



THE PROGRESSIVE POLITICS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

THE EMERGING EVIDENCE ON WHY THE YOUNGER GENERATION
IS BOOSTING PROGRESSIVE PROSPECTS FOR THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

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June 21, 2007

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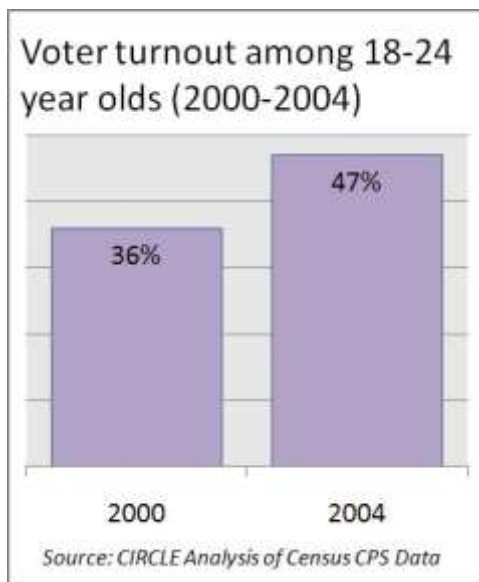
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The sleeper development that was widely overlooked in the 2006 election was the 22-percentage-point margin of support given to Democrats by 18-29 year-olds, almost all of them members of the up-and-coming Millennial Generation. This was just the latest piece of evidence about a generation that has been trending progressive and increasingly voting Democratic in large numbers. But a comprehensive review of available data from a range of polls and surveys in recent years shows just how fortuitous this generation is for progressives. Millennials are emerging as an enormous asset for progressives going forward – as enormous as the sheer size of this, the largest American generation ever.

The “Millennial Generation” is becoming the most common name for young people born roughly in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s, who are pouring out of college right now. This generation is even larger than the Baby Boomers, though just how much bigger depends on where you put their beginning and end birth dates, which currently has no consensus. For this report, we define Millennials as starting in 1978, when the birth rate started climbing from the lows of the Generation X years, and ending in 1996, after an 18-year span that matches the span

of the Baby Boomers, and is typical of the 18-to-20 year span for a generation.



Similar to the Boomers, the Millennials are poised to impact the country at every life stage and in myriad ways - but particularly in politics. By 2008, the number of citizen-eligible Millennial voters will be nearing 50 million. By the presidential election of 2016, Millennials will be one third or more of the citizen-eligible electorate, and roughly 30 percent of actual voters—and this is making no assumptions about possible increased turnout rates among Millennials in the future, which could make their weight among actual voters higher. Moreover, from that point on, the Millennials’ share of the actual voters will rise steadily for several decades as more and more of the generation enter middle age.

The Millennials are an unusual generation, not like young people we have seen for a long time. As first noted by generational analysts William Strauss and Neil Howe, they are not individualistic risk-takers like the Boomers or cynical and disengaged like Generation Xers. Signs indicate that Millennials are civic-minded, politically engaged, and hold values long associated with progressives, such as concern about economic inequalities, desire for a more multilateral foreign policy, and a strong belief in government.

For example, in UCLA’s 2006 American Freshman survey—conducted for the last 40 years, with several hundred thousand respondents each year—more freshmen reported they discussed politics frequently as high school seniors (34 percent) than at any other point in the history of the survey. In the 2004 election, Census data indicate that the 18-24 year old group, completely composed of Millennials, increased their turnout 11 points to 47 percent of citizens in that age group, and 18-29 year olds—dominated for the first time by Millennials—increased their turnout 9 points to 49 percent (note: Census figures on absolute turnout levels are inflated by roughly 4

Millennials are more politically engaged than previous young generations

Millennials come out well compared to other generations in measures of election-related political engagement. According to the University of Michigan's National Election Study (NES), 18-29 year olds in 2004 (an age group dominated by Millennials, who were 18-26 at the time), were either higher or matched previous highs on a wide range of political involvement indicators, when compared to 18-29 year olds in previous elections. These indicators included level of interest in the election, caring a good deal who wins the election, trying to influence others' vote, displaying candidate buttons or stickers, attending political meetings and watching TV programs about the campaign.

