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New Progressive America: The Millennial Generation

David Madland and Ruy Teixeira May 2009



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Introduction and summary

The 2008 election saw strong shifts toward progressives among almost all growing demographic groups in the United States. Conversely, conservatives typically retained strength only among stagnant or declining groups. The result is a demographic landscape sharply tilted toward progressives, a tilt that is only likely to increase in years to come.

There are many components to the new demography, as outlined in the recent Progressive Studies report, “[New Progressive America](#).” One of the most important is the rise of the strongly progressive Millennial generation (birth years 1978-2000). Last November’s election was the first in which the 18- to 29-year-old age group was drawn exclusively from the Millennial generation, and they voted for Obama by a 34-point margin, 66 percent to 32 percent, compared to a 9-point margin for Kerry among 18- to 29-year-olds in 2004 when that age group was not exclusively Millennials.

Behind this striking result is a deeper story of a generation with progressive views in all areas and big expectations for change that will fundamentally reshape our electorate. We can start with the sheer size of this generation. Between now and 2018, the number of Millennials of voting age will increase by about four and a half million a year, and Millennial eligible voters will increase by about 4 million a year. In 2020—the first presidential election where all Millennials will have reached voting age—this generation will be 103 million strong, of which about 90 million will be eligible voters. Those 90 million Millennial eligible voters will represent just under 40 percent of America’s eligible voters.

The diversity of this generation is as impressive as its size. Right now, Millennial adults are 60 percent white and 40 percent minority (18 percent Hispanic, 14 percent black, 5 percent Asian, and 3 percent other). And the proportion of minority Millennial adults will rise to 41 percent in 2012, 43 percent in 2016, and 44 percent in 2020 (21 percent Hispanic, 14 percent black, 6 percent Asian, and 3 percent other). This shift should make the Millennial generation even more firmly progressive as it fully enters the electorate, since minorities are the most strongly progressive segment among Millennials.

But this generation’s progressive leanings are not confined to minorities. White Millennials are far more progressive than the population as a whole in every area, on cultural, economic, domestic policy issues, and more. In 2008, they supported Obama by 54-44, a 21-point shift toward the progressive candidate compared to 2004. Not only

did Obama win white Millennials overall, but he also won both white Millennial college graduate and noncollege voters (by 16 and 6 points respectively). The latter result includes a 12-point (54-42) margin for Obama among the overwhelmingly working-class 25- to 29-year-old white noncollege group, a stunning 40-point swing relative to Kerry's 35-63 drubbing among the same group in 2004. This suggests that as relatively progressive white working-class Millennials replace older white working-class voters in the electorate, the white working class as a whole could become less conservative and more open to progressive ideas and candidates.

One likely consequence of the Millennial generation's rise is an end to the so-called culture wars that have marked American politics for the last several decades. Acrimonious disputes about family and religious values, feminism, gay rights, and race have frequently crippled progressives' ability to make their case to the average American. Millennials support gay marriage, take race and gender equality as givens, are tolerant of religious and family diversity, have an open and positive attitude toward immigration, and generally display little interest in fighting over the divisive social issues of the past. Almost two-thirds agree that religious faith should focus more on promoting tolerance, social justice, and peace in society, and less on opposing abortion or gay rights.

Millennials are also notably progressive on foreign policy issues. As a generation, they are more oriented toward a multilateral and cooperative foreign policy than their elders. They are highly likely to believe that a positive image of America abroad is necessary to achieve our national security goals and that America's security is best promoted by working through diplomacy, alliances, and international institutions. They have also generally been the age group most hostile to the war in Iraq and to former President George W. Bush's handling of it. Exit polls from the 2008 election showed that only 22 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Millennials approved of the Iraq war, compared to 77 percent who disapproved.

Millennials, more so than other generations, want a stronger government to make the economy work better, help those in need, and provide more services. They decisively reject the conservative viewpoint that government is the problem, and that free markets always produce the best results for society; instead they support a more balanced approach to the economy. When asked in the 2008 National Election Study whether we need a strong government to handle today's complex economic problems or whether the free market can handle these problems without government's involvement, Millennials demonstrated an overwhelming preference for strong government by a margin of 78 to 22 percent.

Millennials are particularly resolute on the need for universal health care and, more than older generations, they want to see bold, decisive action toward this goal. Seventy-one percent agree that the federal government should guarantee health care coverage for all Americans. Millennials are also supportive of efforts to ensure that workers get their fair share of economic growth, such as labor unions, the minimum wage, and progressive taxation. They strongly back increased investment in our public schools and college access.

And they believe we need to move away from dependence on fossil fuels, embracing the need for major investments in new energy technologies. By about 3:1, Millennials think we should make major investments now to invent the next generation of clean-energy solutions, rather than continue on our current path, and gradually shift the mix of sources used to meet our energy needs.

Finally, Millennials are neither antibusiness nor antitrade. They are, however, very clear that the government needs to regulate business in the public interest. What's more, they are more worried than older Americans that we will do too little to require fair trade and enforce worker and consumer protections and less worried that we will go too far in burdening free trade accords with protections for consumers and labor.

Millennials' progressivism has already had a large political impact, and these beliefs are not likely to fade as the generation ages. People's opinions certainly do change throughout life, but they are more likely to hold onto existing views than to reverse them. Further, Millennials are much more progressive on many issues than previous generations when they were younger. This is true not just on social issues such as gay marriage but also on issues concerning the role of government and policy goals such as achieving universal health care. In all likelihood, Millennial progressivism is here to stay.

This report provides a detailed portrait of the Millennial generation, covering the generation's size, voting behavior, demographics, and views on cultural, foreign policy, role of government, and economic issues. The weight of this evidence strongly suggests that Millennials are indeed an unusually progressive generation and that they will have a strong and durable impact on our nation's politics. We are on course for a new progressive America, and the rise of the Millennial generation is one main force behind this transformation.

Power in numbers

No consensus view yet exists on the best definition of the Millennial generation. Neil Howe, the influential generational analyst,¹ defines the Millennials as those born from 1982 to 2004,² which aligns closely with the definition used by Morley Winograd and Michael Hais in their recent book, *Millennial Makeover*.³ Our definition, birth years 1978-2000, covers the same number of years but starts earlier for two reasons. First, the “baby bust,” typically linked to Generation X, had recently ended in 1978, and an era of steadily rising births had begun. Second, data analysis indicates that the views of those born 1978-1981, who reached adolescence in the Clinton years, are quite similar to the views of those born later in the 1980s.

The size of this generation is enormous—bigger than the baby boomers under our definition and virtually any other.⁴ And the weight of this generation is just beginning to be felt politically.

The story begins with the 2004 election. That was the first election in which the 18- to 24-year-old age group was composed entirely of Millennials and in which the 18- to 29-year-old group was dominated by Millennials. Census data indicate that 18- to 24-year-olds increased their turnout in that election 11 points to 47 percent of citizens in that age group. And 18- to 29-year-olds increased their turnout 9 points, to 49 percent. These increases were far higher than among any other age group.

Millennials also increased their turnout levels in 2006 relative to the previous congressional election. Census data show that 18- to 29-year-olds (almost all Millennials at this point) increased their turnout from 23 percent to 26 percent of citizen-eligible voters, a 3-point gain relative to 2002. This gain was once again higher than among any other age group.

The 2008 elections continued this pattern. Turnout of 18- to 29-year-olds skyrocketed in the 2008 primaries, about doubling overall. And in the November general election, exit poll data showed the 18- to 29-year-old group (now composed exclusively of Millennials) increasing its share of voters from 17 to 18 percent. Based on extrapolations from these data,⁵ 18- to 29-year-old turnout increased 4 to 5 percentage points, an impressive performance in an election where overall turnout rose only 1.6 percentage points.⁶

This uninterrupted series of turnout increases augurs well for Millennials’ ability to affect politics in the future. At 18 percent of voters, 18- to 29-year-old Millennials are already larger than the senior vote (16 percent of voters), a group typically treated as exceptionally influential by political observers.

Moreover, the 18-percent figure actually understates the current level of Millennial influence on the electorate because the 18- to 29-year-old group does not include the oldest Millennials, the 30-year-olds who were born in 1978. Including them, a reasonable estimate is that Millennials were around 20 percent of the vote in this election.

This figure will steadily rise as more Millennials enter the voting pool. In 2008, about 55 million Millennials were of voting age and roughly 48 million were citizen-eligible voters. Between now and 2018, Millennials of voting age will increase in number by about 4 and a half million each year. And in 2020, the first presidential election where all Millennials will have reached voting age, this generation will be 103 million strong, of which about 90 million will be eligible voters. Those 90 million Millennial eligible voters will represent just under 40 percent of America’s eligible voters.⁷

These trends mean that every election until 2020 will see a bigger share of Millennial voters both because more of them will be eligible to vote *and* because the leading edge of the Millennials will be aging into higher turnout years. Thus, in 2012, there will be 74 million Millennials of voting age and 64 million Millennial eligible voters, accounting for 29 percent of all eligible voters. Assuming that Millennials’ relatively good turnout performance continues (but not that it gets any better), that should translate into roughly 35 million Millennials who cast ballots in 2012 and an estimated 26 percent of all voters.

By 2016, there will be 93 million Millennials of voting age and 81 million Millennial eligible voters—accounting for 36 percent of all eligible voters. This should produce an estimated 46 million voting Millennials, representing 33 percent of all voters. And in 2020, those 90 million Millennial eligible voters should translate into 52 million Millennial votes, representing 36 percent of all votes cast in that election.

The proportion of Millennials among voters should continue to rise for a number of elections—despite the fact that all Millennials will already be in the voting pool—because more and more Millennial voters will be aging into their higher turnout years after 2020. By 2028, for example, when Millennials will be ages 28-50, their share of voters should be about 38 percent, 2 points higher than in 2020.

