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# American Millennials: An Ideological Overview

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American Millennials: An Ideological Overview

## **American Millennials: An Ideological Overview**

### **Introduction**

In an attempt to further understand the inner workings and beliefs held by the majority of my own generation located in the geographic scope of the United States of America, this report will be a conduction of research to further examine the overall beliefs and ideologies of the generation in the United States that older generations, such as Generation X and Baby Boomers, stereotypically view as “the problem” with the country’s political landscape. This report will seek to explain the reasoning behind the ideologies and beliefs of millennials, those Americans born between 1980 and 2000 (probe.org), and what particular world events, if any, result in the beliefs in question. It is fair to say that millennials are at a conflicting turning point politically in the United States, with heated political topics including the Trump Administration and Gun Control, a presentation of political confliction is prevalent in the United States, especially with younger voters. This report will thoroughly cover a prediction of findings, a comprehensive presentation of the findings in question, world events that affect the findings, overall voting trends of millennials, comparison of the findings to the predictions, and a concluding statement.

### **Hypothesis**

It is expected that the ideological beliefs of millennials will be aligned as a whole with a left leaning bias. This will vary from demographic to demographic, based on race, gender, socio economic status, and the region in which the millennial is residing; however, as a whole, it is expected that American millennials will resonate more with progressive ideological beliefs in comparison to historically conservative ideological beliefs.

This hypothesis is based off of personal experience in the scope of social activity as well as schooling procedures at every level of the conventional American Education system: Pre-school – Undergraduate studies. It is fair to say that every level of public education I have personally been a student, partaking in the educational system offered by Massachusetts public schools, that progressive, left-leaning beliefs have been pushed for as long as I can remember being a student. I recall clearly in elementary school, various songs and poems championing social justice and progressive ideologies being read and sung to vulnerable youth. Additionally, I recall specifically in elementary school a fourth grade teacher who would complain about the presidency of George W. Bush to a classroom of 9 and 10 year olds; the year 2004. Such left-leaning biases in the classroom only continued through middle school, junior high school, and eventually high school; eventually developing into the critique of certain conservative policies as curriculum graduated into the more advance studies of United States history as well as the studies of United States government. As one may expect, the majority of my peers and friends adapted left-leaning views over time, and it is fair to say that this is a result of constantly being preached left-leaning beliefs by our role models, our teachers, who spent school year after school year with us developing us into the men and women we are today. What I find exceptionally interesting about this fact is that ultimately the public education one may receive stems primarily from the region in which the individual is located. For example, it is fair to say that a public education in Alabama is much more conservative in comparison to a public education offered in Massachusetts. However, I still stand by my hypothesis that American millennials are the generation of progress, because as a whole, in the most populated states in the country offering good public educational systems, such as New York and California, that these students were

taught left-leaning ideals, similar to my experience as a student in the Massachusetts public school system.

In regards to other factors that lead me to form the Hypothesis in question, I am drawn to family life of millennials during their formative years as well as relevant events that form left-leaning beliefs. As kids through young adults, millennials recall first and foremost 9/11 and the Iraq War, in conjunction with a large number of school shootings. Older millennials will recall the Persian Gulf War and the beginning of conflict in the Middle East with the rise of Saddam Hussein. These violent realities observed and experienced by millennials ultimately will form a societal desire for peace, and an anti-war movement. Strong diplomatic relations and peace at all costs are values held by the modern day Democratic Party, which ultimately will fuel millennial affections for Democratic leaders. Additionally, millennials have experienced a housing crash in the 1990s, and a market recession in the 2000s. With fluctuating markets, millennials have been in the forefront of the crusade to find the blame of these economic tragedies, and many, along with major liberal media outlets, pointed the finger to George W. Bush and his conservative agenda for ruining the economy. Thus, this sparked millennial affections for a charismatic, silver-tongued, young Democratic senator from Illinois named Barack Obama, who became in the first African American president in 2008 after earning mass amounts of millennial support.

I base these social and political events off of my own life experience as a millennial in an attempt to support my hypothesis. Experiencing my own personal reactions to the political and social landscape in which I grew up played a large role in determining this hypothesis. I consider these factors to have played a large part in the formation of the beliefs of other millennials based on the fact that I have witnessed similar ideological results in the cases of my peers.

