

THE IMPACT OF AGE ON POLITICAL ATTITUDES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE BABY BOOMER, GENERATION X, AND MILLENNIAL GENERATIONS

by

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Honors Thesis

Appalachian State University

Submitted to the Department of Government and Justice Studies
and The Honors College

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science

May, 2015

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Abstract

Society commonly believes that as individuals age they become more conservative. However, literature on the topic indicates that this may not be true. To understand what factors shape individuals' attitudes about the federal government this research compares the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations attitudes towards the federal government and trust in government by utilizing questions from the 1978-2012 American National Elections Studies. By comparing mean attitudes of individuals at different stages in life along with conducting a linear regression this research finds that the most important factor contributing to the development of political attitudes is the year of the study or current political climate. However, factors such as age, generation, party identification, gender, race, and income are also found to be significant factors. The results indicate that individuals political attitudes are influenced by a variety of factors, thus to focus solely on age is too simplistic.

Review of the Literature

A person's age at different stages in life brings about different economic and social experiences which impacts their opinions.¹² In order for policy makers and public administrators to develop and administrate governmental policies it is important to understand how and why political ideologies of individuals evolve.³ Age is an important demographic much like class, race, religion, gender etc. Many scholars argue that as cohorts' age, their political opinions change.⁴ As people age they experience psychological and physiological development that influence their perceptions of reality.⁵ These different stages in life present different experiences that shape one's perceptions of the world.⁶ Generally while people in their twenties in the United States are occupied with starting their career, in mid life they are focused on starting a family, and in their later years they are occupied with retirement. These different economic and social concerns shape the political ideologies of individuals. Conventional wisdom suggests that as people age they become more conservative. This belief is perpetrated by the quote often attributed to Winston Churchill which states "If you are not liberal when you are young you have no heart; if you are not

¹ Streig, Gordon and Bourg, Carrol. "Age Stratification Theory, Inequality, and Social Change." *Comparative Social Research* 7(1984):63-77.

² Riley, Matilda. "Aging and Cohort Succession: Interpretations and Misinterpretations." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 37 no.1 (1973):35-50.

³ Kraus, Neil. *Majoritarian cities; policy making and inequality in urban politics*. University of Michigan Press, 2013.

⁴ Foner, Anne. "Age Stratification and Age Conflict in Political Life." *American Sociological Review* 7, no. 2 (1974): 187-196.

⁵ Silverstein, Merrill, Vern Bengtson, Norella Putney, and Daphna Gans. *Handbook of Theories of Aging*. 2nd ed. Springer Publishing Company, 2008.

⁶ Alwin, Duane. "Aging, Personality, and Social Change: The Stability of Individual Differences over the Adult Life Span." *Life Span Development and Behavior* 12(1994):135-185.

conservative when you are old you have no brain.” However there is evidence to suggest that Winston Churchill’s quote is false.⁷

Review of the Literature

Suggesting that most young people are liberal negates strong evidence that one of the best predictors of a person’s party identification and political ideology stems from one’s parent’s political beliefs and voting patterns. Rational Choice Theory indicates that an individual’s ideology and voting choices are determined through past experiences with elections and the political system. This concept asserts that people make political voting decisions based on rational evidence in order to predict which party or candidate they believe will provide the most benefits in the future.⁸ The rational choice model associated with voting patterns dictates that people do not only make voting decisions based on campaigns and candidates present in the current election. Rather, voting decisions are based on the culmination of every election and campaign a person has experienced along with each previous time they have voted. For example if a person votes for the Republican candidate and that candidate wins and the voter is satisfied with the elected Republican’s governing, the voter will most likely vote Republican again in the next election cycle. However, if the person who voted Republican is unsatisfied with the Republican placed into office they may reevaluate their voting decision and vote for a different party in the next election. As a person ages and experiences the results of many elections they have a far more calculated and rational means of making voting decisions compared to a first time voter who has witnessed few election periods and voted few times.

⁷ Krosnick, Jon and Alwin, Duane. “Aging and susceptibility to attitude change.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57 no.3(1989):416-425.

⁸ Achen, Christopher. "Parental Socialization and Rational Party Identification." *Political Behavior* 24, no. 2 (2002): 151-70.

Research also indicates that young voters will often vote in line with their parents past voting habits due to their limited knowledge and evidence as a new member of the political voting system.⁹ As individuals who have been socialized by their family's political ideologies and beliefs, new voters will likely vote along the same party lines as their parents as a result of the scarcity of other evidence presented to convince them to vote otherwise. Thus, research indicates that people often affiliate with the same political party as their parents for their entire life due to their continued voting patterns rooted in their family's political beliefs and influence.

Studies related to age's impact on political attitudes reveal that rather than becoming more conservative in the political sense people become more conservative in their personal ideals and less open to changing the opinions they have developed over their lifetime.¹⁰ As people age the intensity of their ideology decreases; yet their party loyalty increases.¹¹ Thus, as people grow older they do not necessarily become more conservative, they simply become more certain and confident in their beliefs and party affiliation. This relates back to the rational choice theory of voting. As an individual ages they experience many election cycles along with many political officials governing styles and techniques. As opposed to a young person who is unsure of what results will follow their vote choice, an older individual is more likely to know, or believe to know, what benefits will follow depending on which candidate won. Older individuals have had a lifetime to develop their political beliefs, attitudes, and party identification thus their propensity towards tolerating new ideas is less than their

⁹ Alwin, Duane, and Jon Krosnick. "Issues and Inheritance in the Formation of Party Identification." *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (1991): 970-88.

¹⁰ Cutler, Stephen & Kaufman, Robert. (1975). "Cohort Changes in Political Attitudes: Tolerance of Ideological Nonconformity." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 39(1) 69-81.

¹¹ Alwin, Duane, and Jon Krosnick. "Aging, Cohorts, and the Stability of Sociopolitical Orientations Over the Life Span." *American Journal of Sociology* 97, no. 1 (1991): 169-95.

younger counterparts. However, some research reveals that as time has progressed all generations of people have revealed higher levels of tolerance toward new opinions. While older people still remain less tolerant than younger people, the aggregated population as a whole is progressively becoming more tolerant towards new ideas.¹²

There is certainly evidence that suggests age shapes peoples political attitudes and feelings towards government. However, considering other characteristics of the population that covary with age may indicate there are more important factors than age. Gender, race, income, education, region, marital status, and party identification are critical variables to examine when analyzing factors that shape an individual's political attitudes. When studying how a person's age impacts their feelings toward government and politics, examining how these variables covary with a person's age is important. While age may have a strong impact on people of one demographic, it may have a limited impact on other demographics.

In regards to gender, research indicates that women and men are socialized in a way that creates differences in their political attitudes. As children, girls are not encouraged as much as boys to be politically active, thus in adulthood women perceive political discourse and voting differently than their male counterparts.¹³ There is an established gender gap in the voting behaviors of men versus women;¹⁴ on average women tend to be more liberal

¹² Cutler, S. J., & Kaufman, R. L. (1975). Cohort changes in political attitudes: Tolerance of ideological nonconformity. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 39(1), 69-81.

¹³ Gidengil, Elisabeth, O'Neill, Brenda, Young, Lisa. "Her Mother's Daughter? The Influence of Childhood Socialization on Women's Political Engagement." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 31 no.4 (2012):334-355.

¹⁴ Gillion, D. Q., Ladd, J. M., & Meredith, M. (2010). Education, Party Polarization and the Origins of the Gender Gap in U.S. Party Identification. *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association*, 1-61.

than men.¹⁵ Some research points to the roots of the gender gap beginning in the 1960s and 1970s as women started gaining higher levels of education and became cognizant of the increasing ideological polarization within the American party system.¹⁶ The Democratic Party has historically been more active with policies surrounding women's issues, which has led many feminists to support them over the Republican Party. The media's portrayal of politics further divides the differences in perceptions and ultimately different attitudes concerning how men and women view politics and issues relating to campaigns, elections, and political office. There is a 'masculine culture' within traditional media that produces content which is generally targeted at a male audience. This aspect of media further affects the way women perceive and develop different political attitudes than their male counterparts and ultimately vote differently.¹⁷ In addition, some scholars argue that even the constitution was set up upon the basis that males and females do and should behave differently.¹⁸ The constitution set up a state based on traditional values of group cooperation that entailed women providing for the home and men working and going to war. This foundational divide between genders remains present in society today and affects women's more favorable attitudes and feelings towards government; since government in essence provides stability and assistance for families.

In addition to the gender gap, scholars have identified the importance of a marriage gap. Presidential election results in 2004 indicate that while there was an 8 point gender gap,

¹⁵ Ondercin, Heather. "What Scarlett O' Hara Thinks: Political Attitudes of Southern Women." *Political Science Quarterly* 120 no.2(2013):233-259.