TABLE 1
Millennial voting-age population, eligible voters and estimated actual voters, 2008–2020

Year	Millennial voting-age population	Millennial eligible voters	Millennial percent of eligible voters	Estimated millennial actual voters	Estimated millennial percent of actual voters
2008	55 million	48 million	23	25 million	20
2012	74 million	64 million	29	35 million	26
2016	93 million	81 million	36	46 million	33
2020	103 million	90 million	39	52 million	36

Progressive voting and the Millennial Generation

In 2008, 18- to 29-year-olds, now all Millennials, voted for Barack Obama by an overwhelming 66-32 margin. And they showed great generational consistency: 18- to 24-year-olds voted 66-32 for Obama while 25- to 29-year-olds went for Obama by 66-31.

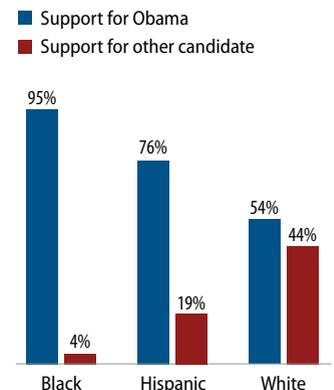
In contrast, we did not see consistency across the two age groups in 2004, when 18- to 24-year-olds were all Millennials but 25- to 29-year-olds were mostly not. The all-Millennial 18- to 24-year-olds voted 56-43 for John Kerry for president while the older, mostly non-Millennial 25- to 29-year-olds group voted only 51-48 for Kerry.⁸

Obama's support among 18- to 29-year-old Millennials was remarkably broad, extending across racial barriers. He carried not just Hispanic 18- to 29-year-olds (76-19) and black 18- to 29-year-olds (95-4), but also white 18- to 29-year-olds (54-44). Obama's 10-point advantage among white 18- to 29-year-olds contrasted starkly with his 15-point deficit among older whites and, compared to 2004, represented a 21-point shift toward progressives among this group.

Not only did Obama win white Millennials overall, but he also won both white Millennial college graduate and noncollege voters (by 16 and 6 points respectively⁹). Some may question the significance of the latter finding since the 18- to 29-year-old noncollege white group contains a considerable proportion of students and is therefore a flawed representation of the young white working class. However, if analysis is confined to 25- to 29-year-olds to eliminate the problem of mixing students on track for a four-year degree with other white noncollege youth, the results are even stronger. Obama won 25- to 29-year-old white noncollege voters by 12 points, 54-42, a stunning 40-point swing relative to Kerry's 35-63 drubbing among the same group in 2004.

The strong support of white college graduate Millennials for Obama is consistent with the continuing shift of white college graduates toward progressives (see "[New Progressive America](#)") and should strengthen that already-existing trend. But the support of white noncollege Millennials for Obama could indicate a new trend. As relatively progressive white working-class Millennials¹⁰ replace older white working-class voters in the electorate, the white working class as a whole could become less conservative and more open to progressive ideas and candidates. Given that Obama lost the white working class by 18 points in the 2008 election, this would be a significant development, mitigating progressives' main demographic weakness and adding to their burgeoning coalition.

Millennials of all races support Obama



Obama's huge overall margin among Millennials contributed to his strong victory last November. Without 18- to 29-year-olds, Obama's popular vote margin would have been slightly under one percentage point. That figure implies that an overwhelming proportion of Obama's 7-point popular vote victory (87 percent) was attributable to the support of 18- to 29-year-old Millennials.

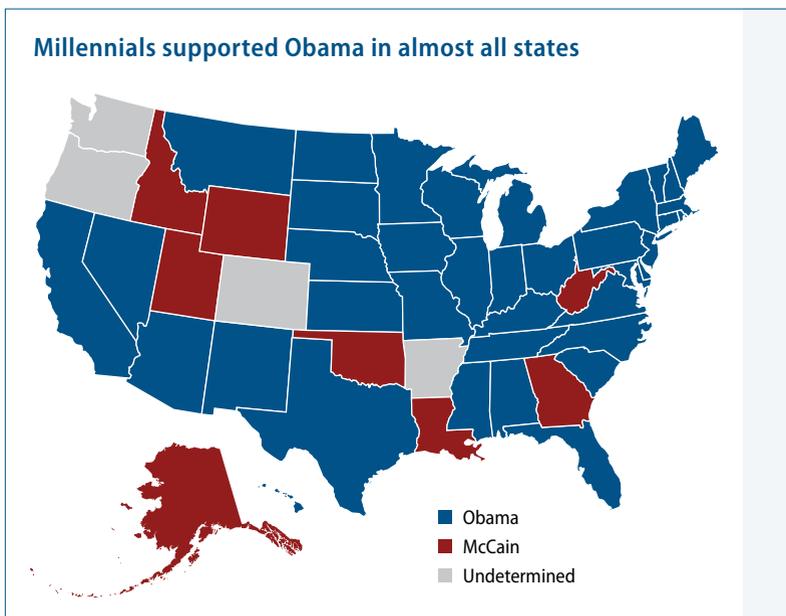
Another way of looking at the strength of Obama's support among Millennials is how many electoral votes he would have carried if just 18- to 29-year-olds had voted. Based on the National Election Pool exit poll results, Obama would have received at least 448 electoral votes and as many as 475.¹¹

Obama received 60 percent of the youth vote or more in every swing state in the 2008 election with the lone exception of Missouri, the only swing state Obama lost. He would have won that state as well, too, if Missouri's margin for Obama among this age group had been just a little closer to the average swing state margin among 18- to 29-year-olds (about 30 points).

Obama's 66-32 performance among the Millennial generation is even more impressive when compared to the 47-53 support Michael Dukakis received in 1988 from 18- to 29-year-olds (at that time a mix of late boomers¹² and early Gen X'ers). That's a 40-point youth swing toward progressives over the two elections.

Impressive youth swings in most states accompanied the large national youth swing between 1988 and 2008.¹³ This includes not just states where progressives have become dominant like California (a 52-point pro-progressive swing), Connecticut (73 points), Illinois (45 points), Maryland (61 points), Massachusetts (50 points), New Jersey (53 points), New York (41 points), and Vermont (67 points), but also many contested states in the 2008 election. In Florida, for example, Obama carried 18- to 29-year-old Millennials by 61-37. In 1988, Dukakis lost his same age group by 36-64. That's a pro-progressive swing of 52 points across the two elections. Similarly, in Indiana Obama carried 18- to 29-year-olds by 28 points, while Dukakis lost this group by 35 points, which translates into a pro-progressive swing of 63 points between 1988 and 2008.

Other large swing state youth shifts toward progressives include 46 points in Michigan (from 45-52 Dukakis to 68-39 Obama), 40 points in Missouri (from 39-59 Dukakis to 59-39 Obama), 58 points in Nevada (from 38-60 Dukakis to 67-31 Obama), 51 points in New Mexico (from 45-52 Dukakis to 71-27 Obama) and 61 points in North Carolina (from 43-56 Dukakis to 74-26 Obama). Smaller but still substantial progressive youth



shifts took place in the swing states of Iowa (21 points), Minnesota (29 points), Ohio (26 points), Pennsylvania (34 points), and Wisconsin (23 points).

Millennials' voting inclinations—hugely important in this election—could become even more so over time. If Millennials remain oriented as they are and maintain the generational consistency they have shown so far, the simple process of generational replacement—more Millennials moving into the electorate and taking the place of older voters—could increase progressives' margin over conservatives by an additional two and a half percentage points in 2012 and then by another two and a half points in 2016. It appears that the Millennial generation's progressive impact on voting may not yet have reached its peak.

TABLE 2
Progressive margins among 18- to- 29-year-olds by state, 1988 and 2008

State	Progressive margins		
	1988 president	2008 president	Progressive shift, 1988-2008
California	1	53	52
Connecticut	-12	61	73
Florida	-28	24	52
Illinois	-2	44	46
Indiana	-35	28	63
Iowa	4	25	21
Maryland	-17	44	61
Massachusetts	7	57	50
Michigan	-7	39	46
Minnesota	1	31	30
Mississippi	-15	13	28
Missouri	-20	20	40
Nevada	-22	36	58
New Jersey	-17	36	53
New Mexico	-7	44	51
New York	14	55	41
North Carolina	-13	48	61
Ohio	-1	25	26
Pennsylvania	-4	30	34
Texas	-14	9	23
Vermont	-4	63	67
Wisconsin	6	29	23

Source: Authors' analysis of 1988 CBS/New York Times and 2008 NEP state exit polls

Millennial demographics

Millennials backed Obama primarily because he reflects their progressive view of the world and progressive policy preferences, as we discuss in detail below. Within the Millennial generation, the exceptionally strong support for Obama among minorities is matched by the group's exceptionally progressive views. In the Progressive Studies Program, or PSP, youth survey, for example, 18- to 29-year-old white Millennials were far more progressive than the population as a whole in every area of political ideology covered by the survey—cultural issues, the role of government, economic and domestic policy, and international issues.¹⁴ Yet Hispanic and black Millennials were more progressive still in each of these areas.¹⁵

This is significant because Millennials are the most diverse generation in American history. Minorities today have a much heavier weight than in earlier generations, pushing the whole Millennial generation in a progressive direction.

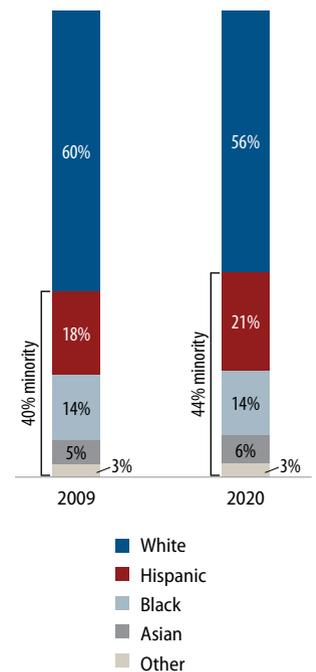
Right now, Millennial adults (those 18 and over) are 60 percent white and 40 percent minority (18 percent Hispanic, 14 percent black, 5 percent Asian, and 3 percent other). The overall minority percentage is very close to the distribution among 18- to 29-year-old Millennial voters in the 2008 election (39 percent minority and 61 percent white). By comparison, voters overall were 74 percent white and 26 percent minority.