Finally, I hypothesize that personal family environments formed the political beliefs and ideologies of millennials as well. First, hearing parents and guardians react to world and political events, elections, etc. develop a level of monkey-see monkey-do in vulnerable youth. Thus, observing negative parental reactions to the Bush presidency, the parental worrying and discomfort after school shootings, and the fear and paranoia resulting from terrorist attacks such as 9/11, and the war in Iraq as a whole, may fuel millennial belief affection for the Democratic party; and form ideological beliefs of anti-war, peace, acceptance of all, and a common theme of love and respect. Millennials have seen parents lose jobs and homes as a result of unstable economic times, and take gambles in support the Democratic Party after the era of George W. Bush. Thus, it is very likely that millennials, many of whom voted for the first time in 2016, based their ballot decision off of the successes of the Obama era, finding an ideological safe haven with the Democratic Party.

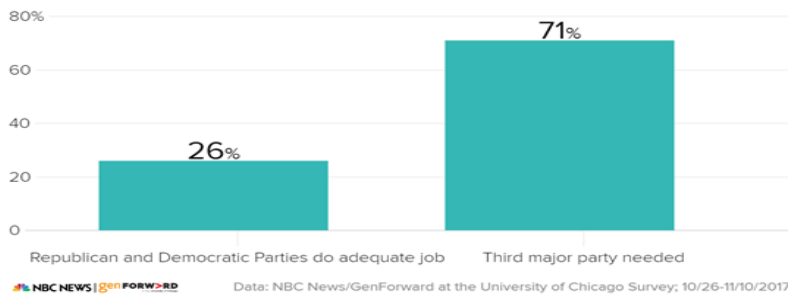
To conclude I hypothesize that as a result of public education systems, world, social, and political events, and parental upbringings, millennials as a whole hold left-leaning ideological and political beliefs, and a strong affection for the Democratic Party.

### **Findings**

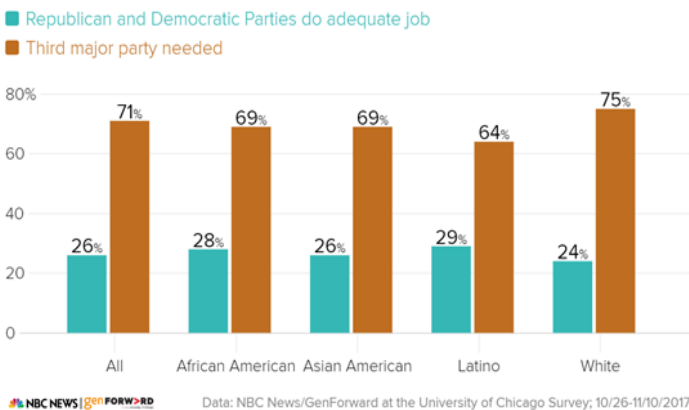
In Exploring the ideologies and beliefs of American millennials, one main differentiating fact stands in regards to the group of Americans as a whole, many millennials are politically torn and conflicted as a result of the extreme and polarizing bi-partisan structure of the United States Political spectrum. For example, a study at the University of Chicago found that ultimately 71% of Millennials are in favor of a third political party; resulting from the belief that Republicans and Democrats do not do an adequate job in representing the beliefs of the people as a whole (NBCnews.com). Within this blanket average, 75% of whites, 64% of Latinos, 69% of Asian

Americans, and 69% of African Americans believe a third political party should be implemented in the American Political Landscape. Furthermore, out of the 71% average of millennials in favor of a third party, 69% are women, and 74% are men (NBCnews.com).

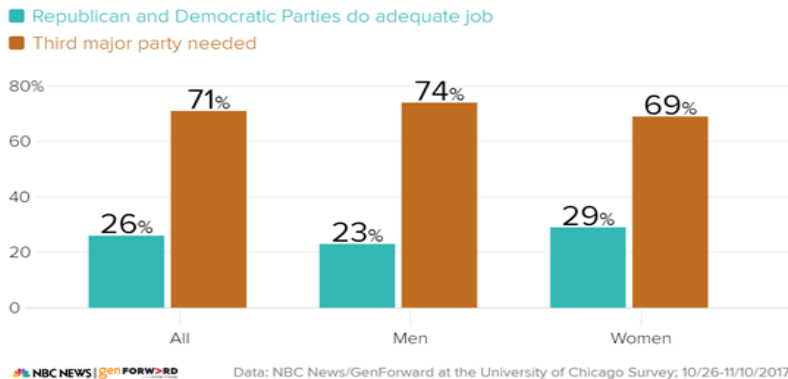
### How millennials feel about a third major political party...



