

Engaging Millennials

Table of Contents

Millennial Voters2

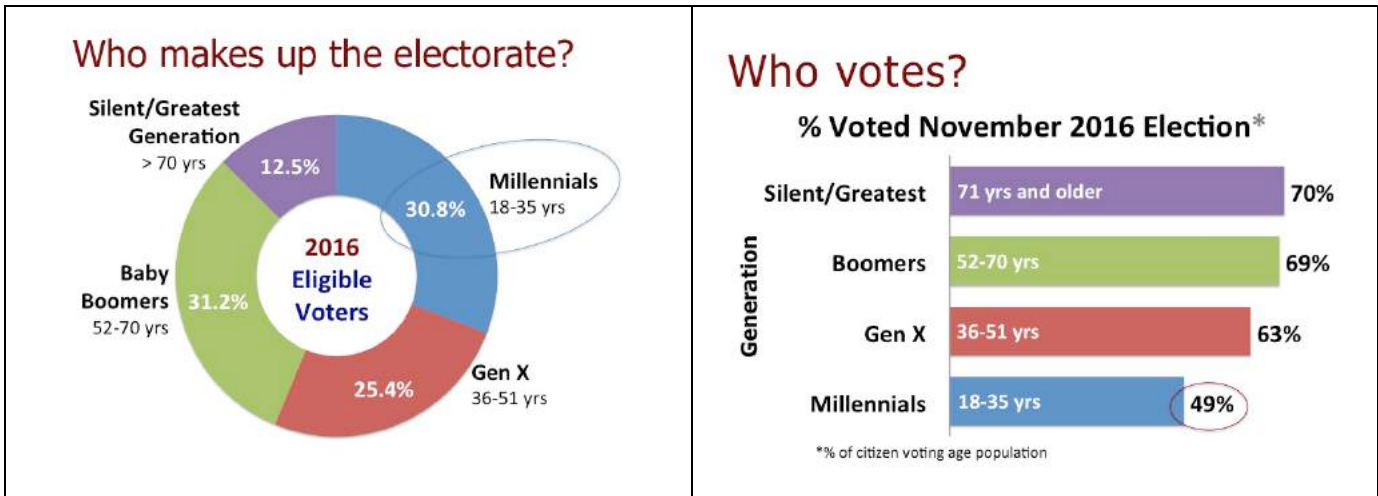
Characteristics of the Millennial Generation3

Tips for Engaging Young Adults3

References4

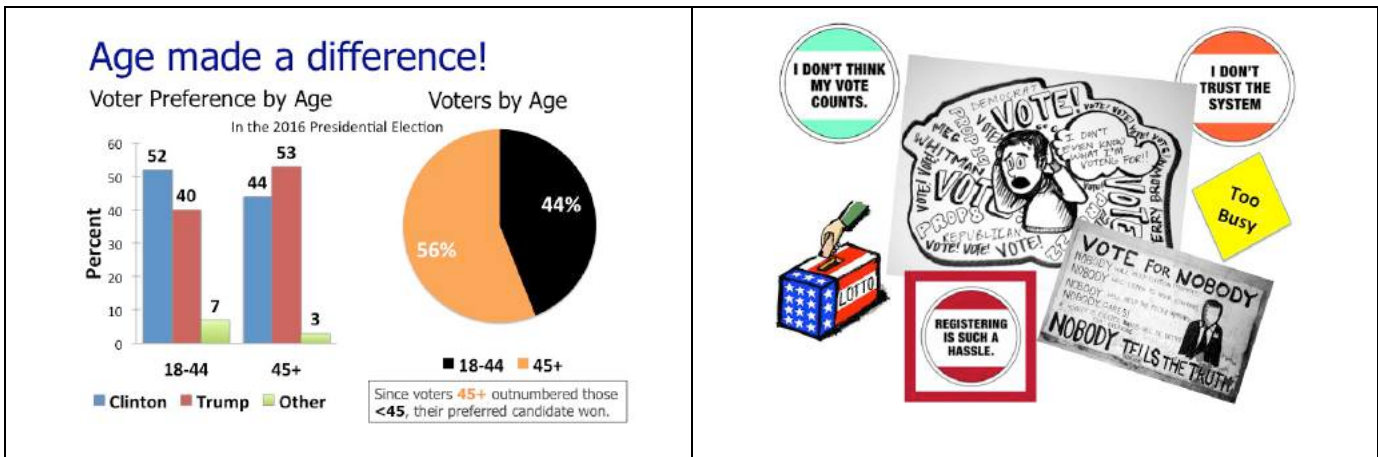


Millennial Voters



Fry, 2016¹

U.S. Census Bureau, 2017²



NBC News, 2016³

Google, Inc.⁴

By 2020, all those in the millennial generation will be in the voting pool and make up the largest segment of the electorate. Madland & Teixeira⁵ estimated that in 2020:

- 103 million millennials will be of voting age.
- 90 million millennials will be eligible to vote—39% of all eligible voters.
- 52 million millennials will vote—36% of voters.

