



Millennial Economics: It Don't Matter if You're Black or White (or Hispanic)

Young Adults' Opinions on Economic Policy Are Becoming More Alike and More Progressive

Amanda Logan and David Madland October 2008



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Introduction

Some worry that as the United States grows more racially and ethnically diverse, the country will become increasingly fragmented. Yet whites, blacks, and Hispanics in the Millennial Generation—Americans between the ages of 18 and 29—are more diverse and share more similar attitudes about the economy than any previous generation of young people. Young blacks and Hispanics have historically been more progressive than young whites, but young whites are closing the gap and have actually become more progressive in several areas, according to the results of our study.

On a range of economic issues—from support for universal health care and labor unions to assistance for the needy—minorities in the Millennial Generation are generally more progressive than whites of the same age. Young blacks and Hispanics are more likely than young whites to believe that the government can be a force for good in the economy, and that labor unions are necessary to ensure strong and sustainable economic growth, as well as support increased investments in health care, education, and other areas.

Perhaps the most unique trait of the Millennial Generation is that the gap between young minorities and young whites is shrinking. Not only are young adults today more progressive than previous generations—as a previous Center for American Progress report, “The Progressive Generation,” found—but they are more likely to hold similar views than previous generations of young adults. Young whites today are closing the progressive gap with minorities on most of the economic issues we examined—and on some issues have become more progressive.

- Over the past 20 years, an average of 86 percent of blacks aged 18 to 29 agreed that labor unions are necessary to protect workers, while 72 percent of young whites agreed—a 14 percentage-point progressive gap. Today the gap is just 2 percentage points.
- Forty-six percent of young Hispanics over the past two decades believed it is the government’s responsibility to ensure a good job and standard of living for all, while just 35 percent of young whites did—a gap of 11 percentage points. Today, the gap is less than 6 percentage points.
- An average of 55 percent of young blacks and 54 percent of young Hispanics over the past 20 years have supported universal health care provided by the government, while

45 percent of young whites held this view. Today, young whites are slightly more supportive of universal government-provided health care than young Hispanics and nearly as supportive as young blacks.

- Over the last two decades, an average of 88 percent of young blacks and 83 percent of young Hispanics thought federal spending for education should be increased, compared to 78 percent of young whites. Today, Millennial generation whites have nearly cut in half the gap between themselves and young blacks and have overtaken Hispanics.
- An average of 85 percent of blacks, 72 percent of Hispanics, and 51 percent of whites aged 18 to 29 over the past two decades have supported increased federal spending for the poor—a gap of 34 percentage points between young blacks and young whites and 21 percentage points between young Hispanics and young whites. In the most recent survey, whites had reduced the gap with blacks by almost 10 percentage points and had cut it in half with Hispanics.

Young adults today have more similar views perhaps because they face a common economic struggle. Millennials are confronting far more significant economic challenges than other recent generations—such as lower rates of health care coverage, worse job prospects, and higher levels of student loan debt—and are likely reacting to the conservative policies that have created much of their financial difficulties.¹ It also appears that the gap is closing in part because young minorities tend to keep the progressive views of their elders, while young whites are increasingly rejecting the more conservative views of elder whites.

Whatever the cause of their economic progressivism, Millennials of all races are set to play a major role in the 2008 election and beyond. The economy is the most important issue of the election for all voters, but has been a bigger concern for Millennials than older generations.² Millennials are a very large generation in size—and by far the most diverse.³ And young adults are voting at increasingly high rates, with 2008 likely to be the third major election in a row with an increase in turnout among young voters.⁴

Due to their embrace—across race and ethnicity—of decidedly progressive positions on economic issues, this generation could well be poised to transform the American political landscape in 2008 and beyond.

Study Background

This study is a companion to “The Progressive Generation,” a report about the progressive economic views of young adults published earlier this year. We found in “The Progressive Generation” that young adults today have decidedly progressive views on economic issues, possibly more so than any previous generation. According to the results of our first-of-a-kind analysis of Millennials’ views on the economy, a majority of 18- to 29-year-olds believe that the government can be a force for good in the economy and reject the conservative viewpoint that government is the problem, and that free markets always produce the best results for society. Not only are Millennials’ views more progressive than those of other age groups today; they seem to be more progressive than the views previous generations held when they were younger. Also noteworthy is the fact that these findings were especially true when compared to the conservative views of Generation X—men and women who are now in their 30s and early 40s.

Like “The Progressive Generation,” this report relies heavily on the National Election Survey and the Pew Values Survey for its analysis.⁵ These sources are two of the longest-running surveys of Americans’ views about a wide range of issues. The National Election Survey has been using many of the same questions about economics and politics for over half a century and the Pew Values Survey has been doing so for two decades, making them ideal for comparing changes in opinions over time. Both surveys have also asked questions about respondents’ race and ethnicity since the late 1980s that allow for a comparable breakdown of respondents by race and ethnicity over time.⁶ While these surveys are publicly available, they have not, according to our research, been used before to analyze the economic views of generations of white, black, and Hispanic Americans. As a result, this is a unique study, with new and important results.