### By race, how millennials feel about a third party

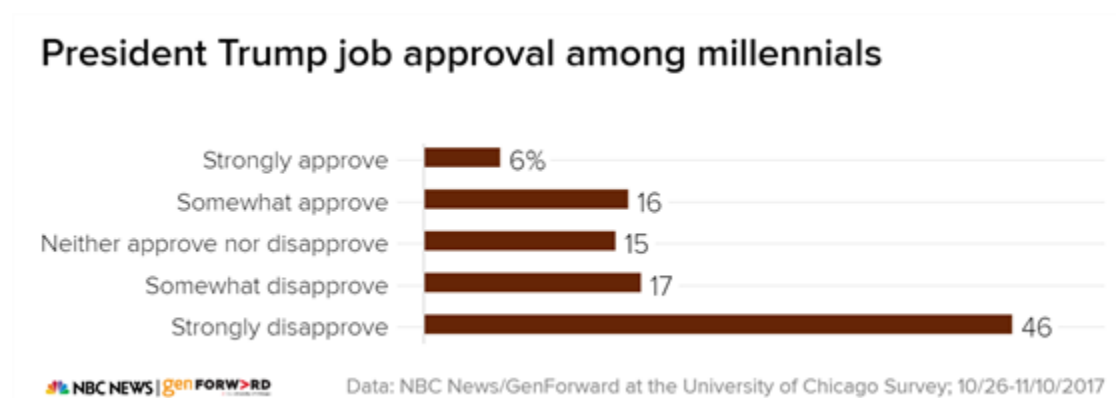


### By gender, how millennials feel about a third party



As a whole based off the findings of the University of Chicago Survey, it is safe to say that the ideological beliefs and political opinions of American millennials is not as black and white as it may have seemed. Millennials as a whole feel underrepresented in politics. Many millennials are young adults, and ultimately, there are few politicians in the major political parties who accurately voice the concerns of the millennials, as there is without question an age gap in the political landscape of the United States (governing.com).

It is imminently apparent, however, that millennials share a strong sense of hatred of President Donald Trump. Demonstrated through another survey put on part by the University of Chicago, it was found that an overwhelming 46% of millennials strongly disapprove of President Trump's efforts in office, and in conjunction with those who "sort of" disapprove of President Trump, the total percentage of disapproval of the president amongst millennials climbs to an overwhelming 63% (NBCnews.com).



The disapproval of President Trump amongst millennials stems from the overall disconnect a young audience shares with a baby boomer Billionaire. It is clear the general consensus amongst millennials is that the government as a whole does not care about them, but this holds true to a larger extent with the perceived intentions of the Republican Party, as nearly



59% of millennials who took part in the University of Chicago survey in question hold an unfavorable view of the Republican Party.

However, resulting from the Trump presidency, whether it be millennial support or millennial disapproval, there has been a recent spike in number of millennials engaged in the American political scene, ranging from local levels to state and federal levels. For example, on the side of leftist liberal resistance, at the state level, Vin Gobel, age 32, won a seat in the New Jersey State Senate. Additionally, Jennifer Carroll Foy, age 36, Chris Hurst, age 30, Danica Roem, 33, Schuyler Van Valkenburg, 32, and Jerrauld Jones, 28, all won seats in the Virginia House of Delegates. At a local level, democrats Derek Dobosz, 21, and Joel McAuliffe, 25, both earned spots in the Chicopee, MA city council ([governing.com](http://governing.com)). These remarkable feats are no doubt a direct reaction from millennials to Donald Trump's presidency, as they as a whole feel as though Mr. Trump is not doing his job in the Oval Office with the best interest of millennials in mind. Additionally on the side of the Democrats, the activist organization, Emerge America, which is a training and recruitment organization that focuses specifically on Democratic women, experienced an 87% increase in signups for their workshops in the year 2017 compared to the year 2016. Additionally, among millennial women that were 35 or younger, there was a 60% percent increase in involvement with the organization ([governing.com](http://governing.com)).