¹⁶ Gillion, D. Q., Ladd, J. M., & Meredith, M. (2010). Education, Party Polarization and the Origins of the Gender Gap in U.S. Party Identification. *Conference Papers -- American Political Science Association*, 1-61.

¹⁷ Everbach, T. (2005) *Media Disparity: A Gender Battleground*. Lexington Books.

¹⁸ McDonagh, E. (2010) War and women's political citizenship: The American revolution as a critical juncture. Forthcoming. Presented at the Western Political Science Association 2010.

there was a larger 15 point marriage gap.¹⁹ However, while research involving marriage and parenthood has not identified these variables as significant predictors of vote choice, major life events such as marriage and having children have been identified as factors that effect a person's political attitudes.²⁰ Major life events also correlate with age. It is possible that since most people start their careers, have children, and retire at similar ages the impact of those event on individuals political attitudes could classified as an impact due to age.

In regards to racial minorities' attitudes towards government, their underrepresentation in government has left many disillusioned with the American political system.²¹ Many racial minorities' attitudes towards government favor more liberal and democratic candidates that seek to ensure their livelihoods are protected. Minorities typically favor progressive leaders and policies. Thus, they typically maintain more liberal party identifications and attitudes towards government more than their white counterparts.²²

Education attainment levels also influence individuals' party identification and attitudes towards government. An individual's level of education not only affects their intelligence, but also their position in society. An individual's self-esteem and social networks are linked to their social class status in society and have implications on political behavior. How a person feels about themselves relative to the rest of society contributes to the political attitudes they develop. Who people network with further contributes to how they

¹⁹ Holden, H. G. (2007). The Marriage Gap. *Conference Papers -- Southern Political Science Association*, 1-24.

²⁰Elder, L., & Greene, S. (2007). Marriage, Work, Race, and the Politics of Parenthood. *Conference Papers -- Midwestern Political Science Association*, 1-26.

²¹ Block, Ray. "What About Disillusionment? Exploring the Pathways to Black Nationalism." *Political Behavior* 33 no.2 (2011):27-51.

²² Alwin, Duane, and Jon Krosnick. "The Development of Party Identification among Adults: Exploration of a Functional Model." *The American Political Science Review* 73, no. 4 (1979): 1039-054.

participate in political engagement such as voting, donating to campaigns, volunteering for campaigns etc.²³

The region an individual lives in along with their social class and income are also important factors that shape political attitudes. Traditionally, people from the southern region typically have more conservative attitudes, while people from the north and west have more liberal attitudes.²⁴ In addition, an individual's income has different effects on voting patterns and political attitudes depending upon which region they live in.²⁵

Generational differences also have an impact on individual political attitudes and ideologies. Research has been completed to examine how different cohorts view government through the lens of major political events that happen in their lifetime.²⁶ For example, millennial's political attitudes are often shaped by the events of 9/11, while the previous generations attitudes are shaped by events such as the Watergate scandal and the Iran Hostage Crisis. Research suggests major generational differences in political attitudes are likely to occur if a major political or societal event occurs during a formative stage in a person's life.²⁷

While generational differences impact peoples political attitudes, for the purpose of this research it is important to compare different generations against one another to determine common trends in the development of people's political attitudes as they age. For the purpose

²³ Emler, N., & Frazer, E. (1999). Politics: the education effect. *Oxford Review Of Education*, 25(1/2), 251-273. doi:10.1080/030549899104242

²⁴ White, S. (2014). The Heterogeneity of Southern White Distinctiveness. *American Politics Research*, 42(4), 551-578.

²⁵ Rigby, E., & Wright, G.C. (2013). Political Parties and Representation of the Poor in the American States. *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), 552-565.

²⁶ Coomes, Michael. "Understanding the Historical and Cultural Influences That Shape Generations." *New Directions for Student Services* 2004, no. 106 (2004): 17-31.

²⁷ Jennings, M. K. (1996). Political knowledge over time and across generations. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 60(2), 228-252.

of this research, three generations will be analyzed to determine if there are common societal trends in political attitudinal development as people age. The generations examined will be the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials.

This research examines the relationship between age and political attitudes. In addition to age several control variables will be examined to further analyze what types of people experience shifts in political attitudes as they grow older. Race, gender, party identification, and income are utilized as control variables for the purposes of this research. The dependent variables that are examined include several survey questions that have been asked consistently during the period of analysis. While some scholars argue individual's political feelings change with age, this research will examine to what extent do these changes occur and to what effect do they have on the development of political attitudes.

While age may have a large impact on shaping an individual's political beliefs and voting patterns, it is difficult to separate the effects of age from other critical variables such as gender, race, income, and party identification. In addition since the national political climate is constantly evolving based on issues such as war and the state of the economy it is often difficult to pinpoint what aspects of a person's life shapes their political ideology. The goal of this thesis is to attempt to determine which aspects of political attitudes are shaped by age and to what extent age is an important factor that contributes to political attitudes.

With the increase of party polarization and distrust in the government research investigating the source of these issues is an important contribution to the field of American Political Science. The idea that young people are only liberal because they are young is a concept that has penetrated the American public's opinions of how political attitudes

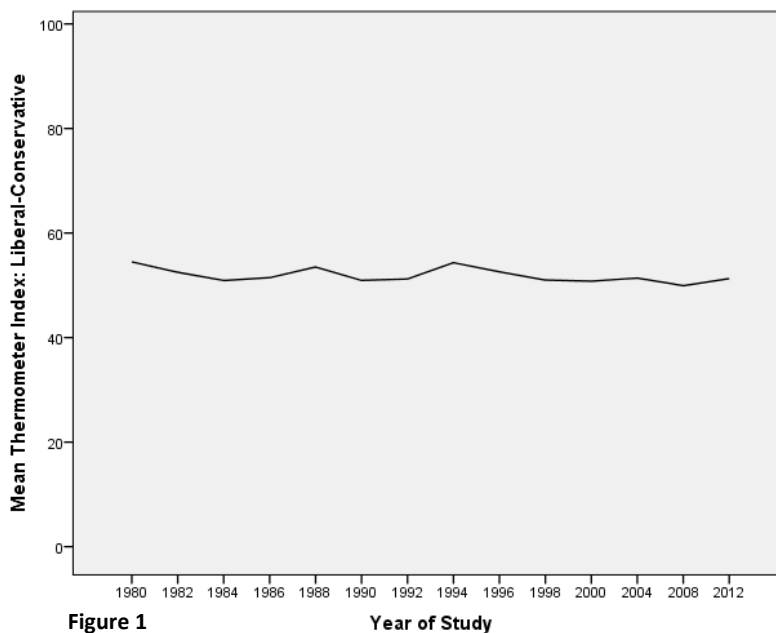
develop. However, to increase trust and positive feelings towards government political science must first understand the true underlying causes of contemporary political attitudes.

Methods

This project aimed to determine the impact of age on political attitudes utilizes the American National Election Study (ANES) Cumulative file to compare the attitudes of three generations. The generations studied are Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. The ANES was chosen because of the reliable nature of the data collected which is a recognized source within the field. The ANES cumulative file also provides comprehensiveness through consistent questions asked over the course of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations which enhances the reliability and validity of the research.

Winston Churchill's quote that suggests individuals become more conservative with age. The liberal to conservative spectrum suggests that there is a simple measure of ideology. With changing political climates over time, it could be assumed that political that the political ideology of society would fluctuate. However figure 1 indicates that trends related to ideology over time have remained static. For this reason the research focuses on more nuanced means of measuring ideology. In contemporary politics one of the defining factors separating liberals from conservatives relate towards the perceptions and trust in government. While liberals are more approving and trusting and government, conservatives are the opposite. Thus, to measure ideology questions on the ANES that asks respondents about questions concerning feelings towards government and trust in government were utilized.

Conservative – Liberal Ideological Self Placement Over Time



To measure and compare the political attitudes of the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1964-1980), and Millennials (1981-1987) the research first focused on analyzing comparison of means for thirteen age groups each within four year periods to simulate the four year intervals in which people vote for presidential election as the independent variables; the age groups included 18-21, 22-25, 26-29, 30-33, 34-37, 38-41, 42-45, 46-49, 50-53, 54-57, 58-61, 62-65, and 66-69. The sample size of the data utilized was 29,209.

To compare the generations two questions were utilized from the ANES as the dependent variables; first, a question that measured individuals feelings towards the federal government and second, a question that measured individuals trust in government (see Appendix A). Both questions were asked utilizing a feeling thermometer that ranged from 1-100 with 1 representing the “coldest feelings” and 100 representing the “warmest feelings.” To compare each generation the mean feeling thermometer score for each generation within

each age group was analyzed. To further measure the development of political attitudes in regards to demographic characteristics the same process was utilized by combining the questions related to feelings towards the federal government and trust in government with the independent variables party identification, income, race, and gender.