Results of the Study

Young minorities are generally more progressive than young whites

Analysis of a wide range of economic issues in the National Election Survey and the Pew Values Survey demonstrates that young blacks and Hispanics have been more progressive economically than young whites on issues ranging from support for universal healthcare and labor unions to general government services and assistance to the needy. These findings keep with previous academic research.⁷

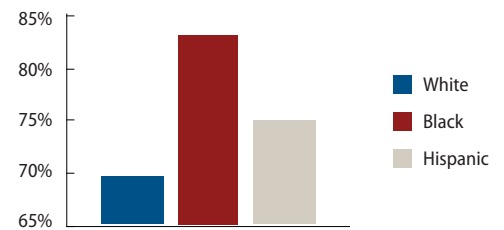
All young adults seem to believe that there are certain minimal living standards that the government should ensure for all citizens. For the past two decades, the Pew Values Survey has asked participants whether they agree or disagree with the statement that the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep; young people, especially young minorities have indicated notable support for this idea.⁸ From 1987 to 2007, an average of 83.3 percent of blacks aged 18 to 29 have said that the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep, while 75.2 percent of Hispanics and 69.8 percent of whites agreed with this statement.

Although young adults feel fairly strongly that the government should make sure all Americans have enough to eat and a place to sleep, there is more division among young people about how much further that obligation should go. The National Election Survey has continuously asked respondents whether they believe it is the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone has a good job and a standard of living.⁹ Between 1988 and 2004, young blacks showed the most support for this notion, with 53.7 percent believing that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone has a good job and a standard of living. Young Hispanics demonstrated the second-most support for this idea, with an average of 45.7 percent believing that these assurances fall within the government's duty. Young whites, however, had markedly less support for the idea, with an average of just over

Do you agree or disagree with the statement that the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep?

18- to 29-year-olds, 1987–2007 average

Percent who agree



Source: Authors' analysis of Pew Values Survey.

Is it the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone has a good job and standard of living?

18- to 29-year-olds, 1988–2004 average

Percent who believe it is the government's responsibility



Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

one-third—34.9 percent—during the same period believing that it is a responsibility of the government to make sure that every person has a good job and standard of living.

The necessity of and extent to which the government should provide services to citizens has always been a highly debated topic between conservatives and progressives. The National Election Survey has routinely asked survey respondents whether the government should provide many more or many fewer services, offering a scale of support for their answer, and between 1988 and 2004, minorities were more likely to take the more progressive view and believe that the government should provide more services.¹⁰ An average of almost two-thirds—65.6 percent—of young blacks indicated between 1988 and 2004 that they felt the government should provide more services, along with 56.4 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics. During the same period, an average of slightly less than half—46.8 percent—of young whites agreed with this position.

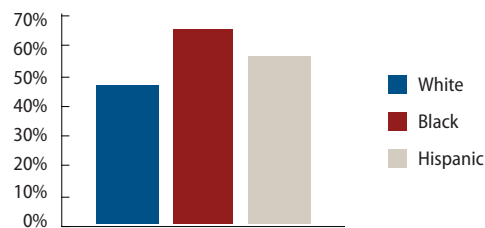
One debate related to the provision of government services that has been building momentum for several decades is whether or not there should be universal health care for all Americans. The National Election survey asks whether a government insurance plan should cover the cost of medical and hospital expenses or if private insurance and individuals should bear these costs.¹¹ Again, young minorities have demonstrated a more progressive view toward government-provided health insurance. More than half of 18- to 28-year-old blacks and Hispanics between 1988 and 2004, or an average of 55.0 percent and 53.9 percent respectively, believed that there should be a government health insurance plan for everyone. Young whites, meanwhile, have been less supportive of the idea of universal health care over the same period, with 45.2 percent believing a government insurance plan should cover all medical and hospital expenses.

As the population ages, many Americans have become increasingly concerned about their future Social Security benefits. The National Election Survey has asked whether respondents believe that spending for Social Security should be increased or decreased.¹² Young minorities, especially young blacks, have been more likely than young whites to believe that Social Security spending should be increased. Between 1988 and 2004, nearly three-quarters—74.4 percent—of 18- to 29-year-old blacks have indicated that spending on Social Security should be increased, along with 56.8 percent of young Hispanics. An average of 53.5 percent of 18- to 29-year-old whites also agreed that Social Security spending should be increased.

Should the government provide many more or many fewer services?

18- to 29-year-olds, 1988–2004 average

Percent who believe the government should provide more services

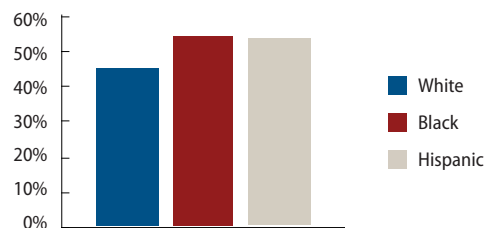


Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

Should there be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses or should individuals and private insurance pay expenses?