More detail on political engagement is provided by the October, 2006 Harvard Institute of Politics (IOP) survey of 18-24 year olds. In that survey, 48 percent said they had signed an online petition, 31 percent had written an email or letter advocating a political position, 29 percent had contributed to an political discussion or blog advocating a political position, 21 percent had attended a political rally, 18 percent had donated money to a political campaign or cause, and 14 percent had volunteered on a political campaign for a candidate or issue. In addition, 60 percent said they followed news about national politics closely, and a similar 60 percent thought political engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing the country. A full 71 percent thought such engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing their local community.

More recently, in a January, 2007 Pew Research Center survey, 77 percent of 18-29 year olds said they are interested in local politics, up 28 points from 49 percent in 1999, the highest increase of any age group surveyed. The survey also found that 85 percent of 18-29 year olds report they are

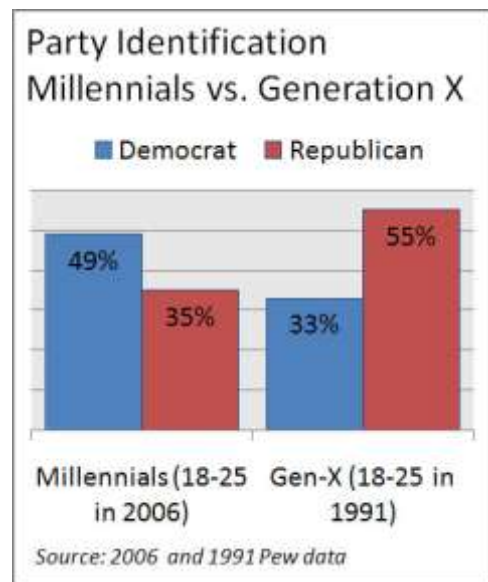
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percentage points over actual turnout because of over-reporting by respondents—but this does not typically affect estimates of the *change* in turnout levels, which is the topic of interest here). These increases were far, far higher than among any other age group.

Or take volunteerism, which is unusually high among Millennials. The American Freshman survey showed 83 percent of entering freshmen in 2005 volunteered at least occasionally during their high school senior year, the highest ever measured in this survey. And 71 percent said they volunteered on a weekly basis.

Millennials have consistently shown they hold progressive values and worldviews - voting more heavily

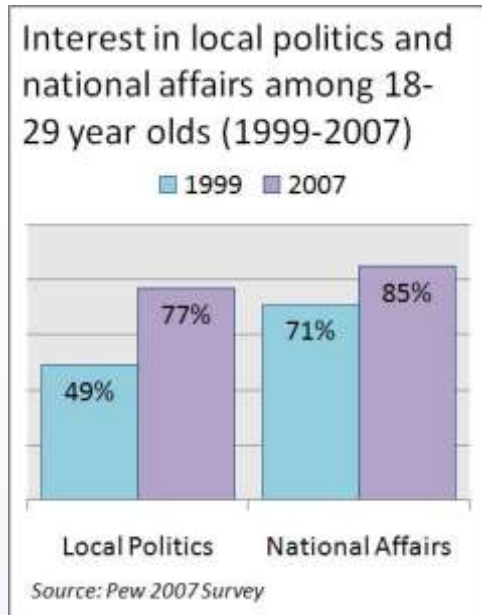
Democratic than other generations in their first few elections. As mentioned earlier, in 2006, 18-29 year olds overall voted 60-38 Democratic in House elections, with the 18-24 year old group



going 58-37 Democratic. In 2004, 18-29 year olds (dominated by the 18-26 year olds who qualify as Millennials) voted 54-45 Democratic for president (55-44 for the House). But note here that 18-24 year olds—Millennials all—voted 56-43 Democratic for president while the older 25-29 year old group—mostly *not* Millennials voted only 51-48 Democratic. Even in 2002, a terrible year for Democrats, 18-24 year olds (the first time Millennials constituted this group) still voted Democratic 49-47.