As more Millennials become of voting age, they will increase the weight of this generation within the electorate. They will also increase the proportion of minorities among all voters because so many Millennials are minorities. This effect will be even stronger than it currently appears because the weight of minorities among Millennials will actually increase over time. Because Millennials who are under 18 tend to be more heavily minority than those over 18 *and* because of ongoing immigration, the proportion of Millennial adults who are minorities is going to rise from 40 percent today to 41 percent in 2012, 43 percent in 2016, and 44 percent in 2020 (21 percent Hispanic, 14 percent black, 6 percent Asian, and 3 percent other).¹⁶ This should make the Millennial generation even more firmly progressive as it fully enters the electorate in the next decade or so and continues tilting American politics toward its values and beliefs.

Millennials are also on track to become America's most educated generation. In 2007, the first year the 25- to 29-year-old age group was entirely composed of Millennials, 30 per-

A diverse generation

The racial and ethnic composition of Millennial adults, 2009 vs. 2020



cent had attained a four-year college degree, the highest rate ever recorded. This compares to 23 percent among GenX 25- to 29-year-olds in 1994. College completion among Millennials varied considerably by race, with 61 percent of Asians in this age group having a four-year degree, 36 percent of non-Hispanic whites, 19 percent of blacks, and 12 percent of Hispanics. Where trend data are available, the current figures are the highest ever recorded for these race-ethnic groups.¹⁷

At this point there are several reasons why it is difficult to say how much more educated the Millennial generation will ultimately be. First, the rate of increase in college completion among the 25- to 29-year-old age group has been slowing down this decade; second, many Millennials will attain a college degree in their thirties and beyond; and third, college completion rates can potentially be boosted by public policy—and there is plenty of economic room to do so, as Massachusetts Institute of Technology labor economist Paul Osterman¹⁸ has pointed out. But it is certain they will be more educated than the generations that preceded them.

The marital status of Millennials is another demographic worth considering. The average age of first marriage has gone up for women from 20.8 in 1970 to 25.5 in 2006 and from 23.2 to 27.5 for men over the same time period.¹⁹ And about 65 percent of young adults now cohabit at least once prior to marriage, compared to just 10 percent in the 1960s.

There have been drastic declines in the proportion of 18- to 25-year-olds who are married. In 1970, about 44 percent of 18- to 25-year-old boomers were married; today only about 15 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds Millennials are. In addition, 60 percent of 18- to 25-year-old Millennials were never married in 2005 compared to just 21 percent of boomer 18- to 25-year-olds in 1970. These changes are intertwined with others that make this generation decidedly nontraditional in its approach to cultural issues.

What if they gave a culture war and nobody came?

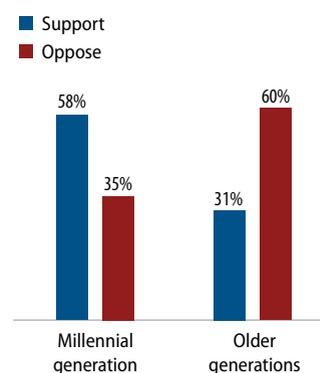
Millennials' progressive values and beliefs surface in all areas, but perhaps the most dramatic demonstration of these progressive leanings is in the cultural or social issues area. Take the biggest hot button cultural issue of the last decade: gay marriage. A strong majority (58 percent)²⁰ of Millennials favor allowing gays to marry, compared to 35 percent who are opposed. Among older cohorts, it's the reverse: 60 percent are opposed, and only 31 percent in favor. Millennials' views on issues like gay marriage are so liberal that their increasing weight in the adult population and the declining weight of older generations will, by itself, make a huge impact on taking this divisive cultural issue off the agenda. Indeed, a simple generational replacement analysis indicates that, by 2018, the time the last Millennials reach voting age (if not before), a majority of adult Americans will favor allowing gay marriage.

Millennials are also the most diverse generation in U.S. history, as we have already noted. Because of their diversity Millennials' attitudes about and experiences with race are dramatically different from earlier generations.²¹ There is essentially universal acceptance among Millennials (94 percent)²² of interracial dating and marriage (back in 1987-88, just 56 percent of white 18- to 25-year-old Gen X'ers agreed with this idea).²³ And Millennials today are twice as likely to completely disagree with the statement, "I don't have much in common with people of other races" as Gen X'ers were in the late 1980s.²⁴ For Millennials, race is "no big deal," an attitude that will increasingly characterize society as a whole as the Millennials age and our march toward a majority-minority nation continues. Barack Obama's election is just the beginning—America's postracial future is fast approaching.

Millennials have an open and positive attitude toward immigration, much more so than older generations. In a 2006 Pew Gen Next poll, 18- to 25-year-old Millennials, by 52-38, said immigrants strengthen the country with their hard work and talent, rather than are a burden on the country because they take our jobs, housing, and health care. That's compared to very narrow pluralities in this direction among Gen X'ers and boomers, and a 50-30 sentiment in the other direction among those 61 and over. And in a 2004 Pew survey, 67 percent of 18- to 25-year-old Millennials thought the growing number of immigrants strengthens American society and only 30 percent believed this trend threatens our customs and values—again, much stronger positive sentiment than among any other generation. Finally, 2007 Pew data indicate that roughly two-thirds of Millennials support providing a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants.²⁵

Millennial generation signals shift in culture war

Millennial and older generations' views on gays' right to marry



These views assume great significance in light of the continuing rise of the percentage of foreign born in the population—by 2050, about one in five Americans will be foreign born,²⁶ up from one in eight today—which will make resolving the immigration issue a top priority. Millennials’ views make it likely that hard-line, anti-immigration politics, already a failure in recent years, will be a rapidly diminishing influence on the immigration debate. This will lead us to the debate we should be having: not whether to stop or accept immigration, but how we should accept it.

Millennials’ religious diversity will also make a contribution to dampening the culture wars. In 2006 combined Pew data, 44 percent of 18- to 25-year-old Millennials said they were Protestant, 25 percent said they were Catholic, and 20 percent said they have no religious affiliation or are agnostic/atheist; among those older than 25, the analogous numbers were 55/25/11. Note also that among 18- to 25-year-olds in 1988 (Gen X’ers), the numbers were 52/29/11. There is a clear trend away from Protestantism especially, and also toward religious disaffiliation.

This pattern was even more pronounced in a 2005 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner survey for Reboot of 18- to 25-year-old Millennials, where almost a quarter (23 percent) had no religious preference or were agnostic/atheist, 4 percent were Jewish or Muslim, and another 7 percent were other non-Christian; only 41 percent identified themselves as Protestants and 63 percent with any Christian faith. Other surveys have the unaffiliated figure still higher. The 2008 Pew Religious Landscape survey measured the unaffiliated figure among 18- to 25-year-old Millennials at 25 percent. More recently, 28 percent of Millennials reported no religious affiliation in the PSP youth survey.

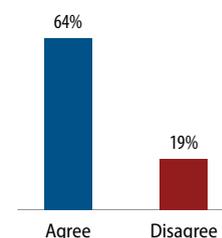
Millennials are also particularly unlikely to believe in creationism. In the 2006 Pew data, 63 percent thought humans and other living things had evolved over time compared to 33 percent who said living beings today are the same as they have always been. This endorsement of evolution is significantly higher than among older generations, including Millennials’ immediate predecessors, the Gen X’ers.

Increased religious diversity, particularly the rise of seculars, is leading Millennials toward a more tolerant, less culturally divisive politics. In the PSP youth survey, 64 percent agreed that “religious faith should focus more on promoting tolerance, social justice, and peace in society, and less on opposing abortion or gay rights.” Just 19 percent disagreed. And, by 54 to 29 percent, Millennials endorsed the idea that, “Our country has gone too far in mixing politics and religion and forcing religious values on people.”

These sentiments suggest that even where Millennials’ views are not noticeably more progressive than older generations—abortion is the chief example—they are unlikely to be attracted to culture wars-style politics. This is particularly true of Hispanics, whose overall cultural outlook—despite conservative views on some specific issues such as abortion—is more progressive than generally supposed. Indeed, in the PSP youth survey, Hispanic

Millennials hold progressive views on religion

Percentage agreeing or disagreeing that “religious faith should focus more on promoting tolerance, social justice, and peace in society, and less on opposing abortion or gay rights.”



Millennials actually had the highest average score of all racial groups on a 10-item progressive cultural index.²⁷ Hispanics are also much less likely than whites to vote on the basis of cultural issues, even where they do hold conservative views.²⁸

Millennials are also at the leading edge of the continuing decline in traditional family values. Consider the changes Millennials have lived through. In the early 1970s, three-quarters of American adults were married. That's declined to 55 percent today. Married couples with children now occupy fewer than one in four households, a share that has been cut in half since 1960. And the share of children being raised by continuously married couples has declined from 73 to 50 percent since 1972, while the proportion being raised by single parents has increased from 5 to 16 percent.²⁹

At the same time, traditional gender role families, where the husband works and the wife keeps house, have declined. In 1972, 53 percent of all married couples fit that definition, but just 26 percent do today. And over the same time period, the proportion of married couples in which both partners work outside the home has risen from 32 percent to 52 percent. Even among married couples with children, the traditional gender role family has declined from 60 percent to 32 percent, while the modern arrangement has increased from 33 to 62 percent.