What does the literature tell us about low voter turnout among the millennial generation?

- Being too busy was the top reason young people told the Census Bureau for not voting.⁶
- Postponed career, marriage, and children delay political involvement.^{7,p10}
- Changing jobs and moving frequently impedes having a stake in a particular community let alone the establishment.^{7,p10;8,16-8}
- Disenchantment with partisan politics and not hearing candidates address issues of interest to them discourages political engagement.^{7,p10;8;9}
- Other than voting, young adults are as politically engaged as prior generations at the same age. But they are more likely to participate in different ways.^{7,p5-6;10,p3-4}

They volunteer for social causes, participate in political protests, employ new forms of political action (e.g., online petitions, contacting emailing officials, political social networking, boycotting products/events for political reasons), and use nonpolitical activities for political purposes (e.g., street parties, swarming, guerilla gardening).

Characteristics of the Millennial Generation

The oldest millennials reached adulthood in 1981 while the youngest came of age in 2016—a span of 35 years. The generation includes recent high school graduates to young families. Thus millennials have widely diverse worldviews, shaped by vastly different life experiences, economic conditions, and political milieus. And, it is the most ethnically/racially and culturally diverse generation in U.S. history.¹¹

A distinctive affinity with technology pervades millennial culture. While older generations have had to adapt to the Internet, email, texting, instant messaging, YouTube, and social media as they became available, millennials have grown up in the digital age.^{12,13} What may appear as an addiction to smartphones is actually the need to be constantly gaining and sharing the latest information important to them. Viewing anyone as an equal, regardless of age or status, coincides with the nonhierarchical, free-flowing nature of digital communication. Being able to readily quickly digitize their own stories, personal feelings, and opinions to others exudes honesty rather than emotion and prioritizes success as experiential rather than material or status achievement.¹⁴

The millennial era economic environment has produced a tendency for personal needs to take precedence over traditional organizational structures and place high value on personal relationships and work-life balance.¹² To be motivated to become involved in an activity, whether paid or volunteer work, requires a sense of purpose, fitting in, and making an impact.^{15,16}

Tips for Engaging Young Adults

Strategy is more important than tactics. **1st**, talking with young adults (rather than at them) is key to acknowledging that they matter. Interaction is essential. **2nd**, whatever the means of communication, its message must have meaning for its target to inspire action. They'll be asking, "So what?" In other words, your mission matters.¹⁷ Whatever the event:

1. ***It's got to be authentic.*** Before trying to lead young people, spend some time getting to know them—ask questions, listen to their stories, and use first names. Tell your story—how you've tried and failed, what you've questioned and feared, and how you are trying to overcome your current challenges.¹⁵
2. ***It's got to be meaningful.*** Whatever is posted, shared, created, displayed, or performed must have relevance to its audience.¹⁷ Make the story about your cause—the work your organization does and how it makes an impact.¹⁸
3. ***It's got to be interactive.*** Young people prefer active and experiential types of learning. Programs and conferences that incorporate group discussions, roundtables, debates, interactive chats, and hands-on activities encourage participation and retain focus. Build a discussion board into online learning. Ask for their opinions and feedback.^{13,19}
4. ***It's got to get to the point.*** Your communications are competing with texts, tweets, emails, instant messages, headlines, and multi-tasking. Verbose voicemails, emails, and lectures get tuned out. Vague, indirect messages waste time.¹⁵ Short, but relatively frequent, focused and interesting snippets about your cause will get attention.²⁰
5. ***It's got to be social and mobile.*** A presence on multiple social media channels is essential. Readability must be optimized for mobile devices.¹² Variety is the spice of life—so vary the content of messages from one to another: Text, photos, infographics, and short videos.²⁰ Tap into their techy side wherever possible.¹⁹
6. ***It's got to be flexible.*** Adapt to your audience and their schedule: Meet on their turf, create choices of opportunities, allow self-paced learning, and encourage self-direction in solving problems—create an environment where they engage themselves.¹³
7. ***It's got to be fun!*** Competitive cooperation is motivating—gamify what otherwise might be dull with points, badges, leaderboards, and other team dimensions.¹³ Mix in play, games, or entertainment. And be sure there are visually appealing opportunities for selfies to share with friends.¹⁹

