

THE
Millennial
Generation

**Who They Are & How the GOP
Can Connect with Them**



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Executive Summary

The past few elections have highlighted a major disconnect between the Millennial Generation and the Republican Party. Though some pundits have taken the party's triumph in the 2014 Congressional elections as reason for optimism, that victory doesn't spell the end of the problem. Millennials hold fundamentally different views from older generations on topics such as the role of government, the importance of community, the impact of the free market, and whether the nation is headed in the right direction. These differences are deep-seated and will not fade away with time.

In this report, we draw out and explain the characteristics that define Millennials as a political generation. We begin by providing a general overview of what generations are and why they matter, followed by a breakdown of the nation's current political generations in order to give readers a sense of where America has come from and where it is going.

The remainder of the report closely examines seven basic traits of the Millennial Generation and explores their implications for politics generally and for the Republican Party in particular. We draw heavily on a Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey that was specially commissioned for this report and was conducted in November 2014. We also draw on focus groups conducted by Presentation Testing as well as interviews conducted by LifeCourse with politically active Millennials. We conclude each trait discussion by outlining three main points that party leaders need to keep in mind when appealing to young voters.

Key Themes

Special: Millennials grew up in an environment in which kids were fussed over and their needs came first. Passionate culture wars over how best to raise and educate kids let Millennials know just how special they were. Now Millennial voters want their voices to be heard and respected by political leaders.

Recommendations *Treat young voters and children as VIPs; focus on policies affecting kids and young adults; resist the urge to “dumb down” messages aimed at youth.*

Sheltered: Millennials were highly protected in childhood by a fortress of youth safety initiatives, which they took as evidence that they were truly valuable. This protection has translated into risk aversion in their young-adult lives: Millennials are avoiding the stock market and real estate, turning away from entrepreneurship, and are trying to plan for the long term.

Recommendations *Help young people avoid risk—and plan for the future; make better outcomes information available to students, consumers, and borrowers; enable young people to get feedback on whether they’re safely “on track.”*

Teamworking: From early childhood, Millennials have been encouraged by parents to work together and build important peer connections. As young adults, they are constantly connected to their friends and expect their leaders to take a stake in the well-being of the communities they hold dear.

Recommendations *Showcase positive roles for government and community; promote a culture of public service; adopt language of cooperation—sharing, teams, friends, helping, groups, connection, consensus, etc.*

Conventional: Millennials are close to their families and espouse relatively conventional life goals. This attachment to family life is mirrored in their faith in big institutions: Though institutional trust is low across all age brackets, Millennials report higher levels of trust than older generations and want the government to help them achieve the American Dream.

Recommendations *Co-market to all generations using an expanded definition of “family”; help Millennials climb the meritocracy ladder so they can achieve the American Dream; recognize that Millennial views on many social issues can be leveraged to your advantage.*

Consensus-Building: Millennials have been told throughout their lives to look after each other, which has led them to seek common ground and avoid conflict. They're turned off by politics as a battleground and want their leaders to be more collaborative.

Recommendations *Be a good listener and treat all points of view with respect; go out of your way to find common ground with members of the other party; showcase bipartisan accomplishments achieved through compromise.*

Confident: Millennials were surrounded in childhood by protective parents who encouraged them to reach for the stars, which led them to adopt high standards and expect big things from themselves. They want leaders to share their optimism and for it to translate into real progress down the road.

Recommendations *Keep messaging upbeat; address long-term policy issues—like infrastructure, education, fiscal stewardship, and public debt; always emphasize a positive and constructive vision when discussing issues and policy initiatives.*

Globally Engaged: Millennials are coming of age in an era when threats to national security come not from powerful nations opposed to a “world order,” but rather from shadowy terror groups in a multipolar world full of failed states and power vacuums. They are globally engaged pragmatists. They want their government to provide order while upholding treaties and alliances.

Recommendations *Explain foreign policy initiatives in terms of interests and results rather than principles and motives; leverage Millennial support for a strong military and for strong relationships with national allies and peacekeeping organizations; avoid single-issue crisis mode—and articulate a comprehensive game plan for bringing order to a chaotic world.*

Introduction

“Amongst democratic nations, each new generation is a new people,” wrote Alexis de Tocqueville after touring America in the late 1820s. The idea that Millennials constitute a new and different political generation seems unorthodox to some. But from the very foundation of the United States, if not earlier, many have observed a generational rhythm underlying the ebb and flow of American political life.

Why Generations Matter

The formation of political preferences and the broader issue of “political socialization” have long been important areas of study within political science, social psychology, and sociology. Historians routinely explain changes in our national direction through the lens of generations. Several well-known scholars have even attempted to narrate the entire political history of the United States as a series of identifiable political generations, each attaining power and growing old in its turn—including Daniel Elazar, Samuel Huntington, Morton Keller, and Arthur Schlesinger, Sr.¹

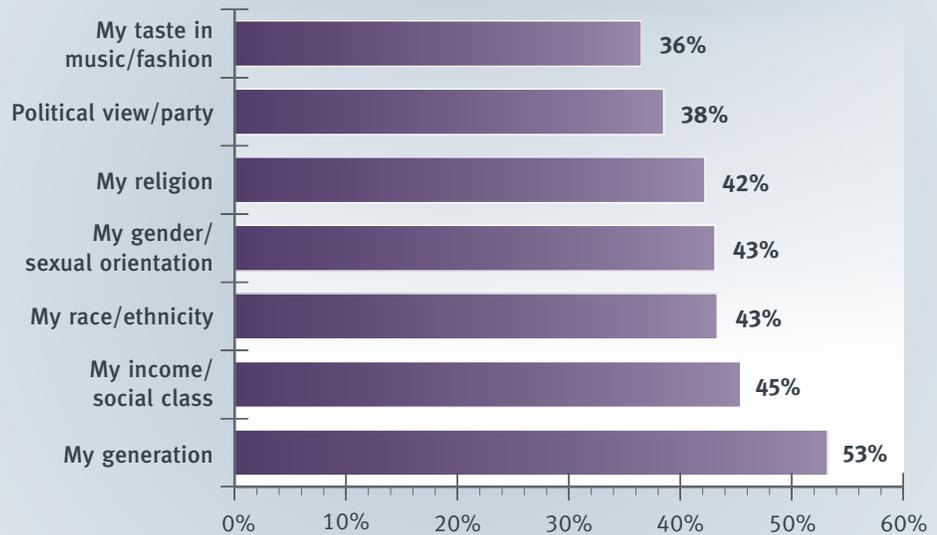
When social scientists refer to generations, they aren’t just talking theoretically. **Generations fundamentally define how we see the world.** When, in our survey, we asked our respondents to what degree certain characteristics define “who you are and how you see the world,” the most popular answer is “my generation” at 53%.² It is the only option that garners more than a 50% vote, outranking such options as “my income/social class” (45%), “my race/ethnicity” (43%), and “my gender/sexual orientation” (43%). Our survey confirmed, for all age groups, what other researchers have recently shown for young adults³: that generational membership trumps all other (or nearly all other) social identifiers.

So what exactly is a generation? A generation consists of everyone born over the span of a single phase of life, or roughly twenty years. Members of a generation share a collective peer personality that is defined by three basic

FIGURE 1

To what degree does each characteristic define who you are and how you see the world?

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



attributes: a shared age location, or a sense of growing up at the same moment in history; a common set of beliefs and behaviors; and a common collective identity. These characteristics age with members as they grow older and pass through new phases of life.

Belonging to a generation doesn't mean that we necessarily get along with or even like most of our peers. But it does mean that our bedrock beliefs, our daily habits, and our collective sense of self are strongly shaped by our formative years. From the soldiers of the American Revolution, dubbed the "generation of 1776" by Thomas Jefferson, to the generation of World War II veterans, dubbed "the greatest generation" by Tom Brokaw, each generation has brought with them the building blocks of a new political story—one that has often formed in direct response to the midlife generation in charge. These attitudes shape the leaders their members vote for, the presidents they elect, and the policies they champion and reject.

FIGURE 2

Millennials' Share of Total U.S. Electorate

Source: LifeCourse analysis of Census Bureau data

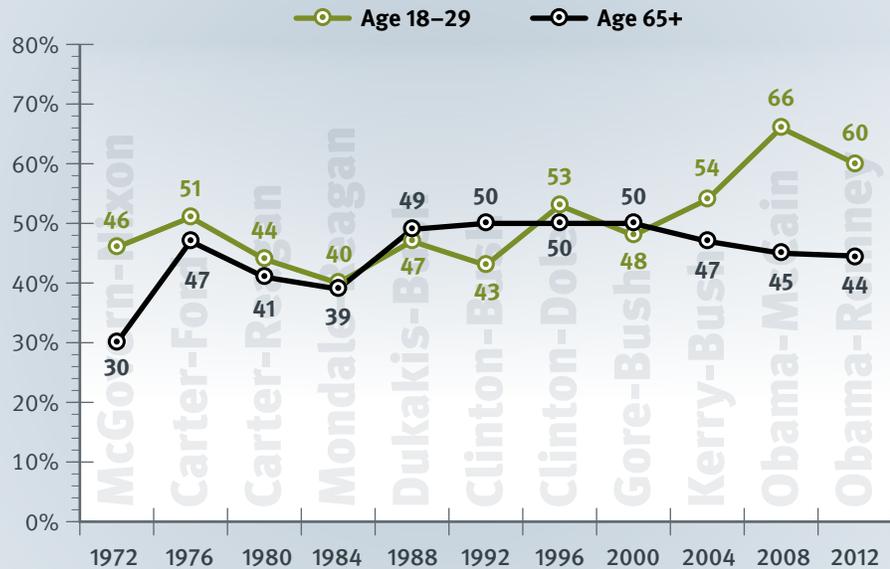


To be sure, the setting of generational boundaries is not an exact science. Like any other social category, such as gender, class, or nationality, a generation allows for plenty of individual exceptions and can be fuzzy at the edges. But a close look at the distinctive characteristics that have been attributed to any given generation finds that they are remarkably inclusive. They cut across most subgroups and reflect significant shifts in attitudes toward everything from privacy, risk-taking, and family life to civic trust, religion, and optimism about the future. People who came of age around the time of Woodstock (Boomers), the fall of the Berlin Wall (Xers), or the Crash of '08 (Millennials) understand that they share, as a group, a distinct outlook that transcends their race, gender, or social class. They understand intuitively (for example, when responding to a survey) what it means to belong to a generation.

FIGURE 3

Young-Old Voting Gap in Recent Elections (1972–2012), Percentage Voting for the Democratic Candidate

Source: Pew Research Center



The Millennial Challenge Facing the GOP

From decade to decade, youth generations can sometimes swing in favor or against a major political party. Over the last decade, the political preferences of the Millennial Generation have emerged as a challenge for the Republican Party. In recent elections, young voters have voted decisively for Democrats while older voters have consistently favored Republicans. This age gap grew to historic proportions with the 2008 presidential election, with voters under age 30 favoring Obama over McCain by 21 percentage points more than voters age 65+.⁴ In the 2012 presidential election, the large age gap repeated itself, at 16 percentage points.

Over the past year, GOP talk about young voters has taken an optimistic turn. After all, the party achieved a sweeping triumph in the last Congressional election: seizing control of the Senate, holding the House, and overtaking

	% Voting Democratic		Young-Old Gap (%)
	Age 18–29	Age 65+	
2004	54	47	7
2006	60	49	11
2008	66	45	21
2010	55	38	17
2012	60	44	16
2014	54	41	13

state governments across the country. The last time the GOP held such a large majority in both houses of Congress was in 1928. The party also gained ground among several traditionally Democratic-leaning demographics—including 18- to 29-year-olds. Pundits speculated that Republicans had finally left their so-called “Millennial problem” in the dust.

But despite all the optimism, the age gap persists. **Even after 2014, the GOP is losing the Millennial Generation by a wide margin.** While Democratic candidates fared worse with young voters in the 2014 election than they did in the presidential elections of 2012 and 2008, they fared worse with every older age bracket as well. This conforms to the typical pattern of recent off-year elections, when younger and more Democratic-leaning voters are less likely to vote. In 2014, under-30 voters favored Democratic over GOP candidates by 11 percentage points, down only 2 points from 2010 (13 percentage points). In 2014, President Obama’s flagging approval ratings no doubt dampened

Millennial enthusiasm for the Democratic ticket. But 2016 is a clean slate. If the recent pattern repeats, the age gap is poised to jump back to its earlier presidential-year magnitude.

The current age gap in party preference for on-year elections is a recent development. It is also unprecedented in size for any presidential election going all the way back (perhaps) to FDR's New Deal victories in 1932 and 1936—when we can only guess at what happened since no one conducted age-bracketed exit surveys before around 1960. The current age gap certainly exceeds the 16-point “generation gap” that separated young and old voters in the 1972 Nixon-McGovern election.⁵ Thereafter, from 1976 through 2000, there was little to no difference in the voting preferences of younger and older Americans—as well as those in-between. As recently as the 2000 election, 18- to 29-year-olds (a bracket then dominated by Generation X) were even less likely than seniors to vote Democratic. However, beginning in 2004—arguably the first election year that the impact of the Millennial Generation could be felt in the electorate—the age gap we see today started to emerge.⁶

This gap will only grow in significance moving forward as Millennials account for an ever-greater share of the voter base in future elections. According to Census data, Millennials represented just over 20% of voters in the 2012 election.⁷ While this share is already sizable, it will grow steadily in future elections. By the 2020 election, this generation is projected to account for over 30% of all voters. By 2028, it will account for 37%. The majority of GOP leaders in office today will be dealing with a Millennial-dominated electorate—successfully or unsuccessfully—for the rest of their political careers.

Some Republican leaders claim that Millennials have shied away from their party due to poor marketing and communication strategies—and that Millennials really agree with the GOP on basic political principles. These leaders sometimes argue, for example, that young people's support for marijuana legalization and enthusiasm for innovative startups like Uber makes them natural libertarians. By tweaking the GOP message to appeal more to this individualism and by steering away from divisive social issues, they conclude, Republicans could get Millennials more or less effortlessly back in their flock.