Dramatic changes in attitudes toward sexuality, marriage, and gender roles have accompanied these structural shifts. In every case, they have moved from less tolerant, traditional views to more tolerant, less traditional views, with much greater openness toward sexuality outside of heterosexual marriage and a strong belief that women are equal in every respect and should work outside the home if they wish. And Millennials, as the cohort that has most fully absorbed the reality of the new American family, have generally moved the farthest toward tolerance and nontraditionalism.³⁰

Nowhere is this clearer than on gender issues. Just as with race, gender equality is rapidly becoming a nonissue with Millennials. In the 2004 National Election study, respondents were asked to place themselves on a seven-point scale relative to the following statements: “Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry, and government. Others feel that women’s place is in the home”—where 1 is the strongest support for women’s equal role and 7 is the strongest support for women’s place being in the home. Two-thirds of Millennials selected 1, the strongest support for women’s equal role and 88 percent of Millennials picked 1, 2, or 3 on the seven-point scale (indicating they felt closer to the equal role statement than to the women’s place in the home statement)—both figures that are higher than for any other generation.

In another NES question on whether government should see to it that women receive equal treatment on the job, Millennials (18- to 26-year-olds in their 2004 survey) were significantly stronger than other generations in the women’s equality direction. Eighty-five percent of Millennials felt that government should do this, compared to 68 percent of Gen X’ers and 71 percent of boomers.

On gender equality, Millennials are truly responding to the lived reality of their generation—gender equality is a “fact on the ground,” as it were. Indeed, women are not only equal in Millennials’ experience, but they frequently take the lead. Today, for example, girls tend to outperform boys in elementary and secondary school, getting higher grades, following more rigorous academic programs, and participating in advanced placement classes at higher rates. They also now outnumber boys in student government, in honor societies, on school newspapers, and in debating clubs. And more girls are attending college than boys: 56 percent of today’s undergraduates are women, compared to 44 percent who are men, and women now earn 170,000 more bachelor’s degrees each year than men do. Finally, while in 1970 fewer than 10 percent of medical students and 4 percent of law students were women, today women are roughly half of the nation’s law and medical students, not to mention 55 percent of the nation’s professionals as a whole.³¹

No wonder Millennials tend to view social issues through a different prism than their elders. It seems unlikely that this generation will be reporting for duty in future culture wars. As a result, these wars, deprived of new cannon fodder, will simmer down to occasional conflicts and will not have the effect on American politics they have had in the recent past.

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America's role in the world

Millennials as a generation are more oriented toward a multilateral and cooperative foreign policy than their elders. In 2004 Pew data, only 29 percent of 18- to 25-year-old Millennials believed that “using overwhelming force is the best way to defeat terrorism,” compared to 67 percent who thought “relying too much on military force leads to hatred and more terrorism.” By contrast those 26 and over were much more closely split (49-41). Sixty-two percent of 18- to 25-year-olds believed the United States should take into account the interests of its allies even if it means making compromises with them, compared to 52 percent of their elders. And in November 2004 Democracy Corps polling, 57 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds (note that only the 18- to 26-year-olds in this group qualify as Millennials) believed that America’s security depended on building strong ties with other nations, compared to just 37 percent who believed that, “bottom line,” America’s security depends on its own military strength. This was the most pro-multilateralist sentiment of any age group.

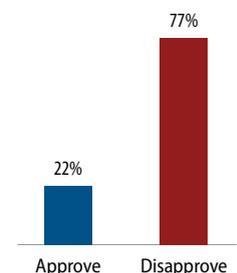
Sentiment was even stronger on the multilateral side when the same question was asked of 18- to 29-year-old Millennials in 2007 in a Gerstein-Agne survey for Generation We. In that survey, 69 percent said that America’s security depends on building strong ties with other nations, compared to only 30 percent who thought that America’s security depends on its own military strength.

Millennials also take different lessons from 9/11 than do older generations. In an April 2005 GQR poll, 18- to 25-year-olds believed by 55-44 that the attack on 9/11 meant that America needs to be more connected to the world, rather than have more control over its borders. And in the 2004 NES, 57 percent of Millennials (18- to 26-year-olds) said that promoting human rights was a “very important” goal of U.S. foreign policy, a figure substantially higher than among any other generation.

Millennials have generally been the age group most hostile to the war in Iraq and to Bush’s handling of it. An average of 26 percent of this age group approved of Bush’s handling of the Iraq war in 2006 Pew polls, compared to 69 percent who disapproved. In the 2006 exit polls, 62 percent of 18- to 29-year-old voters disapproved of Bush’s handling of Iraq, including 43 percent who strongly disapproved and 65 percent—more than any other age group—who thought the United States should start withdrawing troops from Iraq. This pattern occurred again in 2008, when the exit polls showed that only 22 percent of 18- to 29-year-old Millennials approved of the Iraq war, compared to 77 percent who disapproved. The latter figure was substantially higher than among older generations.

Millennials disapprove of the war in Iraq

Percentage of 18- to 29-year-olds who approve and disapprove of the Iraq war



Reasons for this disapproval are not hard to find. In an April 2005 GQR poll of 18- to 25-year-olds, 63 percent of this age group thought the war in Iraq wasn't worth the costs and 64 percent thought the Iraq war wasn't part of the war on terrorism. And in a June 2007 CBS/NTV/MTV survey of 17- to 29-year-old Millennials, only 31 percent thought the war in Iraq had made the United States safer from terrorism, compared to 66 percent who thought it had either made no difference (47 percent) or made the country less safe (19 percent).

Sentiments about Iraq among Millennials are so strong that, in a Democracy Corps/ Campaign for America's Future, or DC/CAF, post-election survey of 2000 voters, 93 percent rated ending the war in Iraq responsibly and redeploying our troops from Iraq to Afghanistan as the single highest policy priority, one of the top few priorities or near the top of the list of priorities. This was far higher than the rating given to ending the Iraq war by other generations and was the highest rated priority overall among Millennials.

And in the same poll, respondents were asked whether "we need to start reducing the number of U.S. troops in Iraq" or whether "we must stay the course to achieve stability and finish the job in Iraq." By 69-31, Millennials preferred the first statement over the second, while voters as a whole favored the first over the second by a significantly more modest margin (58-41).

Millennial views on America's role in the world are crystallized in the PSP youth survey. In that survey, 73 percent of Millennials agreed that "America must play a leading role in addressing climate change by reducing our own greenhouse gas emissions and complying with international agreements on global warming," compared to just 13 percent who disagreed. Seventy-three percent also agreed that "A positive image of America around the world is necessary to achieve our national security goals," while 15 percent disagreed; 63 percent thought "America's security is best promoted by working through diplomacy, alliances, and international institutions," compared to 11 percent who dissented; and 59 percent believed that "The war in Iraq has proven that the United States can not impose democracy on other nations," while 23 percent disagreed.

This is a generation that clearly wants a different, more progressive American approach to the world than we have seen in the last eight years. As the weight of Millennials in the electorate continues to increase, demand for a progressive foreign policy approach should increase in tandem.

How Millennials see the role of government

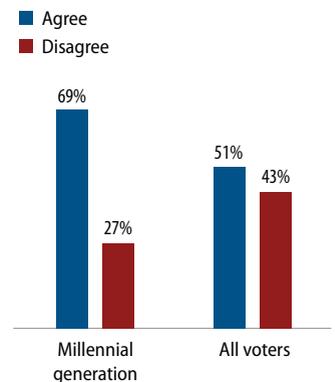
Millennials, more so than other generations, support a stronger role for government, whether to make the economy work better, help those in need, provide more services, or just do more. When asked in the 2008 National Election Survey—a long-running academic survey of political attitudes conducted by the University of Michigan—whether the government should provide more or fewer services, nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of Millennials supported increased government services, compared to 55 percent of 30- to 59-year-olds and 46 percent of respondents over 60 years of age. Millennials also came out strongly in support of more government when asked to choose between two alternatives: “the less government the better” or “there are more things that government should be doing.” Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of Millennial voters in 2008 supported the latter assertion that there is more that government should be doing, compared to 69 percent of 30- to 59-year-olds and 58 percent of people over 60 years of age.

Millennials decisively reject the conservative viewpoint that government is the problem and that free markets always produce the best results for society. Instead they support a more balanced approach to the economy. When asked in the 2008 NES whether we need a strong government to handle today’s complex economic problems or whether the free market can handle these problems without government involvement, Millennials, by a margin of 78 to 22 percent, demonstrated an overwhelming preference for strong government. Both 30- to 59-year-olds (75 percent) and respondents over the age of 60 (66 percent) also favor strong government over a strict free market approach, but not at such a high level.

Millennial (18- to 29-year-old) voters in the 2008 exit poll said by a 69 percent to 27 percent margin (compared to 51-43 overall among all voters) that government should be doing more to solve problems rather than that government is doing too many things best left to businesses and individuals. And in the Gerstein-Agne Generation We survey, 63 percent of Millennials endorsed the idea that “government needs to do more to address the major challenges facing our country,” rather than “government is already too involved in areas that are better left to individuals or the free market” (37 percent). Finally, the same survey found identical 63-37 support among Millennials for the idea that “government has a responsibility to pursue policies that benefit all of society and balance the rights of the individual with the needs of the entire society,” rather than “the primary responsibility of government is to protect the rights of the individual.”

Millennials believe government should be doing more to solve problems

Millennial and general populations’ views on whether the government should be doing more to solve problems



Consistent with these views, Millennials support strong roles for government in specific areas such as government investment and helping the needy. In the PSP youth study, 80 percent of Millennials agreed that government investments in education, infrastructure, and science are necessary to ensure America's long-term economic growth. In a 2007 Pew Research Center Values Survey, 31 percent of Millennials said they "completely agree" that it is the government's responsibility to take care of people who can't take care of themselves, up from only 22 percent of Gen X'ers in 1994. Another 42 percent of Millennials said they "mostly agree" with that view, for a total of 73 percent support. In comparison, 67 percent of 30- to 59-year olds and 66 percent of respondents over 60 either completely or mostly agreed that it is government's responsibility to take care of people who can't care for themselves.

Not surprisingly, given these strongly progressive views on government's role, Millennials have been unusually supportive of Obama's ambitious recovery and budgetary plans. In an early February Women's Voices, Women Vote poll, Millennials, by 79-17, said they supported Obama's investment-oriented recovery package, despite its \$850 billion price tag, compared to 66-29 among all voters.