18- to 29-year-olds, 1988–2004 average

Percent who believe there should be a government insurance plan



Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

Public education has received more scrutiny in recent years as No Child Left Behind has focused more attention on our nation's classrooms. The public is largely supportive of increased federal spending on public education as is evident in the history of the National Election Survey question about whether respondents think that education spending should be increased or decreased.¹³ Nevertheless, young minorities have historically been more likely on average to be in favor of increased federal spending for public education, with an average of 87.8 percent of young blacks and 83.0 percent of young Hispanics supporting greater spending between 1988 and 2004. Eighteen- to 29-year-old whites were slightly less supportive, with an average of 78.4 percent in favor of increased federal spending over the same period.

The National Election Survey has also asked respondents about their opinion on spending for several additional services that haven't received as much attention in the 2008 election cycle. One such question posed to respondents is what they think should happen to federal spending for child care—a key issue for young families struggling to balance work and family.¹⁴ Yet again, young minorities historically have been more in favor of increased spending for this service than young whites. Between 1988 and 2004, an average of 80.1 percent of 18- to-29-year-old blacks and 71.0 percent of young Hispanics thought that federal spending for child care should be increased, while slightly under two-thirds—64.1 percent—of young whites agreed.

Another question related to government spending that the National Election Survey has tracked is whether federal spending for the poor should be increased or decreased.¹⁵ Young minorities have historically been markedly strongly in favor of increased federal spending, with 85.2 percent of 18- to-29-year old blacks and 71.9 percent of young Hispanics in favor of increased spending on average between 1988 and 2004. In contrast, just 51.1 percent of whites were in favor of increased spending for the poor, on average, over the same period.

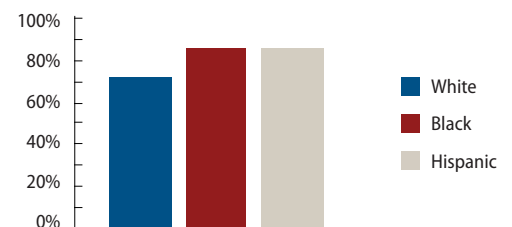
The Pew Values Survey has routinely asked over the past two decades whether survey participants agree with the statement that labor unions are necessary to protect the working person.¹⁶ During this period, young minorities have shown strong agreement with this statement, with an average of 86.3 Hispanics aged 18 to 29 and 85.9 percent of blacks aged 18 to 29, indicating that they believe labor unions are necessary to protect the working person. A majority of young whites have also indicated that they believe that labor unions are necessary to protect workers; however, this support is not as strong, with an average of 71.7 percent of 18- to 29-year-old whites agreeing with this position between 1987 and 2007.

Along a similar vein, the National Election Survey has continuously asked respondents to rank their feelings toward labor unions on a scale of 0 to 100, with 50 to 100 meaning that they felt favorably toward labor

Do you agree or disagree with the statement that labor unions are necessary to protect the working person?

18- to 29-year-olds, 1987–2007 average

Percent who agree



Source: Authors' analysis of Pew Values Survey.

unions, and 0 to 50 indicating that they didn't feel favorably toward them.¹⁷ Between 1988 and 2004, young minorities have held more positive feelings toward labor unions than young whites, with young blacks giving them an average mean rating of 66.6, closely followed by young Hispanics with an average mean rating of 63.8, and finally, young whites awarding labor unions an average mean rating of 54.7.

Young whites are closing the progressive gap

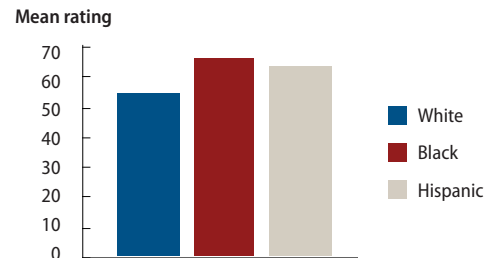
On most—but not all—questions we analyzed, the gap between the views of young minorities and the views of young whites has shrunk over time. In the most recent surveys, the views of young whites were generally closer to the views of young blacks and young Hispanics than they had been in the past. The narrowing of the gap on some questions has been relatively small, but the overall direction is clear. Millennial Generation blacks, Hispanics, and whites share more similar views than previous generations of young people.

The gap between black and white Millennials narrowed slightly on the question of whether the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep.¹⁸ An average of 83.3 percent of 18- to 29-year-old blacks and 69.8 percent of young whites over the past 20 years said that the government should guarantee these minimal living standards. The gap between the average response of young whites and that of young blacks was 13.5 percentage points. In 2007, the most recent year that the question was posed, young people overall increased their support for the idea that the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep, with 91.7 percent of young blacks and 79.1 percent of young whites agreeing with this idea. But support among young whites increased more than that of young blacks, and the percentage-point gap between the two declined slightly to 12.6 percent.

The gap between Hispanic and white Millennials actually shifted on the same question. Over the past 20 years, 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics have agreed more often on average than young whites that the government should guarantee every American enough to eat and a place to sleep. An average of 75.2 percent of young Hispanics have said that the government should ensure the needy a place to eat and sleep compared with 69.8 percent of young whites; the difference between young Hispanics' and young whites' average answer was 5.4 percentage points. Yet in 2007, young whites' support for this idea grew much more than that of young Hispanics, with 79.1 percent of young whites and 76.9 percent of young Hispanics believing that the government should ensure all Americans enough to eat and a place to sleep. This means that whites now actually hold a slightly more progressive view on the issue.