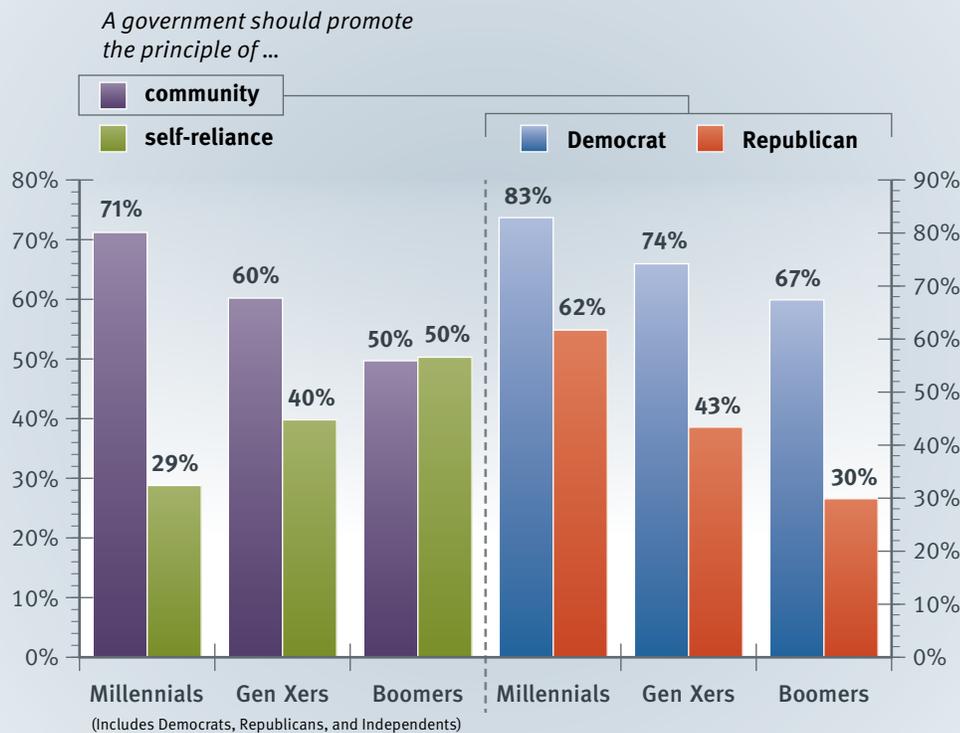


FIGURE 4

Which view comes closest to your own?

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

Yet the findings from our survey suggest that **the Millennial disconnect with the GOP goes beyond cosmetics**. Instead, a deeper shift in beliefs and values is taking place. Millennials—both Democrats *and* Republicans—hold fundamentally different views from older generations on topics such as the role of government and the impact of the free market. To offer just one striking example, our survey shows that when asked whether government should reinforce “the principle of self-reliance” or “the principle of community,” respondents show a vast generation gap. Boomers as a whole are divided exactly 50%-50% on this question, while Millennials respond 71%-29% in favor of “community.” What’s more, the generation gap *within the Republican Party* is even larger: 62% of Republican Millennials opted for “community,” versus only 30% of Republican Boomers. Similar age gaps arise in response to basic questions about the role of business and government and about optimism toward America’s future.⁸

Our survey findings echo those of a recent Pew report, which found that Millennials who identify with the GOP are significantly less conservative than Republicans in older generations. Only 31% of the roughly one-third of Millennials who affiliate with or lean Republican hold political views that are mostly conservative, while about half (51%) hold a mix of liberal and conservative views and 18% take consistently or mostly liberal positions. These views encompass social issues such as immigration and homosexuality as well as more general ideas related to the role of government, regulation of business, and the social safety net. Among Silent and Boomers, the share of self-identified Republicans who hold mostly conservative views rises to about two-thirds.⁹

But wait, some GOP strategists say. Even if it's true that Millennials differ in important ways from older generations in their political outlook, might this simply reflect their early stage in life? Once more Millennials settle down and raise families, pay mortgages, and start businesses, won't their worldview surely become more conservative? And if so, won't they in time increasingly vote Republican?

This would be a plausible argument if every generation of young adults started out by voting heavily for the more liberal party. But, as we have just discussed, most generations don't. What's more, the very power of a political generation as a force in history is premised on the fact that a generation's basic attitudes remain surprisingly durable as its members mature.

Political attitudes, once shaped in a generation, often remain crystalized for a lifetime. Many empirical studies have confirmed that our politics and voting preferences tend to be cemented in our formative years. Researchers at Columbia University, for example, have built a long-term model of presidential voting patterns that accounts for many of the macro-level voting trends of the last half-century, particularly among whites—based on the finding that reactions to political events experienced at age 18 are three times as powerful as reactions to events experienced at age 40.¹⁰ Recent analyses from Pew and Gallup examining voters in the postwar era have also reported that the voting behavior and ideological preferences of today's generations have leaned largely in the same direction throughout their lifetimes.^{11 12}

Before looking more closely at Millennials, let's take a quick look at today's living political generations—and note along the way how the formative experi-

ences of each generation have shaped its basic political outlook and partisan attachments for the rest of its life.

Current Political Generations

Today, the very elder edge of the electorate is occupied by the G.I. Generation (born 1901–24, today age 90+). Coming of age with the double shock of the Great Depression and World War II, this generation of young adults overwhelmingly favored the New Deal party of “big government” and the presidency of “Dr. Win the War” FDR. Highly unionized during their working-age years (and big joiners of AARP after retirement), G.I.s used their heavy voting clout to keep both houses of Congress Democratic nearly all of their lives—even if they did sometimes vote for GOP Presidents belonging to their own generation, like Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Even after the GOP took the House in 1994, these peers of Jimmy Stewart continued to be more likely than younger Americans to vote Democratic.

Dominating the ranks of today’s retirees is the Silent Generation (born 1925–42, today age 72–89). Coming of age during the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy presidencies—amid a popular backlash against the statist activism of the New Deal and World War II eras—the young, conformist Silent leaned more Republican than the rest. While the Silent produced nearly all of the most famous civil-rights leaders and “good government” reformers of the postwar era, they have never favored a strong executive (no Silent has ever been elected President) and have tended to return to their GOP roots as they have grown older.

Occupying midlife and beginning to surge past age 65 is the Boom Generation (born 1943–60, today age 54–71). Boomers came of age during the anti-institutional upheavals that rocked America during the late 1960s and ‘70s—transforming them into counter-culture rebels whose fixation on values has not weakened as they have grown older. Today, as America’s senior political leaders, they define themselves (in the eyes of older and younger voters) as a generation of “blue” vs. “red” culture warriors, better at debating their convictions than at passing new laws or implementing new policies.

In the 1960s, Boomers pushed the Democratic Party toward radicalism and the nation toward liberalism. In the 1980s, they pushed the Republican Party to-

ward radicalism and the nation toward conservatism. As a whole, they've been pretty evenly balanced between parties. First-wave Boomers (today in their 60s) have more years of education than younger Boomers, have done better economically, vote more reliably, gravitate to humanist or mainstream churches, and vote more for Democrats. Last-wave Boomers (today in their 50s) experienced a rapid fall in college attendance, lag far behind first-wavers economically, vote less often, veer toward atheism or "born-again" evangelicalism, and vote more for Republicans. In recent elections, first-wave Boomers have tilted toward the Democrats; their younger brothers and sisters have favored the GOP.

Today's emerging midlife leaders and the parents of most school-age kids belong to Generation X (born 1961–81, age 33–53). The left-alone children of the Consciousness Revolution who later came of age during an era that stressed free agency, personal ownership, and survivalism, Gen Xers tend to vote less often than older generations and have mixed feelings about membership in either party. This generation likes the social and cultural liberalism of Democrats but also favors the economic conservatism of the GOP.

Like Boomers, they show a strong political trend from oldest to youngest, but it tilts in the opposite direction. First-wave Xers, born in the early 1960s, first voted during the early Reagan years and have thereafter leaned heavily to the GOP. (Nowhere is this more evident than in the composition of Xer political leaders: Of all Xers who have ever served in the House, 60% are Republican. Among state governors, this figure rises to 71%.¹³) In the upcoming 2016 primaries, the GOP slate will be crowded with first-wave Xers while the Democratic slate may end up with none. Late-wave Xers, on the other hand, came of age with Clinton and now lean more toward the Democratic Party. Few if any of them are yet old enough to have acquired a national leadership reputation.

A Closer Look at the Millennial Generation

These political narratives provide a broader context for the trends we are seeing now among Millennials. Though their political attitudes cut across the well-known ideological dividing lines of older generations, Millennials do hold generally liberal views and tend to heavily favor Democratic candidates when at the polls.¹⁴ Most crucially, many of these trends are likely to endure as this

generation ages. They encompass a unique worldview that reflects Millennials' shared youth experiences and has already set into motion changes that have transformed each institution they have passed through.

To be sure, most Millennials still do not identify themselves as members of the Democratic Party. Their political loyalties are fluid, and in fact a record share of young adults today (50%) identify as politically independent. This means that although the Democratic Party clearly has the inside track, the lifelong political identity of today's rising generation is still up for grabs. The Republican Party still has a shot.

In this report, we offer a detailed overview of seven basic traits of the Millennial Generation. We explore how these traits influence young people's behavior, values, expectations, and political views—and the implications for GOP leaders.

- * Special
- * Sheltered
- * Teamworking
- * Consensus-Building
- * Conventional
- * Confident
- * Globally Engaged

In discussing this generation, we will be referring to those currently in young adulthood (first-wavers between the ages of 18 and 33). We are mindful that this generation also includes late-wave Millennials who have not reached adulthood yet. However, our other work indicates that, so far, they have many of the same attitudes and traits as those who have already come of age.

Special

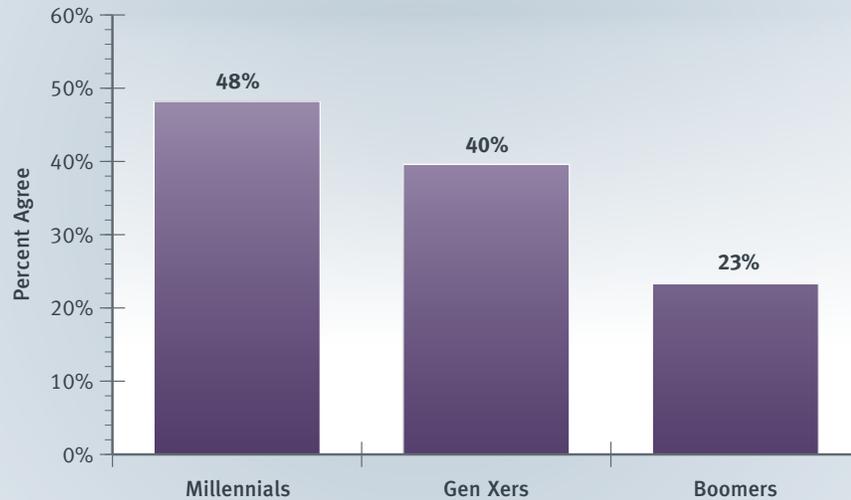
Millennials first arrived on the scene in the early 1980s. They have no memory of the Consciousness Revolution that was so defining for coming-of-age Boomers nor the hands-off parenting era in which Gen-X children were raised. Social and family experimentation was ebbing amid a growing sense that kids needed more structure and supervision. As the decade wore on, attitudes toward having and raising children became much more positive: “Baby on Board” signs appeared in the rear window of child-friendly minivans while Boomer parents began spending far more time with their kids than their own parents ever spent with them.¹⁵ Child safety and child abuse became hot topics as rates of divorce,¹⁶ of abortion,¹⁷ and of violence and abuse against children all fell steadily.¹⁸

This spotlight followed Millennials as they moved on to older age brackets. As the first wave of this generation entered grade school in 1989, public officials suddenly mobilized around a national school reform movement dubbed “Goals 2000” that demanded improved behavior and achievement from the high school Class of 2000. By 1998, over half of all adults—a record share—said

FIGURE 5

I am confident that Americans my age will solve our nation's biggest challenges

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



that “getting kids off to the right start” should be America’s top national priority.¹⁹ Politicians began discussing national issues that had nothing directly to do with children, from tax cuts to Social Security to the War on Terror, in terms of their impact on kids and teens. Boomers fired up culture wars focusing on “family values” that put Millennials at the very center of public debate.

Given this intense level of attention, it’s no wonder that Millennials have developed a sense of specialness to themselves, to their parents, and to the wider community. Their upbringing has instilled in them the sense that they are central to the nation’s well-being and to adults’ sense of purpose. As this generation has matured, the media glare has gotten even more blinding as Millennials have become the centerpiece of countless cover stories scrutinizing their attitudes and behaviors from every angle. While many of these headlines have been less than flattering, they have all reinforced the same basic message: Older generations are deeply invested in how Millennials are faring and feeling.

Today's Special Young Adults

As young adults, Millennials have arrived at the belief that their strengths are the nation's strengths. They see their tech savvy, adaptability, global outlook, and ability to navigate a vast sea of information as assets that can help change the world. In our survey, nearly half (48%) of Millennials say that they are “confident that Americans their age will solve the nation's biggest challenges”—compared to 40% of Xers and only 23% of Boomers.²⁰ This result doesn't just reflect the Millennials' youthful phase of life. As we shall see in Chapter 7 (“Confident”), it also reflects an assured optimism about the future that older generations did not share even when they were younger.