Next, to measure the impact of current events and the political climate over time in relation to the progression of generations over time a means analysis was conducted with year of study as the independent variable and mean thermometer score as the dependent variable. The results of these means analysis of yearly progression were compared to the means analysis of the three generations age progression to determine whether the progression of age or the progression of time indicated a larger impact on individuals' political attitudes.

Next, to further compare the impact of age versus the impact of the current political climate a linear regression was conducted utilizing the variables age, generation, year of study, party identification, gender, race, and income to determine the significance of each.

Results

Comparison of Means Analysis

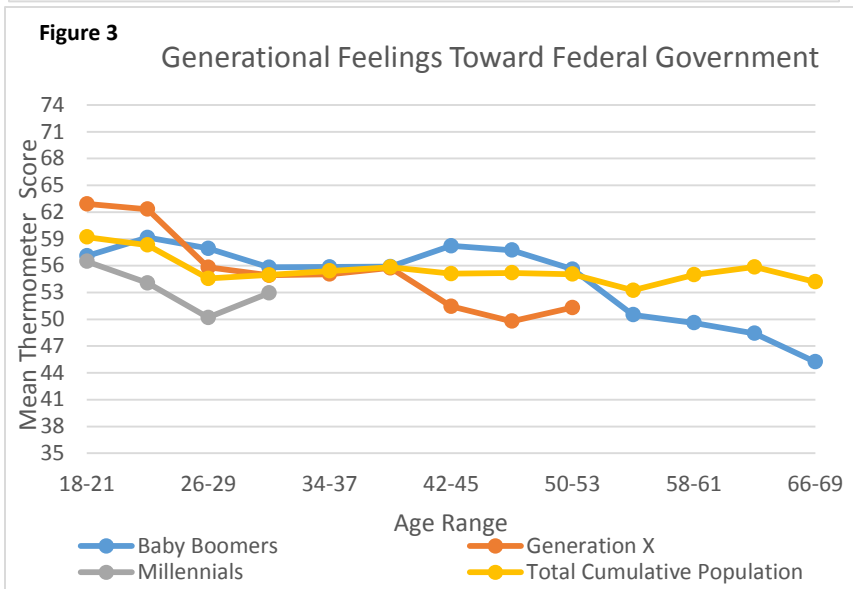
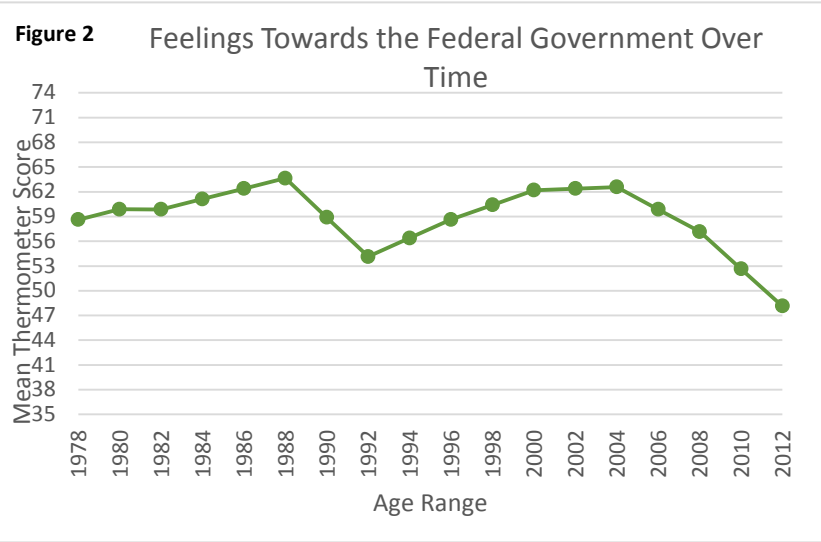
When examining whether age is a factor relating to the development of individuals political attitudes it is difficult to separate whether a person's age or generation is actually the significant factor or if the current political climate is the predominate cause. Because of the growing disapproval of government, congress, and the political party system since the end of the twentieth century, separating the political climate from demographic factors in regards to the development of political attitudes is difficult.

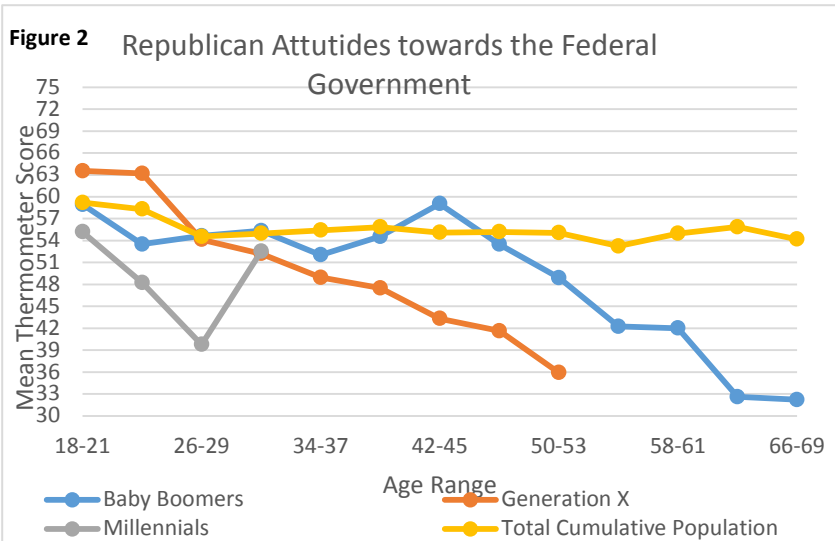
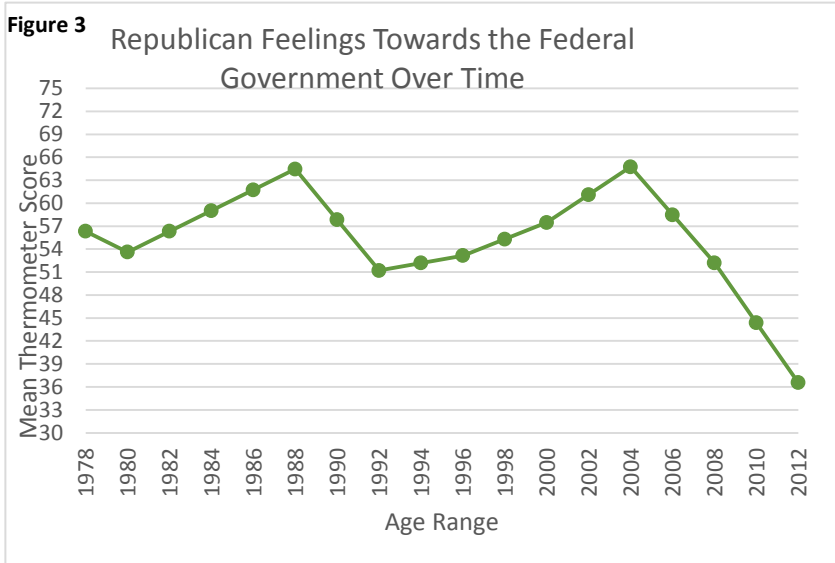
To separate the variable of age from the variable of the given political climate based on the year, this section will compare the American public's feelings towards the Federal

Government and Trust in Government by the mean averages of each American National Election Study by year from 1978-2012 to the mean averages of age groups for the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations. By comparing these two sets of data, the significance of the current political climate versus the significance of the age and generation of individuals will become less convoluted. This section contains a series of comparison graphs that aims to determine whether age, political climate, or other demographic characteristics are more significant in the development of individuals' attitudes towards government.

General Feelings towards the Federal Government

Figure 2 and 3 examine how American's feelings towards the federal government have changed over time in comparison to how the three generations attitudes have developed with age. Figure 2 indicates that over time the American Population's feelings towards the federal government have become colder. Figure 3 reveals that as each generation aged they also experienced increasingly colder feelings towards the federal government. However, the chart also reveals that the total cumulative population over time experienced increasingly colder feelings towards the federal government, thus these graphs appear to indicate that the political climate over time may be more significant than the age of a particular individual.

