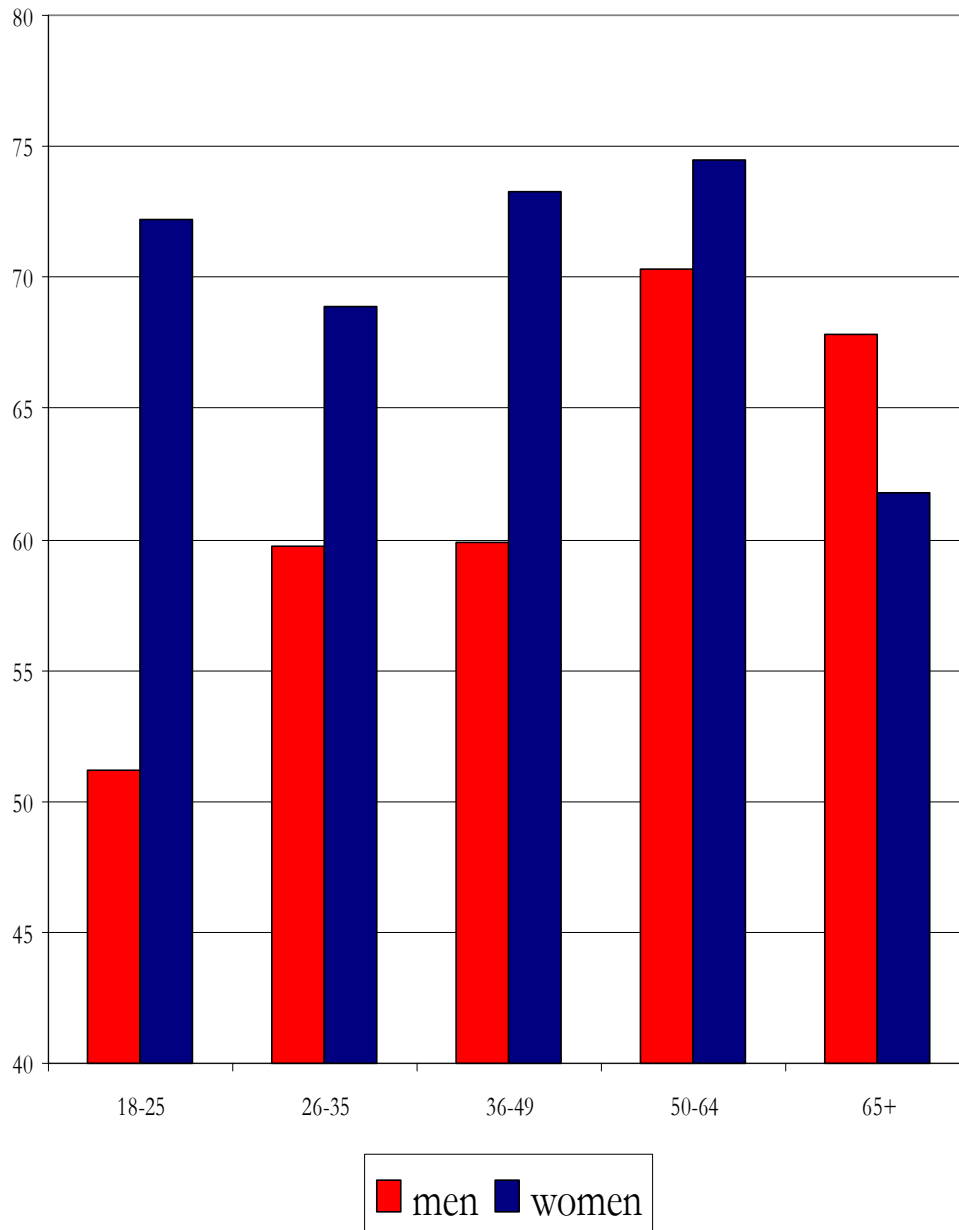


Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted?