Millennials also equate young people's problems with the nation's problems. Ask youth today about their preferred type of community service, and their top choices are largely youth-focused—whether it's tutoring younger students, staffing a teen suicide hotline, volunteering at a local elementary school, or donating class money to start schools in Africa. Millennial adults put improving the quality of American education system at or near the top of the nation's policy priorities.²¹ Graduating college seniors in recent years routinely rank the Walt Disney Company and Teach for America (alongside the FBI and NSA) among their top ten “ideal employers.”²²

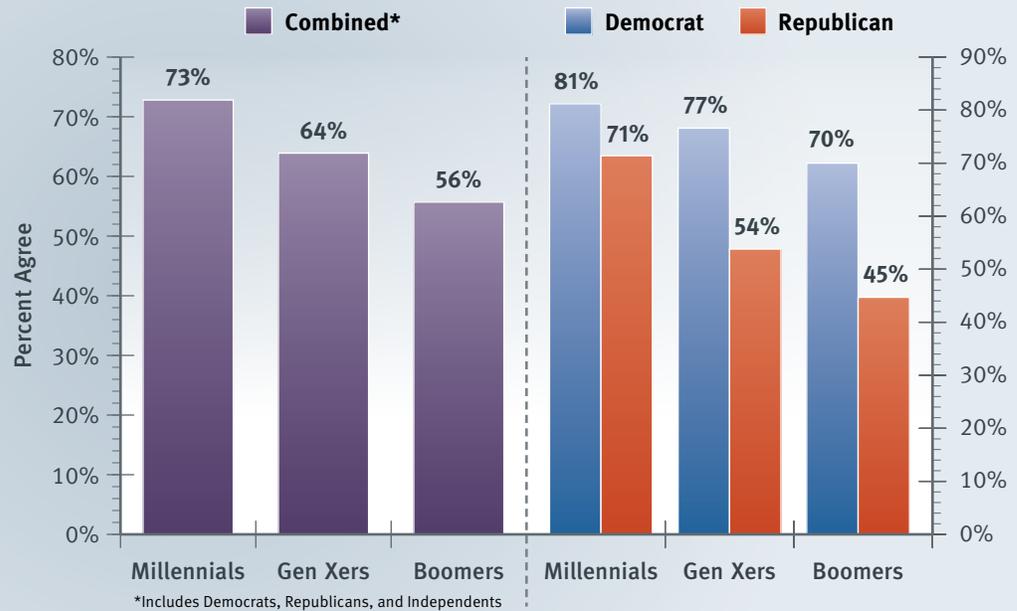
If every child is special, deserving of special care and attention, so too are unborn children. According to most surveys, the attitudes of today's young adults toward abortion do not differ much from those of all older generations²³; indeed, they slightly outpoll any older generation (even the Silent) in favoring “making abortion illegal in all circumstances.”²⁴ Though the overall abortion rate has been falling steadily for the last quarter century, it has been falling much faster among younger women (Millennials) than among older women.²⁵ Forty years ago, young Boomers were vastly more supportive of abortion rights than older generations.²⁶ No longer. Today's Millennials are giving national “March for Life” events a far more youthful cast.²⁷

As Millennials set out into the job market, most assume that they are still worth the same care, support, and attention that they received as kids. Only now, they are looking for less help from their parents and more from policymak-

FIGURE 6

Government should do more to help young Americans prepare and plan for their future careers

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



ers. Fully 72% of Millennials agree that “government should do more to help young Americans prepare and plan for their future careers”—outranking the 64% of Xers and 56% of Boomers who say the same. Out of this total, 34% of Millennials strongly agree, compared to 23% of Xers and only 13% of Boomers.²⁸

The gap between younger and older Republicans in their enthusiasm for helping youth is especially large. Among Millennials, support for this idea is high among both Democrats (81%) and Republicans (71%). Among Xers and Boomers, however, Republicans’ enthusiasm trails Democrats’ by ever-increasing margins: 20 percentage points among Xers (54% vs. 77%) and 25 percentage points among Boomers (45% vs. 70%). Similarly, a mere 5% of Republican Millennials *disagree* with this idea—a far smaller share than Republican Xers (22%) or Republican Boomers (31%).²⁹

Our focus group highlights a similar disconnect between young Republicans and traditional party principles. When asked to offer suggestions for what the

GOP could be doing to better appeal to their age group, Republican Millennials say that the government should lower the cost of tuition for students.³⁰ When asked to explain this preference, since as conservatives they would be expected to oppose government intervention, one woman explains that it's a matter of setting up more young adults to succeed. "They [in government] expect most people to go to college now. It's your only way to be successful," she says. "In order for that to happen, it'd be a lot easier if people aren't going out into the world with hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt."³¹

Implications for GOP Leaders

Millennials favor political leaders who express a sincere interest in their lives and concern about their future. They will give a sympathetic ear to any leader who tries to champion the young—including the unborn. Older Republicans and Democrats may differ hugely in how they think about public funding for preschool education and abortion rights. But Millennials are likely to see it all on the same continuum.

Millennials also favor political leaders who believe that strengths of young people should be celebrated and that their ideas should be listened to. Unlike Gen Xers at the same age (the *Wayne's World* line "We are not worthy!" would not resonate today), Millennials believe that they can make a difference in the long term and that their generation has an important role to play in American history.

Too often, political messages targeting this generation have instead aimed for the lowest common denominator. In 2013, for example, Millennials' critical role in determining the fate of Obamacare made them the target of dozens of ad campaigns urging them to sign up or stay away. Yet these efforts, laden with textspeak and shallow stereotypes, came off as patronizing.³² Reaching out to Millennials isn't a matter of piling on pop culture references, but instead giving serious consideration to issues affecting their long-term future—whether it's paying for college, alleviating student debt loads, offering a clear path into the workforce, or affording a first home. It also means making an effort to engage with this generation in the new media spaces that they favor (like YouTube or BuzzFeed) without assuming that these methods are by design any less substantive than traditional outreach. Regardless of their political identification, Millennials are

TAKEAWAYS

Treat young voters and children as VIPs.

Focus on policies affecting kids and young adults.

Resist the urge to "dumb down" messages aimed at youth.

keenly interested in policies affecting their age bracket—and leaders should take care to present their position to them without dumbing it down.

Sheltered

M

illennials have been the focus of one of the most sweeping child protection movements in American history. From child-safety devices to electronic activity trackers to Amber Alerts, adults have surrounded young people with an ever-larger fortress of measures designed to shield them from injury and predation. These policies have followed them onto campus in the form of blue-light phones, “party patrols,”

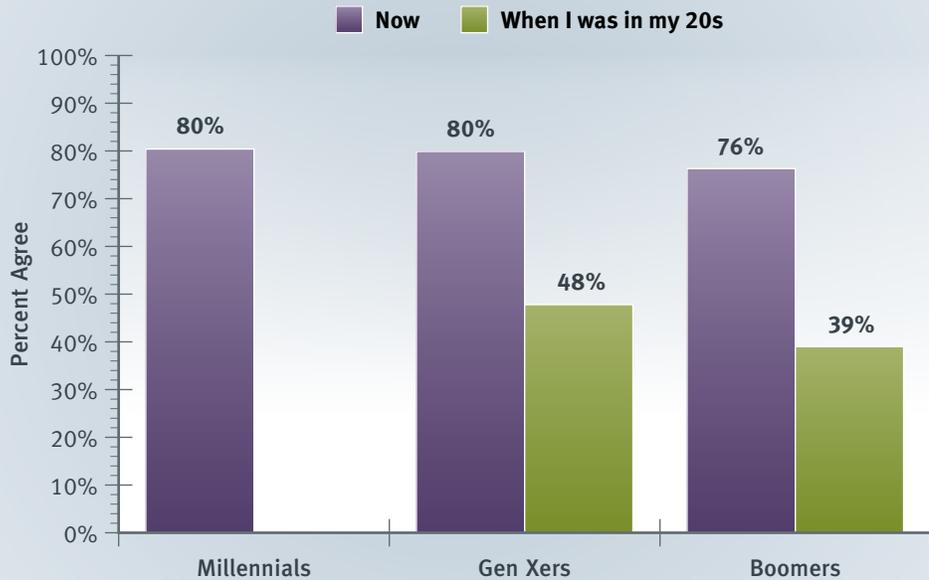
scaled-up counseling services, and even “safe spaces” for students feeling traumatized by “troubling” discussions.³³ In recent years, concern over youth safety has spurred public debates over issues like parents leaving their children unattended and whether kids should be allowed to play sports like football and hockey. Though all data indicate that the likelihood of harm to young people has fallen dramatically over the past two decades, the threshold of public tolerance for such harm has been falling even faster—which is why public alarm continues to rise.

Far from rebelling against this rising wall of adult protection, Millennials accept it as just another sign that they are a special generation. Today’s young people have come to expect authoritative security and monitoring that prior

FIGURE 7

The idea of long-term planning is important to me

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



generations at the same age would have assailed as unnecessary and intrusive. Gen-X youth would have distrusted the motives of older people wanting to protect them—and in any case took pride in their ability to take care of themselves. But Millennial youth have largely acceded to the new logic: Since they’re special, it’s only natural that older people would want to protect them.

This mindset explains why Millennials are also taking great care to protect themselves from risk. Generally speaking, today’s young people are acting more cautiously than prior generations did at the same age. Most notably, they have driven a far-reaching decline in risky lifestyle behaviors over the past two decades. Rates of teen pregnancy and violent youth crime have both declined dramatically,³⁴ while rates of teen drinking and smoking have dropped to record lows.³⁵ Of the 46 “youth risk indicators” that have been continuously monitored by the CDC from 1995 to 2013, nearly all of them (42) have improved.³⁶ Political analyst Michael Barone goes so far as to label Millennials “a new Victorian generation.”³⁷

Today's Sheltered Young Adults

Early-wave Millennials are shying away from personal risk in nearly every aspect of their lives. As was true when they were growing up, these young adults are experiencing rapidly falling accident rates (auto accidents especially³⁸), a shrinking share of fatal drug overdoses³⁹, and falling rates of crime victimization⁴⁰ and incarceration.⁴¹ (From 2000 to 2013, surprisingly, the share of Americans under age 30 in state or federal prisons fell by one third—while the share of those age 55+ more than tripled.⁴²)

Millennials take their personal safety very seriously. The large recent influx of high-achieving young adults into core urban areas would never have occurred without very steep declines in urban youth crime. In this sense, the youth gentrification of major cities—from Los Angeles and San Francisco to New York and Washington, DC—is both the cause and the result of this decline in risk tolerance. Significantly, overall Millennial attitudes toward gun control don't differ much from those of older generations.⁴³ The perceived safety gain from a law that would restrict others from owning a gun is balanced, in their eyes, by the perceived safety loss from not being able to own one themselves.

While Millennials are not hypochondriacs, they are health conscious. Having seen so many doctors and been prescribed so many medications when they were children, they take medical supervision for granted. Nearly half of 18- to 29-year-olds—more than any other age group—prefer health insurance plans with higher premiums and a lower deductible, defying assumptions that healthy young people would simply opt for the cheapest plans possible.⁴⁴ Millennials are not thrilled by the complexity of Obamacare nor by the implicit subsidy it requires younger adults to pay older adults, but they do like the idea that everyone somehow needs to be covered.⁴⁵

Millennials also show prudence in their financial and professional lives. Many observers note this generation's reluctance to invest in real estate or the stock market, an aversion undoubtedly shaped by their having been hit hard by the financial crisis—and the long shadow of the Great Recession—early in their careers. “Younger employees are saving more rigorously than their parents or grandparents,” runs the headline of a recent TD Ameritrade report,

which found that a much larger share of employees under age 35 are contributing to retirement plans than young Boomers or Xers did at the same age.⁴⁶ Auto-enrollment explains some of this shift, but not the fact that Millennials are paying into their 401(k)s at double the default contribution rate. A 2014 report from investment banking company UBS dubbed Millennials “the most fiscally conservative generation since the Great Depression.”⁴⁷

Other data indicate that this generation is less inclined toward entrepreneurship. From 1989 to 2013, the share of people under age 30 who own private businesses fell from 10.6% to 3.6%—a 24-year-low, according to Federal Reserve data.⁴⁸ While some of this decline can be attributed to economic hardship, many Millennials have simply decided to opt for safer paths. A survey from Babson College finds that 41% of 25- to 34-year-olds cite “fear of failure” as their biggest roadblock to starting a business—up from 24% in 2001.⁴⁹ Though media reports often portray Millennials as spurning the 9-to-5 working world in favor of freelancing, the reality is that many of these young people are “permalancing” out of economic necessity and would prefer the security of a permanent position.

Millennials are also looking to stay on track by planning for the future. Conventional wisdom dictates that youth are impulsive and tend to live day-to-day. Yet when asked in our survey if “the idea of long-term planning is important to me,” Millennials (80%) come out on par with Xers (80%) and actually outdo Boomers (76%).⁵⁰ That impulsive stereotype may well have been true for today’s older generations back in their youth: Only 48% of Xers and 39% of Boomers agree that long-term planning was important to them in their twenties—vastly smaller shares than Millennials today.

Implications for GOP Leaders

When Boomer and Xers leaders talk to young adults about their future, they often do so in a swaggering, risk-taking style—even bragging about how many times they have failed.⁵¹ This style does not connect well with Millennials, who will gladly take some risks, but only after they know what the stakes are. They certainly don’t want to fail and repeat the mistakes of their parents or of other

older family members they know—many of whom took risks that left them without a job, without a career, or without any retirement savings.

Millennials' strong attachment to their families and circles of friends derives in part from the role that both can play in backstopping against life risks. And their fear of failure often stems from their unwillingness to disappoint or burden those close to them. Millennials actually welcome a discussion of policies designed to protect people from risk, whether it's preventing employees from losing benefits, taking dangerous products off retail shelves, or cracking down on predatory payday lending. They are also very open to arguments in favor of conservative policy goals—such as personal saving, gun control, or marriage before parenthood—when phrased in terms of reducing life risks.

As Millennials enter the professional world, political leaders should also consider how to offer them clearer and more structured pathways. The growing calls among both Republicans and Democrats to expand vocational training and offer more alternatives to four-year colleges, for instance, are in the right wheelhouse.

More broadly, Millennials would welcome any tool that makes it easier to weigh the pros and cons of major life decisions, such as taking on student debt. Outcomes-based assessment in education has long been a key Republican idea; its biggest champion was once Bush administration Education Secretary Margaret Spellings.⁵² But GOP leaders have allowed this message to slip away from them and into the hands of President Obama, who has proposed the creation of a college ratings system that would take into account factors such as tuition costs, graduation rates, and employment outcomes.⁵³ The current administration has also called for the Department of Education to enlist technology leaders in a “Datapalooza” to build new apps and services that can help students evaluate the value of different programs or choose which classes to take.⁵⁴

This most recent push has been met with dismay by many college presidents, who argue that a liberal arts education cannot be boiled down to mere numbers.⁵⁵ But times have changed. Where young, idealistic Boomers pursued their dreams without worrying about the odds and entrepreneurially savvy Xers



TAKEAWAYS

Help young people avoid risk—and plan for the future.

Make better outcomes information available to students, consumers, and borrowers.

Enable young people to get feedback on whether they're safely “on track.”

dove headfirst into job-market risks, Millennials are looking for a safety net. They assume that there must be a best-practice method for making safe life decisions—and they want to know what it is in order to take on exactly the level of risk that they are willing to accept.



Teamworking

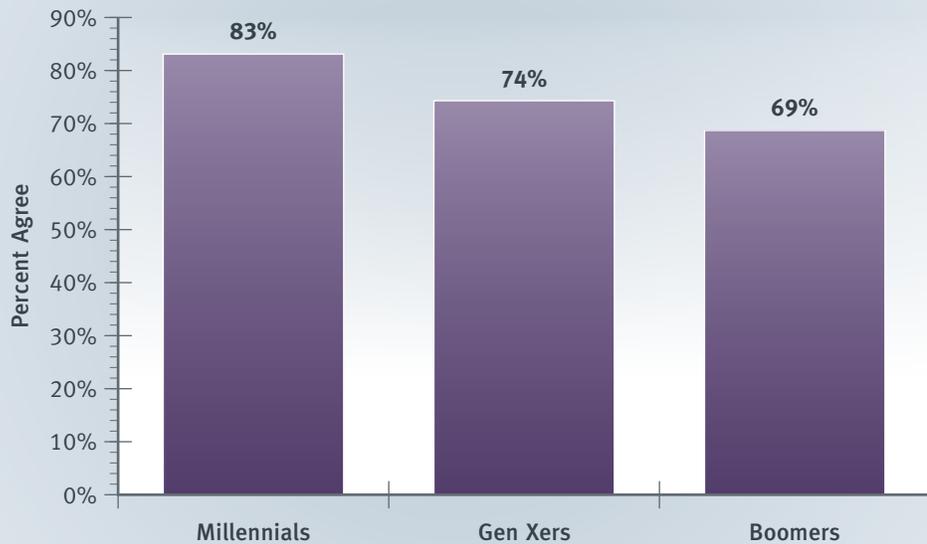
From preschool through grad school, Millennials have been developing strong team instincts and tight peer bonds. In the Gen-X youth era, adults told kids to look after themselves and do everything they could to ensure their own success in life. In the Millennial youth era, adults told kids to look after each other and do everything they can to help the community succeed. Through group projects, peer grading, student juries, honor systems, and the like, Boomer educators have encouraged Millennials to acquire the sorts of team habits and civic attitudes that were seldom stressed when Boomers and Xers were kids.

