



The Demographics of Young Voters and Their Top Concerns

Lauren Vosler • April 10, 2018

Studying the opinions of college-aged voters is crucial to predicting the future political scheme of the United States. Few young people have registered to vote, and even fewer are taking an active role in civic engagement; however, those who do participate in politics are taking a different approach than their predecessors by sharing their opinions online and having open-minded discussions on relevant topics. Most prefer to focus on local issues, with a large percentage in distrust of the federal government and major news media. This has led to a decrease of support in the two-party system and traditional politics with a new focus on identity politics. College-aged voters seem to take particular interest in social issues and the concerns of their geographic location, despite being globally connected more than ever before. The top political concerns of voters ages 18-29, primarily millennials, and their respective demographics will provide a more clear direction for the campaign appeal of future civil servants.

This information was collected through research of various government sites, news articles, and college publications. I also contacted a local government official and asked about the primary concern of his young constituents, how he appealed to these voters during his campaign, and how they viewed the government overall. He has particular insight to the ideals of young people because of his experience in the public

education system. In addition, I asked millennial voters about the issues that would encourage them to vote. This insight provided depth and emotion to the empirical evidence already collected.

The Demographics of Young Voters

Voting Numbers

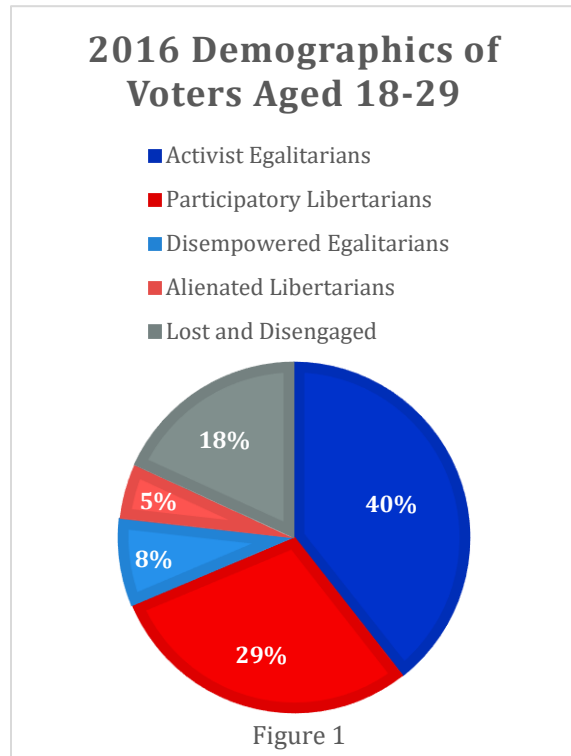
- 50% of people aged 18-29 are registered to vote
- There are over 18 million potential voters
- 46% of young, registered voters participated in the 2016 presidential election
- Battleground states bring more registered young voters at 55%
- Youth often oppose the majority in battleground states
- Youth turn-out in states with little or no voter registration process is 10% higher than the national average
- Online registration correlates with a higher percent of youth voters

Sources:
("Young Voters," 2016)
("Youth Electoral," 2018)

Voting by Ideology

The largest percentage of young voters ages 18-29 fall into the categories of Activist Egalitarians (40%) and Participatory

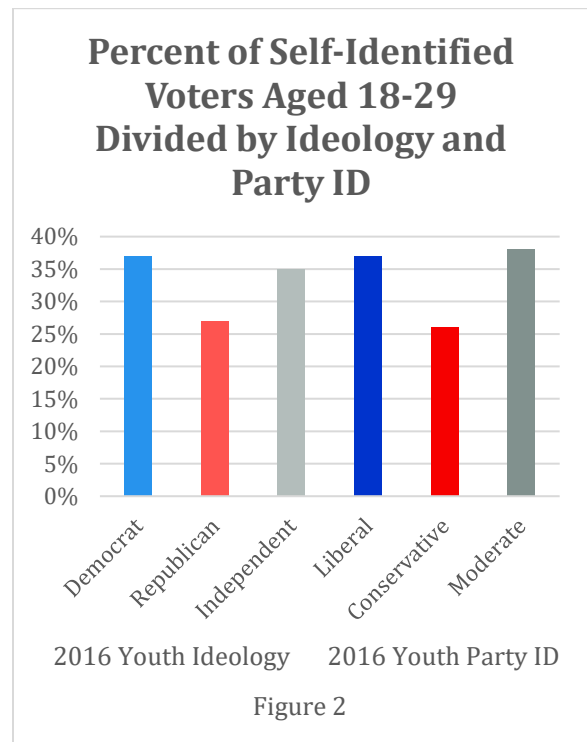
Libertarians (29%) (“Millennials’ Diverse,” 2018). See figure 1. These are the most moderate categories.