According to the Pew Gen Next study, 48 percent of 18-25 year old Millennials now identify with or lean toward the Democratic party, compared to just 35

"interested in keeping up with national affairs," a 14 point increase from 71 percent in 1999 and nearly the same level of interest as adults of all ages (89 percent).



And, according to the December, 2006 Pew Research Center Gen Next data, Millennials who are 18-25 today (birth years 1981-88) are running about 10 points higher than Gen Xers at the same age on following what's going on in government and in level of interest in keeping up with national affairs. In an April, 2005 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) survey of 18-25 year olds, respondents gave themselves an average of 7 on a 10 point scale on how well "I read a lot about politics" describes them (higher than the 5.6 they gave themselves on reading about technology).

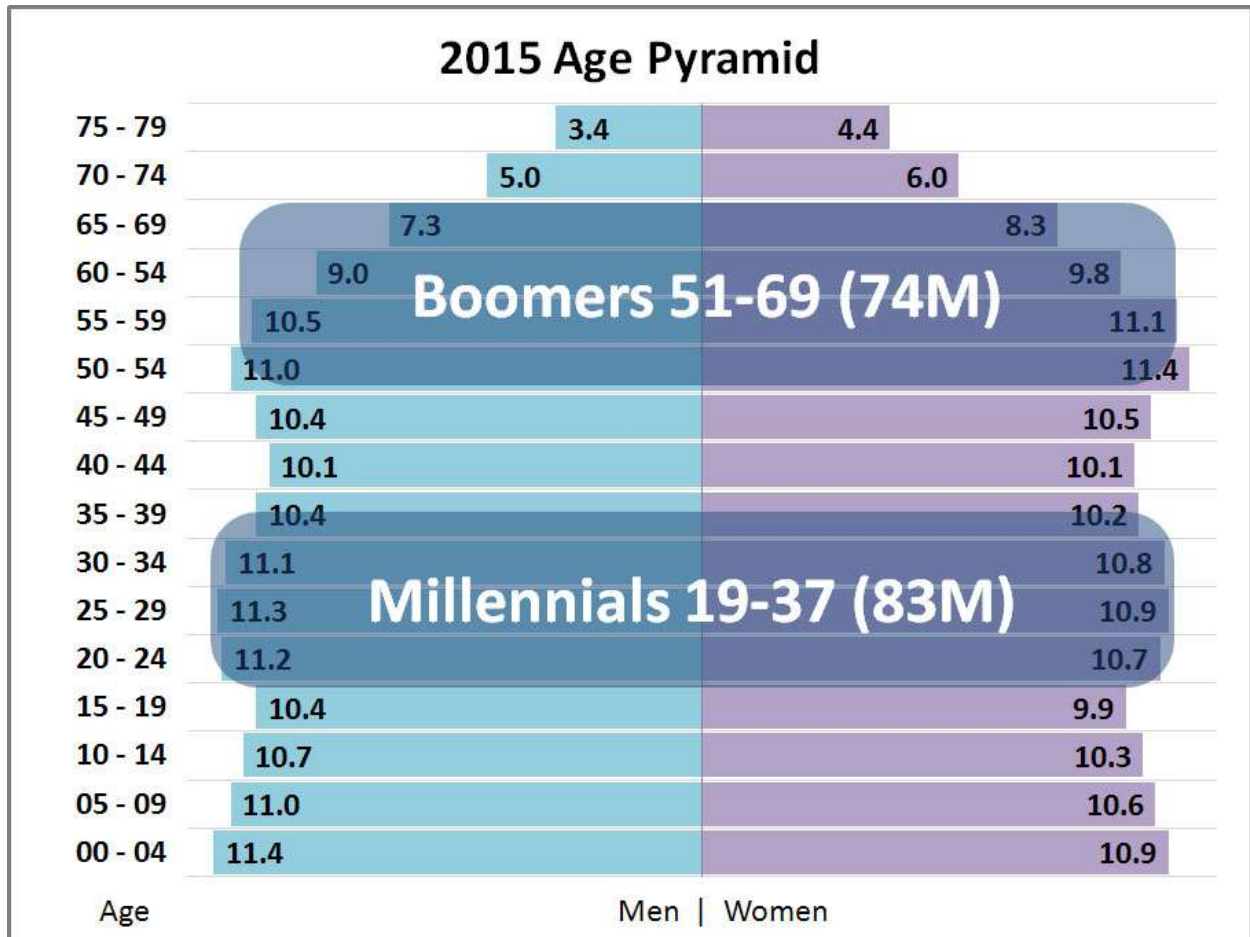
percent who identify with or lean toward the Republicans. The latter figure represents a huge crash in support for the Republicans among this age group—in the early '90s, Gen Xers of this age were identifying at a 55 percent rate with Republicans.