As Millennials grew up, we began to see team-oriented traits emerge. During the 1990s, there was a sharp decline in the share of eighth and tenth graders who felt lonely or wished they had more friends⁵⁶—and a growing desire to share the credit for winning. Colleges started adding more common rooms and lounges to dorms so students could spend more time together in groups. Social media sites flourished among young adults who wanted to stay connected. Technologies like smartphones rapidly added new features that allowed Millennials to stay “in touch” at all times. And surveys have reflected a rising

FIGURE 8

Helping others in need is a strong priority for me

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

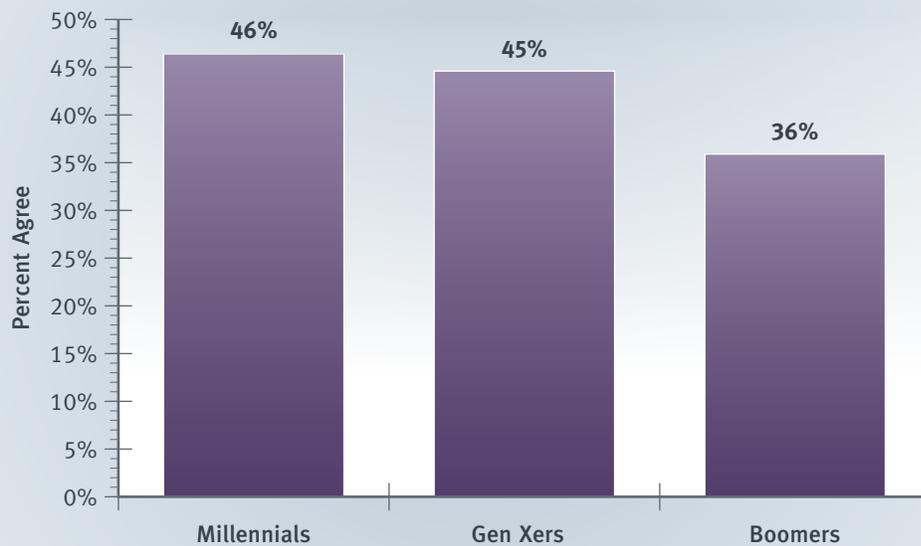


sense of civic obligation, which have translated into rising rates of community service⁵⁷ and a reversal of the youth voting rate decline of the 1990s.⁵⁸

Today's Teamworking Young Adults

The teamworking traits evident in Millennials' childhood have transformed their everyday lives into one big connected experience. During the day, they collaborate on projects at school and at work, occasionally texting friends and family or checking their Facebook and Twitter feeds for the latest news. In the evening, they invite friends over to watch TV or play video games, during which they're bombarded by ads from beer vendors depicting giant parties or from car manufacturers showing groups of friends riding around having a great time. And on weekends they check into their Foursquare app, which automatically posts their location on their Facebook newsfeed for all to see.

FIGURE 9



I like the idea of mandatory national public service—requiring everyone to spend a year or two doing something for their community

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

Our survey confirms the heightened importance of teamwork and community for this generation. When asked if “helping others in need is a strong priority for me,” fully 83% of Millennials agree, compared to 74% of Xers and 69% of Boomers.⁵⁹ Further, almost half of Millennials “like the idea of mandatory national public service—requiring everyone to spend a year or two doing things for their community,” a share larger than any other generation.⁶⁰ When Boomers were young adults, this very idea—then, the draft—led to protesters flooding the streets.

Millennials’ community-oriented mindset shows up clearly in our survey question asking respondents whether government should promote the “principle of community” or the “principle of self-reliance.” Boomers split 50%-50% on this question; Millennials split 71%-29% in favor of community. (See “Introduction” on page 11.) It also underlies how they believe government

FIGURE 10

Which view comes closest to your own?

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

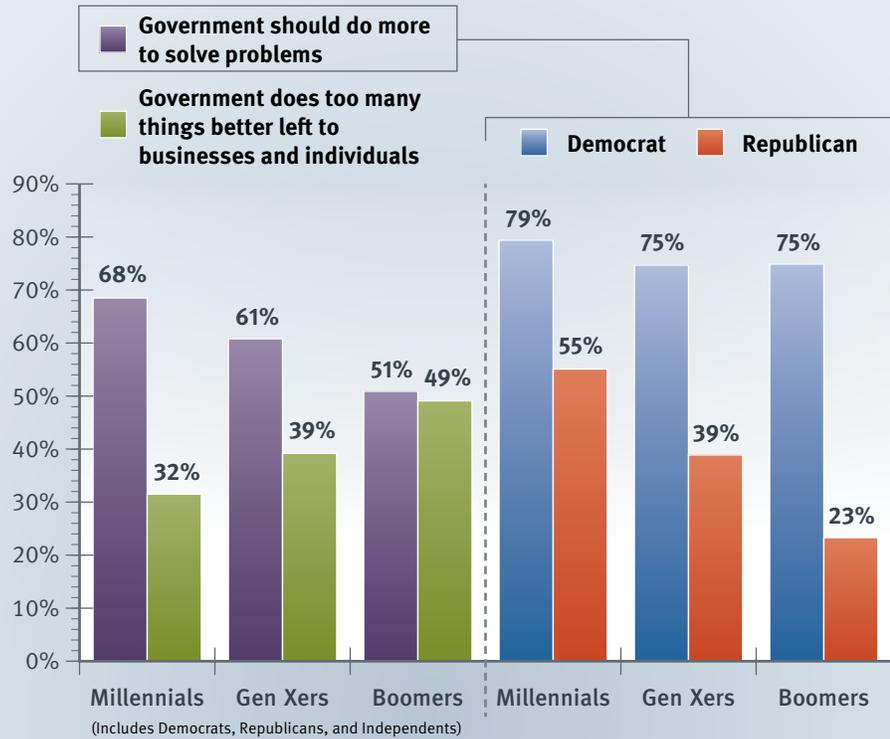
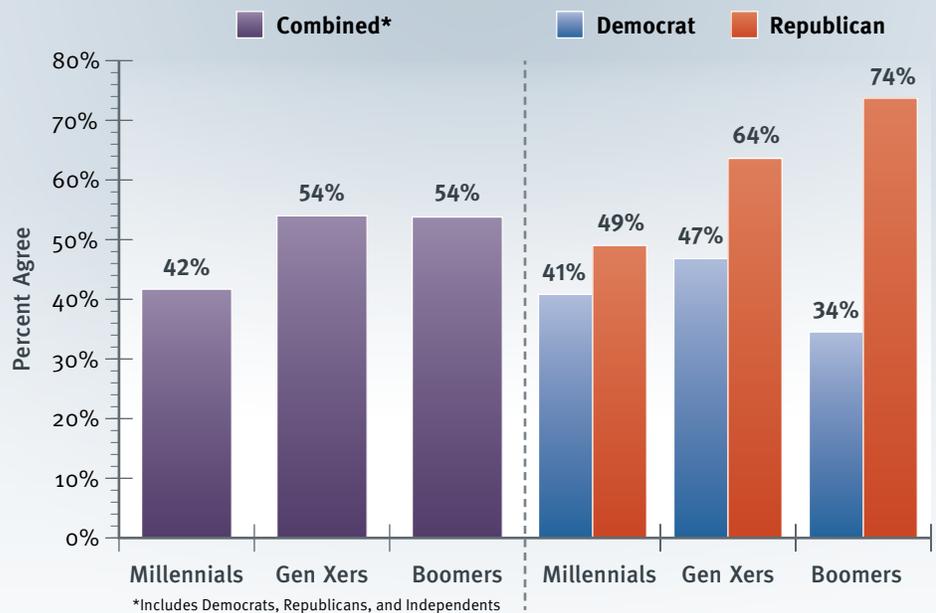


FIGURE 11

When something is run by the government, it is usually inefficient and wasteful

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



should function. When asked whether “government should do more to solve problems” or “government does too many things better left to individuals and businesses,” a predictably large 79% of Democratic Millennials pick the former. What’s more surprising is that even a majority (55%) of Republican Millennials agree with this activism⁶¹—versus a mere 23% of Republican Boomers. What’s more, fully 73% of Millennials believe that “a free economy needs government regulation in order to best serve the public interest.”⁶² And this generation (Republicans and Democrats alike) is the only one surveyed in which the majority doesn’t believe that government programs are “usually inefficient and wasteful.”⁶³

All of these findings present a unique opportunity for the GOP to connect with Millennials. This generation’s conservatism is certainly not their parents’ conservatism, but their desire for an efficient government that solves community problems is something that the GOP is well-positioned to address.

Implications for GOP Leaders

The GOP can reach Millennials by showcasing positive roles for government and community. On the federal level, Republican leaders should emphasize smarter rather than smaller government and how government can be more effective even while decreasing its costs. The rise of the sharing economy is a perfect example of how the GOP can leverage the success of a new business model. The sharing economy has shaken the foundation of top-down legacy industries by providing easy access to rides, rooms, and more without the often-burdensome regulations that have hamstrung traditional players. It constitutes a new form of community that has been strongly embraced by Millennials. Emphasize the efficiency of these decentralized, market-driven, and participatory approaches—and how they will cut down on bureaucratic bloat—and Millennials will listen.

One way to harness this generation’s desire for involved leaders while maintaining smaller government is to champion small-scale solutions. GOP leaders could tout the importance of local businesses, nonprofits, and the church to community well-being—and point out that in many cases, local engagement is more effective than top-down intervention. Manifestos like Gavin

TAKEAWAYS

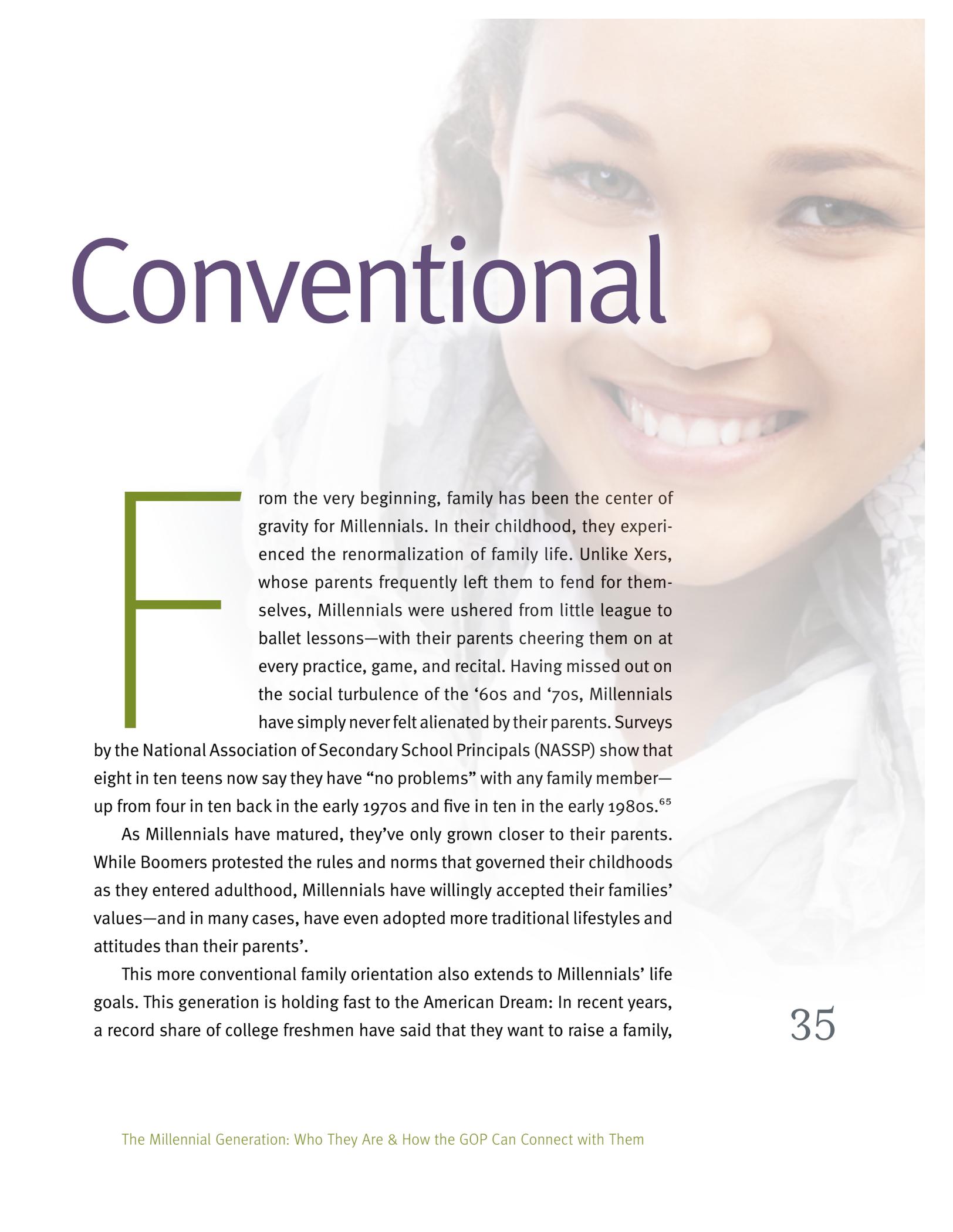
Showcase positive roles for government and community.

Promote a culture of public service.

Adopt language of cooperation—sharing, teams, friends, helping, groups, connection, consensus, etc.

Newsom’s *Citizenville* (“How to Take the Town Square Digital and Reinvent Government”)⁶⁴ are gathering supporters among young Democrats. This is territory that the Republicans should energetically seek to reclaim.

