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VOTING BEHAVIOR AND MOTIVATIONS ACROSS GENERATIONS:  
EVIDENCE FROM A NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE U.S. SURVEY

by

Angela Grace Alexander

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford, MS

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## *Abstract*

The four generations of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z are all distinct in nature as it relates to their characteristics, which are shaped by the American culture in which they were born. These generations as a whole also have different levels of political participation and political ideals. The purpose of this study is to examine how these differences correlate to voting behavior. The goal is to draw conclusions about the differences between voting behavior across generational lines, discovering patterns especially as it relates to motivations for voting. Through the use of a nationally representative survey, I was able to measure some of the motivations that might be instrumental in influencing members of different generations to vote. By combining this information with relevant research, I was able to come to the conclusion that Baby Boomers are highly motivated by civic duty to vote, and in turn they have had the highest turnout in several recent elections. Generation X and Generation Z did not reveal clear and consistent motivations. However, Millennials were the generation most motivated by social influence. Utilizing these motivations by generation could increase the efficacy of targeted campaigns and efforts to increase political participation.

## Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Background on Generations</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Political Differences between Generations</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Differences in Political Participation</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Motivations/Hypotheses</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Research Design and Data</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>Appendix</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>References</u>	<u>32</u>

## ***Introduction***

Political participation is a vital element to a democracy. The process of voters educating themselves on candidates, issues, and elections, and using that information to turn out and make an informed vote is key to the outcomes of elections, and therefore the state of politics and governance in the United States. However, in recent years, voters, particularly younger voters, are not turning out in as great of numbers as preceding generations in previous elections (McDonald, 2021). This could be due to the fact that voting may no longer be seen as the duty of a citizen, but rather an “expressive act” (Blais & Achen, 2019). People may vote to express their support for a particular candidate or party, or they may choose not to express an interest at all in voting. The goal of this particular study is to analyze the voting motivations of American voters via a survey and relate it to the expression of the voting behavior found in recent voting and election data in order to find a correlation and look for patterns and differences within generational groups.

The generations that this study focuses on and the generational breakdown are as follows: Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996), and the portion of Generation Z that is of voting age (1997-2003). These generations are differentiated by several characteristics that include so much more than just birth year. They are shaped by historical events that affect each generation differently based on the phase of life they were in when these events occurred. They are shaped by societal differences, average educational attainment, technological savvy, and several other factors. Several studies have shown that these generations also have different attitudes towards voting, politics, partisan leanings, social issues, and past presidential candidates (Holbein & Hillygus, 2016; Moeller, et al, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2011).

The four potential motivations for voting explored in this study are ‘civic duty,’ ‘social influence,’ ‘candidate/party support,’ and ‘issue support.’ ‘Civic duty’ is characterized by a sense of responsibility to fulfill the duties of a citizen to one’s country. ‘Social influence’ is a gauge of the effect that others in one’s social circle have on their own person and beliefs. ‘Candidate/party support’ is a voting motivation that is driven by preference for a particular candidate in an election or political party. ‘Issue support’ is the motivation for voting that is characterized by strong feelings on issues that are relevant during an election that may influence one’s choice to vote. Through the use of the survey (included in the appendix), I use the respondents’ answers to detect patterns in voting motivations, and break the answers down into generational categories in order to draw conclusions from the data.

Understanding the motivations behind a citizen’s choice to vote and detecting patterns within generational confines could be extremely useful for at least two reasons. They could be used to increase voter turnout, allowing campaigns and election information to be tailored to certain demographics. In addition, they could help predict how the face of American politics might change in the coming years.

The following section will cover a more in depth discussion of the generations and their cultural backgrounds and differences. In the next section, the general political state of each generation is outlined, as well as some of the political interactions between generations. Next, previous election data is used to compare the voting patterns and turnout rates of certain age demographics over a period of several decades. After discussing more in depth about the voting motivations outlined in this study, I specify my hypotheses based on relevant research about how the generations are likely to be motivated. The survey design is outlined and explained as to how it is configured in order to draw motivations from the data, and data that has been collected from

the survey is displayed in the results section. I conclude with a discussion of the voting motivations of the generations and the implications it may have on future politics.

### ***Background on Generations***

The Baby Boomer generation, for the purpose of this study, consists of adults born between the years of 1946 and 1964. The members of this generation are currently in and around their 60s. The reason that members of this generation were coined Baby Boomers is because the period in which they were born marked a significant increase in the birth rate. After men returned from fighting in World War II, they came home to their wives in 1945, and thus the “baby boom” ensued. The time in which they were raised is drastically different from the world today. When Baby Boomers were children, televisions had just begun to replace radios in the average home. Many of these Baby Boomers might remember the first time they ever saw a color television in the early 1960’s. The majority of Baby Boomers were also likely to be raised in a two parent household with a working father and stay at home mother. Baby Boomers grew up in the age of the civil rights movement, and most were school aged children at the time of integration. This generation matured largely in the 1960s and 1970s. About half of the men in this generation were eligible to be drafted at the time of the Vietnam War. The culture in which this generation was raised centered around American family values, which I believe will contribute to a shared sense of patriotism among the Baby Boomers. In addition, I think many of the values they were taught in their early life might have stuck with them into their 60s and reflect an arguably more conservative viewpoint than younger generations.

The members of Generation X were born between the years of 1965 and 1980. Unlike the baby boom, this generation is characterized by a decline in birth rates in the United States, which

is sometimes why they are termed the “baby bust.” This could be due to a myriad of factors including the introduction of birth control pills, policy relating to reproductive rights, the influx of women into the workforce, or an increase in divorce rates. The family environment in which Generation X was raised is slightly different than that of Baby Boomers because the members of Generation X are more likely to have grown up in a dual income household or a single parent household than previous generations. This generation is also characterized by an increase in higher education with more women and more people in general attending college due to their generation being one of the first to experience the emphasis on higher learning in the labor market (Currier, 2018). Generation X also was the first generation to have access to computers making them somewhat more tech savvy than Baby Boomers but not as technologically advanced as, say, Millennials. Because this generation grew up post civil rights movement, they do not remember a segregated world and are less likely to have similar notions to those who grew up in the pre-civil rights era. Also, due to the higher number of women and mothers in the workforce and the progress made for women’s issues during this generation’s formative years, they might be likely to adopt a more feminist outlook.