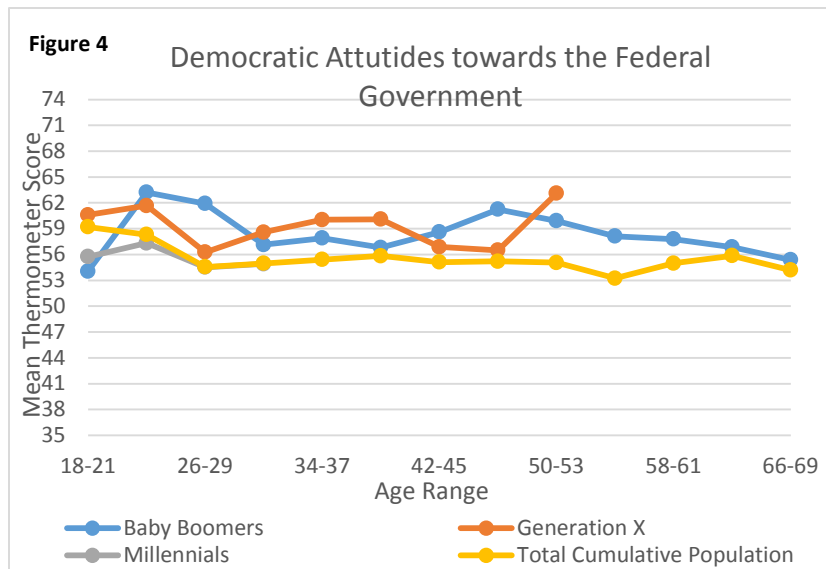
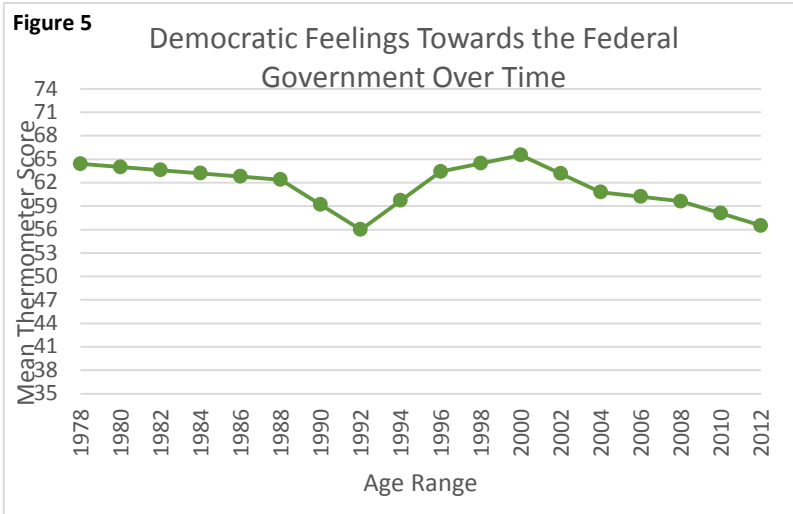




Party Identification's effect on Feelings Towards Government

Figures 4 and 5 relating to Republican attitudes towards the federal government reveal that from 1978 to 2012 individuals who identify as Republican expressed increasingly colder attitudes towards the federal government. Figure 5 further reveals that compared to the total cumulative population, which includes respondents with other party identifications, Republicans from each generation tended to express a higher level of cold attitudes. While the total population expressed colder attitudes towards government over time, Republicans increasing coldness was more extreme, indicating that Party Identification may be a significant factor relating to the development of feeling towards the federal government.

Figures 6 and 7 relating to Democratic attitudes towards the federal government reveal that from 1978 to 2012 individuals who identify as Republican have generally expressed increasingly colder attitudes toward the federal government. However, based on Figure 7, the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations indicated warmer attitudes towards government than the total cumulative population which includes individuals who identify with other party identifications. Thus, like the figures 4 and 5 about Republicans over time these graphs may further indicate that Party identification is a significant factor in regards to the development of attitudes towards the federal government.

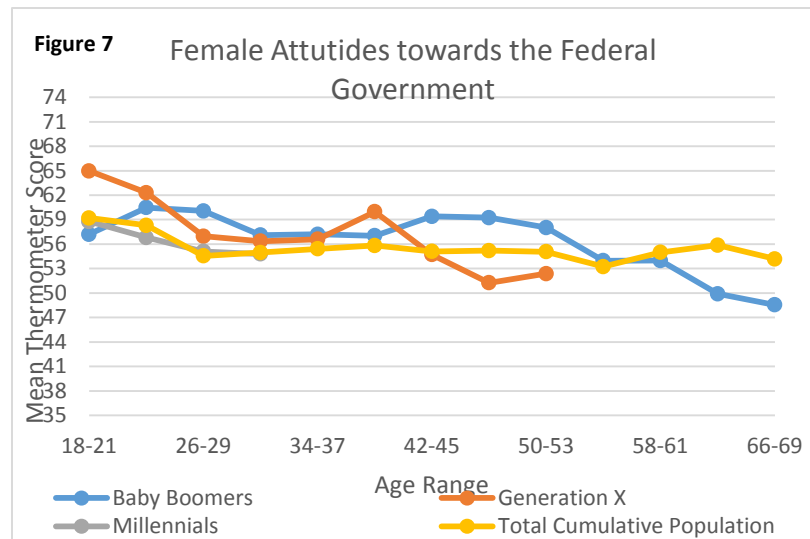
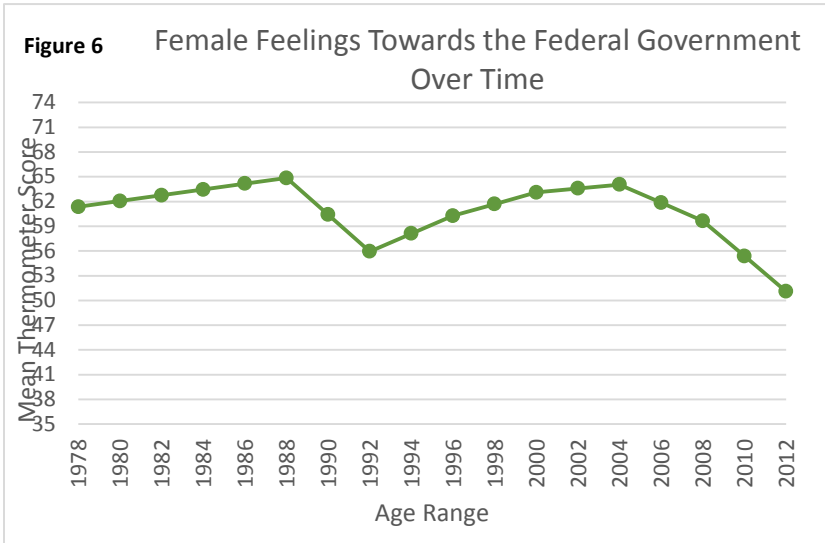


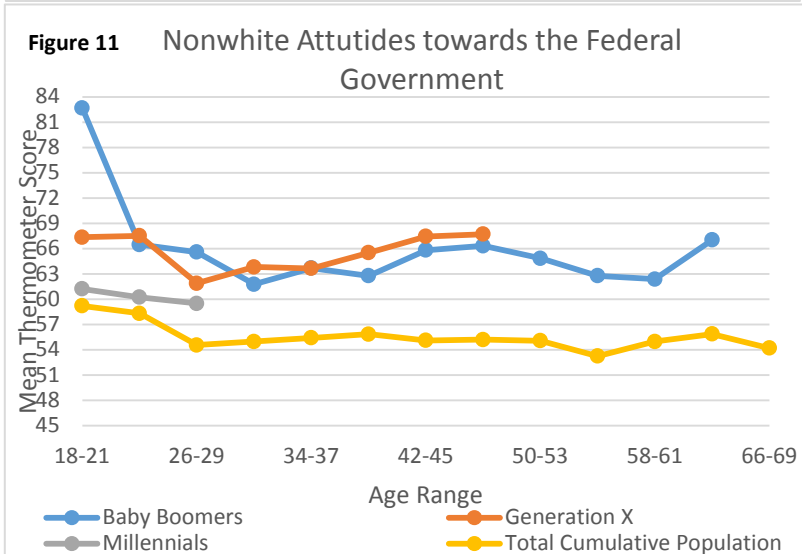
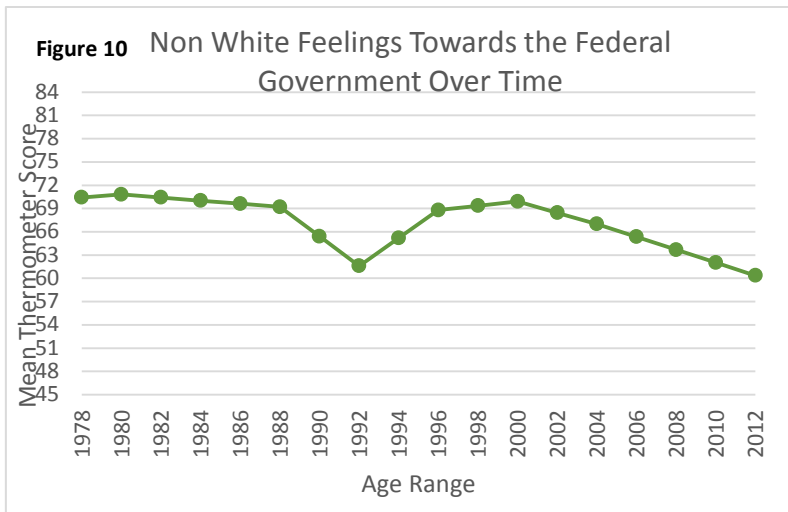
Minority Feelings towards the Federal Government