Recent millennial political action is bi-partisan. On the republican side of the spectrum, in specific reference to millennials, we see that Michael Oberly who is the press secretary for the Young Republican National Federation, noticed increased excitement and willingness from young Republicans to run for office, which he directly credits to the success of Trump's untraditional campaign, which has been seen as inspiring to many millennials across the country

(governing.com). Additionally, Emily Brewer, a 33 year old millennial was recently elected to the Virginia House of Delegates.

What this data provides is evidence that in fact millennials are very active in the pursuit of gaining their political voice. Overall, millennials appear to lean left based on the University of Chicago Study, and the recent elections of millennial republicans into various local and state offices prove that the generation that has been torn politically to the point where they feel as though a third party is needed, and that neither major party accurately depicts their personal beliefs and ideologies as autonomous citizens of the United States, is taking action politically, and replacing older incumbents who did not accurately represent them in their respective positions.

It is also clear from the studies that the recent spike in political action on part of millennials is a direct reaction to the trump presidency. In the eyes of young Republicans, President Donald Trump is seen as a source of inspiration; the whole idea that someone who has no political experience can ride into the Oval Office like a knight on shining armor on a mission to drain the swamp. On the other hand, Donald Trump's controversial agenda, talking points, and harsh rhetoric has pushed many millennial Democrats to their breaking point politically, inspiring both millennial representation in various political offices, as well as develop a strong presence as activists.

### **Continued Findings**

As a whole, Millennials specific ideologies are a direct result of events and overall factors in which they have experienced in their lives such as the George W. Bush Presidency, the recession, the Barrack Obama Presidency, and the war in Iraq (AmericanProgress.org).

According to a study conducted by The Center for American Progress on the overall ideological leanings of millennials, millennial Americans are found to be most progressive on social and cultural values and the least progressive on economic and domestic policy (AmericanProgress.org). In addition to this, it was found that young people not only embrace and implement progressive ideas about culture and society, but they also meet conservative ideals on matter with firm rejection.

The study conducted by The center for American Progress additionally found that the overall ideological beliefs among young people is both more progressive overall as well as more compressed than the overall United States voter population as a whole. This means, overall, Democrat led progressive social movements resonate well with the United States millennial population as a whole, rejecting conservative dissents to the matters (AmericanProgress.org).

Additionally, it was found that nearly than two in three American millennials agree with progressive perspectives on energy, sustainable living, climate change, government efforts to protect people as well as the economy, and new steps to be implemented to fight inequality (AmericanProgress.org). As a whole, and demonstrated by Center for American progress, it is clear that the political ideologies in which millennials feel the strongest about resonate with those of liberal Democrats and the Democratic Party as a whole. As demonstrated through the study in question, it is proven that there truly is a cross generational gap in regards to the key guiding principles and fundamental values in which millennials and their older counterparts believe

should be considered when running the country. According to the study, only 19%, or four in twenty one fundamental values and ideological values held by millennials are those in which are considered to be conservative. Remarkably, in comparison to the beliefs of the millennial population, the voter population as a whole has 40-50% of fundamental ideological viewpoints in which are considered to be conservative (AmericanProgress.org). Overall, this shows how drastically the youngest voting age demographic differs from the rest of the voter population in terms of the most basic fundamental ideologies. This proves that the more millennials who become involved in politics, winning offices on all levels of government, then there is truly a shift from historical conservatism in the United States, championed by older generations, to progressive democratic movements which are sparks, implemented, and carried out by the millennials in office. This truly will expose the generational gap in ideological beliefs, as it does not appear that there is much of a middle ground in regards to basic ideological beliefs between those of the voting population as a whole, and those of millennials, who are the youngest voting demographic.