Millennials consist of individuals born between the years of 1981 and 1996. This generation is marked by growing up largely in the 1990’s and the new millennium. While they were alive during a time when digital technology was not so prevalent, they did grow up on the cusp of the internet age. When this generation reached teenage years, cell phones started to become a necessary item, and eventually, those cell phones turned into smartphones. Social media became prevalent in the formative years of Millennials with many of them on digital platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, and AOL instant messenger. This generation is also characterized by an increase in formal education with many obtaining more graduate degrees



than before. Many Millennials came of age or were in early adulthood at the time of the 2008 economic crisis, inheriting a crumbling economy and plummeting housing market which made achieving the American Dream much harder for them than it was for their parents and grandparents. Members of this generation tend to live with romantic partners before marriage at a much higher rate than before. As the members of this generation are largely in their thirties now, many are beginning to have families with children belonging to Generation Alpha or late Generation Z. However, Millennials are setting a trend for getting married later in life and having smaller families than previous generations.

Generation Z is considered to be all the individuals born between 1997 and 2010. This generation spans from college graduates to children just entering middle school. Because members of Generation Z can be anywhere from 11 to 25, their characteristics vary somewhat due to age. Part of this generation is getting married and having children while the other part is figuring out how to navigate 7th grade. For the purposes of this study, I mainly focus on the voting eligible portion of this generation whose birth years are between 1997 and 2004. All of this generation grew up in the age of the internet, and cell phones became exceedingly popular and necessary in the early 2000s. Therefore, much of this generation grew up not only around computers and the internet, but also the prevalent use of cell phones in society is a trend that most of Generation Z has known their whole lives. This generation is the one of the most tech savvy and most involved across many social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, VSCO, and Snapchat. This is most likely due to the fact that much of this generation had their own cell phones or smartphones early on in their preteen and teenage years. Similar to Generation X, the early part of this generation was also born in the midst of an unpopular war but were not of the age to enlist. Some of Generation Z's parents might have been in the military fighting in the

middle east as 9/11 occurred within the Generation Z birth year window. However, Generation Z was too young (and most not yet born) to understand the devastation of 9/11 at the time of its occurrence. Generation Z has shown and is predicted to be the most well educated generation yet, which could have a significant impact on the political climate of the U.S.

### ***Political Differences between Generations***

Baby Boomers currently hold the majority of the elected positions in the US government. They hold a great deal of power in our political system, in part, because they hold so many offices. Baby Boomers hold 230 of the 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives and 60 of the 100 seats in the United States Senate (Blazina & DeSilver, 2021). The office of the President has also been occupied by Baby Boomers since 2000, with the exception of our most recent elected president, Joe Biden, born in 1942, which makes him a member of the even earlier Silent Generation. As a generalization, Baby Boomers tend to hold relatively conservative viewpoints. While they might hold somewhat more liberal positions on social issues than earlier generations, they still perpetuated a conservative trend in political partisanship whether that be a factor of the cohort effect, aging, or period influences (Alwin, 1998).

Generation X is largely overlooked in the political scene as the larger generations of Millennials and the Baby Boom are the two primary forces fighting for political power (Currier, 2018). As the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers have both produced several U.S. Presidents, Generation X has yet to do so. Millennials have not yet had a president belonging to their generation either, but this is likely due to the fact that only a very small portion of that generation would even have been eligible to run for president due to age, and many Millennials in politics are still starting out in their careers. Generation X seems somewhat removed from the world of

politics as their presence is not greatly felt in that area. They seem to straddle the gap somewhat between the staunch conservatism of many Baby Boomers, and the leftward swing of Millennials. They hold more liberal positions on social issues than Baby Boomers and are more comfortable with the increasing diversity in the United States, but they do not have as many liberal tendencies as Millennials (Pew Research Center, 2011). It also seems that the political climate in which Generation X grew up has shifted them in a particular direction. The older portion of Generation X, who became politically active during the Reagan and Bush administrations, have voted more Republican than the electorate. On the other hand, the younger portion of Generation X, who became eligible to vote during the Clinton administration, have mostly voted more Democratic than the electorate (Pew Research Center, 2011). Therefore, Generation X is a bit more of a mixed bag than other generations due to the fact that they have a partisan split and almost blend into the background of the political scene.

Millennials have just recently passed Baby Boomers as the largest generation of eligible voting age. It is clear that as more and more Millennials enter the world of politics and Baby Boomers are slowly dying out, the political climate of the United States Government is bound to change. Although there is a stereotype that younger Americans tend to be more liberal than their older counterparts, Millennials have presented themselves as a considerable outlier regarding their political stance. On average, Millennials have “distinct political leanings that are significantly to the left of older generations,” creating a deep partisan and generational divide (Fisher, 2017). Millennials' disproportionate support for the Democratic party is a result of both this generation's increase in diversity as well as a general contempt for Republican presidents such as George Bush and Donald Trump (Fisher, 2017). In 2018, Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest eligible voting block (Gonyea & Hudson, 2020), and we may be able to

predict a higher number of Democrats being elected to office, possibly counteracting the Republican shift we have seen in the past few decades, if Millennials turn out to vote.