GOP leaders should also promote a culture of public service. As we’ve seen in our survey, Millennials are more likely than Xers and Boomers to believe that public service should be encouraged and even required: They want to be an active part of the solution for problems that matter to them. By calling for citizens to do their part, politicians can appeal to young adults—while also taking some of the burden off of government. Language of cooperation can help convey this message: By using words such as “teams,” “helping,” and “connection,” politicians may be more likely to grab Millennials’ attention.



Conventional

From the very beginning, family has been the center of gravity for Millennials. In their childhood, they experienced the renormalization of family life. Unlike Xers, whose parents frequently left them to fend for themselves, Millennials were ushered from little league to ballet lessons—with their parents cheering them on at every practice, game, and recital. Having missed out on the social turbulence of the ‘60s and ‘70s, Millennials have simply never felt alienated by their parents. Surveys by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) show that eight in ten teens now say they have “no problems” with any family member—up from four in ten back in the early 1970s and five in ten in the early 1980s.⁶⁵

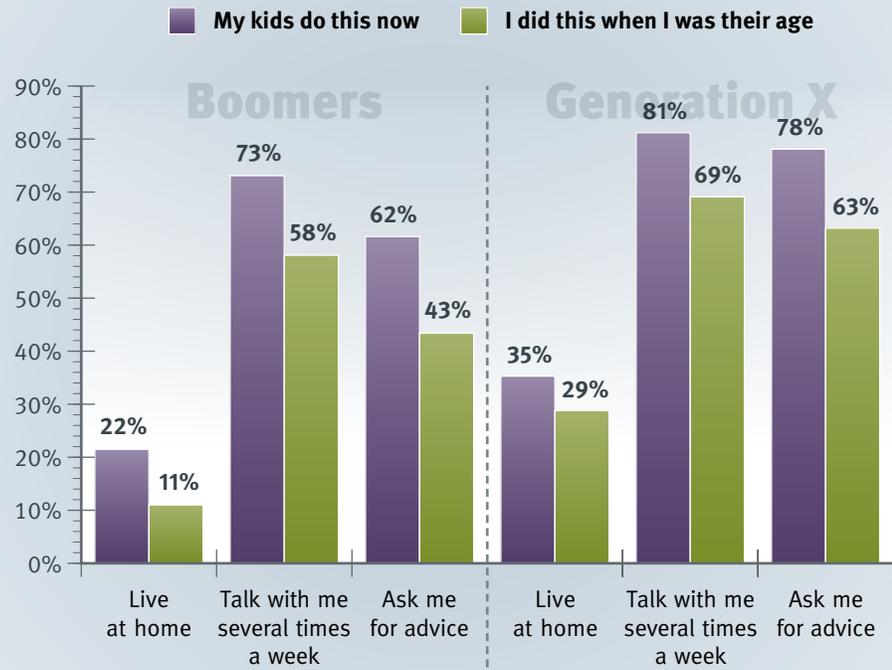
As Millennials have matured, they’ve only grown closer to their parents. While Boomers protested the rules and norms that governed their childhoods as they entered adulthood, Millennials have willingly accepted their families’ values—and in many cases, have even adopted more traditional lifestyles and attitudes than their parents’.

This more conventional family orientation also extends to Millennials’ life goals. This generation is holding fast to the American Dream: In recent years, a record share of college freshmen have said that they want to raise a family,

FIGURE 12

*Boomers (age 53–72)
vs Xers (ages 33–52),
when asked about
their adult children*

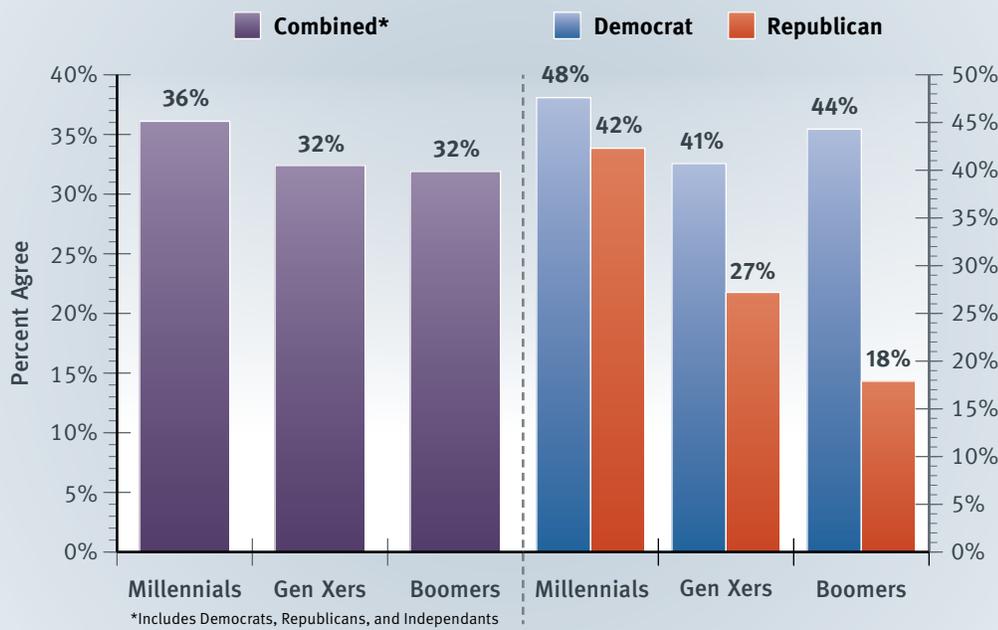
Source: Congressional Institute-
LifeCourse survey (2014)



even if they later take their time starting one.⁶⁶ Young people also express high levels of respect for national institutions, traditions, and family values—including monogamy and parenthood (94%), marriage (84%), the U.S. Constitution (88%), and the military (84%).⁶⁷

As they strive to achieve educational, career, and family goals, Millennials are placing their trust in the system. This generation has grown accustomed to relying on protective institutions to help them make good life choices—in K-12 schools, colleges, and in the workplace. Over the course of the past decade, they’ve taken Advanced Placement exams in droves, more than doubling the number of passing AP grades over the last decade.⁶⁸ They are also boosting educational attainment, with the share of all 25- to-29-year-olds who have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher increasing from 23% to 34% from 1990 to 2013.⁶⁹ This driven generation hopes that these credentials will earn them a slice of the American Dream. Unlike Boomers, who famously “stuck it to the

FIGURE 13



I trust the government to do the right thing in most situations

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

man,” Millennials have shown little desire to rebel and persist in believing that by following the rules, they will find a way to succeed within the system. Today’s young adults are providing a modern twist to the traditional belief that social rules and institutional standards pave the road to success.

Today’s Conventional Young Adults

As they’ve matured, Millennials have maintained strong emotional bonds with their parents and often ask them for guidance. In our survey, 70% of Millennials agree that they often seek advice from their parents—exceeding the share of Xers (65%) and Boomers (57%) who say they did the same when they were in their teens and twenties.⁷⁰ A similar gap emerges when Xers and Boomers were asked whether their children often ask for their advice and whether they did the same when they were their kids’ age. It turns out that Republican parents are particularly close to their offspring. A remarkable 94% of Millennial Republicans

say that they talk to their parents several times a week. This is a big generational shift from the 69% of Xer Republicans and 62% of Boomer Republicans who say they did the same in their youth—and the shift is bigger among Republicans than Democrats.⁷¹

Not only are Millennials and their parents emotionally attached, they are also living in close proximity. This trend long preceded the recession of 2008, and has continued as the economy recovers—signaling stronger family relationships at least as much as greater economic dependence. According to Census data, 23% of 25- to 34-year-olds lived in a multi-generational household in 2012, up from a postwar low of 11% in 1980.⁷² Our survey points to the same trend, with 35% of Xers and 22% of Boomers saying they have adult children who live at home.⁷³ These figures far exceed the shares of Boomers and Xers who say they lived under the same roof as their parents at the same age.

This closeness doesn't just reflect the proliferation of smartphones and text messages. Studies show that families are increasingly talking about more personal topics. According to AARP research, Millennials are more comfortable discussing sensitive subjects with their parents—namely, their emotional lives (friends, relationships, dreams) and their financial lives (careers, spending, savings)—than Boomers were when they were young adults.⁷⁴

As they look ahead, what Millennials expect from life as they grow older seems similarly conventional. According to MetLife, this generation aspires to attain the basic elements of the American Dream (marriage, children, home, college education, and financial security) at least as much as older generations do.⁷⁵ Millennials are also ruthlessly meritocratic, believing that one must achieve to be rewarded. They have far exceeded both Boomers and Xers in the sheer quantity of educational exams they have willingly studied for and passed. In their late 20s, they have pushed both the high school graduation rate and four-year college attainment to historic highs. They also assume that achievement is color blind. A majority disapproves of affirmative action in jobs and higher education—and does so by about the same margin as older generations.⁷⁶

As they look forward in their personal lives, Millennials aim for family ideals that are similarly conventional—though (by their own admission) many are struggling to attain them. While only 26% of Millennial adults (age 18–32)

have yet married—a figure far below the married shares of earlier generations at the same age⁷⁷—aspirations to marry eventually remain nearly as high as ever. A majority (69%) of unmarried Millennials say that they want to get married; they just aren't financially ready. While wealthier Millennials are tying the knot, those in tough financial straits are waiting to get hitched. Similarly, young adults today have been slower to have children—but 74% say they still want to have kids at some point.⁷⁸ A parallel dynamic applies as well to lower homeownership rates.⁷⁹

Millennials' desire for mainstream success in their family and career lives is mirrored in their very conventional faith in big institutions—including government. To be sure, overall trust in government is at historic lows across all age brackets.⁸⁰ But today's Millennials consistently express more trust in government than older generations. For instance, in the latest Pew survey about how Americans view federal agencies, Millennials gave the most positive ratings of all generations to agencies ranging from the VA (61%) to the NSA (61%) to even the IRS (53%).⁸¹ For the latter two agencies, approval drops 22 and 13 percentage points, respectively, among those 65 and older.

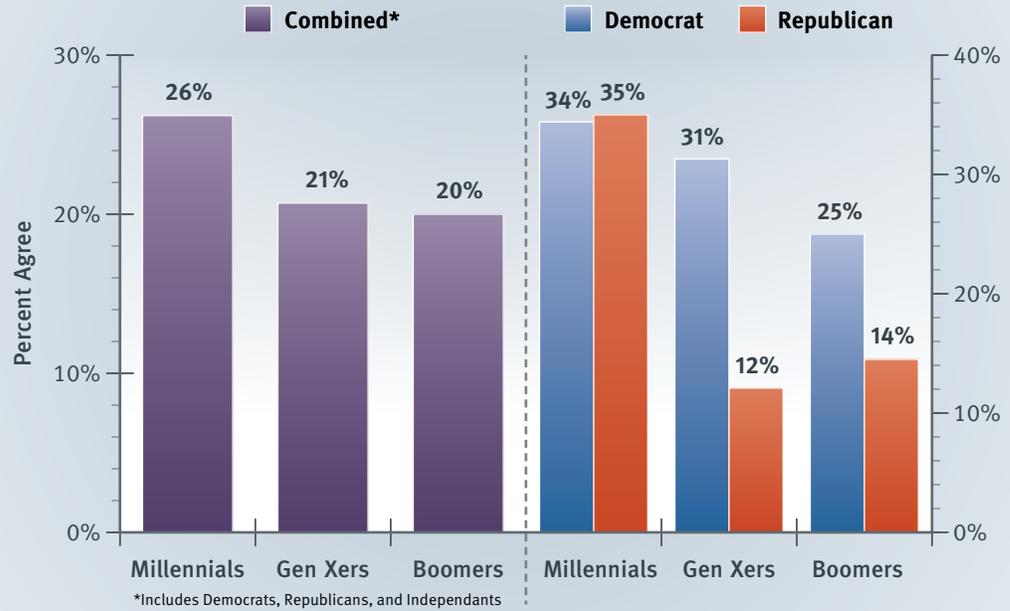
A similar pattern emerges with other institutions. Though surveys show that trust remains dismal across the board, Millennials report higher levels of trust in small businesses, churches, public schools, and corporations than older generations.⁸² All of this is a complete inversion of the generational pattern that prevailed during the 1970s. Back then, it is worth recalling, not only did young Boomers boast that they would “trust no one over 30,” they also registered notoriously little trust in any institution, including government—far *less* than older generations at that time.

Our survey also shows that Millennials are more trusting of the intentions of government than older generations. For instance, while 36% of Millennials say that they “trust the government to do the right thing in most situations,” only 32% of Boomers and Xers feel the same way.⁸³ Among Republicans, the generational divide is even starker: 42% of Millennials, 27% of Xers, and 18% of Boomers agree with this statement. Similarly, 35% of Millennial Republicans say that “when the government tells me something, I usually believe it”—a statement only 12% of Xer Republicans and 15% of Boomer Republicans agree with.

FIGURE 14

When the government tells me something, I usually believe it

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



It's not just that Millennials trust the government; they also expect more from it. Though unhappy with today's political gridlock, Millennials still believe in government's potential and want leaders to take an active role in solving public problems. According to Pew, a majority of Millennials (53%) favor a bigger government providing more services over a smaller government providing fewer services—outranking Silent and Boomers by 31 and 21 percentage points, respectively.⁸⁴ And when asked if it's the government's responsibility to ensure health care coverage for all, Millennials (who consume the least health care) are the most supportive of the idea at 54%.

While trusting a wide variety of institutions more than older generations, Millennials do not embrace all institutions with equal warmth. Most notably, Millennials share with older generations a general aversion to financial institutions: They are more likely than older people to be “unbanked” or “underbanked”⁸⁵ and to place a high priority on freeing themselves from all forms

of debt.⁸⁶ Millennials are also relatively unattached to religious institutions. Surveys show that, after leaving secondary school, they have lower levels of religious affiliation and lower rates of church attendance than Boomers and Xers exhibited at the same age⁸⁷ (though this may be linked to their later age of marriage).

Implications for GOP Leaders

GOP leaders should address a more inclusive image of “family” to gain Millennials’ attention and respect. As a growing share of young adults still lives with their parents, leaders need to acknowledge that this generation often continues to identify with its extended family. When discussing the rising cost of college, for example, leaders should approach tuition and student loans as financial burdens that affect both parents and their children and present solutions families can navigate together.

They also need to acknowledge that the definition of the nuclear family is broadening—and that for most Millennials, a married mother and father living together with 2.5 kids isn’t “family” as they know it. Even while Millennials continue to insist on marriage as the ideal (and agree with older generations that single parenting is “bad for society”⁸⁸), roughly 45% of all births to Millennials are out of wedlock.⁸⁹ Some of these unwed parents later marry; most don’t. And of those who don’t, most receive help raising their kids from their extended family. The vast majority say they didn’t get married because they couldn’t afford it, their lives were too unsettled, or they simply couldn’t find a “marriageable” partner.⁹⁰ Whatever the reason, they work and hope for better times ahead while taking pride in whatever provisional family they now enjoy.