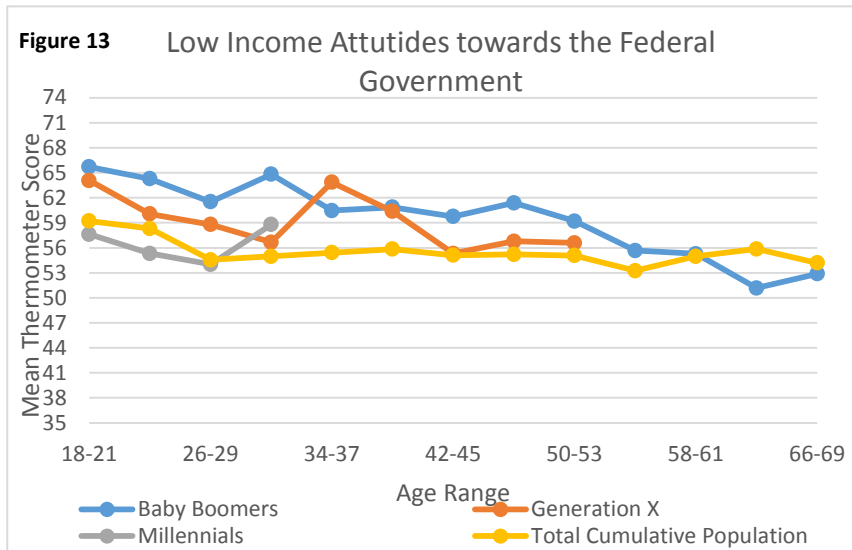
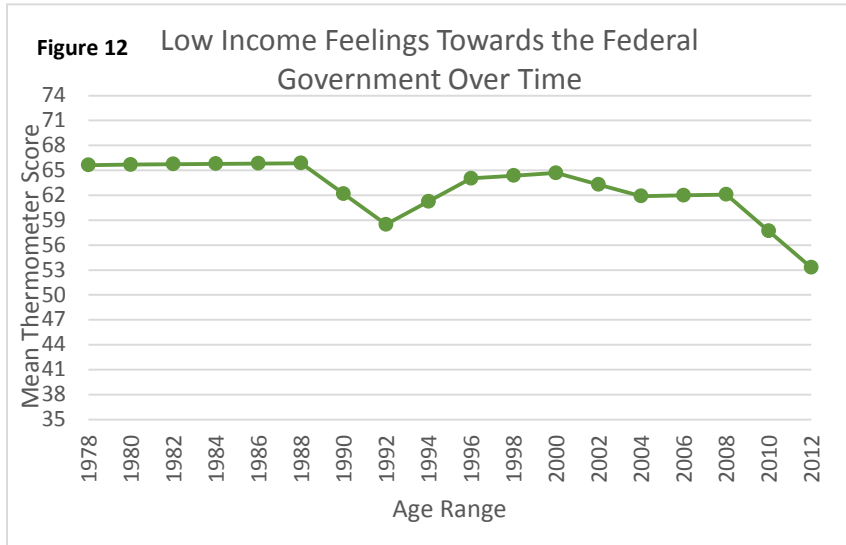
The next three sets of graphs examine three types of minorities in the United States. Women, nonwhites, and low income populations typically have less representation in government, thus their feelings towards government may reflect their under representation and ultimately impact their development of feelings towards the federal government.

Figures 8 and 9 relating to female attitudes towards the federal government reveal that from 1978 to 2012 females in general expressed increasingly colder attitudes toward the federal government both over time and by generation. Figure 9 indicates that within the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations, when the generations were younger they expressed warmer feelings towards government than the entire population, however as the generations aged females expressed increasingly colder feelings towards the federal government compared to the population as a whole. It is difficult to determine whether this female variation from the total cumulative population holds more significance based on gender or age, however Figure 9 indicates that females have expressed differing opinions from society as a whole.

Figures 10 and 11 relating to nonwhite attitudes towards the federal government reveal similar implications as the graphs relating to female attitudes towards the federal government. While nonwhite attitudes have become colder over the years, their attitudes have consistently remained warmer than the total cumulative population. Figure 11 relating to nonwhites compared to Figure 9 relating to females reveals that nonwhites maintain even warmer feelings towards government than females.





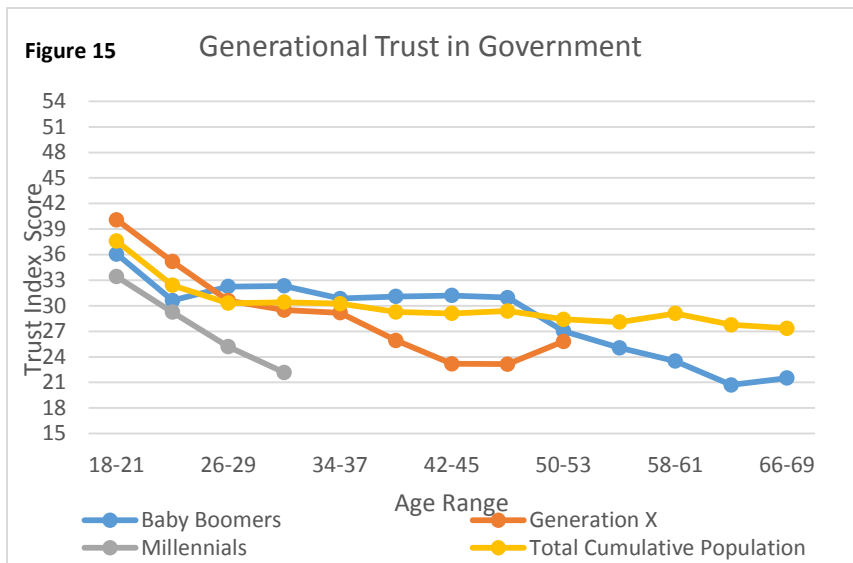
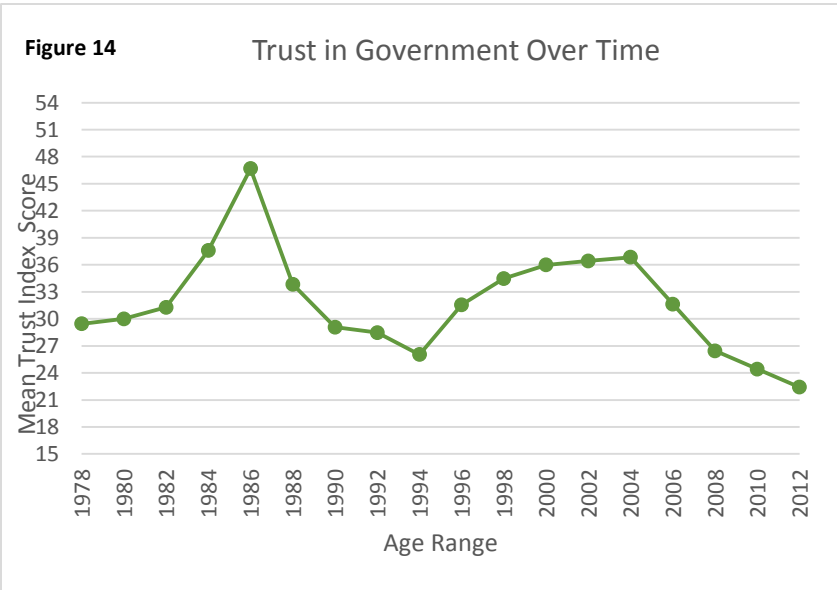


Figures 12 and 13 related to low income attitudes towards the federal government are similar to both the female and nonwhite analysis related to feelings towards the federal government. While attitudes have become colder over time, low income attitudes have consistently remained warmer than the general population.

The implications of the over time and generational comparisons related to minority populations revealed that even though these minority groups possess less representation within the government, each group and each stratified generation maintained warmer attitudes towards the federal government than the population as a whole. While the hypothesis assumed these populations would have colder feelings towards government because of the lack of representation, results demonstrate that nonwhites and low income individuals in particular maintained warmer than average positive feelings towards the federal government.

Generational Trust in Government

Figures 14 and 15 related to the general population's trust in government reveal that over time individuals have grown to distrust government quite a bit. Figure 15 indicates that from the Baby Boomers to the Millennials each generation has become more distrusting than the one before. These graphs suggest that the trust in government is most likely the result of a political climate that has produced increasingly low levels in trust in the government rather than other factors.