Labor unions thermometer

18- to 29-year-olds, 1988–2004 average mean



Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

Note: This graph depicts the mean response to a question about respondents' feelings toward labor unions, with ratings of less than 50 indicating more negative feelings and more than 50 indicating more positive feelings.

White Millennials slightly narrowed the gap with black Millennials on the question of whether the government should provide more or fewer services.¹⁹ On average, 65.6 percent of 18- to 20-year-old blacks have historically said that the government should provide more services in general, while only 46.8 percent of young whites have agreed. There has been an average 18.8 percentage-point gap between the two races. In 2004, this gap was lower, standing at 16.5 percentage points, with 77.4 percent of black Millennials and 60.9 percent of white Millennials believing there should be more services. Both races' support for more services increased significantly, but white Millennials' support grew at a slightly higher rate.

The gap between Hispanic and white Millennials on this same question once again reversed. An average of 56.4 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics believed that the government should provide more services over the period between 1988 and 2004, while 46.8 percent of 18- to 29-year-old whites did, meaning there has been a historical average gap of 9.7 percentage points. Yet in 2004, this gap switched, with whites becoming slightly more progressive; 60.9 percent of white Millennials said the government should provide more services compared to 57.1 percent of Hispanic Millennials.

The gap between young Hispanics and young whites decreased on the question of whether it is the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone has a good job and standard of living, though it actually increased between young blacks and young whites.²⁰ The gap between young whites and young Hispanics shrunk from a historical average of 10.8 percent to 5.4 percent in 2004. This was because young Hispanics' support for the idea was slightly less in 2004 than was the historical average—45.7 percent compared to 43.2 percent in 2004. At the same time, young whites' support for the idea was slightly stronger in 2004 than was their historical average, with 37.8 percent believing it was the government's responsibility in 2004 contrasted to an average of 34.9 percent over 1988 to 2004.

An average of 53.7 percent of young blacks between 1988 and 2004 indicated that it was the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone has a good job and standard of living compared to just 34.9 percent of young whites, meaning there was a 18.8 percentage-point gap between the two groups. When the question was asked most recently in 2004, the gap between young blacks and whites actually widened to 31.0 percentage points because of a surge in young blacks' support—68.8 percent of black Millennials said it was the government's responsibility to ensure a good job and standard of living, compared to just 37.8 percent of white Millennials.

White Millennials almost entirely closed the gap with black Millennials when asked whether there should be a government insurance plan to cover all medical and hospital expenses or whether individuals and private insurance should pay for these expenses.²¹ An average of 55.0 percent young blacks between 1988 and 2004 thought that there should be a government insurance plan, while just 45.2 percent of young whites held that view. There has been a historic average gap of 9.8 percentage points between the

two races on this subject. Yet in 2004, white Millennials had almost caught up to black Millennials in their level of support for government health insurance, with support levels of 56.0 percent and 56.2 percent, respectively.

A similar picture exists with the difference between young Hispanics and young whites, yet white Millennials' support again surpassed that of Hispanic Millennials'. Between 1988 and 2004, an average of 53.9 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics said that there should be a government insurance plan to cover all medical and hospital expenses. Only 45.2 percent of whites thought so, meaning there was an 8.7 percentage-point difference between young Hispanics and young whites on this issue. In 2004, however, 56.0 percent of young whites supported the idea of a government insurance plan compared to 52.9 percent of Hispanic Millennials.

Young whites have also noticeably narrowed the gap with young blacks on the question of what should happen to federal spending for Social Security.²² In 2004, 77.8 percent of 18- to 29-year-old blacks and 63.2 percent of young whites said that federal spending for Social Security should be increased—a 14.6 percentage-point difference between the two. This is 6.3 percentage points lower than the historical average difference of 20.9 percentage points.

The gap between young Hispanics and young whites on the question of Social Security in 2004, however, was essentially equal to the historic average gap. In 2004, 66.7 percent of Hispanic Millennials and 63.2 percent of white Millennials were in favor of increased federal spending for Social Security—a 3.5 percentage-point difference—which is only slightly higher than the 3.3 historical average gap.

The gap between blacks and whites also decreased on the issue of federal spending for public education. Over the last two decades, an average of 87.8 percent of young blacks and 78.4 percent of young whites thought that the federal government should increase spending on public education—an average difference of 9.4 percentage points.²³ That gap had lowered in 2004, however, with just 5.6 percentage points separating the views of Millennial blacks and whites. For 18- to 29-year-olds, 91.7 percent of young blacks and 86.1 percent of young whites thought that federal spending for public education should be increased.

Hispanic and white Millennials' views once again reversed on the issue of federal spending on public education. On average, between 1988 and 2004, 83.0 percent of young Hispanics and 78.4 percent of young whites thought that federal spending for public education should be increased. A 4.6 percentage-point difference existed between the two. In 2004, however, the gap had been eliminated and the roles had switched, as 81.0 percent of Hispanic Millennials and 86.1 percent of white Millennials thought that federal spending for public education should be increased.