8. **Location, location, location!** Go where young people hang out.²¹
- *Sites:* College and high school campus dining rooms, snack bars, book stores, classrooms; bars, clubs, coffee shops, theaters, barber/beauty shops, transit centers, churches, city parks
 - *Events:* Sporting events, festivals, concerts
 - *Don't forget the incentives and photo-ops!*
 - Free food and drinks
 - Swag—wacky, fun memorabilia—water bottles, tee shirts, hats, sunglasses, bags, coupons, etc.
 - Pet-the-puppy—millennials love dogs, so have your volunteers bring their dogs to the event to engage young people in conversation and take a selfie.²²

References

1. Fry R. Millennials match baby boomers as largest generation in U.S. electorate, but will they vote? *Pew Research Center Fact Tank*. 2016, May 16. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/j9gxyyl> [Note. Article updated April 3, 2018.]
2. U.S. Census Bureau. *Table 1. Reported voting and registration, by sex and single years of age: November 2016* (P20 Tables). 2017, May. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/mdxxwza>
3. NBC News. *Presidential results*. 2016, November 11. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/p6sqqjp>
4. Google Inc. *Google Images*. n.d. Available from: <https://images.google.com>
5. Madland D, Teixeira R. *New progressive America: The millennial generation*. Center for American Progress. 2009, May. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/ho27oa3>
6. U.S. Census Bureau. Table 10. Reasons for not voting, by selected characteristics, November 2014. *Current Population Survey* (No. p20-577). 2015, July 16. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/ycakq2y8>
7. Dalton RJ. *Tocqueville revisited: Participation in america in the twenty-first century*. Irvine, CA: University of California-Irvine, Center for the Study of Democracy. 2015. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/y9ftpfv3>
8. Snyder A. College students don't vote, but they should. *The State Press*. 2017, October 18. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/yytq35v2>
9. Shames SL. Why millennials reject political careers. *KERA Think*. 2017, February 27. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/mojxfhu>
10. Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. *American teens are politically engaged but pessimistic about country's direction*. 2017. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/ku86ldt>
11. Raphelson S. Amid the stereotypes, some facts about millennials. *NPR*. 2014, November 18. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/og3lhva>
12. Clarke S. 5 tactics to attract and engage millennials [Blog post]. *SocialTalent*. 2016, May 24. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/jb3xt6j>
13. Caprino K. Quit trying to "engage" millennials. *Forbes*. 2014, May 1. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/yawqzrddy>
14. Pritchard R. Tips for communicating with millennials [Blog post]. *Lewis*. 2014, August 20. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/n3zxyrn>
15. Angone P. 7 tips for engaging millennials [Blog post]. *All Groan Up*. 2015. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/zd6m38h>
16. Villanueva N. Webinar recap: Tapping into millennial minds--Engaging millennials with nonprofits [Blog post]. *Engaging Volunteers*. 2013, August 28. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/jq4wrpz>

17. Dilenschneider C. The two most important mindset shifts for engaging millennials [Blog post]. *Know Your Own Bone*. 2016, August 17. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/jnkwoej>
18. Josephson B. What your nonprofit can do to engage millennials [Blog post]. *Hubspot*. 2013, October 18. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/gmxfut7>
19. O'Loughlin S. B-to-B events: Six ways to engage millennials [Blog post]. *EventMarketer*. 2016, June 24. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/j9nfm9z>
20. Brewer T, Porter M, Bohanon M. How nonprofits can better engage millennials. *Left + Right*. 2016, June 2. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/hdedrob>
21. Rock the Vote. *Winning young voters: A handbook for campaigns, candidates, political parties & organizations*. 2008, April. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/y2hhxgdx>
22. Smith R. A secret weapon for GOTV: Puppies? *Iowa Starting Line*. 2016, November 4. Available from: <http://tinyurl.com/ya4w25uc>



Compiled by
Elizabeth A. Erkel, PhD, Vice President, 2014-2018
League of Women Voters Texas Education Fund