

## MILLENNIALS MOST PROGRESSIVE GENERATION IN 50 YEARS

Young Americans under 30 are much more progressive than any generation since the early 1960s and likely to move the country leftward for decades to come, according to a CIRCLE report. CIRCLE Director Peter Levine, along with Constance Flanagan and Les Galloway of Penn State University, authored a report *The Millennial Pendulum: A New Generation of Voters and the Prospects for a Political Realignment*. The report was funded by the New American Foundation and was officially announced at an event on February 18, 2009 in Washington DC.

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**THE REPORT FINDS THAT THE MILLENNIALS (BORN AFTER 1982) ARE STARTING THEIR ADULT LIVES MUCH MORE PROGRESSIVE ON ECONOMIC ISSUES THAN ANY GENERATION FROM THE EARLY 1960S TO TODAY.**

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The report finds that the Millennials (born after 1982) are starting their adult lives much more progressive on economic issues than any generation from the early 1960s to today. The historical analysis shows that each generation has held a fairly stable attitude toward economic issues that has remained durable even as major economic and political events have occurred. Each generation has grown somewhat more conservative as its members have moved through life. But the Millennials are starting to the left of previous generations and are therefore likely to move the country leftward for decades to come.

The study compares three key theories: age effects (people are more liberal when they are young), period/historical effects (people, regardless of age, tend to change their opinions at the same time in response to major events such as elections, social movements, etc.), and cohort effects (people born around the same time are permanently influenced by events that arise when they are young, such as wars, social movements, or 9/11). The full report is available at [www.newamerica.net](http://www.newamerica.net) or <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=332>.

### GENERATIONAL GAP IN PARTISAN PREFERENCES

"The Millennials are more liberal, more Democratic, more tolerant of others, and more trusting of American institutions than their elders," said Peter Levine director of CIRCLE. "While each generation has grown somewhat

more conservative with age, the Millennials are starting to the left of previous generations and therefore likely to push a more liberal agenda for many years."

President Barack Obama's victory and unprecedented support of voters under 30 (66 percent) in the presidential election underscored the more liberal leanings of this new generation of voters. In most presidential elections young voters have chosen the same candidate as older voters. However, during the last two presidential elections a new pattern has emerged: a generational gap in the partisan preferences began in 2004 and widened in 2008. This past election, there was a 15-point difference between youth support for Obama and the Democrats' share of the whole popular vote.

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### ISSUE PREFERENCES: YOUNG PEOPLE MORE SUPPORTIVE OF LARGE INSTITUTIONS

Concern for government waste has been a defining issue for conservatism, especially during Ronald Reagan's presidency, and Millennials were found to be especially liberal with only 29 percent believing government wastes money. In contrast, about 39 percent of those who turned voting age in the 1960's were concerned with government waste when Lyndon Johnson was president. Millennials also are more supportive of government spending on education, health care, and other government services than the rest of the population. In fact, the Millennials' support of increased federal aid to schools was the highest of any generation at any time during the past 20 years.

The study also showed that today's young people trust large institutions such as corporations, banks, government bureaucracies and unions more than average Americans today and the previous generation did when they were young. In fact, they are far more confident in the financial sector than other generations have been at any point in their lives since the 1970s. However, this may change because

## CIRCLE FACT SHEET

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CIRCLE has produced numerous Fact Sheets, which are brief documents with basic information and graphs on various topics. The following Fact Sheets have been recently added to CIRCLE's Web site:

■ **STATE ELECTION LAW REFORM AND YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT:** describes the relationship between various options for state election law reform and youth voter turnout. The analysis focuses on the 2008 presidential election. Similar studies on previous presidential elections are available as working papers funded by CIRCLE.

■ **THE YOUTH VOTE IN 2008:** presents trends in youth voting from 1972-2008 using data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) November Voting and Registration Supplements. Additionally, it provides information on differences in youth voting trends among women and men, racial and ethnic minorities, and people of different educational levels.

■ **YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN THE STATES: 2002 TO 2007:** provides a 50-state breakdown of volunteering rates for teenagers, young adults, and the population over 25. Vermont, Utah & North Dakota show the highest rates; New York and Nevada are among the lowest.

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this research does not include the current major economic crisis and current polls reveal low public confidence in Wall Street.

### **MILLENNIALS ARE READY TO SERVE; COMFORTABLE WITH DIVERSITY**

Millennials are more committed to community service than previous generations. Since 1990, there has been a steady increase in volunteering, with high school seniors who expect to go on to college responsible for most of the increase. This trend may be helped by the institution, in some school districts, of service-learning programs.

Today's young people are also highly tolerant and favorable toward diversity. CIRCLE's 2006 national survey found 53 percent accepted homosexuality compared to 46 percent of older adults. More than half (57 percent) of young people felt immigrants strengthened our country compared with only 43 percent of older adults.

On civil liberties such as support of free speech for gays, racists, and opponents of religion, Millennials reflect the increasing tolerance that has characterized successive generations of Americans. Likewise their views on gender roles and racial equality are more

progressive as public opinion has been shifting since the mid 1980s in a more liberal direction.

"We are witnessing a dramatic shift in political attitudes among young Americans. They are much more progressive than their elders," said Levine. "What this change means to our nation's direction is yet to be seen. But as younger generations replace the previous ones as the major share of the voting public, their beliefs and behaviors play a key role in shaping our country's future." ★