The gap between black and white Millennials once again narrowed on the issue of federal spending on child care. Between 1988 and 2004, an average difference of 16.0 percent-

age points existed between 18- to 29-year-old blacks and whites on the issue. An average of 80.1 percent of young blacks and 64.1 percent of young whites said that spending should be increased.²⁴ In 2004, the gap was considerably smaller, standing at 9.7 percentage points. Black Millennials' support was somewhat lower than the historical average—77.8 percent—while white Millennials' support was slightly higher than the historical average—68.1 percent.

The gap between Hispanics and whites similarly decreased. Between 1988 and 2004, an average difference of 6.9 percentage points existed between 18- to 29-year-olds on the issue of increased federal spending for child care; an average of 71.0 percent of young Hispanics and 64.1 percent of young whites believed that spending should be increased. In 2004, the gap was less than half as large, standing at 3.3 percentage points. Hispanic Millennials' support was roughly even with the historical average at 71.4 percent, while white Millennials' support was slightly higher than young whites' historical average at 68.1 percent.

A considerable gap still exists between young blacks and young whites on the issue of federal spending for the poor, but young whites reduced it by nearly 10 percentage points in 2004.²⁵ Over the last two decades, an average of 85.2 percent of 18- to 29-year-old blacks have thought that federal spending for the poor should be increased compared to an average of 51.1 percent of whites, meaning there has been an average of 34.1 percentage points between the two groups' views. In 2004, however, the difference was just 25.3 percentage points, as slightly fewer black Millennials than the historical average—82.9 percent—said that spending should be increased, while more white Millennials than the historical average—57.6 percent—agreed.

Young whites also lessened the difference between their views of federal spending for the poor and those of young Hispanics in 2004. Between 1988 and 2004, an average difference of 20.8 percentage points existed between the two, with an average of 71.9 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics and 51.1 percent of young whites believing that such spending should be increased. In 2004, however, support among Hispanic Millennials was lower than the historical average level of support—65.9 percent—while young whites' support—57.6 percent—was higher than their historical average. This means that the percentage-point difference between the two races in 2004 of 8.3 percentage points was less than half of what it had been historically.

The difference between Millennial blacks' and whites' opinions on labor unions has shifted dramatically in recent years. Over the past two decades, when asked whether they believe that labor unions are necessary to protect the working person, an average of 85.9 percent of 18- to 29-year-old blacks indicated that they believed labor unions were necessary, along with 71.7 percent of young whites.²⁶ This translates into a 14.2 percentage-point difference between the two races. The difference was much smaller in 2007, standing at 1.6 percentage points, with 75.0 percent of young blacks believing that labor unions were necessary and 73.4 percent of young whites feeling the same.

The gap between young Hispanics and young whites, however, actually widened. The two races have had an average percentage-point difference of 14.6 over the last 20 years, with 86.3 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics believing that labor unions are necessary to protect workers and an average of 71.7 percent of young whites believing this. Both Hispanic Millennials and white Millennials had a higher average level of support for this notion in 2007, yet young Hispanics' support grew more—to 91.2 percent—and the gap widened slightly to a 17.8 percentage-point difference.

A similar question has tracked young adults' views toward labor unions with a scale such that ratings above 50 indicate a generally positive group of labor unions.²⁷ Between 1988 and 2004, 18- to 29-year-old blacks have given labor unions an average mean rating of 66.6, while whites have assigned them an average rating of 54.7, for a historical difference of 11.9 percentage points between the two races. In 2004, this gap was slightly smaller than the historical gap, with a difference of 11.2 between the two. Black Millennials gave labor unions a mean rating of 67.9, while white Millennials gave them a mean rating of 56.7.

The gap between young Hispanics and young whites averaged 9.2 over the 1988 and 2004 period, with 18- to 29-year-old Hispanics awarding them an average rating of 63.8 and young whites again awarding them an average rating of 54.7. The difference between the two races' mean ratings was 0.1 points smaller in 2004, or roughly the same as it has averaged historically, standing at 9.1.

Young Whites Closing the Progressive Gap: A Comparison of the Views of Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, Age 18–29

Question	Progressive answer	Young black–young white percentage-point difference: historical average	Young black–young white percentage-point difference: most recent survey	Young Hispanic–young white percentage-point difference: historical average	Young Hispanic–young white percentage-point difference: most recent survey
Do you agree or disagree with the statement that the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep? (PEW)	Agree	13.5%	12.6%	5.4%	-2.2%
Is it the government's responsibility to ensure that everyone has a good job and standard of living? (NES)	Yes	18.8%	31.0%	10.8%	5.4%
Should the government provide many more or many fewer services? (NES)	More	18.8%	16.5%	9.6%	-3.8%
Should there be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses or should individuals and private insurance pay expenses? (NES)	Universal coverage	9.8%	0.2%	8.7%	-3.1%
What do you think should happen to federal spending for Social Security? (NES)	Increase	20.9%	14.6%	3.3%	3.5%
What do you think should happen to federal spending for public education? (NES)	Increase	9.4%	5.6%	4.6%	-5.1%
What do you think should happen to federal spending for child care? (NES)	Increase	16.0%	9.7%	6.9%	3.3%
What do you think should happen to federal spending for the poor? (NES)	Increase	34.1%	25.3%	20.8%	8.3%
Do you agree or disagree with the statement that labor unions are necessary to protect the working person? (PEW)	Agree	14.2%	1.6%	14.6%	17.8%
Labor unions thermometer (NES)	Mean rating	11.9	11.2	9.2	9.1