About half of the members of Generation Z are eligible to vote, and their general political stances look similar to that of Millennials. Much of Generation Z is largely Democratic and socially liberal, perhaps even more progressive than that of their Millennial counterparts. This could be due in part to the fact that Generation Z is considerably more diverse than earlier generations. A slim majority of Generation Z is white encompassing about 52% of the generation's US population. 25% of Gen Z is Hispanic, 14% are African-American, 6% are Asian, and the remaining percentage of another ethnic origin or race (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). The demographics are much more varied across the board for this generation as Millennials are 61% white, Generation X is 70% white, and Baby Boomers are 82% white (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Because of this increase in diversity, more diverse political views are also present. Many researchers have predicted that the higher levels of diversity and education that Generation Z possesses and will possess will greatly influence the partisan shift of our government in future decades (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

### ***Differences in Political Participation***

Regardless of the size or political standing of a generation, visible political change cannot happen unless these individuals are registered to vote and turn out to vote in elections. Political participation is vital to the role of representation in politics. Registering to vote, educating oneself on elections, and voting accordingly is vital to political participation. For the 2020 elections, turnout was highest among Baby Boomers and declined steadily among younger generations. Almost 80% of the population that is 60+ turned out to vote, while roughly 73% of

the population aged 45 to 59 turned out. From there it only declines, with only 65% of citizens aged 30 to 44 turning out, and just over 50% of 18 to 29 year olds voting (Figure 1. McDonald, 2021). However, these turnout rates are some of the highest ever reported for each age demographic with each spiking considerably over average turnout. This is most likely due to the highly controversial 2020 Presidential Election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. It is also important to note that turnout noticeably spikes during Presidential Election years and declines in each midterm election. The following graph has tracked data not by generation, but by age, and the trend for almost three decades shows that the older the voters are, the higher the turnout.

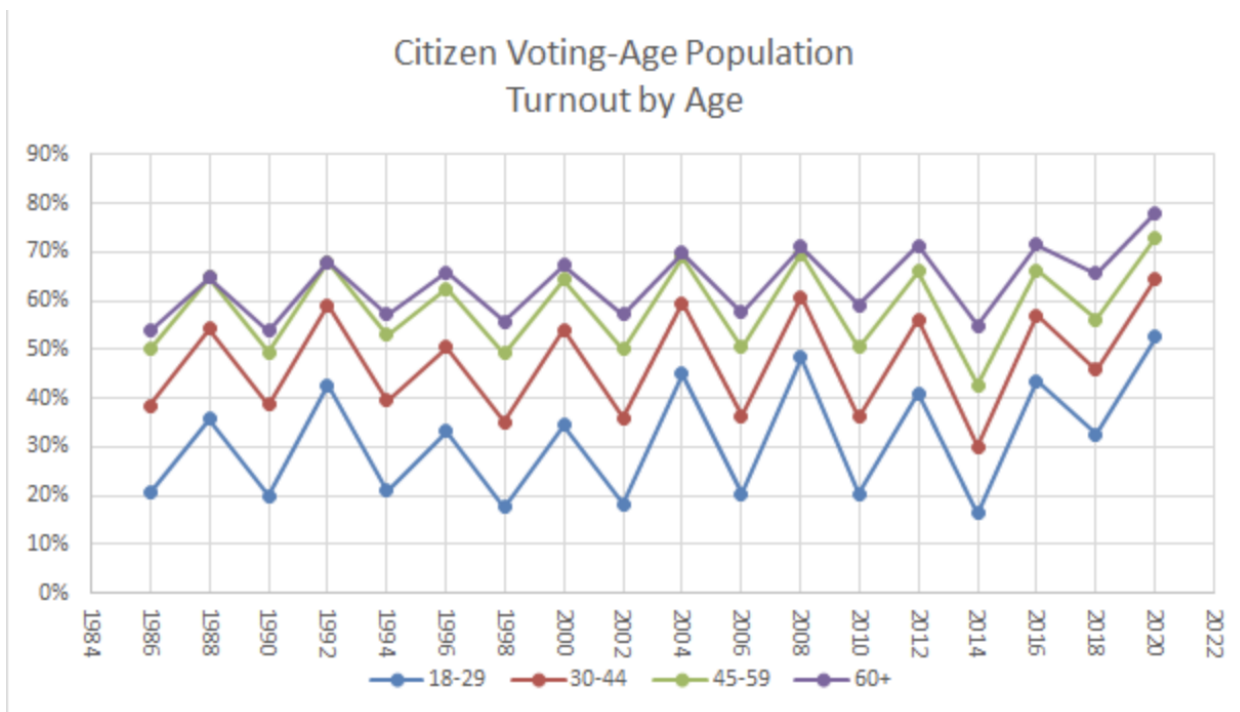


Figure 1. Turnout Rates by Age 1986-2020. From *The United States Election Project* by M. P. McDonald (2021). <http://www.electproject.org/home/voter-turnout/demographics>

### *Motivations/Hypotheses*

There are several motivations that might lead a person to vote such as a feeling of responsibility as a citizen, support for a specific candidate, strong feelings about prevalent issues, or pressure and influence from others. For the purposes of this study, four motivations for voting have been outlined and will be used in conjunction with responses to the survey questionnaire outlined in a later section. The four motivations by which respondents will be measured are ‘civic duty,’ ‘social influence,’ ‘candidate/party support,’ and ‘issue support.’

Civic duty is defined as the set of responsibilities that citizens have as members of a democracy. Individuals with a strong sense of civic duty would most likely feel that it is a privilege and their responsibility to their country to exercise their right to vote in order to maintain the integrity of our officials and our political system. An obligation to fulfill one’s civic duty can influence attitudes on a variety of topics such as military service, voting, community service, civic engagement, jury duty, tax law, and other topics of responsibility that come with citizenship.

Social influence is also a highly motivating factor that is often used as a method to get out the vote. Tactics such as letting voters know that voting records and registrations are public are common. Bandwagon tactics such as “Everyone else is voting. You should too!” can also have a similar effect. Other social pressures such as parents, siblings, friends, or coworkers urging you to vote could also be a significant influence. Socialization is vital to the formation and evolution of one’s views and beliefs. Whether it be attitudes toward candidates, policy, or voting practices in general, social influence can have a significant impact on all of these things and measuring these influences via a survey might reveal if a certain generation is more susceptible to social influence.

Candidate/party support is a voting motivation that drives citizens to vote because they have strong ties to a certain candidate or political party. For example, they might be highly partisan and want to support whatever candidate their party is endorsing. In addition, finding a candidate that a voter truly supports would be a strong motivator for participating in an election in order to support a chosen candidate.