Party identification's effect on Trust in Government

Figure 16 and 17 related to Republican levels of trust in the government indicate that the Republican trust in government has generally decreased over time and that each generation of Republicans have become more trusting than their previous generation. This data also indicates that each generation of Republicans are more distrusting than the total cumulative population which may reveal that party identification could be a significant factor influencing an individual's trust.

While respondents who identified as Republican had significantly lower levels of distrust in government figures 18 and 19 related to Democratic trust in government indicate that respondents who identify as Democrats have levels of distrust consistent with the total cumulative population. While Democratic individuals have generally become more distrusting in government over time, their consistent attitudes related to trust may reveal that party identification does not significantly develop individuals trust in government unless they identify as Republican.

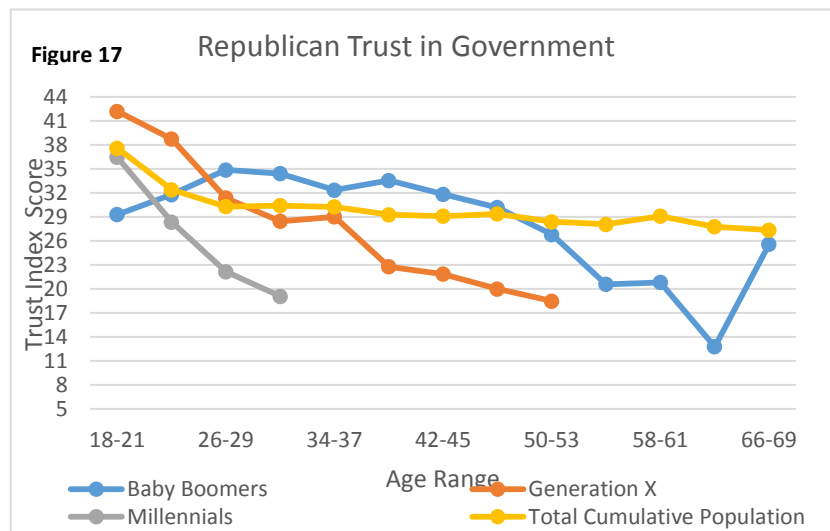
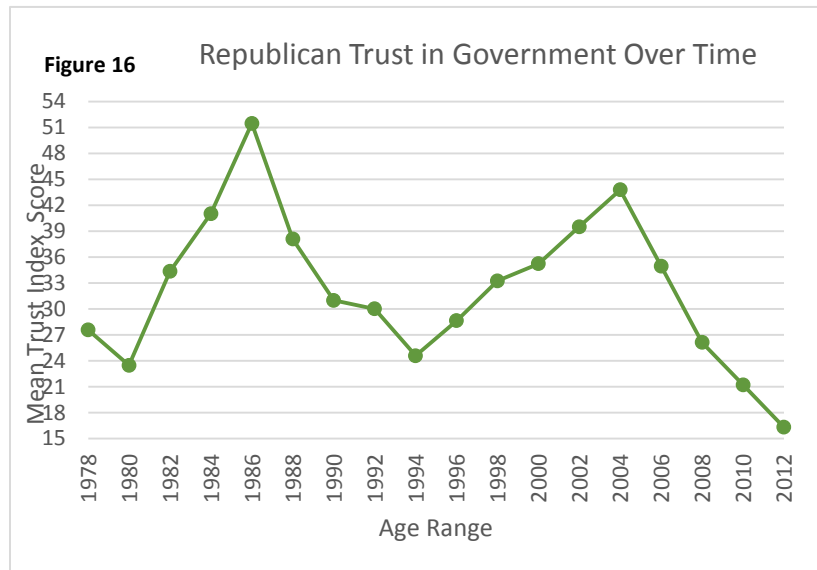


Figure 18 Democratic Trust in Government Over Time

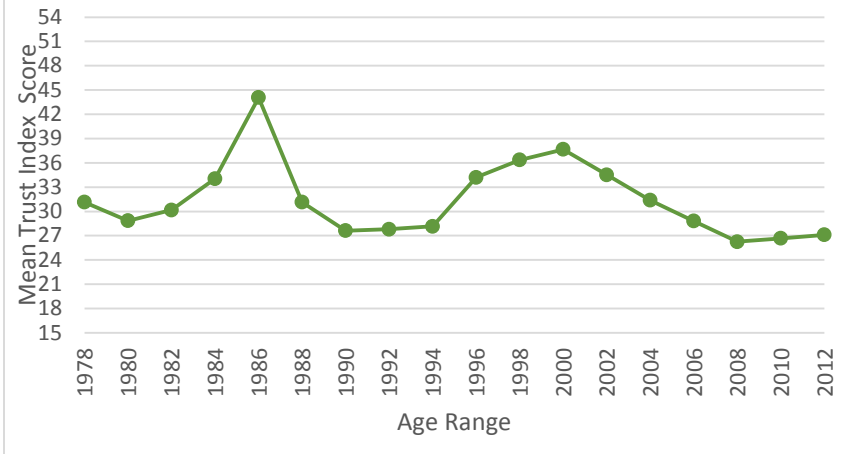
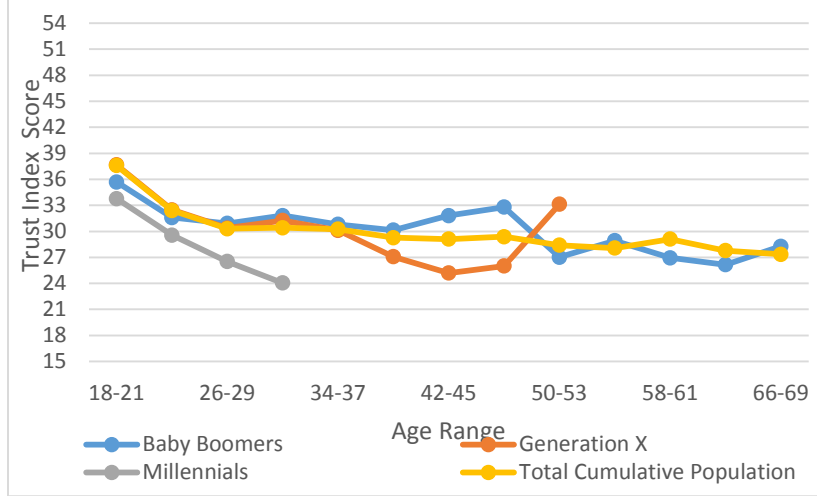


Figure 19 Democratic Trust in Government



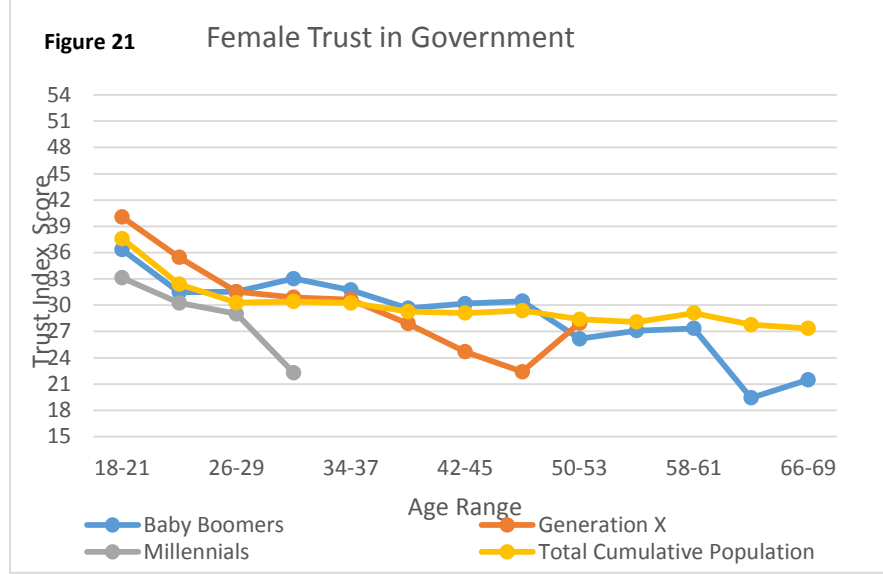
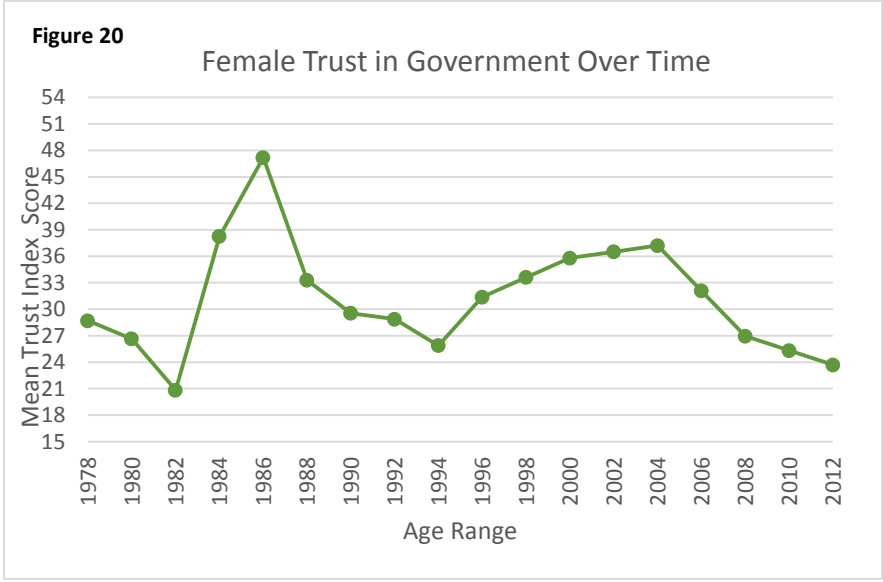
Minority Trust in Government