As found in the Center for American Progress study, opinions on fundamental historical American family and societal traditions are changing as well. For example, drastically fewer younger Americans than older Americans agree that changes in the traditional family have harmed society. A large amount of millennials as well have formed the belief that the country has gone too far in mixing politics and religion, which has historically always been an unmistakably American theme (AmericanProgress.org). Additionally, it was found that far fewer American millennials in comparison to older Americans agree that the military is the most effective way to ensure national security, and far fewer American millennials than older voters agree that restrictions on civil liberties and the use of torture is a necessary evil in protecting us

from terrorism (AmericanProgress.org). Millennials also tend to agree at a much larger rate than the rest of the voting population that government intervention is necessary in a failing economy, and when the rich is continuing to grow their wealth in the situation stated above. American Millennials are additionally far less likely than older Americans to agree with the conservative ideals that stronger business relations do more harm than good, the free market is better than the government at creating jobs, and that limited government is better than big government (AmericanProgress.org).

Remarkably, a finding in the Center for American Progress study was that 48 % of American millennials list “opportunity” as their top political value, and 41 percent listed “equality.” Compared to older voters, the older counterparts list “liberty” and “justice” as their top ideological values (AmericanProgress.org). A conservative value that is still held true in regards to millennial beliefs is that of autonomous freedoms, that the individual citizen has a right to their own choices and ultimate consequences. Additionally to autonomy, nearly 42% of millennials believe that the current economic problems are a direct result of what happens when a society relies upon corporations. Millennials believe corporations have too much power, and are only feeding the rich at the expense of the middle class; the stereotypical Democratic talking point. Nearly the only common ground found in the study in question between beliefs on American millennials and beliefs of the older voting generations is that the government should play a role in assuring the economy is in a position to succeed – what seems like a bi-partisan issue centered around the overall betterment and well-being of the economy of the country.

### **World Events**

In regards to the world events that have shaped the ideological and political views of the American millennial, it is impossible to do so without addressing then events on 9/11, and the effects that followed thereafter (mcall.com). Millennials are now the young leaders, professionals, and parents in America, and their views, outlooks, and political ideologies have an underlying affect from 9/11 at most, and terror attacks at least. Events to follow that have played their role in influencing American millennials would be the recession, war on terror, the ever climbing student loan national debt epidemic, and the rapid development of technology in a short period of time (mcall.com). As a whole these events have led to the growing sense of wanting to “give back” and “do more” amongst millennials, more than likely in direct response to the negativity surrounding millennials in the outside world during their formative years. Millennials are adaptors, progressors, and always looking for the benefits of technological collaborations and improvements. The war on terror has taken its toll on millennials through showing that the world can be a nasty place, it is not all good that people experience in their everyday lives. With this being said, millennials have developed a strong desire for peace and conflict avoidance; championing the ideals if peace, love, and equality (mcall.com).

No event may have more of a direct effect on millennial political ideologies than that of the development and advancement of social media. In accordance with a study from The American Press Institute, nearly 69% of millennials get the news daily and 85% say that keeping up with the news is at least somewhat important to them, doing so through social media (forbes.com). This fact shows one of the most drastic differences between the American millennial generation and the rest of the voter population. Millennials are the first generation to fully implement and develop social media and take advantage of all of its capabilities. With this comes the abilities of millennials to post, share, like, retweet, etc. key political issues and

ideologies in which are the most important to the specific individual in question. In fact, millennials are 2.5 more times likely to be early adopters of technology and social media capabilities than all the other generations; and this fact does not exclude the topic of political content sharing (forbes.com).

As a result of the prominent millennial participation on social media, various political campaigns and administrations have attempted to keep up with the social media world and millennial voter by implementing extensive social media campaigns as their own, such as Bernie Sanders and his #Feelthebern social media campaign during his 2016 attempt at the presidency, and Donald Trump and his #MAGA (acronym for Make America Great Again) campaign in an attempt to rally together relatively small number of millennial supporters he had under one single social media hashtag. Donald Trump has also attempted to stay up to date during his current term in office by frequently tweeting, reaching millions of people around the world, many of whom are millennials, in the instantaneous ability for the Commander-In-Chief of the United States to go public.

Additionally, Participatory politics, which is a political movement, developed in 2016, that encourages individual participation and engagement in various types of political discussions and debates, predominantly using social media to do so, with Millennials leading the way (Forbes.com). What this social media millennial movement has done is make politicians aware of the fact that millennials are becoming more demanding that their voice is heard, as well as being involved with any relevant discourse. This specific example of social media usage on part of millennials in regards to political discussion is a specific example of just how millennials are beginning to develop a prevalent political voice.