Millennial support for health care reform

Perhaps no single issue exemplifies Millennials' progressive economic views as much as their support for universal health care. Millennials are resolute in their support for universal coverage and want big, bold action.

In a Center for American Progress/Half in Ten poll conducted in November 2008, respondents were asked whether they supported providing quality, affordable health care coverage for every American. Millennials, more than any other age group, supported this policy proposal, with an overwhelming 88 percent agreeing, compared to 82 percent of the total population. In the PSP youth survey, Millennials backed a federal government guarantee of health care coverage for all Americans by 71 percent to 16 percent, compared to 65 percent to 23 percent among the total population. In the Democracy Corps post-election survey, respondents were asked whether we should give everyone a choice between a public health plan and what they have now, or give everyone a tax credit to choose their own coverage. Millennials preferred the first over the second statement by 67 percent to 32 percent, a substantially higher margin than among all voters (58 percent to 38 percent).

And in a harder test of support for universal coverage—a National Election Survey question that asks whether health insurance should come from a government plan or the private sector—61 percent of Millennials, compared to 52 percent of 30- to 59-year-olds and 41 percent of people over 60, supported a government-provided universal health insurance plan. Similarly, in a June 2007 CBS/NYT/MTV survey of 17- to 29-year-olds, Millennials endorsed having one health insurance program administered by the government cover all Americans, rather than the current system, by a 62-32 margin. This contrasts with a 47-38 split among all adults in a February 2007 survey that asked the same question.

The Democracy Corps post-election survey also found that Millennials think we need to take big steps on health care right now. The poll asked whether we need to act boldly or step by step to address the problems in health care. Millennials were solidly on the side of moving boldly, rather than step by step (57 percent to 38 percent), while voters as a whole actually sided slightly with the more incremental approach (46 percent to 50 percent).

These results suggest a sense of urgency among Millennials about the health care problem, an urgency that is confirmed by this result from the Gerstein-Agne Generation We study: 96 percent of Millennials agreed that, “With costs rising out of control and the quality of

Millennials are resolute in their support for universal coverage and want big, bold action.

health coverage declining, the health care system in our country is broken, and we need to make fundamental change,” and 80 percent thought this situation was either a “a crisis that our country must address immediately” or a major problem. Of 15 problems tested in this survey, this statement elicited the highest levels of Millennials saying that the situation was a crisis to be addressed immediately. Health care also had the highest levels saying it was either a crisis or a major problem.

These views translate into high expectations for the Obama administration in this area. Sixty-four percent of 18 to 29-year-old Millennials in the Women’s Voices Women’s Vote poll said it was extremely or very important for Obama and Congress to enact a proposal to “provide a universal health care system so that every American has coverage,” compared to 59 percent overall. Similarly, 69 percent of Millennials thought it was extremely or very important for the Obama administration to enact a proposal to require businesses to provide health care for their employees—or contribute to a fund to help pay for their coverage—compared to 56 percent overall.

Unions, the minimum wage and progressive taxation

Millennials are typically more supportive than older Americans of efforts to ensure that workers get their fair share of economic growth—such as labor unions, the minimum wage and progressive taxation. Millennials tend to view unions as important social institutions that advance progressive causes such as empowering workers, enforcing labor standards, and ensuring workers are awarded their fair share of productivity gains. They also think that the minimum wage is an important tool to make work pay and believe the wealthy should be paying a higher share of taxes than working Americans.

Today's young people have had the least direct exposure to labor unions of any recent generation, largely because unionization has declined steadily over the past 40 years. Unions today represent only about 12 percent of the workforce, down from about one-third in the late 1960s. Millennials' opinions of unions then reflect more of their general views about workers joining together to have greater influence over wages, benefits, and working conditions than personal experience with organized labor.

When asked in the Democracy Corps post-election poll to rate their feelings toward labor unions on a scale from zero (meaning very cold and unfavorable) to 100 (meaning very warm and favorable.) Millennials gave labor unions a mean response score of 59.6, which surpassed all other age groups and the mean for the total population (50.7). In the 2008 National Election survey thermometer about labor unions, Millennials gave labor unions a mean response score of 60.7, also higher than older Americans.

Millennials are also clear on the value of unions to workers. The Pew Values Survey in 2007 asked respondents whether and to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following assertion: Labor unions are necessary to protect the working person. An overwhelming 75 percent of Millennial voters either completely or mostly agreed with the statement, compared to 64 percent of 30- to-59-year-olds and 66 percent of people over 60.

Millennials are more likely than older Americans to support efforts to raise the minimum wage. Their view tends to be that full-time workers should be able to earn enough to support the basic needs of their families. When asked in the Democracy Corps post-election poll to rank the priority of issues for the new administration, 63 percent of Millennials ranked raising the minimum wage as the single highest priority, one of the top few priorities, or near the top of the priority list, compared to 54 percent of the total population. Similarly, in the Half

in Ten poll, an overwhelming 91 percent support increasing the minimum wage and ensuring that it rises with inflation, compared to 84 percent among the population as a whole.

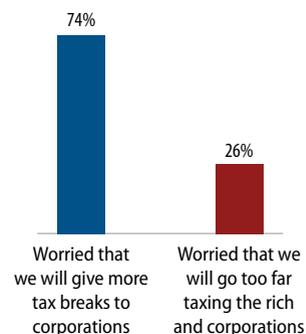
Moreover, Millennials have shown their support for raising the minimum wage at the voting booth. In the 2006 election, 18- to 29-year-old voters, more than any other age group, were supportive of raising the minimum wage in various referenda (74 percent vs. 66 percent for all voters).

Millennials have also exhibited strong support for progressive taxation and want to repeal the Bush tax cuts that overwhelmingly reduced tax rates for the wealthiest Americans. In the Democracy Corps post-election poll, 77 percent of Millennials ranked repealing the Bush tax cuts for those making more than \$250,000 and cutting taxes for middle class families near the top of the priority list or higher. No other age group was as concerned about repealing the Bush tax cuts; only 56 percent of 30- to 39-year-olds and 57 percent of 50- to 64-year-olds ranked repealing the Bush tax cuts this high. The same poll asked respondents whether they were more worried that we will give more tax breaks to the rich and corporations, or that we will go too far taxing the rich and corporations. Millennials, by a margin of 74 percent to 26 percent, responded that they were more concerned about giving more tax breaks to the rich and corporations rather than taxing these groups too much. The total population expressed a tendency toward similar concerns, but by a smaller margin (61 percent to 33 percent).

Similarly, a 2009 Quinnipiac University poll found that young people think to a far greater degree than the general public that progressive taxation is good for the economy. In the poll, 60 percent of Millennials said President Obama's plan to raise taxes on those who earn more than \$250,000 a year will be good for the economy, compared to just 20 percent who said it would be bad, with 17 percent undecided. Among all voters, 47 percent said the plan would be good for the economy, while 28 percent said it would be bad, with 21 percent undecided.

Millennials support progressive taxation

Percentage responding that they were more concerned about giving more tax breaks to the rich and corporations rather than taxing these groups too much.



Investing in education

Education is an issue pertinent to young people, because they are more likely than other segments of the population to have just finished college or still be enrolled in education programs. Millennials have consistently shown strong support for increasing government funding for public schools and increasing government assistance to ensure that every child has the opportunity to obtain a quality education. In addition, Millennial voters are more likely than other age groups to prioritize spending on education and to think that the government is not currently doing enough to ensure that our schools remain competitive.

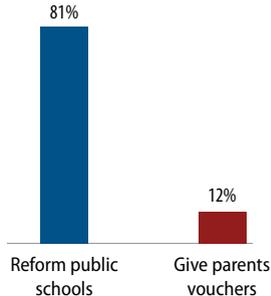
An overwhelming 96 percent of Millennials supported expanding publicly funded scholarships to help more families afford college when asked in the Half in Ten survey in 2008, compared to 86 percent overall. Millennials also back expanding access to college. In the 2009 Women's Voices Women's Vote survey, 76 percent said it was extremely or very important for the Obama administration to expand the Lifelong Learning Tax Credit and Hope Scholarships, and 71 percent gave the same level of importance to increasing access to student loans and cutting interest rates. The comparable figures for all voters were 68 and 61 percent, respectively.

More generally, Millennials place a high priority on increased investment in education. In the Democracy Corps post-election survey, respondents received a list of problems the country faces and were asked from those listed which President Obama should pay the most attention to. Thirty-one percent of Millennials ranked "Investing more in education and training" as either their first or second most important issue, compared to a mere 14 percent of the general population. In the same survey, 45 percent of the Millennials who chose to vote for Barack Obama cited the idea that he "will invest in education and make college more affordable" as one of the top three reasons why they voted for him. This was the top reason for Millennials but only the fourth-ranked reason among all Obama voters. Finally, 94 percent of Millennials in the survey thought our failure to make needed investments in education and research to maintain America's leadership was a serious problem (52 percent very serious problem) in our current economy, compared to 84 percent of the total population (44 percent very serious problem).

Millennials also tend to hold strongly progressive views on the issue of school vouchers, preferring more government investment geared toward improving our public schools to increasing the number of school vouchers. In the Democracy Corps survey, respondents were asked which of the following two statements was closer to their views: “we need to reform our public schools and invest properly so that we can give our children a world class education” or “we need to reform our schools by giving parents vouchers so they have more choice and can send their children to private schools when public schools are failing.” Millennials overwhelmingly supported the former assertion by an 81 to 12 percent margin, compared to 68-28 among all voters.

Millennials support investing in our public schools

Percentage responding that one of the two following statements was closer to their views: “we need to reform our public schools and invest properly so that we can give our children a world class education” or “we need to reform our schools by giving parents vouchers so they have more choice and can send their children to private schools when public schools are failing.”



Toward a greener world

Millennials have strongly progressive views on energy and environmental policy, often more progressive than the public as a whole. Millennials believe we need to move away from dependence on fossil fuels and embrace the need for major investments in new energy technologies, and they think doing so is vital to our economic future. What's more, Millennials think that environmental protection and transforming the economy away from fossil fuels is one of the defining features of their generation.