Gen Xers continue to be the most Republican generation today, while the Millennials are emerging as the most Democratic generation by a substantial margin. Other polls of Millennials or Millennial-dominated age groups confirm this solid Democratic lead in party ID. Indeed, on election day in 2006, the exit polls showed the Democrats with a 12 point lead on party ID among 18-29 year old voters. Numerous political science studies confirm that party identifications and associated voting behavior, once formed in a generation's twenties, tend to persist over the life course.

Millennials by the Sheer Numbers

Everyone knows the Boomers are a huge generation that's aging and is about to seriously stress our Social Security system. But few realize that the Millennials are even larger. This is true no matter what definition you use. (A young generation often does not have a common name and clear start/end dates until a consensus emerges among demographers and social commentators over time.) For example, if you give Millennials a start date of the birth year 1978, after the "baby bust" (which Generation X is typically linked to) had ended and an era of steadily rising births had begun, and continue until 2000—as is common in market research—the size of this generation is truly staggering: 95 million (though only about half are adults) out of a population of 300

million, compared to 78 million Boomers. By 2018, Millennials, by this definition, will be 100 million strong and they will all be old enough to vote. Even taking citizenship into account, there will still be 90 million citizen-eligible Millennial voters.



But even if you use 1996 as the last birth year for the Millennials, so that the number of birth years covered by this generation is the same as that covered by the Baby Boom (1978-1996 vs. 1946-64), this generation is still larger than the Boomers: 80 million today and 83 million by 2016, when the tail end of the generation votes in their first presidential election.

The size of the Millennial Generation is so great partly because many Millennials are children of the Boomers (the "echo boom"). The size of the generation is also boosted by the children of the unprecedented numbers of immigrants in the last several decades. The Millennials are the most diverse generation by far, with almost 40 percent belonging to minority groups, Hispanics in particular.

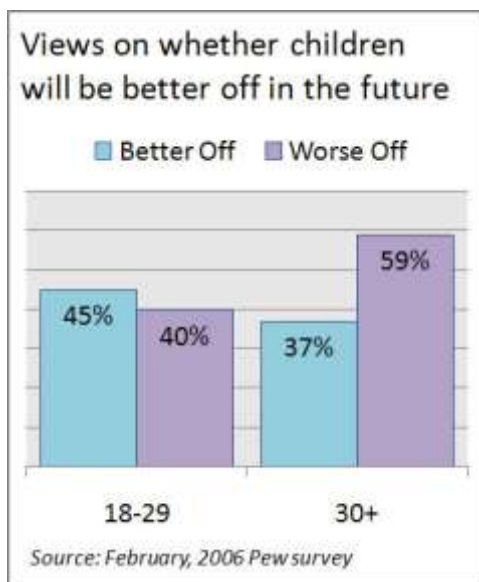
According to March, 2006 Census data, about 62 percent of Millennial adults are non-Hispanic white, 18 percent are Hispanic, 14 percent are black and 5 percent are Asian. Reflecting this diversity and a generational proclivity toward seeing race as "no big deal," Millennial attitudes on race are extremely progressive. According to the Pew Gen Next study, in 2003, almost all (89 percent) of white 18-25 year old Millennials said they agreed that "it's all right for blacks and whites to date each other," including 64 percent who "completely" agreed. Back in 1987-88, when the same question was posed to white 18-25 year old Gen Xers, just 56 percent agreed with this statement. Data from a 2005 Gallup poll underscore these findings; 95 percent of 18-29 year olds said they approve of blacks and whites dating and 60 percent of this age group said they had

dated someone of a different race. In addition, 82 percent of white 18-25 year old Millennials in 2003 disagreed with the idea that they “don’t have much in common with people of other races.”