In our interviews, Echelon Insights co-founder Kristen Soltis Anderson sums up this point, saying: “[For] many young people, family means multiple generations living under the same roof. Maybe they’ve not decided to get married even though they have kids, and they don’t feel like they have to walk down the aisle to make it official. I think that’s something Republicans need to keep in mind. That when they think of the word ‘family,’ what young people interpret Republicans saying is family means ‘my type of family,’ not a broad definition of family.”⁹¹

TAKEAWAYS

Co-market to all generations using an expanded definition of “family.”

Help Millennials climb the meritocracy ladder so they can achieve the American Dream.

Recognize that Millennial views on many social issues can be leveraged to your advantage.

Amid these shifting family structures, GOP leaders need to understand why young adults turn so readily to mainstream institutions, including government, for help. Fully 55% of Millennials—more than any other generation—say that it’s important to “achieve the American Dream in [my] lifetime.”⁹² In the wake of the Great Recession, unfortunately, many sense that the dream is slipping beyond their reach. Millennials have been coming of age into the worst youth economy by far since the Great Depression, and however much their sense of “specialness” sustains them, they cannot help but feel the stress.

Consider this finding from the Pew Research Center: Between 2008 and 2012, the share of Americans under age 30 who consider themselves “lower” or “lower middle” class jumped from 25% to 48%—a much larger jump than any other age bracket.⁹³ According to the Census, the share of 25- to 29-year-olds who are neither living alone nor heading a family has grown from 36% in 2000 to 48% in 2014.⁹⁴ Most of this increase is equally divided between growth in young people living with parents and young people living with friends. Yes, Millennials love their parents and are connected to their friends, but like all generations they do look forward to launching their own lives and families.

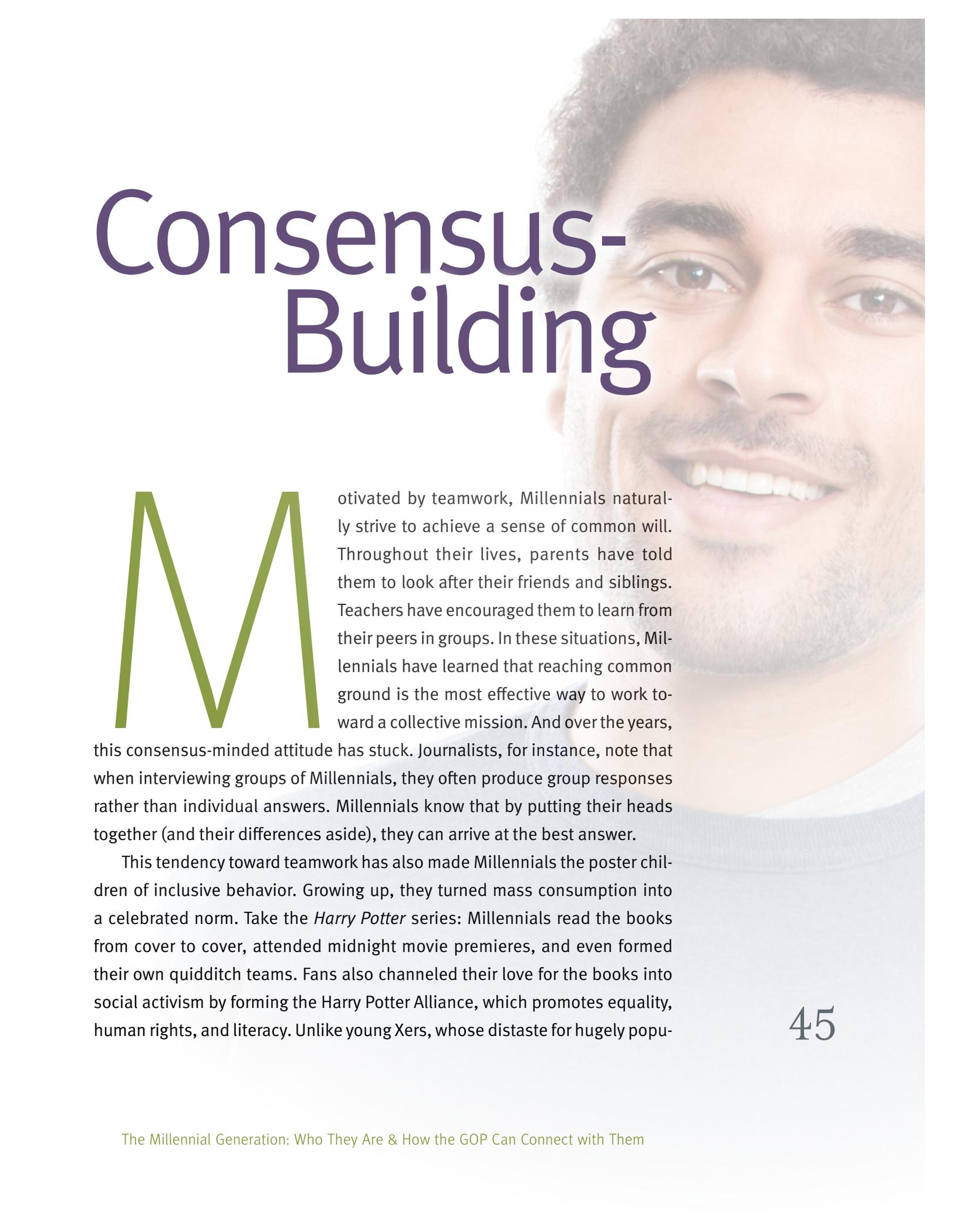
So the first big lesson for GOP leaders is simply this: A rising share of young people think that the American Dream is out of reach and available only to individuals with means—in stark contrast to their parents, who largely regarded the American Dream as a birthright open to everyone.⁹⁵ But they would like it to be otherwise. Here is where government enters the picture. What Millennials most want from government is nothing more than modest assistance and guidance in their efforts to work and achieve: help with the rising cost of post-secondary education, or help financing college or housing debt, or help shoring up local infrastructure. GOP conservatives often express dismay at Millennials’ desire for “more” or “bigger” government. But what they really want is quite inexpensive, typically achievable through “discretionary” appropriated outlays; they are perfectly willing to trim back on much vaster entitlement outlays. (See “Confident” section on page 53.)

It’s worth adding that the Millennial desire for public help is not motivated by any sense of grievance, but rather by a very conventional desire to join the same middle class, now endangered, that their parents took for granted.

These first-wave Millennials are aware that their Boomer moms and dads—and their Silent and G.I. grandmoms and granddads—once enjoyed cheap public colleges, easy starter home loans, and flush local governments. They wonder if just a bit of that largesse couldn't be made available for them as well. To quote a returning soldier's wish from *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946): "All I want's a good job, a mild future, a little house big enough for me and my wife." To which the movie's (and the federal government's) answer was: "I don't think that's too much to ask."

The second big lesson is that Millennial attitudes on "social issues" should not be regarded as a generational monolith, with all them leaning against the GOP. In fact, as we have seen, Millennials differ little from older generations on a whole host of social issues of vital concern to conservatives. These include abortion, gun control, affirmative action, importance of family, desirability of marriage and children, and faith in a meritocratic society. If GOP leaders are smart about how they reach out, they can connect with Millennials on any of these issues.

To be sure, there are some social issues on which Millennial definitely part company with older generations—such as gay marriage (and gay rights generally), immigration amnesty, the legalization of marijuana, and a broader definition of "family."⁹⁶ But all told, this isn't a bad balance for GOP leaders to work with. None of these issues are showstoppers. Once upon a time, back in the tear-gas filled 1970s, G.I. Generation conservatives would have longed to reach out to a youth generation as fundamentally conventional as this one.



Consensus-Building

M

otivated by teamwork, Millennials naturally strive to achieve a sense of common will. Throughout their lives, parents have told them to look after their friends and siblings. Teachers have encouraged them to learn from their peers in groups. In these situations, Millennials have learned that reaching common ground is the most effective way to work toward a collective mission. And over the years,

this consensus-minded attitude has stuck. Journalists, for instance, note that when interviewing groups of Millennials, they often produce group responses rather than individual answers. Millennials know that by putting their heads together (and their differences aside), they can arrive at the best answer.

This tendency toward teamwork has also made Millennials the poster children of inclusive behavior. Growing up, they turned mass consumption into a celebrated norm. Take the *Harry Potter* series: Millennials read the books from cover to cover, attended midnight movie premieres, and even formed their own quidditch teams. Fans also channeled their love for the books into social activism by forming the Harry Potter Alliance, which promotes equality, human rights, and literacy. Unlike young Xers, whose distaste for hugely popu-

lar brands pushed them to pursue pop culture niches, Millennials believe that universal appeal enhances rather than diminishes. When it comes to social trends and activities, Millennials think “the more the merrier.”

Without an insider-outsider divide, the Millennial perspective on the world is less black and white. While Boomers relished heated arguments over ideological questions that they knew probably had no final answer, Millennials are avoiding classroom debates altogether. They simply don’t see the point in arguing if it doesn’t solve the problem at hand. For a generation raised on test scores, finding the right answer is paramount—and arguing is a waste of time. It’s all about the destination, not the journey.

Today’s Consensus—Building Young Adults

Raised to seek consensus, young Millennials view with dismay the uncivil state of American politics today. Fully 74% of 18- to 24-year-olds agree that “politics has become too partisan.”⁹⁷ This generation has grown to equate politics with incivility: In a Weber Shandwick survey, 48% of Millennials said that incivility is part of the political process—which dropped to 36% among Boomers and Xers and 24% among Silent.⁹⁸ In a CIRCLE focus group, one college student observed: “I think [political leaders are] just too afraid to agree with one another because there’s this mindset where you have to either be completely Democratic or completely Republican. You have to be one or the other.”⁹⁹

Millennials wish that politicians would make more of an effort to find common ground. A majority (52%) of 18- to 29-year-olds—more than any other age bracket—believe that the ability to compromise is an important quality in a politician.¹⁰⁰ Young people are also the least likely to rank “the willingness to stand firm” as an admirable quality. In our focus group, Millennial Republicans urge party leaders to “be adults” and stop fighting.¹⁰¹ This attitude also explains why Millennials don’t tune in to the fiery talking-head cable shows their parents watch¹⁰² and walked away from Occupy Wall Street as soon as it turned violent.

While Boomers and Xers dig deep into their partisan trenches, Millennials often align more closely with their generational counterparts across the aisle than with older members of their own party. Throughout our survey, Millennial Republicans and Democrats display a smaller gap in their views on an array of

partisan issues, suggesting that they may be more capable of reaching middle ground than older generations.

In a similar manner, Millennials believe that people and institutions at all levels should be able to work together. They don't see individuals and government necessarily in opposition with one another. In our dial test survey, we had Millennials listen to two different political speeches—one geared toward Boomers and Xers, the other geared toward Millennials. Our Millennial respondents rated each script on a moment-by-moment basis, indicating how strongly they agreed or disagreed with what they were hearing. The argument that most strongly resonates with young people is the idea that “great things happen” when leaders focus on “achieving and maintaining the right balance among individuals, communities, and the government.”¹⁰³ For Millennials, politics isn't an either-or game; it's a fusion, a balancing of complementary activities.

Implications for GOP Leaders

Millennials' consensus-building nature shapes the tone they want to see in national politics. Boomers, who grew up in an era of social conformity, came of age rebelling against the establishment and infused a strident tone into their rhetoric. Millennials, who have grown up watching national leaders pummel each other with scandal charges and negative ads, associate scorched-earth partisanship with interminable partisan gridlock and political failure—among them, the government shutdown of 2013. Now Millennials want to reestablish a regime of politeness.

To win over young voters, politicians should steer clear of culture-war confrontations. Aggressive rhetoric turns off most Millennials, who are more interested in getting things done than winning a partisan battle. Millennials do not want arguments over social issues to overshadow more conventional “news” stories such as the state of the economy, unemployment, or student loan debt. In their personal lives, Millennials have spent a lifetime listening to Boomers argue with each other. When they hear it happening in politics, they are more likely to satirize it and less likely to pick a side.

Politicians need to recognize that Millennials gravitate toward candidates who are willing to reach out to bring about political harmony. In both the Re-



TAKEAWAYS

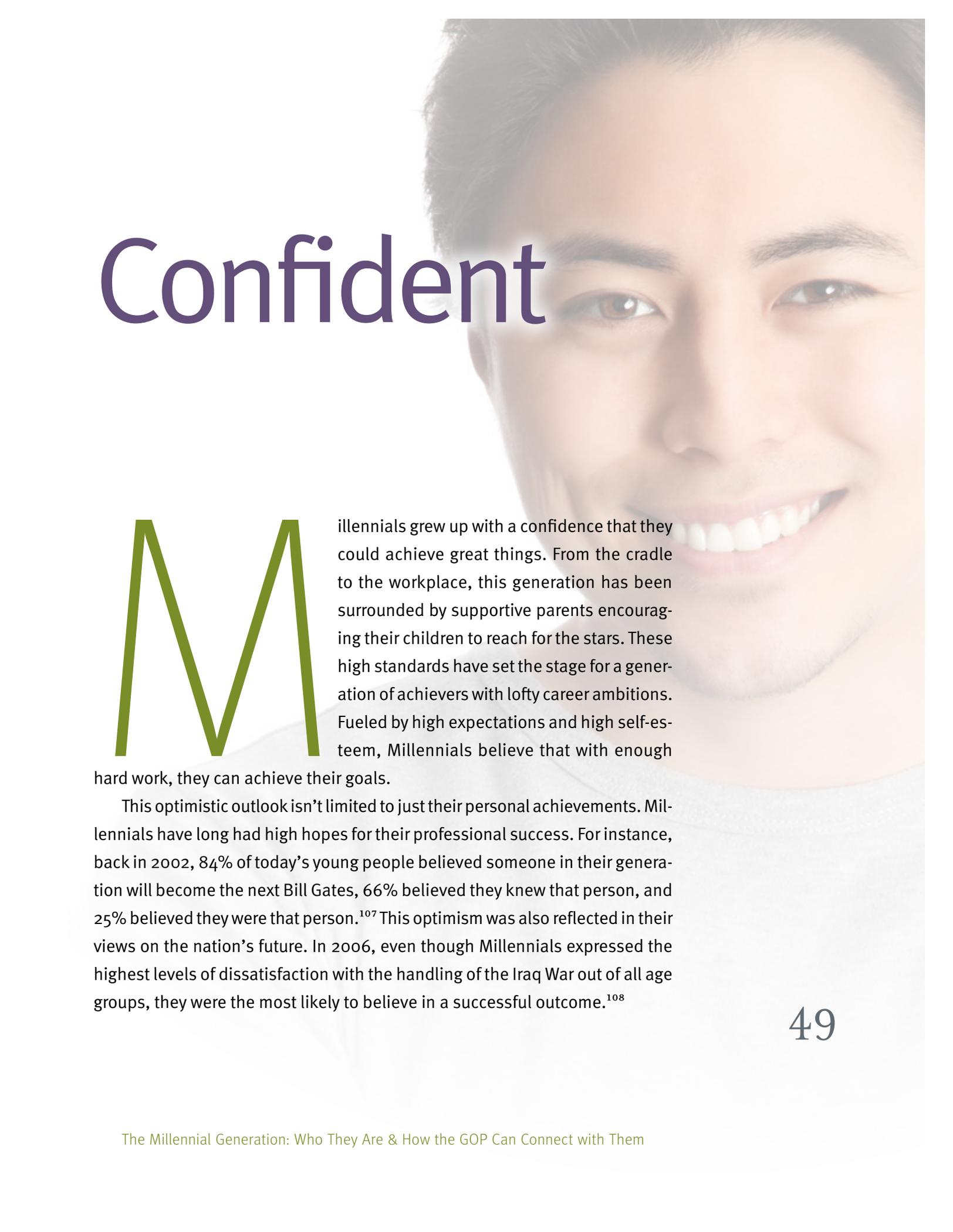
Be a good listener and treat all points of view with respect.