Source: Authors' analysis of the PEW Values Survey and the National Election Survey. Notes: The oldest PEW Values Survey used in this report was conducted in 1987 and the most recent in 2007. The oldest National Social Survey used in this report was conducted in 1988 and the most recent in 2004. The percentage-point differences were calculated, for example, by subtracting the average percent of young white respondents who provided a progressive answer over the listed time period from the average percent of young black respondents who provided a progressive answer over the listed time period. The Labor Unions Thermometer lists means instead of percentage-point differences. See text of paper, related charts, and endnotes to view the "progressive answer" for each question in its entirety.

Young blacks and Hispanics more likely to think like their elders than young whites

The gap between the views of young minorities and the views of young whites is closing in part because white Millennials are increasingly rejecting the more conservative views of older whites, while minority Millennials, especially blacks, tend to keep the progressive views of elder minorities. Black Millennials and Hispanic Millennials have views on economic issues that are similarly progressive as older blacks and Hispanics, but white Millennials are generally much more progressive than older whites.

When asked whether the government should guarantee that every citizen has enough to eat and a place to sleep, young minorities' views mirror those of older minorities rather closely, while young whites' views break from the views of older whites.²⁸ In 2007, 91.7 percent of black Millennials believed that the government should guarantee these basic necessities, much like the 94.4 percent of blacks ages 30 and older. Hispanics' views are also relatively similar across generations, with 76.9 percent of Millennials believing the government should provide all citizens enough to eat and a place to sleep, along with 68.3 percent of Hispanics ages 30 and older. In contrast, young whites have broken with the more conservative views of older whites overall. In 2007, 79.1 percent of white Millennials said that the government should ensure these things, compared to 61.3 percent of whites ages 30 and older.

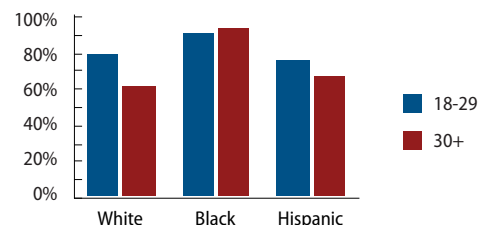
On health care, 56.2 percent of black Millennials in 2004 thought that there should be a government insurance plan to cover the costs of medical expenses, similar to the 49.6 percent of blacks aged 30 and older.²⁹ There was more variation among the Hispanic age groups, but still less than the variation among whites, with 52.9 percent of Hispanic Millennials, and 40.3 percent of Hispanics aged 30 and older believing that the government should provide health insurance to cover medical expenses. Young whites' views were noticeably more different from older whites, with 56.0 percent of white Millennials believing that health care should come from a government insurance plan in 2004, compared to just 41.5 percent of whites aged 30 and above.

Young minorities do not have identical views to their elders on the topic of government services, but the difference between the views of white Millennials and older whites is still greater than the difference between young and older minorities.³⁰ In 2004, 77.4 percent of 18- to 29-year-old blacks thought that the government should provide more services, along

Do you agree or disagree with the statement that the government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep?

18- to 29-year-olds and 30+, 2007

Percent who agree

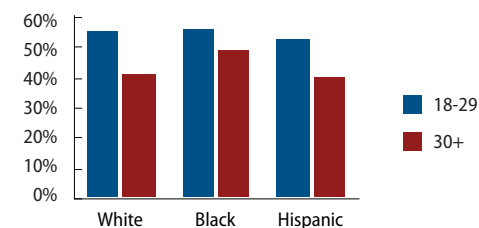


Source: Authors' analysis of Pew Values Survey.

Should there be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses or should individuals and private insurance pay expenses?

18- to 29-year-olds and 30+, 2004

Percent who believe there should be a government insurance plan



Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

with 63.6 percent of blacks aged 30 and older. For Hispanics, 57.1 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds favored more services, while 44.3 percent of Hispanics aged 30 and older agreed. In contrast, 60.9 percent of white Millennials thought that the government should provide more services, compared to 44.6 percent of whites aged 30 and older.

When asked about federal spending for public education, white Millennials' views are markedly more progressive than their parents', while black and Hispanic Millennials' views were in line with those of elder minorities, albeit slightly lower in their support for increased spending.³¹ For blacks, 91.7 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds and 94.6 percent of those aged 30 and older thought in 2004 that the federal government should increase spending for public education. Similarly, 81.0 percent of young Hispanics and 88.4 percent of Hispanics aged 30 and older believed that this spending should be increased. In contrast, 86.1 percent of white Millennials in 2004 thought that the federal government should boost spending compared to just 67.0 percent of whites aged 30 and up.