The Millennial Personality

Generations are more than just numbers; they have personalities that are shaped by many factors, including what's happening in the world when they come of age. The Millennial personality comes closest to that of the "GI generation," the one lauded by some as the "Greatest Generation," members of which fought in World War II and built up America and the world in the postwar boom. Millennials are fundamentally optimistic, willing to trust political leaders who perform well, and they believe in government again.

Their optimism has been well-captured in a series of Pew surveys. In a February 2006 survey, 18-29 year olds were the most optimistic age group in assessing whether today’s children would



grow up better or worse off than people are now (45 percent better/40 percent worse—other age groups responded more negatively than positively by margins of 17-27 points). In a July, 2006 survey, 18-29 year olds were the most optimistic about whether they would move ahead in life (as measured by self-placement on a “ladder of life” going from 0 as lowest to 10 as highest) in the next five years; 72 percent thought they would, compared to 13 percent who expected no change and 8 percent who thought things would get worse. They were also more likely to believe they had made progress in life in the last five years (58 percent thought so, while 20 percent thought they’d stayed the same and 18 percent thought they’d slipped).

Millennials also show a non-cynical attitude toward political action and the usefulness of government. In the Harvard Institute of Politics (IOP) October, 2006 survey of 18-24 year olds, 60 percent thought political engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing the country and 71 percent thought such engagement was an effective way of solving important issues facing their local community. Millennials disagree with the idea that if the federal government runs something, it is necessarily inefficient and wasteful. According to Pew Values surveys, 18-25 year olds in 2002-03 disagreed with that idea by exactly 2:1 (64-32), while 18-25 year old Gen Xers who were asked about the idea in 1987-88 were split down the middle, 47-47. The 2006 CIRCLE Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey of 15-25 year olds found a strong endorsement among 15-25 year olds of the idea that “government should do more to solve problems” (63 percent), rather than “government does too many things better left to businesses and individuals” (31 percent).

Similarly, in June, 2005 Democracy Corps polling, 63 percent of 18-29 year olds believed the role of government should be to promote the principle of a strong community and policies that

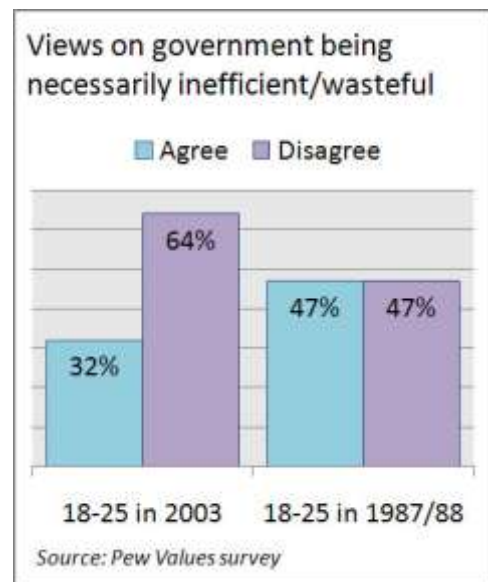
expand opportunity and promote prosperity for all, not just a few, compared to 35 percent who thought the role of government should be to promote the principle of self-reliance and policies of limited government and low taxes. This split was by far the most pro-active government/strong community of all the age groups; 30-39 year old Gen Xers for example, were split 50-45 on this question.

A Harvard IOP October, 2006 survey of 18-24 year olds found a remarkable array of non-cynical sentiments toward politics and political service: 71 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;” 55 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 56 percent disagreed that “it is difficult to find ways to be involved in politics.” In addition, 67 percent agreed that “running for office is an honorable thing to do”; the analogous figures for whether community service and getting involved in politics were honorable things to do were 88 percent and 60 percent.