When the Gerstein-Agne Generation We survey asked Millennials whether their generation was more likely or less likely than earlier generations of Americans to be characterized by its concern about environmental protection, 67 percent said more likely, compared to 13 percent less likely, for a net score of +54, the second-highest level of support for any item tested. Millennials also tend to believe that they need to do their part in addressing environmental concerns. According to a study conducted by Frank N. Magid Associates, 79 percent of Millennials agree that it is “my responsibility to improve the environment.”³²

Millennials are also much less likely than older American to think that concerns about global warming are exaggerated. According to a Gallup poll survey taken in March 2009, only 31 percent of Millennials thought that news of global warming was exaggerated, compared to 43 percent of 30- to 49-year olds, 42 percent of 50- to 64-year-olds, and 47 percent of people over 65.³³

Millennials strongly support a national move toward clean energy. In the PSP youth survey Millennials endorsed the idea that America's economic future requires a transformation away from oil, gas, and coal to renewable energy sources such as wind and solar by a 78-percent to 9-percent margin, compared to 76 percent to 11 percent among adults as a whole. Similarly, 83 percent of Millennials in the Women's Voices Women's Vote poll thought a proposal to “invest in renewable energy, like solar, wind and bio-fuels, to create 2.5 million new green jobs and make America energy independent” was extremely or very important for the Obama administration to enact, compared to 78 percent of all voters.

Millennials are also strong on the general need for environmental protection. In the 2007 Pew Gen Next survey, they overwhelmingly believed that the country should do “whatever it takes” to protect the environment with meaningful, stricter environmental laws and regulations, and that people should be willing to pay higher prices in order to protect the

environment. They also were more likely than any other age group to favor environmental protection, even at the cost of economic growth, according to a Magid Associates 2006 survey of Millennials. And in a March 2005 Gallup poll, 58 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds—Millennials were almost all of this group—said protecting the environment should be given priority “even at the risk of curbing economic growth,” while just 32 percent prioritize economic growth “even if the environment suffers to some extent.” This compares to a 44-38 split among those 65 and over.

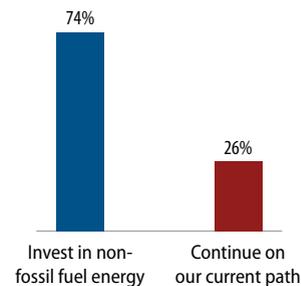
The Gallup finding highlights a common pattern: the biggest differences by age are often between Millennials and much older generations. Differences can be quite narrow between Millennials and the generations immediately preceding—Gen Xers and boomers. In the 2007 Pew Values Survey, 84 percent of Millennials thought we needed stronger environmental laws, and 63 percent supported greater environmental protections even if that results in higher prices. That’s high, but on both of these questions, Gen Xers expressed as high or even stronger levels of support. So Millennials are part of a generational shift toward environmentalism that spans several generations.

Millennials’ strongly progressive views on energy and environment are linked to a sense of urgency in this area. In the Gerstein-Agne Generation We survey, 74 percent of Millennials said “we must make major investments now to innovate the next generation of non-fossil fuel based energy solutions,” compared to just 26 percent who believed “we should continue on our current path, gradually shifting the mix of sources used to meet our energy needs.” In addition, 94 percent agreed that “our country must take extreme measures now, before it is too late, to protect the environment and begin to reverse the damage we have done” (74 percent say this situation is either “a crisis that our country must address immediately” or a major problem).

This sense of urgency extends to the issue of global warming. In a June 2007 Democracy Corps poll of Millennials, 61 percent thought that “global warming represents an immediate threat and we need to start taking action now,” rather than “global warming represents a long-term threat and we need to study the problem before taking drastic action.”

Millennials believe we must seize the energy opportunity

Percentage responding “we must make major investments now to innovate the next generation of non-fossil fuel based energy solutions” versus “we should continue on our current path, gradually shifting the mix of sources used to meet our energy needs.”



Business, trade, and regulation

Millennials are by no means anti-business. The National Election Survey has asked participants for decades to rank their feelings toward big business on a scale of 0 to 100, with 50 to 100 indicating that they felt favorably and warm toward business, and 0 to 50 meaning that they didn't feel favorably toward business. In 2008, Millennials gave business a mean response of 55, compared to 54 for respondents aged 30 to 59, and 59 for those aged 60 years and older.

Millennials' response puts them about in the middle of previous generations' opinion of business. When they were young, baby boomers had the lowest view of big business in the history of the survey, giving business a mean ranking of 42 in 1976. In contrast, Millennials have a less favorable view of big business than did Generation X and some older generations when they were young. In 1994, young people gave business a mean response of 58, and in 1964, the first year the question was asked, 18- to 29-year-olds had a mean response of 59.

Surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center also provide a mixed view of the Millennials' opinions about business. In 2007, people under age 30 were more likely than older people to agree that the strength of this country is mostly based on the success of American business, while in many previous years—including 1989 and 1994—young people were less likely than older people to agree. The 2007 survey also found that Millennials were less likely than older age groups to think that business corporations make too much profit, although they were more likely than any previous group of young people in the survey's 20-year history to think that corporations make too much profit. Results from Democracy Corps's post-election poll thermometer testing respondents' opinions of big corporations showed Millennials with a mean response of 42, on a scale of 0 to 100—in line with the rest of the population, which gave big corporations an average rating of 43.

While Millennials are not anti-business, they are very clear on the need for government to regulate business in the public interest. In the Democracy Corps post-election poll, Millennials, by a 58- to 34-percent margin, thought government regulation of businesses is necessary to protect the public, rather than government regulation of businesses frequently does more harm than good. In the PSP youth survey, 70 percent agreed that government regulations are necessary to keep businesses in check, compared to just 11 percent who disagreed. In the same survey, only 36 percent of Millennials agreed that gov-

While Millennials are not anti-business, they are very clear on the need for government to regulate business in the public interest.

ernment regulation of business does more harm than good, compared to 43 percent of the general population. And the 2007 Pew Values survey found that people under age 30 were less likely than older people to think the regulation of business usually does more harm than good. Millennials' concerns about regulations, however, were higher than young people's in many of the survey's previous 20 years.

Millennials' views on free trade are also nuanced. They tend to be more supportive of free trade than other age groups, but they also want assurances that workers and consumers are not exploited in the process. In the PSP youth survey, 68 percent of Millennials said that free trade is good for America because it creates new markets for our goods and services and lowers costs for consumers, compared to 65 percent for all respondents. But in the Democracy Corps post-election poll, Millennials were more worried than older Americans that we will do too little to require fair trade and enforce worker and consumer protections and less worried that we will go too far in burdening free trade accords with protections for consumers and labor. Millennials endorsed the former over the latter position by a 65-30 margin, compared to 53-34 among all voters.

Millennials and Social Security

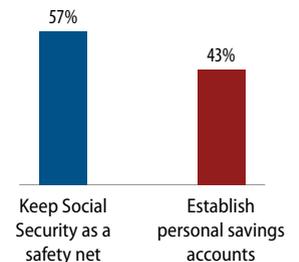
Millennials are more open to allowing private accounts within Social Security than older age groups. In a January 2005 *Los Angeles Times* poll—conducted during the last time the issue was “hot”—about three-fifths of 18- to 29-year-olds (mostly Millennials at the time) approved a proposal to create private investment accounts within Social Security that could earn a higher return but would be less predictable, compared to just 42 percent of all adults. But it is easy to over-interpret these data as indicating resolute support among Millennials for privatizing Social Security. In reality, Millennials’ support for private accounts drops sharply, just as it does among other age groups, when it is stipulated that Social Security’s guaranteed benefit would decline if private accounts were implemented.³⁴

Furthermore, other data indicate that Millennials still support the Social Security program and would like to see funding for the program increased even more than older people would. In the Democracy Corps post-election poll, voters were given the following choice: “We need to reform Social Security and protect it to ensure that it’s a safety net the American people can count on;” or “We need to reform Social Security and establish personal savings accounts so individuals have more options.” Millennials preferred the first, non-private account approach to the second, private account approach by a 57-43 margin. And in the 2008 National Election Survey, 54 percent of Millennials supported increased spending for Social Security, slightly more than those ages 30 to 59, or those 60 and older.

Finally, Millennials’ relatively high support for privatization may simply be a lifecycle effect rather than anything distinctive about their generation. The reason: Studies show that the further people are away from retirement age, the more likely they are to support proposals for private accounts. Once their distance from retirement age is accounted for, there is nothing distinctive about Millennials’ views on privatization.³⁵

Millennials prefer protecting Social Security to private savings accounts

Percentage responding “We need to reform Social Security and protect it to ensure that it’s a safety net the American people can count on” vs. “We need to reform Social Security and establish personal savings accounts so individuals have more options.”



Cynicism about government

Millennials do want government to play a strong and positive role in today's economy, but there is a disjuncture between Millennials' views on how government should work and their views on current government institutions and most elected officials. This underlying level of cynicism is important to note both because it suggests that Millennials are likely to support "good government" reforms such as limits on lobbying and campaign contributions and because it indicates that cynicism could work to undermine Millennials' high level of support for government programs. Obviously, the latter problem will be particularly acute if the Obama administration's programmatic initiatives appear to be ineffective in solving economic and social problems.

Although some older analyses of Millennials—such as a New America Foundation report based on 2006 data—have found instances where this generation was particularly trusting of government, most of the more current data points to relatively high levels of distrust.³⁶

The 2008 National Election Survey shows that the Millennials are relatively distrustful of the federal government, although they tend to be slightly more trusting than older Americans. In the 2008 NES, only 35 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds felt they could trust the federal government to do what is right most or all of the time, compared to 30 percent of 30- to 59-year olds and 29 percent of people over 60. Millennials are less trusting of the federal government than other young adults have been on average during the 50 years this question has been asked (46 percent), and far less trusting than young adults in the 1950s and 1960s, when more than 70 percent of young people thought they could trust the federal government to do what is right most or all of the time.