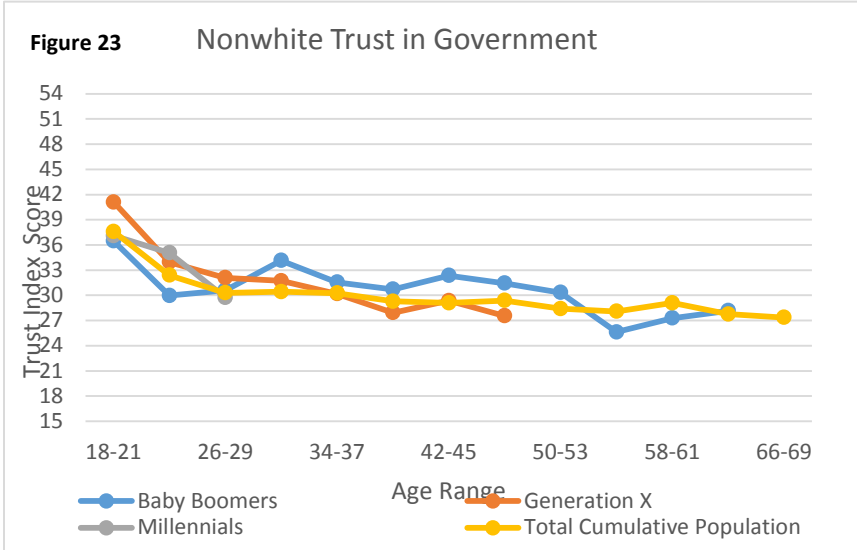
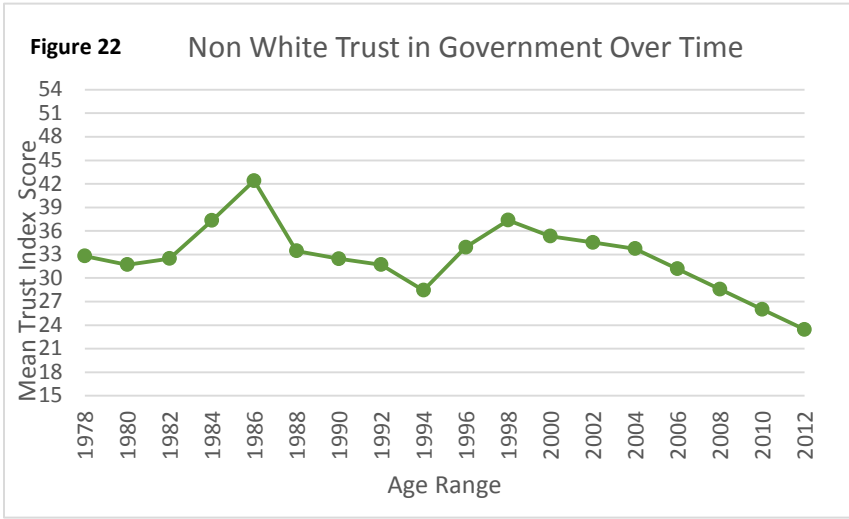
Like the hypothesis related to minorities feelings towards the federal government, the hypothesis in regards to trust in government is that minorities will be less trusting in government because of their lack of representation.

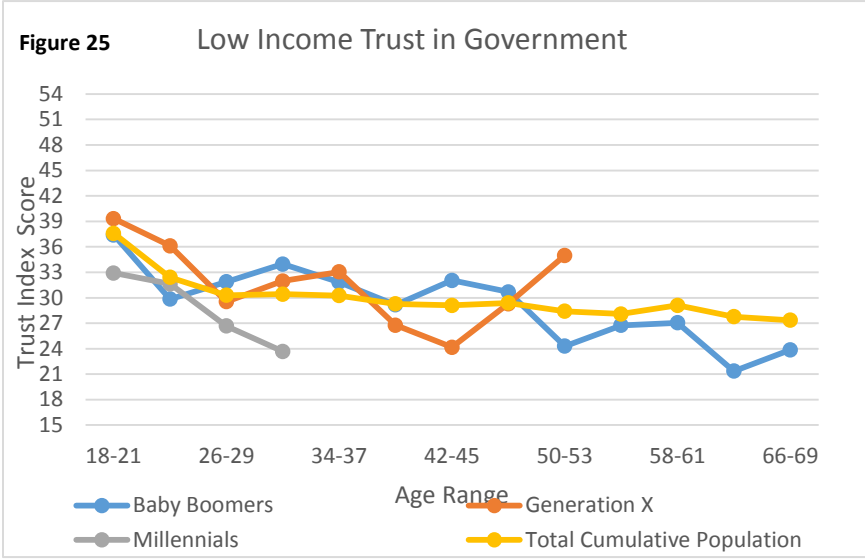
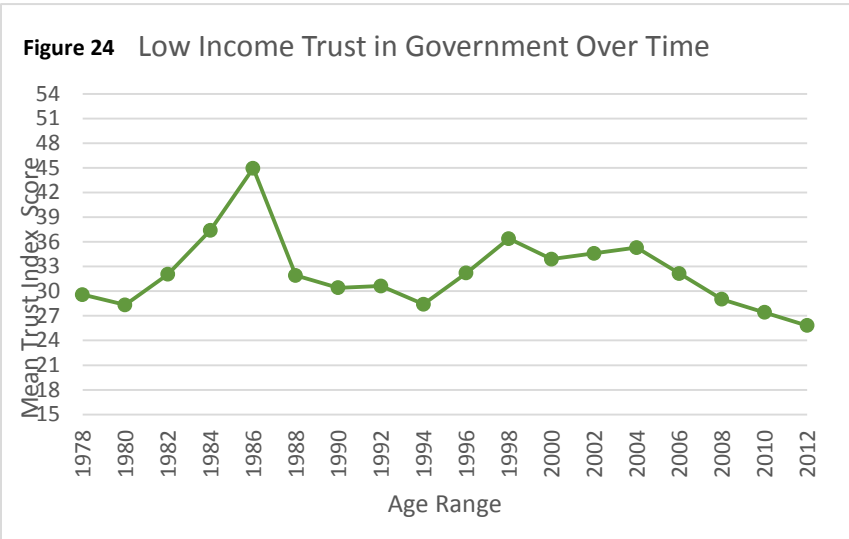
Figures 20 and 21 reveal that female trust in government has generally decreased over time. Figure 21 also appears to suggest that each generation has become less trusting in government than the previous generation; however the margins are not large enough to determine whether age is a significant factor. Figure 21 also indicates that female trust in government is lower than the total cumulative populations, but not by large margins.

Figures 22 and 23 related to nonwhite trust in government indicate that over time they have become more distrusting in government; however their distrust appears to be consistent with the total cumulative population. Figure 23 also shows that the levels of trust in government are similar within each generation as they age which may suggest age could be a significant factor related to nonwhite trust in the government.

Figure 24 and 25 relating to low income trust in government indicate that over time these individuals have developed lower trust in government. Figure 25 reveals that in relation to the total cumulative population the low income trust has varied from the total average; Baby Boomers and Generation X were both more trusting than the cumulative average during middle age, and less trust in later years.







Unlike the results relating to feelings towards the federal government which revealed minorities, particularly nonwhites and low income populations, maintain more positive feelings, results relating to trust indicate that minorities are less trusting in government than the average population. These findings confirm the hypothesis that minorities would be less trusting in government than the average population.

Linear Regression Analysis

To further determine what factors are most important in regards to developing individuals political attitudes a linear regressions were conducted with the dependent variables Federal Government Thermometer and Trust in Government. The independent variables utilized related to generation, gender, political party identification, race, and year of study.