A major factor in regards to political social media usage specific to millennials is the fact that 70% of millennials said they feel more excited about doing things when their friends agree with it (forbes.com). This fact alone plays a huge role in the overall purpose and usage of social media; to share posts, ideas, and information, and (in theory) gain instant approval. Thus, when millennials see their friends share political information, they may feel more inclined to follow the beliefs put forth in the information, and be more inclined as a whole, more importantly, to believe said information. Additionally, when an individual shares a political opinion on social media, and someone likes or shares the information in question, the person who shared the information is more inclined to share more of the information and further follow the beliefs in which he or she is sharing (forbes.com). This is ultimately how millennials engage in politics, through instantaneous sharing, and quick views of information. Very rarely will a millennial go sit in at a town meeting, or request a copy of a proposed piece of legislation, but if there is a popular issues trending on social media, there is a good chance the issue is gaining momentum and opinions online through the opinions put forth by usage of the millennials.

Additionally, put forth by the study from the American Press Institute, it was found that nearly 68% of millennials said they usually do not make major decisions without discussing it with people they trust (forbes.com). This, similar to the 70% of millennials feeling more excited when their friends agree, promotes the usage of social media because with the instant sharing of political beliefs and issues that social media allows and promotes, this gives the opportunity for millennials to discuss with their friends who are active on other social media accounts, the issues at hand, and form collaborative opinions on the matter (forbes.com). Which ultimately, is exactly what happens in practice of millennial participation in the political discussion online on social media.



Overall, as demonstrated through relevant findings, the most important world event that has affected the political and ideological beliefs of American millennials the most is the implementation and evolution of social media. Through social media, American millennials have been able to develop and sustain a political voice that is unique to their specific voter demographic, and have developed a generational specific tool in order to assemble, discuss, and interact with elected officials and candidates alike.

### **Comparison of findings to hypothesis**

As a whole, the findings in my research was not far off from that of my hypothesis. In reference to the research in question, it was proven that millennials are overwhelmingly left leaning, and have developed ideologies that differ greatly from that of other voters. Additionally, my hypothesis was proven to be true in regards to the specific events that affected the development of millennial ideologies the most, including 9/11, the war on terror, the Bush Administration, and the success of the Obama Administration. What if failed to realize, however, is the overall magnitude that the Trump Administration has had on the political opinions and ideological values of millennials, as well as completely missing the massive effect that social media has on the ability of millennials to develop and express politic voice and opinions. Social media allows for instant satisfaction and approval from peers if a similar view is shared amongst two individuals, and in the case of political views and opinions, this results in the rapid development of political trends, and feeds into the overall theme of millennials utilizing the approval of others in order to form and develop their own opinion; in this case, the opinions being political.

In regards to the Trump Administration effect on the formation of millennial opinions of American politics and ideological beliefs, I failed to consider this to be a factor because the majority of millennials were old enough to vote in the election, so as a result, I assumed the formation of an opinion more likely than not already had been formed, and the Trump Administration was simply a result of the Democratic (and electoral college) process. What I failed to see was how such a polarizing political force could have such a drastic influence on a vulnerable class of voters.

Additionally in my findings, I failed to prove the correlation of parental political preference to that of the individual millennial. Millennials are an autonomous group, who are not afraid to part ways with social norms. Overall, there is a low level of risk involved with the potential of millennials adapting the political opinions of their parents.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude on my findings, it has been proven via established educational and intuitional studies that American Millennials hold a strong preference for Democratic politics and liberal political ideologies. Though not every millennial is the same, as a collective whole, are the most progressive voter demographic in the United States. Shaped by Bush, Obama, Trump, 9/11, and the war on terror, millennials have developed a passion for helping others, seeking peace, treating everyone with respect, progression, and conflict avoidance. Millennials are the generation of social media. They have established a political voice and formed political opinions through the development and usage of social media. They are a progressive generation unlike any other, and with progression comes the potential for a better tomorrow, which is the very goal in which millennials as a whole strive for.

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