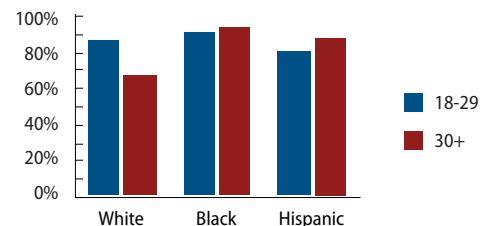
Young whites, again, hold markedly more progressive views than older whites on the issue of federal spending on child care, while black Millennials' views are slightly less progressive than their elders', and Hispanic Millennials' views are essentially the same as older Hispanics.³² In 2004, 77.8 percent of 18- to 29-year-old blacks thought that federal spending for child care should be increased, compared to 85.5 percent of blacks aged 30 and older. In the same year, 71.4 percent of young Hispanics and 71.6 percent of older Hispanics felt that this funding should be increased. For whites, however, the picture was different in 2004, with 68.1 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds thinking federal spending for child care should be increased compared to just 50.1 percent of whites aged 30 and older.

Yet again, on the topic of spending for the poor, white Millennials have noticeably more progressive views than older whites, while the views of both black and Hispanic Millennials are relatively in line with those of their elders.³³ In 2004, 82.9 percent of young blacks thought that federal spending for the poor should be increased, along with 88.1 percent of blacks aged 30 and older. For Hispanics, the support was even more uniform in 2004, with 65.9 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds and 62.3 percent of Hispanics aged 30 and older in favor of increased federal spending for the poor. In contrast, 57.6 percent of white Millennials thought that this spending should be increased compared to just 48.1 percent of whites aged 30 and older.

What do you think should happen to federal spending for public education?

18- to 29-year-olds and 30+, 2004

Percent who think it should be increased

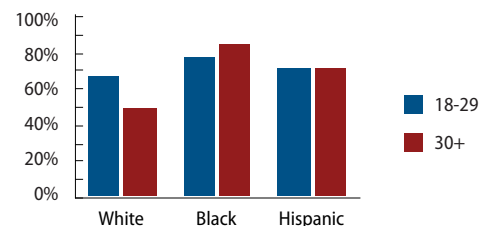


Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

What do you think should happen to federal spending for child care?

18- to 29-year-olds and 30+, 2004

Percent who think it should be increased

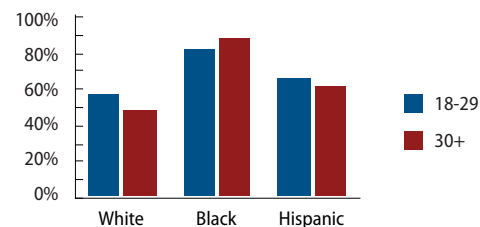


Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

What do you think should happen to federal spending for the poor?

18- to 29-year-olds and 30+, 2004

Percent who think it should be increased



Source: Authors' analysis of National Election Survey.

Conclusion

As we near the 2008 election, journalists, pundits, pollsters, and politicians alike will continue to speculate about voting behaviors of various blocs of Americans, just as they do every election cycle. Much conversation has and will continue to be had about what, for example, middle-aged white males, Hispanic mothers, blacks of all ages, and “the youth vote” supposedly will do on November 4. To be sure, no one can predict exactly how these voters will feel and act on Election Day. But our study suggests that young voters of all races are much more likely to vote in a similar manner than other generations.

The Millennial Generation is the most diverse generation in America, and yet they hold more strikingly similar attitudes about economic issues than previous generations of young people. Minorities have historically been more progressive than whites and continue to be so on many issues today, but young whites are closing this gap, even becoming more progressive in several areas.

Today’s young adults have grown up in a time of declining health care coverage and increasing levels of debt, including student debt, and have come of age facing worsening job prospects and declining wages. Perhaps because they must all face far more significant challenges than other recent generations when they were young adults, Millennials hold more similar views about how to address these economic issues that are already deeply affecting their lives. Black, Hispanic, and white Millennials today are more unified in their progressive attitudes than previous generations of young adults on a range of issues, including health care, the provision of governmental services, and federal spending for child care.

Regardless of what is prompting Millennials of all races to hold progressive economic views, it is already clear that they are a large and politically active generation that cares about economic issues and has a cohesive progressive outlook. Millennials will undoubtedly play a major role in the 2008 election and will likely continue to have a large effect on the face, feel, and viewpoint of American politics for many years to come.