Thermometer Federal Government Linear Regression (Table 1)

The findings in Table 1 indicate that in regards to feelings toward the federal government, age, year of study, generation, race, party identification, race, gender, and income are all significant factors. Each of these factors play a significant role in regards to influencing the populations feelings towards the federal government. The results further indicated that each variable maintained a positive correlation in regards to feelings towards federal government. The stepwise linear regression represented in Table 1 indicates that age alone is a significant factor in regards to individuals' feelings towards the federal government. As variables related to year of study, generation, and other demographic factors were added to the regression each factor also revealed significance with the exception of year

1992. These results indicate that while age is a significant factor related to respondents feelings towards government, other factors are equally important.

Trust in Government Index Linear Regression (Table 2)

The findings in Table 2 indicate that age alone is a significant factor in regards to trust in government. The stepwise linear regression further reveals that year of study, generation, and race are all equally significant in regards to trust in government. However, unlike the findings related to feelings towards the federal government, party identification, gender, and income are not as significant when compared with other factors. The results further revealed a negative correlation in regards to age, party, and gender while there was a positive correlation in regards to generation, race, and income. Depending on the year of study at times there was a positive correlation, while at other times there was a negative correlation.

Table 1. Feelings towards the Federal Government

Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)		Model (4)	
	b	t	b	t	b	t	b	t
Age	.012	1.124***	.038	3.498***	.164	9.868***	.158	8.607***
1980	---	---	5.801	7.012***	15.753	19.194***	8.312	8.833***
1988	---	---	9.553	12.359***	18.804	25.679***	10.999	13.017***
1992	---	---	---	---	8.745	13.051***	.750	.948
1996	---	---	4.445	5.471***	12.762	17.207***	5.327	6.315***
2000	---	---	8.002	9.991***	15.912	22.111***	8.321	9.820***
2004	---	---	8.402	9.272***	15.683	19.062***	7.857	8.600***
2008	---	---	2.975	3.964***	9.525	14.900***	---	---
2012	---	---	-6.124	-9.869***	---	---	---	---
Generation X	---	---	---	---	4.847	8.064***	3.870	5.536***
Millennial	---	---	---	---	9.680	9.822***	4.897	3.297***
Democrat	---	---	---	---	---	---	1.636	3.563***
Nonwhite	---	---	---	---	---	---	9.749	18.334***
Female	---	---	---	---	---	---	2.553	5.668***
Low Income	---	---	---	---	---	---	3.436	7.020***
N	18,987		18,987		18,987		11,677	
R ²	.000		.049		.054		.072	

***coefficient significant at the .001 level

** coefficient significant at the .01 level

* coefficient significant at the .05 level

Table 2. Trust in Government

Variable	Model (1)		Model (2)		Model (3)		Model (4)	
	b	t	b	t	b	t	b	t
Age	-.084	-10.704***	-.064	-.8331***	-.016	-1.517	-.008	-.672***
1978	---	---	---	---	8.659	13.711***	---	---
1980	---	---	-.2753	-.3707***	5.773	8.304***	-3.007	-3.915***
1982	---	---	1.964	2.535**	10.411	14.369***	1.787	2.232*
1984	---	---	8.181	11.563***	16.569	25.525***	7.492	10.223***
1986	---	---	17.272	20.442***	25.582	32.266***	17.132	19.707***
1988	---	---	4.539	6.291***	12.745	19.486***	3.727	4.991***
1990	---	---	-.242	-.345	7.813	12.492***	-.907	-1.234
1992	---	---	-.813	-1.202	7.184	12.082***	-2.111	-2.970***
1994	---	---	-.3206	-4.441***	4.691	7.310***	-4.109	-5.500***
1996	---	---	-2.441	3.242***	10.255	15.246***	1.021	1.286
1998	---	---	5.203	6.520***	12.973	17.936***	3.685	4.419***
2000	---	---	6.850	9.130***	14.455	21.757***	5.075	6.190***
2004	---	---	7.676	9.086***	14.925	19.589***	5.904	6.446***
2008	---	---	-.2733	-3.950***	4.122	7.073***	-5.360	-6.749***
2012	---	---	-6.618	-11.733***	---	---	---	---
Generation X	---	---	---	---	2.180	5.114***	2.255	4.568***
Millennial	---	---	---	---	5.500	7.121***	5.434	4.067***
Democrat	---	---	---	---	---	---	-.557	-1.777
Nonwhite	---	---	---	---	---	---	1.719	4.482***
Female	---	---	---	---	---	---	-.146	-.473
Low Income	---	---	---	---	---	---	.446	1.318
N	29,209		29,209		29,209		20,943	
R ²	.004		.063		.065		.054	

***coefficient significant at the .001 level

** coefficient significant at the .01 level

* coefficient significant at the .05 level

Discussion

This research aimed to measure if individuals become more conservative as they age. Results reveal that while age is a significant factor in regards to trust in government, other factors are more significant and ultimately age does not comprehensively possess a large influence on all aspects of political attitudes and ideologies.

Cumulative compared means analysis reveals the progress of time on political attitudes. As time progressed the results from each survey revealed increasingly colder feelings towards government along with lower levels of trust. These findings indicate the major significance of political climate on American citizens' attitudes.

In regards to party identification Republicans from each generation consistently maintained less positive feeling towards government and greater distrust in government than the average population. Due to the "anti- Washington" and "anti- Trust" feelings typically associated with the Republican Party these findings are not surprising.

Another finding indicates that while minorities held higher than average positive feelings towards government, their trust in government was less than average. The initial hypothesis predicted that minorities would have less positive feelings and less trust towards government due to their under representation in government offices. However, this was only true in regards to trust. Findings reveal that minorities, particular nonwhites and low income populations in fact have more positive feelings towards the government than the rest of the population, yet maintain lower levels of trust in government. These results indicate that feelings towards the federal government and trust in government are perceived as different

concepts by the public. While minority populations possess relatively high feelings towards the government they simultaneously maintain relatively low levels of trust in the institution. A possible explanation for these findings may rest in the social programs that aim to support the welfare of minority populations. While underrepresented individuals lack trust in government officials with different lifestyles than themselves, they may still appreciate the social spending on programs that assist their quality of life.

The linear regression further demonstrated slight differences between feelings towards the federal government and trust in government. Both indicated that the year each study was conducted since 1978 was significant. Thus, the political climate appears to have a consistently significant impact on individuals' political attitudes. However, in regards to other factors, demographic variables including race, gender, class, and party identification all were significant in regards to feelings towards the federal government, yet in terms of trust in government age, year of study, and generation were significant while all of the demographic variables with the exception of race were insignificant. These results indicate that political attitudes related to feelings towards the government are more influenced by stratified demographic factors within American society, while trust in government is more related to generational attitudes with the exception of nonwhite individuals who surprisingly maintain levels of trust in government consistent with the average population.

The findings of this research further the literature suggesting that age is not an overwhelmingly significant factor related to the development of political attitudes. The results suggest that the concept of Americans becoming more conservative as they age is too simplistic; factors relating to political climate, generation, gender, race, and income are in many cases more important influences on political attitudes than age.

Appendix A –ANES Dependent Variable Questions

Question: The federal government in Washington -- thermometer

Varied Phrasings:

1964-1968:

There are many groups in America that try to get the government or the American people to see things more their way. We would like to get your feelings towards some of these groups. I have here a card on which there is something that looks like a thermometer. We call it a "feeling thermometer" because it measures your feelings towards groups. Here's how it works. If you don't know too much about a group or don't feel particularly warm or cold toward them, then you should place them in the middle, at the 50 degree mark. If you have a warm feeling toward a group or feel favorably toward it, you would give it a score somewhere between 50 degrees and 100 degrees, depending on how warm your feeling is toward the group. On the other hand, if you don't feel very favorably toward some of these groups--if there are some you don't care for too much--then you would place them somewhere between 0 degrees and 50 degrees.

1970-1974:

(1970: As you know, there are many groups and persons in America that try to get the government or the American people to see things more their way. Please use the thermometer again--this time to indicate your feelings toward these groups or persons.) (1972,1974: We'd also like to get your feelings about some groups in American society, using the feeling thermometer just as we did for the [1972: candidates;

1974: leaders]. If we come to a group you don't know much about, just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.)

1976:

We'd also like to get your feelings about some groups in American society. When I read the name of a group, we'd like you to rate it with what we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees-100 degrees mean that you feel favorably and warm toward the group; ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorably towards the group and that you don't care too much for that group. If you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward a group you would rate them at 50 degrees. If we come to a group you don't know much about, just tell me and we'll move on to the next one.

1978-1984:

(1980-1984: And still using the thermometer, how would you rate the following.)

1986-LATER:

([And] still using the thermometer, how would you rate [the following]:)

Question: Trust in government index, 100 pt scale. 0 Least trusting-100 Most trusting

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