Issue support could also be a significant motivator if a particular issue that a voter has a strong opinion about is controversial during a voting period. These are brought up in elections quite frequently whether it be candidates' opposing views on an issue such as abortion or voting on the legalization of marijuana. Those who vote based on prevalent issues may or may not have strong party ties, but their stance on an issue could lead them to vote regardless of party.

It is my hypothesis that voting behavior, and motivations for voting in particular, will vary across generational lines. The Baby Boomer generation has a stronger sense of patriotism (Adams & Gay, 2019), and that is likely to make them value voting as a privilege and a right that they must participate in as a productive citizen. A large portion of Baby Boomers were eligible to be drafted in the Vietnam War, and many of the Baby Boomers had parents or older family members that fought in World War II. The social and political culture of patriotism and civic duty was alive and well when this generation was raised and maturing into young adults, and I think many of those same principles have stuck with them to this day as they enter their 60s and 70s. I make these generalizations based upon the generational theories proposed by Karl Mannheim in which he proposes that “socialization can be a collective experience across groups of individuals in society, and patterns of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors within and across different groups have the potential to emerge from these shared experiences” (Mannheim, 1952). Due to the political environment and the overwhelming societal ideal to perform one's duty to

his country whether that be enlisting in the war or exercising one's right to vote, I think that the shared experience of Baby Boomers has fostered a strong sense of patriotism. A study on subjective patriotism conducted by researchers at the University of Florida revealed interesting findings. After having members of several generations self-report feelings of patriotism, they found that younger generations appear to be significantly less patriotic than previous generations (Adams & Gay, 2019). Patriotism is very closely tied to love of country and dedication to fulfilling your duty as a citizen. Therefore, I think Baby Boomers will be most motivated to vote by the measure that is defined in this study as "civic duty."

A person's social circle such as family, friends, romantic relationships, coworkers, and even social media friends/followers certainly has an effect on a person's beliefs in several ways whether it causes or is a reflection of it. (Sokhey & McClurg, 2012). I predict that Millennials are likely to be more motivated to vote by 'social influence' due, in part, to the fact that this generation is one of the first generations to latch onto social media as it became prevalent. In addition, unlike Generation Z that is also active on several media platforms, Millennials have a greater portion of married individuals than Generation Z. Many of the Baby Boomers have also been retiring and collecting social security for years now, even retiring at much higher rates following the pandemic, which has left Generation X and Millennials as the bulk of the labor force in the United States (Fry, 2020). Millennials and Generation X have several spheres of influence that much of Generation Z has yet to enter, and that Baby Boomers may have left behind. Therefore, I think it is plausible to predict that the more influences that these two generations have would make it more likely that social influence has a greater effect on their voting decisions.



It is my hypothesis that the motivation of ‘candidate/party support’ will span across generations, and not necessarily be a motivator that is partial to a certain generation. However, it is likely that the survey might show a higher trend in Democratic support among younger generations such as Millennials and Generation Z (Fisher, 2020).

Generation Z is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse generations yet (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Also with the rise and prevalence of social media experienced by this generation, they are constantly bombarded on most platforms about issues for which other users are advocating. Therefore, I think that ‘issue support’ might be a driving force for voting in Generation Z, or at the very least, issue support might be reported more by Generation Z than other generations even if it is not the most prevalent motivation for Generation Z. Research suggests that the shift of younger generations away from the Republican party is largely due to a negative reaction to the rightward shift in politics over that past few decades, especially when it comes to social issues such as gay marriage and other controversial topics (Fisher, 2020). It is for this reason among others that I predict that issue support might be a leading motivation for the voting behavior of Generation Z because of their strong feelings on issues such as these.

### ***Research Design and Data***

In order to measure political motivation, I created a survey using questions that I felt might accurately gauge why a person of a certain age is motivated to vote. The four political motivations that are to be measured are civic duty, social influence, candidate/party support, and issue support. All survey questions are included in the Appendix.

This survey was administered through Lucid in March 2022 to more than 2,000 respondents. The responses were collected from March 9-12, 2022. Human subjects approval

was obtained from the IRB at the University of Mississippi (Protocol #22x-215). For this study, I obtained informed consent, basic demographic (e.g. gender, race, education, income), and political (e.g. partisanship, ideology, voting behavior) information prior to my questions asking about voting (Table 1). My sample consisted of a fairly representative racial composition including about 74% White, 11% Black, 6% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 4% other. The partisan make-up of my sample is roughly 52% Democrats, 38% Republicans, and 10% Independents. Of the 2,168 survey respondents, there were 781 Baby Boomers (36.02% of the sample), 431 Gen Xers (19.88% of sample) , 634 Millennials (31.09% of sample), and 282 Generation Z respondents (above the age of 18) (13.01% of sample).

Table 1. Survey Sample Characteristics	Sample characteristics (N = 2,168)
Average Age (in years)	47
% Female	55
Race	74
% white	11
% black	
Average Income (10-point scale) 3 = \$35,000-\$49,999 4 = \$50,000-\$74,999	3.9
Average Partisanship (7-point scale) 1 = Strong Republican 4 = Independent 7 = Strong Democrat	4.4
Average Ideology (7-point scale) 1 = Extremely Conservative 4 = Moderate 7 = Extremely Liberal	3.9
Average Education (6-point scale) 1= Some high school 6= Postgraduate degree	3.7

The survey begins with a dropdown menu in which people will select their birth year, so that I may adequately categorize them into their respective generations. There is also a question in which respondents choose the generation with which they self identify. Next, in the general information portion of the survey, respondents are asked if they are registered to vote, which party they identify with (if they identify with a party), and their conservative or liberal leanings. The purpose of these questions is to get a general idea of to which generation respondents belong and sense of their general political stance.

The next portion of the survey is aimed to gauge typical turnout. The questions first ask whether or not respondents voted in the 2020 Presidential Primary and General Presidential elections. Then, respondents are asked how often they typically vote in presidential, gubernatorial, and local elections. I also posed a question about where respondents get their news because I believe that will vary greatly based on generation whether or not they get their news from cable news networks, social media, or other mediums. Through the responses to these questions, I believe I will be able to determine how involved people are in the political process of voting.