Note, however, that Millennials, while clearly believing in the potential of government, are not satisfied with the ways politics is conducted today or with the politicians that currently represent them. In the same survey, 78 percent agreed that “elected officials seem to be motivated by selfish reasons;” 74 percent agreed that “politics has become too partisan;” 69 percent agreed that “the political tone in Washington is too negative;” and 75 percent agreed that “elected officials don’t seem to have the same priorities that I have.”

It’s also worth noting that Millennials are shying away from the kind of high risk behaviors that promote pessimism, cynicism and an inability to solve problems. The first Millennials entered their senior years in high school in 1996 and 1997. Those years generally marked the peak of drug use by 12th graders (as measured by the National Institute on Drug Abuse’s annual Monitoring the Future survey), which had been rising throughout the early 1990’s, when later Gen Xers were reaching that grade. Since then drug use has been declining for almost all drugs tracked by the survey. For example, 42 percent of 12th graders in 1996 said they had used some illicit drug in the last year, compared to 37 percent in 2006. Perhaps of even more significance, drug use is now being delayed by adolescents. In 1996, 24 percent of 8th graders said they had used an illicit drug in the last year; that’s now down to 15 percent.

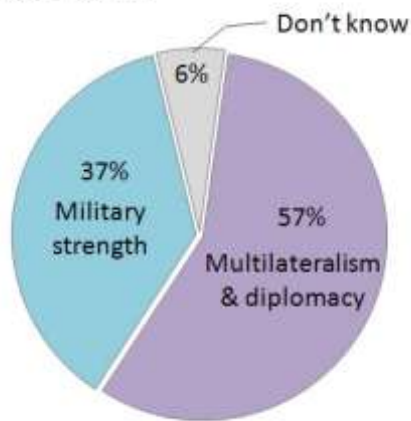
Teens are also waiting longer to have sex. According to the Guttmacher Institute, some 13 percent of females and 15 percent of males 15-19 in 2002 had sex before they were 15; that’s down from 19 and 21 percent respectively in 1995. The pregnancy rate for females age 15-19 is now 75 per 1000; that rate is down 36 percent since its peak in 1990. Births among this age group are also down by 31 percent over this time period.



Millennials have a global multilateral foreign policy mindset

Millennials as a generation seem more oriented toward a multilateral and cooperative foreign policy than their elders. Pew Values data show that 18-25 year old Millennials in 2002-03 were split down the middle on whether military strength is the best way to ensure peace, while older adults endorsed this idea 61-35.

Views among 18-29 year olds on what American security depends on



Source: 2004 Democracy Corps survey

In 2004 Pew data, only 29 percent of 18-25 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 (41-49). In addition, 62 percent of 18-25 year olds believe the US 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 18-29 year olds (note: only the 18-26 year olds in this group qualify as Millennials) believed that America’s security depends on building strong ties with other nations, compared to just 37 percent who believed that, “bottom line,” America’s

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Holding Other Values of the Progressive Worldview

Millennials show deep concern for today's income inequalities and social stratification, and it is possible that looking out for everyone in society may emerge as their mission, much as it did for the GI generation. In the 2004 NES, 84 percent of Millennials (18-26 year olds) said that the gap between rich and poor had grown in the last 20 years and 94 percent thought that the change in the gap between rich and poor was a bad thing. These figures are higher than those for older generations. In the Magid Associates 2006 survey of Millennials for the New Politics Institute, “transition” Millennials (those 18-22, born 1984-88) were more likely than any other age group to favor governmental action to reduce economic differences among Americans; “cusp” Millennials’ (those 23-28, born 1978-83) attitudes are similar, but not quite as strong.

Millennials tend toward progressive positions in other areas, too, as numerous surveys have documented. For example, they take concern for global warming and the environment as a given. Millennials overwhelmingly believe that the country should do “whatever it takes” to protect the environment, that stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost and that people should be willing to pay higher prices in order to protect the environment. In a March, 2005 Gallup poll, 58 percent of 18-29 year olds (Millennials are 18-27 within 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 relatively narrow 48 percent to 41 percent split among those 50-64 and an even narrower 44 percent to 38 percent split among those 65 and over.