Millennials especially distrust elected officials. In the 2008 NES, 54 percent of Millennials believed that quite a few—rather than not many—government officials were crooked, compared to 56 percent of 30- to 59-year-olds and 48 percent of people over 60. Between 1958 and 2004, an average of 41 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds believed that quite a few or quite a lot of government officials were crooked, which is 13 percentage points lower than Millennials. And in the 2007 Pew Values Survey, 76 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds believed that elected officials lose touch with citizens, about the same level of cynicism young people have expressed over the past 20 years.

Millennials' political cynicism more reflects views of current political institutions and leaders than any fundamental distaste for politics.

The Gerstein-Agne Generation We survey found similar levels of distrust. That survey asked Millennials whether their generation was more likely or less likely than earlier generations of Americans to be characterized by various attitudes and behaviors. The characteristic that Millennials thought least likely to apply to their generation was trusting government and political leaders. Sixty-three percent of Millennials thought they were less likely to trust government and political leaders than previous generations, compared to only 17 percent who thought they were more likely. In the same survey, 93 percent of Millennials agreed that “government is dominated by special interests and lobbyists, who give millions of dollars in campaign contributions to politicians, who in turn give even more back to those special interests, while the rest of us are left holding the bag,” with 73 percent saying this situation is either a “a crisis that our country must address immediately” or a major problem. In addition, 82 percent of Millennials in the survey agreed (45 percent strongly) that “our current political and corporate leaders are abusing their power for selfish gains, wasting our nation’s resources for their own short-term gain and threatening our long-term security.”

However, it is worth noting that, on the specific issue of government waste, Millennials are actually somewhat less likely than older Americans to think that government is inherently wasteful or inefficient. The 2008 NES found that 64 percent of Millennial voters believe that government wastes “a lot” of tax money, compared to 72 percent of 30- to 59-year-olds and 76 percent of people over 60 who share similar concerns. In the PSP youth poll, 57 percent of Millennials agreed that government spending is almost always wasteful and inefficient, while 61 percent of all those polled agreed. Similarly, the 2007 Pew Research Center Values Survey found that 56 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds agreed that when something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful, compared to 66 percent of 30- to 59-year-olds and 69 percent of people over 60.

It is also important to stress that Millennials’ political cynicism more reflects views of current political institutions and leaders than any fundamental distaste for politics. In an October 2008 Harvard Institute of Politics poll of 18- to 24-year-old Millennials, 69 percent thought political engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing the country and 67 percent thought such engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing their local community; the analogous figures for community volunteerism were 68 and 81.

In addition, 72 percent disagreed that “politics is not relevant to my life right now;” 84 percent disagreed that “it really doesn’t matter to me who the president is;” 53 percent disagreed that “people like me don’t have any say about what the government does;” 59 percent disagreed that “political involvement rarely has any tangible results;” and 60 percent disagreed that “it is difficult to find ways to be involved in politics.” Finally, 68 percent agreed that “running for office is an honorable thing to do.” The analogous figures for community service and getting involved in politics were 89 and 64.

Will Millennials remain progressive?

Some might argue that Millennials' attitudes are just a product of the current zeitgeist—everyone has become more progressive in recent years—and thus when times become more conservative so will Millennials. Others might argue that Millennials will surely become more conservative as they age—a lifecycle effect will moderate their youthful progressivism. While it is possible that the Millennial Generation may become more conservative as they age, evidence suggests that they will remain progressive. Dismissing Millennial progressivism as just the product of youth would be misguided.

Millennials' current progressivism is likely to have profound and lasting political implications. People's opinions certainly change throughout their life, but they are more likely to hold onto existing views than to reverse them. What's more, on many issues, Millennials are much more progressive than previous generations when they were younger.

While the degree to which people tend to maintain throughout their life the attitudes and opinions that they currently have is a point of much debate, the general thrust of academic literature is that political ideas and attachments that are developed in early adulthood tend to last.³⁷ Research suggests that a socialization process occurs that leads young adults to hold onto the party identification and opinions that they developed in their formative years.

This is especially true with partisan identification.³⁸ Party identification is the single strongest predictor of how people vote and tends to stick with individuals once they form an attachment early in their political lives. As Duane F. Alwin and Jon A. Krosnick argue in a study in the *American Journal of Sociology*, which analyzed NES panel data over several decades, “party loyalties either increase or persist with age.”³⁹

There is less research about whether people maintain their support for specific issues rather than general partisanship, yet many of these academic studies raise considerable doubt about general claims that people naturally become less progressive as they age. Alwin and Krosnick argue that attitude stability “appears to occur immediately following early adulthood ... and appears to remain at a constant and high-level throughout the remainder of the life cycle.”⁴⁰ A handbook on gerontology notes that, “It is a stereotype that individuals become more conservative as they age.”⁴¹ Several studies have found that people actually become more progressive as they get older. A textbook on generational analysis argued: “According to almost any constant definition of conservatism people

typically become less rather than more conservative as they age.”⁴² The findings of a 2007 study of 30 years of public opinion data in the prestigious *American Sociological Review* “contradict commonly held assumptions that aging leads to conservatism.”⁴³

Finally, good evidence suggests that Millennials have distinct generational views, which means that they are especially likely to keep their progressive views. The shared experiences of Millennials—like the cohort who lived through the Great Depression and World War II—seem to have formed a distinct and lasting worldview that will shape their political views throughout their lifetimes.

In a survey from the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 69 percent of Millennials said their age group is unique, compared to only 42 percent of Generation X and 50 percent of baby boomers.⁴⁴ Another survey, the Gersten-Agne Generation We survey, found that by 10-1—or 90 percent to 9 percent—Millennials agree that their generation “shares specific beliefs, attitudes, and experiences” that set them apart from generations that have come before them. They even say, by 54 to 44, that they have more in common with young adults of their generation in other countries than they have with Americans of older generations.

As a New America Foundation report argues, “It appears that we are witnessing a ‘cohort change’ in this new generation.”⁴⁵ This thorough review, by university academics, confirmed the arguments made by one of the authors in a previous CAP report, entitled the “Progressive Generation,” that on many issues Millennials’ views are more progressive than previous generations. As Levine, Flanagan and Galloway wrote: “Millennials have a more progressive identity than did previous generations at their age and are likely to move the country leftward on economic and social issues for decades to come.”⁴⁶

These general arguments make a strong case that Millennials are likely to remain progressive, but a closer look at a few specific questions that have been asked over a long period of time can show just how distinctive Millennials views are. Millennials are starting from such a high level of progressivism that even if there is some drop off in support, their views will still be progressive rather than conservative. In the past, young adults were more conservative than older Americans on several questions on which Millennials are now especially progressive. This suggests that Millennials’ progressive views are not just a product of youth, but rather a distinct feature of their generation.

The data below examine attitudes about several questions that have been asked for decades in the National Election Survey, providing a long-term comparison for the attitudes of different generations of young adults. They focus on economic issues, where there is perhaps the strongest argument that as people age, get jobs, and pay taxes they will become more conservative, and thus any evidence of likely future progressivism is particularly compelling. In addition, there is relatively little debate about attitudes toward gender, race and homosexuality, which are viewed as being generationally

The shared experiences of Millennials—like the cohort who lived through the Great Depression and World War II—seem to have formed a distinct and lasting worldview that will shape their political views throughout their lifetimes.

“sticky” and unlikely to change significantly over the life course.⁴⁷

Questions about universal health coverage and labor unions show not only that Millennials are historically progressive, but also that young people have not always been so progressive. Those about government’s general role show also show how much more progressive young adults are today than those of previous generations.

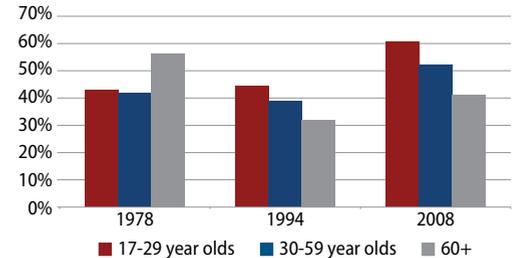
Support for government health care plans among Millennial voters is at highs not seen before in any generation. In the 38-year history of the National Election Survey’s question assessing support for government health care plans over private health care plans, the level of support has never been higher than in 2008, when 61 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds supported a government health plan. Importantly, young people have not always been the demographic most in favor of government-provided health insurance. In 1978, for example, those 60 years old and up at the time were actually the most supportive of government-provided health insurance, with 56 percent in favor compared to 43 percent of young people and 42 percent of those between the ages of 30 and 59. And in 1970, the first year the National Election Survey posed the question, the 60-and-up group again was more supportive of government health insurance, with 53 percent in favor, while 44 percent of young people favored government health insurance.

Millennials are also now broadly supportive of labor unions, although young people have not always been. In the 2008 National Election survey thermometer about labor unions, Millennials gave labor unions a mean response score of 60.7, which is not only higher than older Americans today, but is the second-highest mean recorded by any age group over the 40-year-long history of the question—the highest being young people’s mean of 62 in 1998. When this question was first posed in 1964, young people actually had the least favorable impression of labor unions out of the three age groups, with a mean of 54 compared to a mean of 58 for both of the older age groups. In 1968, 1972, and 1976, young people also had lower ratings of labor unions than did older Americans.