Next, the survey moves on to the motivation portion in which questions are first asked about civic duty, but that term is not explicitly mentioned. Respondents are asked to report how important they believe it is to vote, and if they believe they have a responsibility to do so. The answers to these questions will allow me to discern whether or not civic duty is important to the respondent and find if that is their main motivator for voting or if another motivator is more influential. Then, social influence as a factor to voting is measured by another set of questions. They are asked about their likelihood to vote in a certain election based on whether or not their friends, family, or peers are voting. They are then asked how much they believe their political

views are influenced or shaped by social influences. Lastly, they are asked whether or not they like to know for which candidates their peers are voting. These questions will measure if one's political and voting behaviors are more motivated by social influence or are largely independent of social influence.

The next portion of the survey asks more in depth questions about party affiliation and candidate support. Respondents are asked if having a candidate they support on the ballot would influence their decision to vote. Then, they are asked how often they vote for their political party (if they identify with a particular one). These questions aim to show how strong one's ties are to particular candidates and parties and if that is a driving motivator for voting. Next, the survey asks about issues. There are many political issues that are hot button, controversial topics that might influence a voter to vote one way or another. These questions are designed to determine how important issues are to a particular voter and how that influences their voting behavior. They are asked if they are more likely to vote if issues pertinent to them are debated during an election, followed by a question that asks if they would be willing to vote for a candidate that aligned with their views but belonged to a different party. This question is meant to see whether party affiliation or issue concern is more important to the voter. Finally, they are asked if their preferred candidate came out with different views on an important issue, if they would still vote for their preferred candidate or if they would search for a new candidate that aligns more closely with their views.

Through the survey questions, I will analyze responses to see what motivates each respondent to vote based on their answers to the above questions. After that, I will sort the answer according to respondent age and see if I can determine a definitive trend among generations that correlates to voting behavior and motivation.

## Results

According to election data research, voting records, and the results of the survey, voting behavior varies greatly in accordance with generational lines. The United States Election Project compiles turnout data by race, ethnicity, age, education and more. Baby Boomers vote much more frequently and in greater numbers than all of the successive generations, with each declining in participation more than the one before it (Figure 1). The results of my survey have also reflected the same conclusion when respondents self-reported their turnout for the 2020 general presidential election between Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

2020 Presidential Election Turnout	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average %
Did not vote	8.71%	21.81%	20.92%	30.50%	17.94%
Thought about voting, but did not	0.38%	3.94%	6.68%	10.28%	4.34%
Usually vote, but did not	1.15%	4.87%	3.86%	9.93%	3.87%
Attempted to vote, but did not	0.64%	1.86%	2.08%	5.32%	1.94%
Voted	89.12%	67.52%	66.47%	43.97%	71.91%

Table 2. Which statement best reflects your participation in the 2020 General Presidential Election?

The main purpose of the survey, however, was to ask respondents of all generations questions that would reveal their primary motivation for voting from the ones outlined in this study. When asked how important they thought voting is, 86.7% of Baby Boomers responded ‘very important’. From there, the percentages of respondents in descending generations that answered ‘very important’ declined accordingly: 72.8% of Generation X, 63.7% of Millennials, and 46.5% of Generation Z said voting was very important. The younger the generation got, the more likely they were to respond that voting was only somewhat important. When asked whether voting was a duty or a choice, the only generation in which the majority responded that it was a

duty was the Baby Boomer generation. The data from these questions leads me to conclude that the Baby Boomer generation, more than any other generation, is motivated to vote out of civic duty due to the importance of and responsibility they feel to vote.

Importance of Voting	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average Percent
Very Unimportant	1.66%	4.18%	4.15%	4.61%	3.32%
Somewhat Unimportant	1.66%	4.87%	9.35%	17.73%	6.78%
Somewhat Important	9.99%	18.10%	22.85%	31.21%	18.36%
Very Important	86.68%	72.85%	63.65%	46.45%	71.54%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3. Importance of Voting by Generation

Is voting a duty or a choice?	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average Percent
Mainly a choice	33.57%	45.01%	54.01%	52.13%	44.97%
Neither a duty nor a choice	11.78%	17.17%	13.65%	14.89%	13.84%
Mainly a duty	53.56%	37.82%	32.34%	32.98%	41.19%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4. Is Voting a Duty or a Choice? Breakdown of Responses by Generation

The next set of questions aimed to gauge social influence inquired about the likelihood to vote based on whether or not friends and family were voting, and the answers were largely inconclusive. Baby Boomers and Generation X mostly answered that the fact their friends are voting will have no effect on their voting behavior or make them extremely likely to vote. The majority of Millennials said this factor would make them extremely likely to vote, followed by no effect, and somewhat likely to vote. Generation Z pretty definitively answered that their friends' and family's choices to vote would have no effect on their own. 'Somewhat likely' and 'extremely likely' virtually tied for the second most common answer for Generation Z.

Likelihood to vote if friends/family ARE voting	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average Percent
Very unlikely	2.43%	4.18%	4.60%	5.32%	3.83%
Somewhat unlikely	0.26%	0.93%	1.93%	3.19%	1.29%
No effect	43.15%	42.00%	28.93%	39.36%	38.01%
Somewhat likely	5.38%	12.06%	18.25%	26.60%	13.47%
Extremely likely	48.78%	40.84%	46.29%	25.53%	43.40%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5. How likely are you to vote if your family and friends are voting?

In addition, the survey also asked about the respondents' likelihood to vote if their family and friends were not voting. The results for this question were extremely similar to the previous question and there was not a significant difference in the percentages for each answer from each generation.

Likelihood to vote if friends/family are NOT voting	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average Percent
Very unlikely	2.18%	4.64%	3.86%	4.96%	3.55%
Somewhat unlikely	0.26%	2.09%	2.97%	9.22%	2.63%
No effect	45.07%	43.85%	31.01%	40.78%	39.90%
Somewhat likely	5.12%	10.44%	20.33%	22.34%	13.15%
Extremely likely	47.38%	38.98%	41.84%	22.70%	40.77%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6. How likely are you to vote if your family and friends are NOT voting?