Go out of your way to find common ground with members of the other party.

Showcase bipartisan accomplishments achieved through compromise.

publican and Democratic primaries in 2008 and 2012, a majority of under-30 voters favored the more consensus-minded candidate: Hillary Clinton over John Edwards, and Barack Obama over Clinton. Millennials were especially attracted in 2008 by Barack Obama’s post-election pledge to “create an atmosphere where we can disagree without being disagreeable.”¹⁰⁴ His post-partisan image helped him win over Millennial voters—and painted Hillary Clinton as hot-headed and divisive by comparison. Similarly, in the 2012 GOP primaries, Mitt Romney’s expert-trusting, consensus-seeking persona routinely gained him greater support among Millennial voters than among older voters—who were more likely to consider Romney inauthentic.

Millennials favor political leaders who can put their personal passions aside, who will work collaboratively on solving big challenges, and who won’t play brinksmanship. This sentiment is the cornerstone of the first and (as yet) only bipartisan advocacy organization of Millennials, Common Sense Action (CSA).¹⁰⁵ Launched in 2013 by Brown University students Sam Gilman and Andrew Kaplan, the group’s central mission is to build a movement of young voters who are committed to repairing politics by working across party lines. In CSA’s *Agenda for Generational Equity* report, they outline “a menu of policy options”—avoiding partisan antagonisms in favor of unbiased civility.¹⁰⁶ Although this group has only 40 university chapters across 20 states, its approach resonates with Millennials, who are only a few years away from filling the Congressional ranks. And unlike the passionate leaders of decades past who considered it a virtue to stick to the party line, Millennials will continue to lead the charge toward a future that prioritizes practical solutions over ideological purity.



Confident

M

illennials grew up with a confidence that they could achieve great things. From the cradle to the workplace, this generation has been surrounded by supportive parents encouraging their children to reach for the stars. These high standards have set the stage for a generation of achievers with lofty career ambitions. Fueled by high expectations and high self-esteem, Millennials believe that with enough

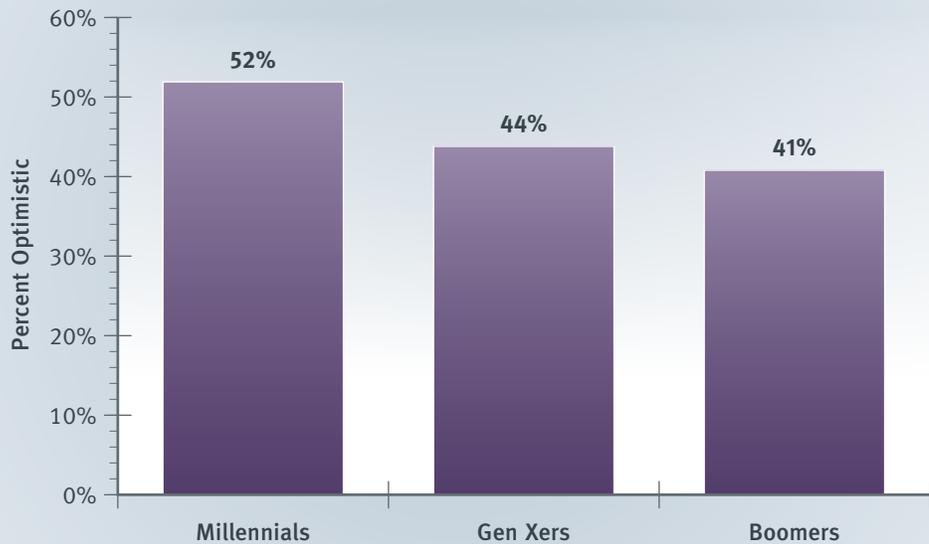
hard work, they can achieve their goals.

This optimistic outlook isn't limited to just their personal achievements. Millennials have long had high hopes for their professional success. For instance, back in 2002, 84% of today's young people believed someone in their generation will become the next Bill Gates, 66% believed they knew that person, and 25% believed they were that person.¹⁰⁷ This optimism was also reflected in their views on the nation's future. In 2006, even though Millennials expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction with the handling of the Iraq War out of all age groups, they were the most likely to believe in a successful outcome.¹⁰⁸

FIGURE 15

How optimistic are you about the future of America?

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

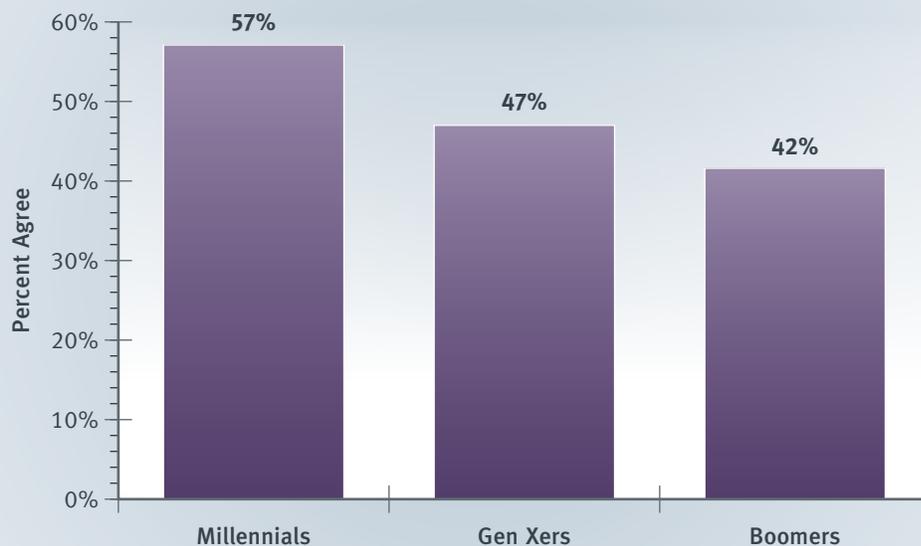


Today's Confident Young Adults

This generation also continues to be optimistic about America's future. A 2012 Horatio Alger Association report showed that 60% of high school students and 54% of high school graduates are mainly hopeful and optimistic about the future of the country.¹⁰⁹ In addition, a 2014 Pew survey found that nearly half (49%) of young adults believe that the nation's best years are ahead of us—again, outranking all other age groups.¹¹⁰

This sunny perspective sets Millennials apart from Boomers back when they were young adults in the '60s and '70s. In a 1974 Gallup survey, only about half of adults under age 30 said they had "quite a lot" of confidence in America's future, compared with about 70% of those ages 30 and older.¹¹¹ This relative pessimism has stayed with Boomers as they've aged. Over the past two

FIGURE 16



I think our country's best years are ahead of us

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)

decades, this generation has generally expressed more discontent than other age groups about the state of the nation and their quality of life.¹¹²

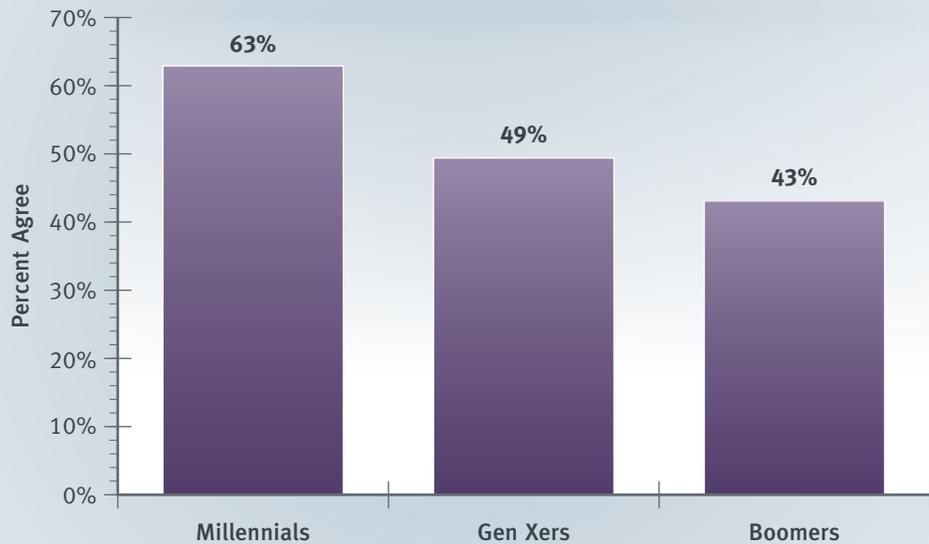
Our survey paints a similar picture. More than half (52%) of our Millennial respondents, for example, are optimistic about the future of America—compared to 44% of Xers and 41% of Boomers. Millennials are also the most likely (and Boomers the least likely) to agree that “our country’s best years are ahead of us.”¹¹³ And again, the results indicate that on these topics, Republican Millennials’ views are more in tune with those of Democrat Millennials than with older Republicans.

Even when it comes to their own personal economic future, most Millennials are surprisingly positive—despite the large number who have experienced unemployment or underemployment since the Great Recession. In 2013, Gallup

FIGURE 17

Government should place more emphasis on long-term problems than today's problems

Source: Pew Research Center



found that fully 80% of 18- to 29-year-olds were optimistic about how they and their families would do that year—outranking all other age groups.¹¹⁴ Pew reported more than 80% of 18- to 33-year-olds say that they either currently have enough money to lead the lives they want (32%) or expect to in the future (53%).¹¹⁵ And according to Wells Fargo, the vast majority (84%) of young adults also feel that they have the skills needed to achieve their career goals.¹¹⁶

Much of this optimism, to be sure, rests on positive expectations that Millennials know are subject to the whims of the economy and the job market. When asked, they are realistic about the risks. Several annual polls (such as the most recent *American Freshman* surveys) indicate that Millennials have grown more focused on money and financial security in recent years.¹¹⁷ One annual assessment of emotional health finds Millennials to be the most “stressed” age group today, mostly for economic reasons.¹¹⁸ Even so, they’re continuing undaunted on the long road to recovery.

Implications for GOP Leaders

The GOP should make an effort to present upbeat, forward-thinking messages. Instead of dwelling on who was at fault for policy failures, Millennials would rather hear elected officials and candidates discuss actionable ideas for how young adults can prosper and move forward. Instead of reports of officials working relentlessly to repeal Obamacare, for example, they want to hear alternative proposals to fix a health care system that everyone on both sides agrees isn't working. Millennials are already all too familiar with the obstacles facing their generation today. They are looking for leaders who will talk positively about the future and celebrate their achievements.

Just as they're inclined toward long-term planning in their personal lives, Millennials are future-oriented when it comes to public policy. When asked in 2012 by Pew whether the federal government should focus its resources on programs that benefit younger adults or older adults, Millennials chose younger adults by a three-to-two ratio while the Silent Generation chose older adults by three-to-one ratio.¹¹⁹ And in our survey, Millennials are the most likely generation to agree that "government should place more emphasis on long-term problems than on today's problems."¹²⁰

These findings suggest that young adults are not only more interested in policy issues that will primarily affect their generation, but also hopeful that public officials will address them. Since the 1980s, the relatively small share of the federal budget devoted to future-facing investments like infrastructure, research, and education has remained flat at best while the share devoted to entitlements has ballooned. This trend creates the sense (justified or not) that today's leadership would rather kick the can down the road than invest in their children.

Now may be the time for Republicans to begin again to champion entitlement reform while they have a key constituency that is interested in listening. If GOP policy strategists are wondering how to make more public resources available to the rising generation while still shrinking the total size of government, there are not many options on the table. Yes, they can start by getting more bang for their buck and make government "smarter" in all the P2P digital ways

TAKEAWAYS

Keep messaging upbeat.

Address long-term policy issues—like infrastructure, education, fiscal stewardship, and public debt.

Always emphasize a positive and constructive vision when discussing issues and policy initiatives.

that Millennials are already embracing in their daily lives. But at some point, budgetary savings will have to be found elsewhere—and, for most Millennials, the lowest-priority public dollars are those that pay off benefit liabilities to older generations and don't have much connection to their own future. According to Pew, more than seven in ten Millennials don't expect Social Security to be their main source of income and more than four in ten don't expect to receive Social Security at all. At the same time, a larger share of Millennials (84%) than of any older generation say that adult children have a personal obligation to help elderly parents in need.¹²¹

Positive talk of reforms alone, of course, does not make for a winning strategy. These promises must be backed up by progress. President Obama's "yes we can" optimism was a huge part of what made his candidacy so attractive to young voters—and much of the disillusionment that has developed since stems from perceptions that he failed to bring about the changes he promised to deliver. But the crucial first step for GOP leaders is to project a pragmatic, problem-solving attitude. A party that starts with "no"—or one riven by obstructionist in-fighting—isn't going to get off the ground.



Globally Engaged

First-wave Millennials share a certain similarity with their Boomer parents forty years ago. Both groups came of age during difficult wars (in the Middle East and in Vietnam), and afterwards both groups helped trigger a society-wide disenchantment with military intervention abroad.