Results of a National Election Survey question regarding whether or not government should be expected to ensure a good job and standard of living for everyone are particularly illustrative of just how progressive the Millennial generation is compared to previous generations of young people. Millennials’ support for government ensuring a good job is at historic highs, far above older Americans and previous generations of young people. In 2008, 50 percent of young people

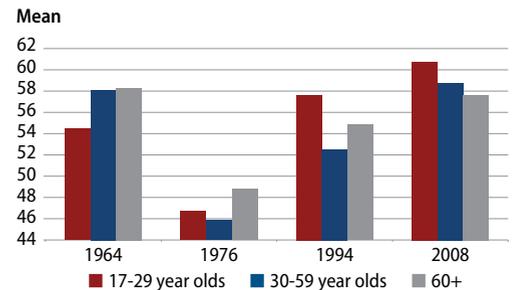
Millennials are more progressive on health care

Percentage of respondents who believe that health insurance should come from a government insurance plan rather than a private insurance plan, by age and year



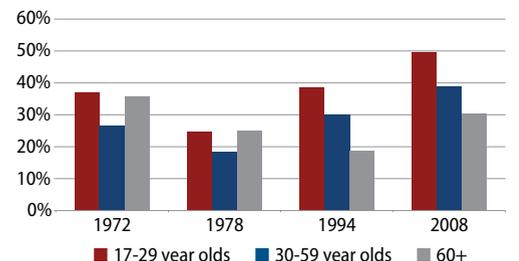
Millennials are more progressive on unions

Mean response to question about feelings towards labor unions with less than 50 indicating more negative feelings and more than 50 indicating more positive feelings, by age and year



Millennials support good jobs for all

Percentage of respondents who believe that government should see to a good job and standard of living for everyone, by age and year

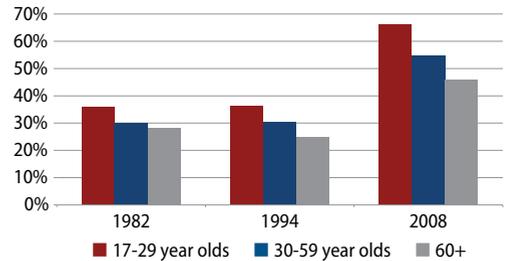


aged 18 to 29 supported the assertion that government should see to a good job and standard of living for everyone, compared to 37 percent in 1972.

The National Election Survey question about whether the government should overall provide more or fewer services also shows the extremely high levels of progressive support among Millennials. In 1982, the first year this question was asked, 36 percent of young people aged 18 to 29 expressed support for providing more government services rather than fewer. By 2008, the percentage of young voters who supported more government services had grown to an overwhelming 66 percent, an increase of 30 percentage points and more supportive than any age group in any previous year the question was asked.

Millennials are more progressive on government services

Percentage of respondents who believe that the government should provide more services, by age and year



Conclusion

The Millennial generation, which supported Obama by a 2-to-1 ratio in 2008, has already had a large effect on American politics. That effect will only grow in future years as this generation—the largest and most diverse in U.S. history—adds 4 million eligible voters each year to America’s electorate. This generation’s agenda is therefore likely to have a large and growing impact on the nation’s agenda. That’s good news for progressives because Millennials’ agenda is so clearly progressive in all areas. Millennials want to end the culture wars; move America’s foreign policy toward a more cooperative and multilateral approach; rebuild a strong, positive role for government; achieve universal health care; reform and expand America’s educational system; start the transition to a clean energy economy; and much more. If progressive governance can achieve these objectives, the loyalty of this generation to the progressive cause seems assured.

Endnotes

- 1 With the late William Strauss, he wrote a series of widely-read books about American generations that helped popularize generational analysis, including *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584-2069* (New York: Harper, 1992).
- 2 Neil Howe and Reena Nadler, "Yes We Can: The Emergence of Millennials as a Political Generation" (New America Foundation, February 2009).
- 3 Morely Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube and the Future of American Politics* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2008). They use the years 1982-2003.
- 4 For example, even if our definition of the Millennials was cut off at 1996 so it covered the same number of birth years as they most common definition of the Baby Boom (1946-1964), Millennials would still be larger than the boomers.
- 5 Extrapolations from Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), "Young Voters in the 2008 Election", December 19, 2008; According to Michael McDonald, "2008 Current Population Survey," U.S. Elections Project, April 5, 2009, the Current Population Survey (CPS) Voter Supplement confirms that youth turnout went up in 2008, though they have the level of increase (2.1 percentage points) smaller. However, as McDonald also notes, the CPS data also have turnout overall declining by .2 points across the two elections, compared to an increase of 1.6 points based on official voting and population data. If this discrepancy of 1.8 points is added to the CPS-measured increase of 2.1 points, the resulting 3.9 point increase for youth is close to the youth increase estimate from the exit poll data.
- 6 Michael McDonald, "2008 General Election Turnout Rates", U.S. Elections Project, March 12, 2009 available at http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html
- 7 The data analysis in the next four paragraphs originally appeared in my memo "Generation We and the 2008 Election", prepared for Generation We and appearing on their website. The estimates were based on my analysis of 2008 Census National Population Projections by single years of age, 2008 NEP exit poll sample composition and 2004 Census Voter Supplement data by single years of age.
- 8 Some of the analysis in this section originally appeared in "Generation We and the 2008 Election".
- 9 Scott Keeter analysis of 2008 NEP exit poll data, provided in personal communication.
- 10 This relative progressivism is confirmed by results of the PSP youth survey, where white non-college Millennials score far higher than older white non-college adults on all four progressivism indices in the survey: role of government, economic issues, cultural and international. Again, this pattern applies to the 25-29 year old white non-college Millennials.
- 11 The higher figure incorporates the electoral votes of Colorado, Oregon and Washington, where the NEP has not yet reported results for this age group, but which were highly likely to have had an 18-29 year old majority for Obama.
- 12 As Scott Keeter has noted, late boomers are far more conservative than early boomers, who are the most progressive group in the electorate besides the Millennials. See Scott Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials" in Ruy Teixeira, ed., *Red, Blue and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics*, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2008).
- 13 Not all states are available for this comparison since the CBS/New York Times 1988 exit poll only interviewed respondents in only about half of the 50 states.
- 14 See the companion report to this report, *The State of American Political Ideology Among Youth: 2009*, for a full explanation of the indices in these four different areas.
- 15 Though this gap may be narrowing, see Amanda Logan and David Madland, "Millennial Economics: It Don't Matter Whether You're Black or White (or Hispanic)," (Washington: Center for American Progress Action Fund, October, 2008).
- 16 Authors' analysis of Census population projections, 2008.
- 17 Data on Asians only available going back to 2003; see Census Bureau Historical Educational Attainment Tables, Table A-2, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.html>
- 18 Paul Osterman, "College for All?: The Labor Market for College-Educated Workers."
- 19 Roberto D. Munster, "Marital Status and Civic Engagement among 18-25 Year Olds" (Medford: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, December 2007).
- 20 See Scott Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials." In Ruy Teixeira, ed., *Red, Blue and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2008).
- 21 Some of the analysis in this section originally appeared in my essay, "What We Now Know about the Millennial Generation," prepared for Generation We and appearing on their website.
- 22 Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials."
- 23 Pew Research Center, "A Portrait of "Gen Next"" (January 9, 2007).
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials."
- 26 Census Bureau 2008 Population Projections.
- 27 Only a small part of the difference between whites and Hispanics on this index could be accounted for the one immigration question in the battery. Even without that question, Hispanics still scored much higher than whites on this index.
- 28 Pew Hispanic Center and Kaiser Family Foundation, "2002 National Survey of Latinos" (December 2002).
- 29 Data in this and the next paragraph from Tom W. Smith, "Changes in Family Structure, Family Values and Politics, 1972-2006" in Ruy Teixeira, ed., *Red, Blue and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2008).
- 30 Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials."
- 31 Data in this paragraph from National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of Education*; Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz, "On the Pili: Changing the Course of Women's Education", Milken Institute Review, second quarter, 2001; Alvin P. Sanoff, "Competing Forces", *Prism*, October, 2005; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Occupations: 2000", Census 2000 Brief, August, 2003.
- 32 Frank N. Magid Associates, "American Tapestry: The Millennial Generation," available at <http://www.knightdigitalmediacenter.org/resources/powerpoint/200812Tapestry-Shutte.ppt>.
- 33 Gallup, "Increased Number Think Global Warming Is 'Exaggerated,'" available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116590/Increased-Number-Think-Global-Warming-Exaggerated.aspx>.
- 34 Ronald Brownstein, *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 2005.
- 35 This was tested with a simple regression model with support for privatization as the dependent variable and age and a dummy for Millennial Generation as the independent variables. Because the dummy variable is not significant, there is nothing distinctive about the views of Millennials. In contrast, when this model is run with many (but not all) of the other policy questions used in this report as dependent variables, the views of Millennials are shown to be distinctive.

- 36 Peter Levine, Constance Flanagan, and Les Galloway, "The Millennial Pendulum: A New Generation of Voters and the Prospects for a Political Realignment" (Washington: New America Foundation, February 2009).
- 37 See for example, Angus Campbell and others, *The American Voter*. (New York: Wiley, 1960); Duane F. Alwin and Jon A. Krosnick, "Aging, Cohorts, and the Stability of Sociopolitical Orientations Over the Life Span," *The American Journal of Sociology* 97(1) (1991):169-195; M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, "Continuity and Change in Political Orientations: A Longitudinal Study of Two Generations," *The American Political Science Review* 69 (4) (1975): 1316-1335; Richard G Niemi and Barbara I. Sobieszek, "Political Socialization," *Annual Review of Sociology* 3: 209-233. 97 (1) (1977):169-195; Marc Hooghe, and Britt Wilkenfeld, "The Stability of Political Attitudes and Behaviors across Adolescence and Early Adulthood: A Comparison of Survey Data on Adolescents and Young Adults in Eight Countries," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 31 (2008): 155-167.
- 38 Larry M Bartels, "A Generation of Political Learning," San Francisco: Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (2001); and Angus Campbell and others, "The American Voter" (New York: Wiley, 1960).
- 39 Alwin and Krosnick, "Aging, Cohorts, and the Stability of Sociopolitical Orientations Over the Life Span."
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Abraham Monk, *Handbook of Gerontological Services* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
- 42 Norval D. Glenn, *Cohort Analysis*. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977).
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- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Keeter, "The Aging of the Boomers and the Rise of the Millennials."

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