However, when respondents were asked how much they think their family's, friends', and coworkers' views influenced their own, Millennials were much more likely to respond that they had influence. 33.2% of Millennial respondents answered that their social circle does 'greatly

influence' their own views, whereas less than 5% of Baby Boomers said they were greatly influenced, and less than 17% of Generation X and Generation Z said they were greatly influenced.

Believed Peer Influence	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average Percent
No influence	59.03%	47.33%	23.74%	30.14%	41.97%
A little influence	23.30%	19.49%	19.29%	24.47%	21.45%
Somewhat influence	12.80%	16.71%	23.74%	31.56%	19.42%
Greatly influence	4.87%	16.47%	33.23%	13.83%	17.16%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 7. How much do you believe your family/friends/coworkers views on voting and issues influence your own beliefs?

In addition, almost 60% of Millennials responded that they would prefer to know who their friends are voting for, followed closely by Generation Z in which 56.3% of them would prefer to know. The majority of Baby Boomers and Generation X responded that they would prefer not to know for whom their friends are voting.



## Do you prefer to know for whom your friends are voting?

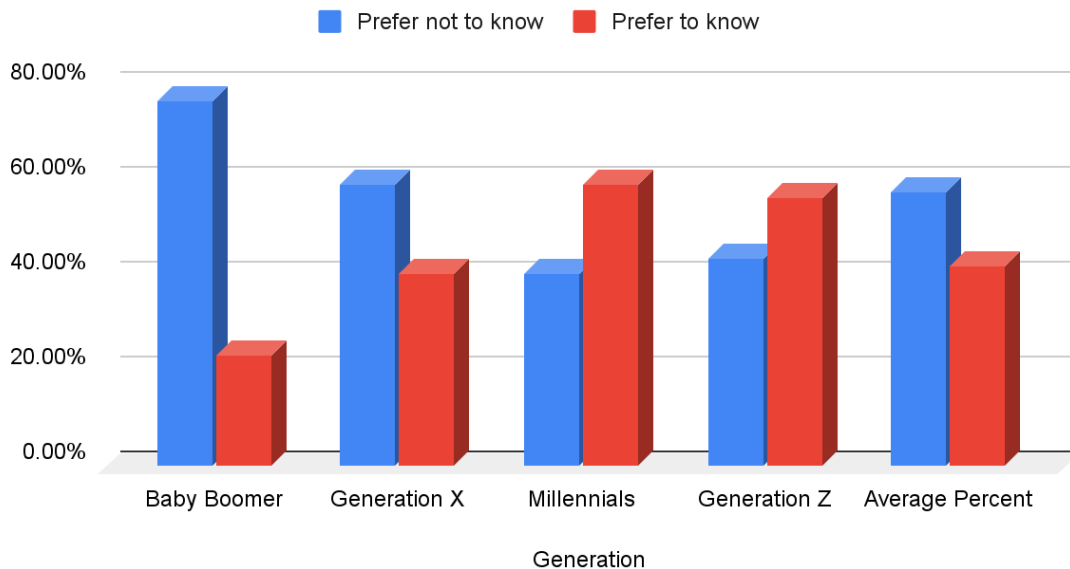


Figure 2.

In the next portion of the survey, a few questions were posed in order to measure how much candidate and party support influenced voting motivations. When asked, “How much does having a candidate you support on the ballot influence your decision to vote?”, the answers were largely the same when compared by generation. On average, about 42% of each generation responded that having a candidate they supported on the ballot greatly influenced their decision to vote. The answer “somewhat influence” to this question was also pretty consistent, with about 25 to 30 percent of each generation choosing this answer. Ten to 18 percent of all generations responded that having a candidate they support on the ballot only influences their decisions to vote a little. Lastly, 14 to 25 percent of each generation claimed that this factor had no effect on their decision to vote. The responses to the question about how often one votes for the candidate from their preferred party were also relatively consistent across generational lines.

Candidate Influence	Baby Boomer	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z	Average Percent
No influence	25.35%	18.79%	14.09%	17.38%	19.51%
A little influence	10.88%	12.76%	12.31%	18.79%	12.73%
Somewhat influence	25.10%	24.83%	25.37%	31.56%	25.97%
Greatly influence	38.67%	43.62%	48.22%	32.27%	41.79%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8. How much does having a candidate you support on the ballot influence your decision to vote?

The questions aimed to gauge issue support were somewhat inconclusive in determining generational differences. While members of each generation had a relatively consistent distribution of answers, there were still some interesting findings. About 66 to 78 percent of respondents from each generation said that they would be more likely to vote if issues that they felt strongly about were debated during an election.

### Are you more likely to vote when issues are debated in an election that you feel strongly about?

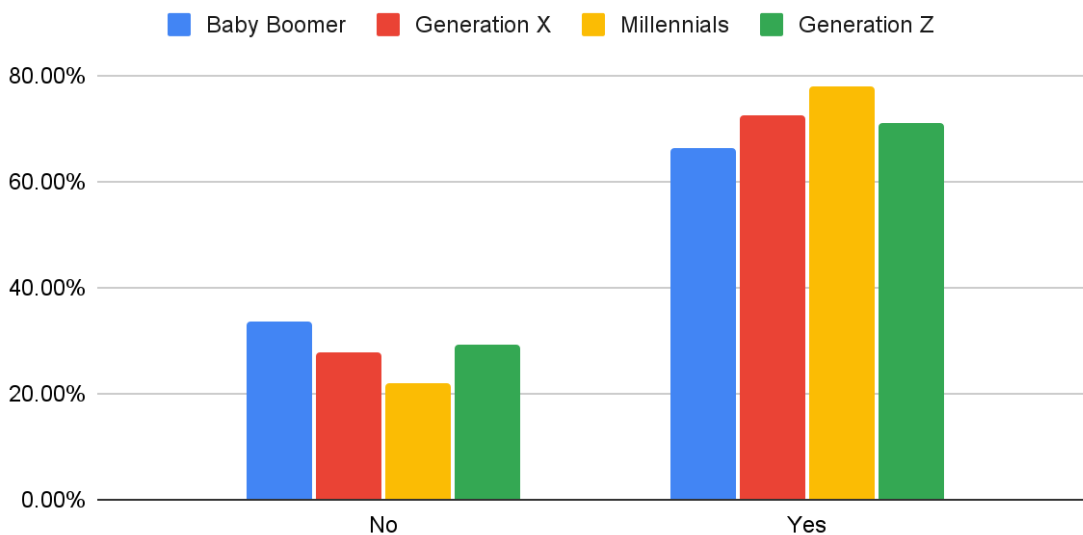


Figure 3.