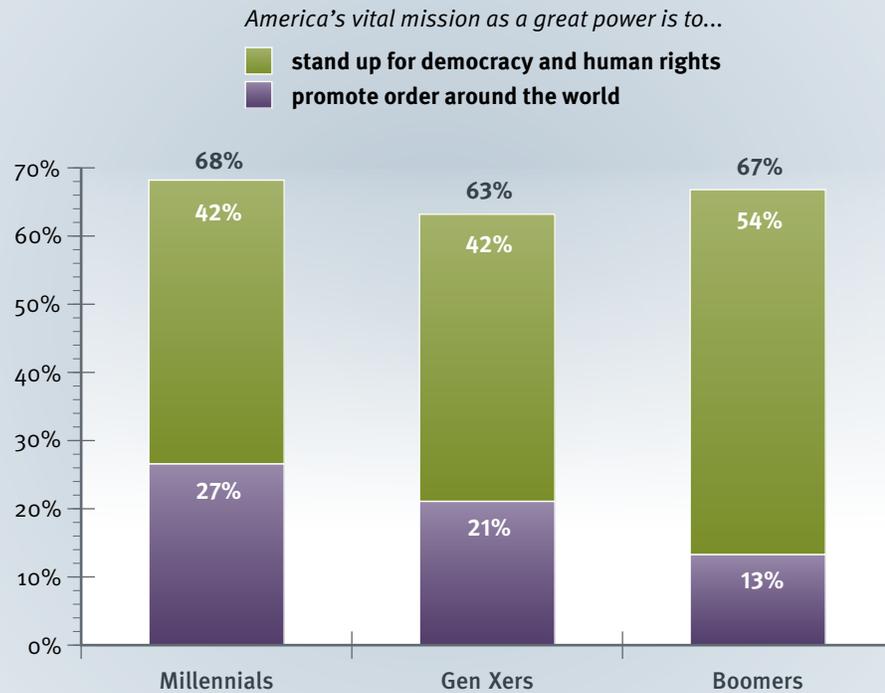
But that's about where the similarity ends. When it comes to most of the other historical forces that have shaped their outlook on the world, Millennials live in a world that Boomers would scarcely recognize. Boomers grew up in the shadow of the Cold War. Life at home and abroad was highly ordered. Nearly every nation on earth was allied with one of two camps: U.S. or USSR. Rather than protected, Boomers felt oppressed—and endangered—by this state-heavy, regimented construct. Powerful institutions, equipped with weapons of mass destruction and threatening war, felt like threats. In championing the individual conscience, Boomers hoped to restore the morality, humanity, and personal liberty taken away from them by the “domino theory” obsession of their parents to control all outcomes.

For Millennials, the opposite is true. They only know about a post-Cold War era of multilateral confusion and power vacuums, where terrorists and rogue states may be as likely to use WMDs as major powers. This generation has been

FIGURE 18

Yes, America should be more globally engaged

Source: Congressional Institute-LifeCourse survey (2014)



shaped by collective experiences like Columbine, Waco, 9/11, and the sectarian civil wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In all of these instances, the real danger seems to come not from out-of-control institutions, but out-of-control individuals (or small groups of conspirators) who terrorize humanity because national or global institutions are not strong enough to control, restrain, or even monitor them.

Today's Globally Engaged Young Adults

It's no secret that Millennials are highly connected—not just to their own friends, but to people and events all over the world. They are more likely than older generations to be immigrants or children of immigrants—or to have personal friendships with members of immigrant families. Understandably, they take a more positive view than older generations of a “path to citizenship” for undocumented immigrants.¹²² In their lifetimes, travel has become more affordable, the Internet and free services like Skype have covered the globe, and thou-

sands of youth-led non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have undertaken missions to help ordinary people in every continent. For Millennials, getting in touch with—or even involved with—protesters in Hong Kong, schoolteachers in Thailand, or software entrepreneurs in Kenya is literally just a click away.

Our survey results indicate that this connected mindset inclines most Millennials to favor national policies that take the rest of the world into account. Contrary to the perceptions of many older people, today’s youth are not isolationists. We found that 68% of Millennials say that America should be “globally engaged,” slightly higher than the share of Xers (63%) and Boomers (67%) who say the same.¹²³

What’s more, the Millennial view of global engagement includes a commitment to military action when justified. Millennials are roughly as likely (at 50%) as Xers and Boomers (at 49% and 52%, respectively) to believe that, in the event of a Russian invasion of Estonia, we should honor our NATO treaty and intervene militarily.¹²⁴ (Most of those not in favor of intervention, in all groups, say they are “unsure” how America should respond.) Millennials clearly want to support America’s allies, even if that requires the use of force. Their engagement is not limited to the “soft power” of social or philanthropic outreach.

Yet the Millennial understanding of global engagement differs in certain respects from that of older generations. Our survey asked, of everyone who favored global engagement, to justify their answer by choosing between two explanations. On the one hand, they could favor global engagement because “America’s vital mission as a great power is to promote order around the world and ensure peace and prosperity”—or they could favor global engagement because “America’s vital mission as a great power is to stand up for democracy and human rights and to help the disadvantaged.” The former (Hamiltonian) response is more about order, interests, and outcomes. The latter (Wilsonian) response is more about morality, principles, and motives.

Remarkably, of those who choose engagement, a higher percentage of Millennials (39%) pick the former order-keeping response than Xers (33%) and Boomers (20%).¹²⁵ And once again, the generational gap within Republicans is even larger than across all Americans: 51% of Millennial Republicans opt for the order-keeping response, versus only 26% of Boomer Republicans.

Today's older generations are likely to assume that Democratic leaders have historically been at least as likely as Republican leaders to put boots on the ground on behalf of lofty principles. But the foremost example of values-based intervention for Millennials is the G.W. Bush administration's efforts at democratic state rebuilding in the Middle East—which most Millennials ultimately opposed and which, in their eyes, was implemented without sufficient foresight about its costs and consequences.

Armed intervention in the pursuit of higher values (referred to here as the Wilsonian approach) works best when a nation enjoys an overwhelming advantage in power and prestige around the world. And for Millennials, this is precisely the problem. They are much less likely than older generations to believe that America still enjoys either of these advantages. A Brookings Institution study of politically engaged Millennials found that 74% believe that America is not as globally respected as it once was.¹²⁶ And this sentiment may actually be stronger among Republican Millennials. In our focus group, young Republican respondents are skeptical that America is the “envy of the world.”¹²⁷

Implications for GOP Leaders

Unlike Xers and Boomers in their youth, Millennials are eager to be globally engaged, which in certain respects makes the GOP's job easier. Yet the Millennial understanding of globalism is not the same as that of their elders. This generation is less inclined to use armed intervention to pursue idealistic objectives whose real-world consequences haven't been clearly spelled out. They certainly have little interest in trying to forcibly transform civil societies or rebuild political institutions abroad. Instead, they would seem to favor using force when necessary to protect allies, foster security, and promote prosperity. And if force isn't necessary, most desirable global objectives are best pursued in ways that don't involve any state intervention—like fostering NGOs and business startups and social entrepreneurship.

Key GOP-friendly imperatives like having a strong military and protecting our allies fully resonate with Millennials. Fully 47% of 18- to 29-year-olds trust the military to do what is right—the highest level of approval out of all federal institutions.¹²⁸ And according to a 2011 Pew poll, while most (66%) Millennials believe that relying too much on military action creates international resentment, a similar share (63%) believes that we should take the interests of our allies into account even if that means making compromises in our foreign policy.¹²⁹

When military action is unavoidable—for example, when an ally’s survival or our own national security is at stake—Millennials believe that quick action is essential. Millennials were as disquieted as older Americans by the delayed response to ISIS: Fully 37% of 18- to 30-year-olds support an air campaign against ISIS, while only 20% oppose it.¹³⁰ Above all else, Millennials want clarity in their foreign policy. They want a clear outline of the problem; an effective, proven solution; and a clear timetable for action.

Consider Chris Christie’s recent scathing criticisms of the Obama administration’s ISIS response¹³¹ as an example of what Millennials look for in their leaders regarding foreign policy. He emphasized efficiency, swift action, and the importance of helping others and restoring America’s standing in the world. Importantly, he left out any mention of promoting specific values or ideals.

Apart from the issues themselves, effective messaging can get Millennials on board with the GOP. In an era of instant tweets and video clips from around the world, America’s leaders should provide fuller and more real-time access to foreign-policy information. Millennial sympathy for Edward Snowden has not been motivated by any great concern among young people about privacy (surveys consistently show Millennials worry less about third-party privacy on the Internet than older generations). It is motivated more by a very real concern among Millennials about secrecy: They think the basic methods adopted by national security agencies ought to be transparent and open to popular discussion and debate.

TAKEAWAYS

Explain foreign policy initiatives in terms of interests and results rather than principles and motives.

Leverage Millennial support for a strong military and for strong relationships with national allies and peacekeeping organizations.

Avoid single-issue crisis mode—and articulate a comprehensive game plan for bringing order to a chaotic world.

Conclusion

As the Republican Party considers how to reach the Millennial Generation in 2016 and beyond, there are three essential points to keep in mind.

First, party leaders should consider how to **adjust their tone and attitude**. Ever since most Millennial voters can recall, they have seen Republicans characterized as “the party of no”—opening the way for Barack Obama’s popular 2008 youth brand (“yes we can”). This isn’t just a problem of media bias. Many prominent GOP leaders openly champion scorched-earth obstructionism as a political strategy—which has helped them achieve short-term policy and electoral gains, but has also left them tagged as a party more able to articulate what it stands against than what it stands for.

Millennials are looking for leaders who will set a forward-thinking agenda, approach problems with a can-do attitude, and do not express nostalgia for bygone eras they have never experienced. They believe that leaders should cooperate and take charge. They want them to take seriously the economic difficulties facing their generation. And they want legislators to implement policies that will guide them on the path to achieving the American Dream—while acknowledging that the endpoint won’t necessarily look like that of their grandparents.

Language matters. When it comes to “smaller government,” the Millennial reaction depends critically on how this goal is framed. If it means more-for-less efficiency as in “smarter government,” most Millennials will be on your side. If it means government that is fiscally smaller over the long run due to entitlement and tax reform, most Millennials will be willing to listen. But if it means total opposition to almost every form of government spending—including the infrastructure, schools, R&D, and family safety nets that young people hope will be there for them as they grow older—most Millennials will simply tune you out.

Second, Republicans need to **reevaluate their policy positions** and be smarter about anticipating how Millennials are likely to respond to them. Many economic and fiscal planks in the GOP platform align well with Millennials’ in-

terests and values—including outcomes-based reform of education and health care; a digital, market-oriented overhaul of public bureaucracies; and serious proposals to slow the growth of entitlement spending and federal debt. Millennials will buy into these ideas if they associate them with responsible and far-sighted concern for their generation’s future. Too often, the GOP sells its economic package as a way to get “government out of our lives”—which, as we have seen, is exactly the wrong way to approach this generation.

On social issues, some Republican leaders think their positions are all lost causes with Millennials while others think Millennials will respond no differently than older generations. Both groups need to reset their assumptions. On some key social issues—including abortion, gun control, affirmative action, and the desirability of marriage and children, among others—Millennial attitudes don’t differ much from those of older generations. They are certainly open to a GOP pitch, so long as the pitch includes the right notes. On other social issues such as gay marriage, immigration amnesty, legalization of marijuana, and a broader definition of “family,” the generation gap is indeed sizable and the challenge of persuading Millennials will be much tougher.

On any social issue, GOP leaders should feel free to speak from conviction to Millennials. And to do their best to win them over, they should frame their advocacy around touchstone Millennial attitudes: an enthusiasm for kids; an optimism about their future; a determination to help young people avoid life risks and build careers; an excitement about pushing the nation forward; a passion for serving families and communities; and a desire to build an open meritocracy that works for everyone. If they deliver their message respectfully and are willing to listen to the other side, they will get a warm reception even from those who remain unpersuaded.

It is not necessary for the GOP to change its core policy principles in order to appeal to Millennials. But it is necessary for leaders to change how they argue for these principles and to be realistic about how hard they want to push for specific policy goals that are unlikely ever to find favor with the newest generation of voters. For leaders to show the public they can govern, they need to show the public they can adapt, be creative, and compromise from time to time to serve the country as a whole. Millennials, as we have seen, are more prone

than older generations to regard the ability to compromise as a laudable sign of statesmanship—a strength, not a weakness.

Third, Republican leaders need to make an effort to **resolve confusion about their political principles**. The last two rounds of midterm elections, along with incidents such as the 2013 government shutdown, have highlighted an ongoing power struggle between insurgent Tea Party Republicans and establishment Republicans who hold starkly different views on tactics and policy. As the Tea Party contingent has grown in visibility and power, traditionally conservative ideas and concepts that would generally be positively received by Millennials have become tainted or heretical.

Consider how a once-comforting term like “community” is now a code word for big-brother socialism. “Public authorities,” which law-and-order conservatives of the Nixon era instinctively backed, are now openly mocked. “National service” (even in rudimentary forms like AmeriCorps) is feared as an opening wedge for the militant left. Even the word “family,” having now been redefined by many conservatives as a “family values” kind of family, excludes tens of millions of Millennials who consider themselves extremely attached to their families. Millennials are in fact closer to their families than today’s older generations (Boomers and Xers) ever were to theirs—making the GOP’s failure to attract Millennials with pro-family language and policies a very costly missed opportunity.

Much of this confusion can be attributed to generational change. Just as Millennials began to come of age as voting adults, the ideological composition of the party has shifted dramatically. The memory of the G.I.s faded, and most of the Silent Generation leaders retired. Boomers moved up to most senior positions and young Xer upstarts became the next leadership generation about to step on stage. The result is a party that appears to be in the throes of an identity crisis—and leaders will need to coalesce around one vision in order to convince Millennials that they have a plan that will keep the nation on the right track going forward.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted on topics relating to the social, political, and cultural mood of U.S. Millennials. LifeCourse research staff collected, reviewed, and analyzed hundreds of polls, articles, websites, and white papers in order to develop a comprehensive framework for the research.

Next, in-depth interviews were conducted with Millennials who are active in the current political environment in order to test key hypotheses about this generation's attitudes. The hypotheses address views on government's role in the lives of citizens, capitalism, family, optimism about the future, consensus in politics, personal risk, and foreign policy. From these interviews and the literature review, LifeCourse constructed a fifty-six question survey. Where appropriate, the survey included questions in the public domain from the Pew Research Center, Gallup, Harvard Institute of Politics, and CIRCLE at Tufts University.

The final survey instrument was fielded by Survey Sampling International (SSI) in an online panel from November 12–20, 2014 with 1,815 persons between the ages of 18 and 72. All respondents reside in the United States. Quota segments were used in order to assure an n size of 300 in each of the six age cells analyzed. Younger Millennials are defined as those age 18–24, older Millennials 25–32, younger Generation Xers 33–42, older Generation Xers 43–52, younger Boomers 53–62, and older Boomers 63–72.

All data has been weighted to U.S. Census criteria by age, gender, and educational attainment.

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