And Millennials certainly don’t perceive differences between genders, races or sexual preferences the way other generations do. Their views on the non-significance of race were alluded to above. But their views on sexual preference issues are perhaps the

security depends on its own military strength. This was the most pro-multilateralist sentiment of any age group. They also take different lessons from 9/11. In an April, 2005 GQR poll, 18-25 year olds believed by 55-44 that the attack on 9/11 means 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 (18-26 year olds) said that promoting human rights was a “very important” goal of US foreign policy, a figure substantially higher than among any other generation.

Millennial 18-25 year olds are now most hostile to the war in Iraq and to Bush’s handling of it. In 2006 Pew polls, an average of 26 percent of this age group approved of Bush’s handling of the Iraq war, compared to 69 percent who disapproved. In the 2006 exit polls, 62 percent of 18-29 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—thought the US should start withdrawing troops from Iraq. In addition, a majority of those voters did not think the Iraq war had improved the long-term security of the United States. Similarly, in an April, 2005 GQR poll of 18-25 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.

As for patriotism, Millennials in the same poll gave themselves a 7.2 out of 10 on whether they consider themselves a patriotic person, higher than any other trait tested except for being a healthy person. But almost 70 percent say they would be unwilling to join the US military.

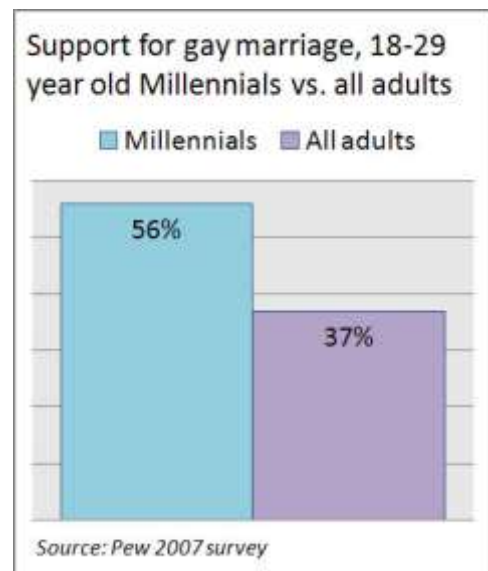
home. Two-thirds of Millennials selected 1, the strongest support for women’s equal role and 88 percent of Millennials picked 1, 2 or 3 on the 7 point scale (indicating they felt closer to the equal role statement than to the women’s place in the home statement)—both figures that are higher than for any other generation.

To some extent, Millennials are just responding to the lived reality of their generation: women are not only equal in their experience but frequently taking the lead. For example, today girls tend to outperform boys in elementary and secondary school, getting higher grades, following

most strikingly liberal. For example, in a 2007 Pew survey, an outright majority (56 percent) of 18-29 year olds supported allowing gays and lesbians to marry, while the public as a whole opposed gay marriage by a 55-37 majority. Other examples: in a 2006 Pew survey, 18-25 year olds favored allowing gays to adopt children by 61-35, while other adults were opposed 50-44; in the November, 2004 Reboot study of 18-25 year olds, an outright majority (53 percent) said they favored legalizing gay marriage; and in an August, 2005 Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (GQR) survey of 18-25 year olds, 82 percent reported that they personally knew or worked with someone who was gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered.

It is also worth emphasizing the extent to which gender issues have faded for this generation. In the 2004 National Election Study, respondents were asked to place themselves on a 7 point scale

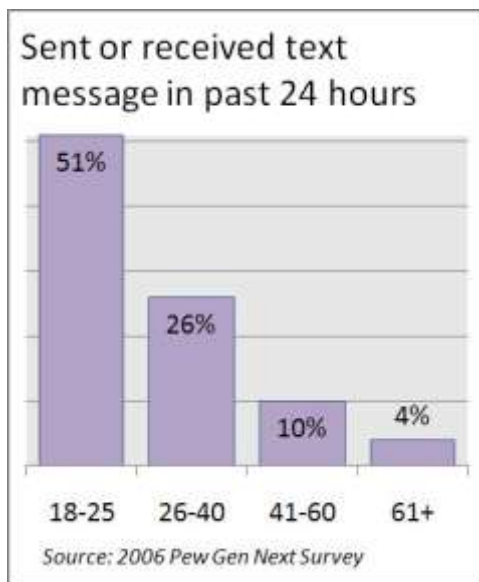
relative to the following statements: “Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. Others feel that women’s place is in the home,” where 1 is the strongest support for women’s equal role and 7 is the strongest support for women’s place being in the



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. In addition, more girls are attending college than boys: 56 percent of today's undergraduates are women, compared to 44 percent who are men. Reflecting this disparity, 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 four 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.