When asked if they would be willing to vote for a candidate outside of their preferred party if they aligned with their views on important issues, about 70 to 82 percent of each generation responded that they would be willing. However, of the four generations, Generation X and Generation Z seemed the most reluctant to vote outside of their preferred parties.

Would you be willing to vote for a candidate that aligned with your views on issues if they did not belong to your party?

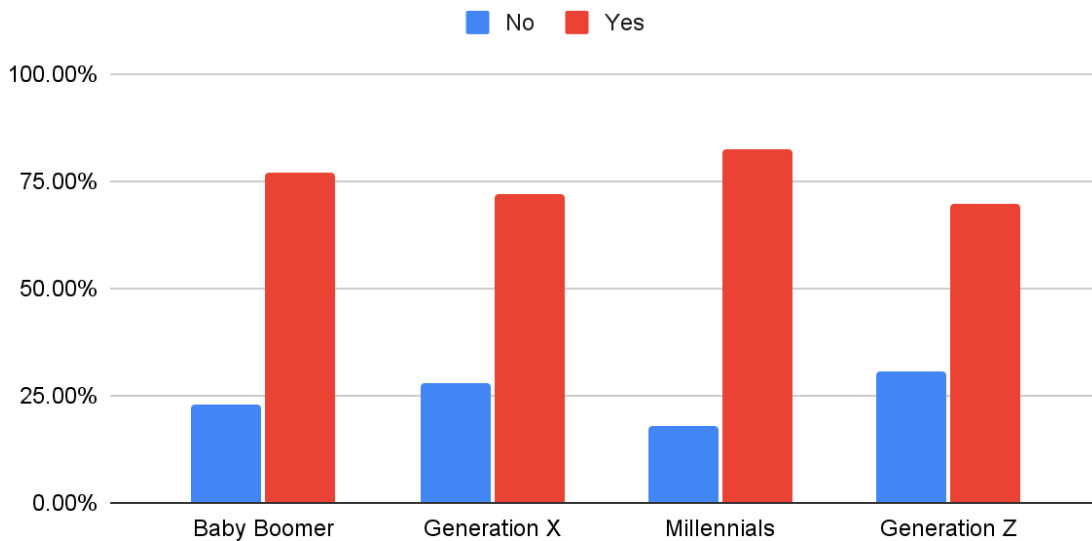


Figure 4.

The next question asked that if they found out their preferred candidate did not align with their views on important issues, would they vote for their preferred candidate, find another candidate that better aligns with their views, or do something else (such as refrain from voting). The answers to this question were a bit more of a mixed bag in the generational breakdown than the other two questions focused on issue support. 75.67% of Baby Boomers, 55.22% of Generation X, and 56.38% of Generation Z responded that they would look to find another candidate. On the other hand, 48.07% of Millennials said that they would rather just vote for

their preferred candidate. Only 40.5% of Millennials answered that they would search for a new candidate for which to vote, and 11.42% of Millennials answered that they would neither vote for the preferred candidate nor search for a new one.

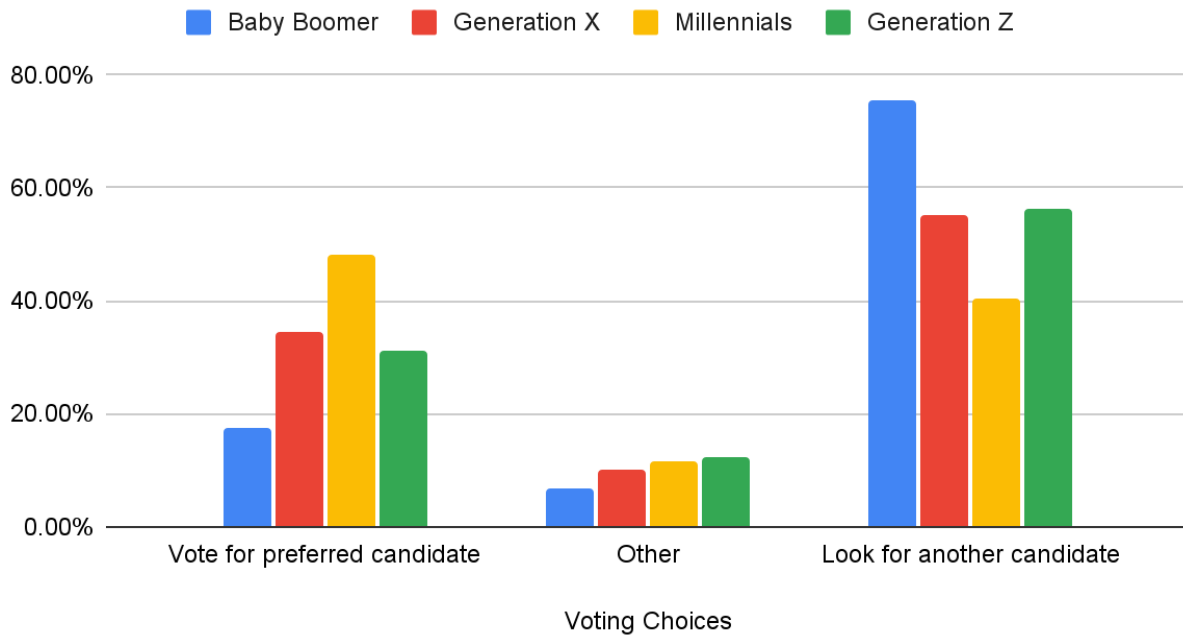


Figure 5. Issue over Candidate/Party. (Note: Survey question: If you found out that your preferred candidate did not align with your views on certain issues that are important to you, would you continue to vote for your preferred candidate or would you look to find another candidate that better represents your views on those issues?)