# Gender Differences



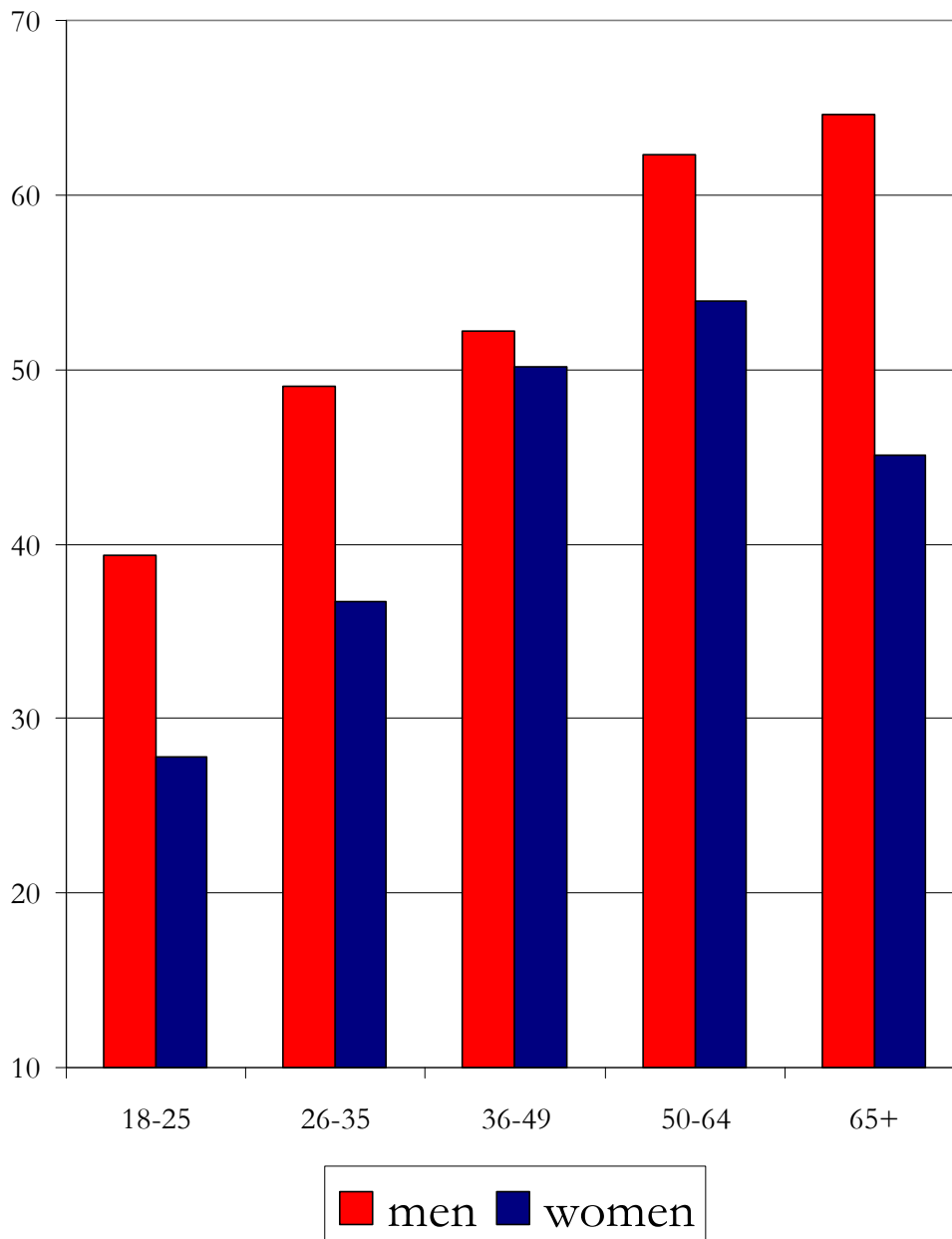
## Young men are not following terrorism news as closely as young women are



Are you following the terrorism attacks on the US very closely?



## Young women are not following war news as closely as young men are



Are you following the US military effort in Afghanistan very closely?