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Endnotes

- 1 Madland, David and Amanda Logan, "The Progressive Generation," (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2008). Draut, Tamara, "Economic State of Young America," (Demos, 2008).
- 2 See for example, Lake, Celinda, Joshua E. Ulibarri, and Karen M. Emmerson, "Rock The Vote 2008," (Washington: Lake Research Partners, 2008), accessed at http://www.rockthevote.com/research/Feb_Poll_D.pdf, April 20, 2008; Greenberg, Anna and Amy Gershkoff, "Forging the Ties that Bind: Reaching Out to the MySpace Generation," *Democratic Strategist*, April 20, 2007, accessible at http://www.thedemocraticstrategist.org/ac/2007/03/forging_the_ties_that_bind_rea.php; Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, "Nationwide November 2003 Youth Survey," (College Park, MD: The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, 2004).
- 3 Leyden, Peter and Ruy Teixeira, "The Progressive Politics of the Millennial Generation," (Washington: New Politics Institute, 2007).
- 4 Scott Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials," draft paper, February 8, 2008; and Heather Smith, "Galvanizing Young Voters," *Washington Post*, April 5, 2008.
- 5 Results of the General Social Survey also support the authors' findings; however, it was excluded from this report because questions identifying Hispanic ethnicity are not comparable until recent years, making it difficult to correctly identify trends in the data over time.
- 6 Note that race and ethnicity are imprecise terms. We follow the Census Bureau procedure and define race and ethnicity in the following manner: we define Hispanics as those who answer affirmatively to a question about whether they are of Hispanic origin. White or black is determined using a separate race question, after excluding those who considered themselves Hispanic. This procedure produces the following categories, Hispanics, non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks.
- 7 On minorities being generally more progressive than whites, see for example: Paul R. Brewer, "Public Opinion, Economic Issues, and the Vote: Are Presidential Elections 'All About the Benjamins'?", in Wilcox and Norrander, eds., *Understanding Public Opinion* (CQ Press, Washington, D.C., 2002); Blekesaune, Morten and Jill Quadagno, "Public Attitudes towards Welfare State Policies: A Comparative Analysis of 24 Nations," *European Sociological Review* (2003) 19: 415-427.
- 8 Exact wording of Pew Values Survey question: "Now I am going to read you another series of statements on some different topics. For each statement, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it...The government should guarantee every citizen enough to eat and a place to sleep."
- 9 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "Some people feel that the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. (1972- 1978, 1996-LATER: Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.) Others think the government should just let each person get ahead on his/their own. (1972-1978, 1996: Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6.) Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)"
- 10 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. (2004: Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1.) Other people feel that it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. (2004: Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6.) Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)"
- 11 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "There is much concern about the rapid rise in medical and hospital costs. Some (1988, 1994: people) feel there should be a government insurance plan which would cover all medical and hospital expenses (1988, 1994: for everyone). Others feel that (1988, 1994: all) medical expenses should be paid by individuals, and through private insurance like Blue Cross (1988, 1994: or other company paid plans). Where would you place the Democratic Party on this scale [1988 ONLY: or haven't you thought much about this]? (7-POINT SCALE SHOWN TO R)"
- 12 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which (1986 AND LATER: of the following) programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on Social Security be increased, decreased or kept about the same?"
- 13 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which (1986 AND LATER: of the following) programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on public education be increased, decreased or kept about the same?"
- 14 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which (1986 AND LATER: of the following) programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on child care be increased, decreased or kept about the same?"
- 15 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "If you had a say in making up the federal budget this year, for which (1986 AND LATER: of the following) programs would you like to see spending increased and for which would you like to see spending decreased: Should federal spending on aid to the poor be increased, decreased or kept about the same?"
- 16 Exact wording of Pew Values Survey question: "Now I am going to read you another series of statements on some different topics. For each statement, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it or completely disagree with it. Labor unions are necessary to protect the working person."
- 17 Exact wording of National Election Survey question: "There are many groups in America that try to get the government or the American people to see things more their way. We would like to get your feelings towards some of these groups. I have here a card on which there is something that looks like a thermometer. We call it a "feeling thermometer" because it measures your feelings towards groups. Here's how it works. If you don't know too much about a group or don't feel particularly warm or cold toward them, then you should place them in the middle, at the 50 degree mark. If you have a warm feeling toward a group or feel favorably toward it, you would give it a score somewhere between 50 degrees and 100 degrees, depending on how warm your feeling is toward the group. On the other hand, if you don't feel very favorably toward some of these groups—if there are some you don't care for too much—then you would place them somewhere between 0 degrees and 50 degrees. [And] still using the thermometer, how would you rate [the following]: Labor unions?"
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Amanda Logan is a Research Associate with the Economic Policy Team at American Progress. Her work largely focuses on issues surrounding lower- and middle-income American families, including prices for necessities, wages and benefits, economic distress such as bankruptcies, and how they view economic policy. Amanda has been with American Progress since 2006, first working as a Special Assistant for Economic Policy. Prior to joining American Progress, Amanda interned at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the European Parliament, the National Low Income Housing Coalition, and the Idaho National Laboratory. She has appeared on radio programs and her work has been referenced in national media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *U.S. News and World Report*, *CNN*, and *NBC Nightly News*. A native of Idaho Falls, ID, Amanda graduated *summa cum laude* from Moravian College in Bethlehem, PA with a bachelor's degree in economics and political science.

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Dr. David Madland is the Director of the American Worker Project at American Progress. He has written academic articles and books as well as op-eds and commentaries on a range of economic issues, including retirement, economic insecurity, health care, campaign finance, taxes, and public opinion. He has a doctorate in government from Georgetown University and received his bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley. Madland's dissertation was about the political reaction to the decline of the defined benefit retirement system.

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The American Worker Project, led by Director David Madland, Policy Analyst Karla Walter, and Research Associate Amanda Logan, is a project of the Center for American Progress Action Fund that conducts research to increase the wages, benefits, and security of American workers and promote their rights at work.

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