**Conclusion**

From the research, it can be concluded that the older a voter is, the more likely they are to exercise their right to vote in elections, as evidenced by turnout data from the past 30 years (McDonald, 2021). In addition, the survey results showed that Baby Boomers, which was the oldest generation surveyed, had a different attitude towards voting than the younger generations.

Over 86% of Baby Boomers responded that voting was very important whereas not even three-fourths of other generations responded in the same manner. Generation Z did not even have a majority of respondents answer that it was very important. As it relates to a feeling of civic duty, Baby Boomers were the only generation to have a majority respond that voting was a duty rather than a choice. The Baby Boomers' feeling of responsibility and duty to vote is likely also at least somewhat responsible for their higher rates of turnout. Generation X was the second most generation to express these feelings of importance and duty surrounding voting, exceeding Millennials and Gen Z in this area, but not responding to the extent of the Baby Boomers.

According to Millennials, they seem to be the most socially influenced generation. When respondents were asked to self-report the influence that their peers have on their own beliefs and views about voting, about 12% of other generations on average reported their peers greatly influencing them, whereas over 33% of Millennials felt greatly influenced. In addition, only Millennials and Generation Z preferred to know for whom their friends were voting, and a higher percentage of Millennials wanted to know who their friends voted for than Generation Z.

The data from the questions intended to measure candidate and party support were somewhat inconclusive. For the most part, each generation seemed to be influenced similarly to vote if a candidate they supported was running. Millennials, followed by Generation X, did have higher percentages of respondents report that candidate support would greatly influence their decision to vote, but it was not that large of a difference from Baby Boomers and Generation Z. The vast majority of each generation responded that they would be more likely to vote if there were issues debated in the election for which they felt strongly, which is not surprising.

The following two questions in the previous section aimed to compare party support in relation to issue importance. Most respondents, especially Baby Boomers and Millennials,

answered that they would be willing to vote for a candidate if they aligned on issues. A majority of Generation X and Generation Z reported that they would as well, but still about 30% of each of those two generations reported that they would not vote for a candidate of another party even if they did align on issues. However, when asked if they would continue to vote for their preferred candidate if they found that they did not align on issues, a majority of every generation except Millennials responded that they would look for a different candidate for which to vote, and almost half of Millennials opted to stick with their preferred candidate. Because of these varying results, it is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion about generational differences as it relates to candidate/party support and issue support.

Even though two of the four motivations did not produce substantial differences across generations, these findings can still have an impact on how those in the political sphere approach voters. The concept of civic duty and social influence appear to be highly motivating factors that encourage people to vote regardless of party affiliation or ideological viewpoints, especially to members of certain generations and age groups. The younger the generation, the less likely it is for them to perceive voting as a vitally important part of their lives or a duty that they should fulfill as a productive citizen. It also appears that the voters that are motivated to vote by civic duty has a direct correlation to higher voter turnout. If officials who are running for office and organizing campaigns were to capitalize on this and promote voting as a citizen's responsibility and bring that value back to the forefront of American ideals, and possibly even combine that with the motivation of social and societal influence, voter turnout could be increased in great numbers if they were successful in this endeavor.

## *Appendix*

### *Survey Instrument*

In what year were you born? [dropdown menu]

Which generation do you identify with?

- Baby Boomer
- Generation X
- Millennials
- Generation Z

Are you registered to vote?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Which of the following statements best describes you?

- I did not vote in the November 2020 General Election between Joseph Biden and Donald Trump
- I thought about voting this time, but didn't
- I usually vote, but didn't this time
- I attempted to vote, but did not or could not
- I definitely voted in the November 2020 General Election

From which of the following sources do you most often get your political news?

- Television news programs (morning or evening), television talk shows, public affairs, or news analysis programs
- Newspapers
- Internet sites, chat rooms, or blogs
- Radio news or talk shows
- None of these sources

How important do you think voting is?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a choice - they feel free to vote or not to vote, depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For others voting is a

duty - they feel they should vote in every election no matter how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting mainly a choice, mainly a duty, or neither a choice nor a duty?

- Mainly a choice
- Mainly a duty
- Neither a choice nor a duty

How strongly do you feel that voting is a choice?

- Very strongly
- Moderately strongly
- A little strongly

How strongly do you feel that voting is a duty?

- Very strongly
- Moderately strongly
- A little strongly

How likely are you to vote if your friends/family are voting in a certain election?

- Extremely likely to vote
- Somewhat likely to vote
- No difference
- Somewhat unlikely to vote
- Very unlikely to vote

How likely are you to vote if your friends/family are NOT voting in a certain election?

- Extremely likely to vote
- Somewhat likely to vote
- No difference
- Somewhat unlikely to vote
- Very unlikely to vote

How much do you believe your family/friends/coworkers views on voting and issues influence your own beliefs?

- Greatly influence
- Somewhat influence
- Influence a little
- Do not influence

Do you prefer to know who your friends are voting for or do you prefer not to know?

- Prefer to know



- Prefer not to know

How much does having a candidate you support on the ballot influence your decision to vote?

- Greatly influence
- Somewhat influence
- Influence a little
- Does not influence

How much does having a candidate you dislike on the ballot influence your decision to vote?

- Greatly influence
- Somewhat influence
- Influence a little
- Does not influence

How often do you vote for candidates from your preferred party?

- Always
- Very often
- Sometimes
- Seldom
- Never

Are you more likely to vote when issues are debated during the election that you feel strongly about?

- Yes
- No

Would you be willing to vote for a candidate that aligned with your views on certain issues if they did not belong to your preferred party?

- Yes
- No

If you found out that your preferred candidate did not align with your views on certain issues that are important to you, would you continue to vote for your preferred candidate or would you look to find another candidate that better represents your views on those issues?

- Vote for preferred candidate
- Look to find another candidate that better represents your views Other (i.e., not vote)

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