The High-Tech, New Media Generation

Of course, the Millennials are the generation that came of age completely at home with the new technologies and new media that are reshaping politics. No one gets these new tools better than they do.



For example, in a May, 2006 Young Voter Strategies poll of 18-30 year olds—overwhelmingly Millennials—about 90 percent use email and the internet, with 62 percent saying they check their email *daily* and 70 percent saying they use the internet *daily*. A little over half use Facebook/MySpace at least occasionally and about two-thirds use IM; 18 percent and 28 percent, respectively, use these technologies daily.

Even stronger results come from a GQR April, 2006 survey of 18-25 year olds. In that survey, respondents reported spending an average of 21.3 hours a week online, including time spent doing email and IM. In addition, 86 percent reported using email every day, 56 percent said they read news online every day, 41 percent said they used MySpace, Facebook or something similar

every day and 40 percent said they IM'd every day. Over half (52 percent) said they had a personal page on MySpace and 34 percent said they had one on Facebook.

But perhaps the most striking and distinctive aspect of Millennials' technology usage is their embrace of mobile media. For example, in a March, 2005 Kids World Study survey (reported in NPI's 2006 study, *Mobile Media in 21st Century Politics*), 28 percent of 18-24 year olds reported text messaging regularly, compared to 16 percent of 25-34 year olds and just 7 percent of 35-54 year olds. Even more impressive, in the 2005 Pew Gen Next survey, a majority (51 percent) of 18-25 year olds said they had sent or received a text message *in the past 24 hours*, compared to 26 percent of those 26-40, 10 percent of 41-60 year olds and 4 percent among those 61 and over.

There's no question that the way to engage this generation is through a wide array of new media. But progressives would be well advised to not think of this generation as passive consumers of political media who pull a lever in a voting booth once every two to four years. They should be

understood as political actors who could use the new interactive media to help actively bring about political change. After all, political campaigns of today are increasingly characterized by people-powered politics, using grass-roots media such as blogs and videos on YouTube. No one knows those tools better than the Millennials.

The great explosion of progressive politics under Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s and 1940s was partly fueled by energized young people. This GI Generation voted in higher numbers for FDR than the rest of the electorate and acted as the foot soldiers of progressive politics at that time.

We may be seeing a similar development with the rise of the Millennial Generation today. Certainly this development could be derailed, but the huge numbers of Millennials have the potential to drive a new progressive era that will reinvent what it means to be "progressive" and take on the new challenges of the 21st Century. Hang on for this ride.

Bios:

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Eric Greenberg is an entrepreneur currently developing a food company that supplies real, good food for the chronically ill and health conscious. He is also President and Chief Executive Officer of Innovation Investments, LLC, a diversified investment holding company. Greenberg has founded and established many business in his entrepreneurial career including: Acumen Sciences, LLC., and the Acumen Journal of Life Sciences, Scient, a consulting firm focused on eBusiness and emerging technology, and Viant, an internet systems integrator. Greenberg serves on the Board of the Shoah Foundation, received Shoah's Ambassador to Humanity Award for 2001, has endowed the human genetics lab at the University of California, San Francisco where it is named after him, has endowed genetic research treatments at Columbia/Cornell for breast cancer and pediatric cardiology, is a recipient of the Einstein Technology Innovation Award from the State of Israel and the Jerusalem Fund and was named by Worth Magazine as the 10th most generous American under 45. Greenberg is also active in several other philanthropic and political causes. He is currently writing a book on the Millennial generation and politics, where he has had the privilege of collaborating with the coauthors of this paper.

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