Both types of egalitarians support government involvement in social, political, and economic inequality while libertarians differ by supporting individual freedom with less governmental control. Participatory Libertarians are also the most educated group; in this age range, seventy-four percent have an annual income of over \$50,000, and thirty-five percent have a college degree or more. (“Millennials’ Diverse,” 2018). The Activist Egalitarians have slightly lower economic rates with fifty-seven percent having an annual income over \$50,000 and thirty-one percent having a college degree or more.

Locations of civic engagement are places from where voters are most likely to come and governmental involvement is highest; they often contain a high population of Activist

Egalitarians and Participatory Libertarians. Seventy-seven percent of self-reported Activist Egalitarian and seventy-three percent of Participatory Libertarian millennials voted in the 2016 presidential election compared to only forty-eight percent of Alienated Libertarians (“Millennials’ Diverse,” 2018). Both moderate groups were more likely to support Hillary Clinton and are more open to compromise with a political solution. Their more radical counterparts, Disempowered Egalitarians and Alienated Libertarians, who make up eight percent and five percent of millennial voters respectively, are more likely to oppose compromise; they also rarely work together or discuss differing views (“Millennials’ Diverse,” 2018). Party politics are similarly spread. In 2016, thirty-seven percent of 18-29 year olds identify as liberal, thirty-five percent identify as independent, and twenty-seven percent identify as republican (“Young Voters,” 2016). See figure 2.



Overall Consensus

Young voters have similar voting *trends* but are divided on certain issues. A high percentage of millennial egalitarians and libertarians alike agree that poor people are too dependent on government assistance; they also have a general distrust of major news media (“Young Voters,” 2016). Only one percent of Disempowered Egalitarians and twenty-four percent of Participatory Egalitarians support major news media, and a majority of young voters agree that the government needs a change. There is a substantial debate over what that change should be. Furthermore, support of moderate voters and third party candidates are common trends among youth. This detachment, especially for conservatives, from traditional party politics sprouts from a misalignment with older representatives (“Young Voters,” 2016). As young voters become more liberal as a whole, the ideals of current representatives in both parties become less appealing, leading to a much larger percentage of moderate voters.

Highly Debated Issues

Gun control

According to Jeff Gottke, a recently elected City Council member and high school teacher in Mount Vernon, Ohio, gun rights are a potent issue in his rural community. In regards to young voters, he stated, “around here gun rights are a big issue right now. With the recent instances of school shooting there is a large number of students who are becoming more vocal about increasing gun control measures. As a reaction to that there are perhaps more students who do not favor more gun restrictions. At school, it has

become a pretty emotional issue” (J. Gottke, personal communication, April 5, 2018). While this might be true of rural communities, a Harvard study concluded that sixty-one percent of voters aged 18-29 are in support of stricter gun laws (“Two-thirds,” 2017). This has increased since 2013 when a minority of young voters supported gun control.

Marijuana Legalization

With 29 states already supporting the use of medical marijuana, a recent trend has brought recreational usage to the polls. Sixty-one percent of Americans support its legalization with seventy percent of voters aged 18-29 in agreement (Geiger, 2018). In 2018, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Utah will most likely vote on this issue, bringing a higher percentage of supporters to the polls. A young voter stated that if this issue was on the ballot, he would be more likely to participate because “voting creates a defensive platform for an otherwise overlooked issue that extends beyond outdated stigmas” (R. Lessig, personal communication, April, 2018). Pushing this issue to the ballot could incite young voters to participate because of their country-wide support.

Top Concerns

Emotional issues like the aforementioned are highly debated amongst college-age voters, but there are some universal concerns. Transparency of politicians (Rall, 2018), college tuition, health care, unemployment, and various social inequalities are the most pressing concerns of young people. There is a great amount of fear, especially among Democrats, for the future of the United States. Eighty-two percent of self-identified

Democrats aged 18-29 feel fear more than hope when looking to the future while only fifty-eight percent of Republicans in the same category experience fear; thirty-nine percent expressed hope (“Two-thirds,” 2017). With this trend of fear and governmental distrust in the minds of young voters, it is important to promote a platform of honesty and openness.

Transparency of Politicians

Young voters are taking a different, more radical approach to politics than their predecessors. With the rise of Social Justice Warriors and youth protestors, it is clear that change is favorable to this generation. These voters want two things from their leaders: an increase in political truthfulness and radical change from the current corruption within the government (Rall, 2018). Political analysts are saying that, “young people are clamoring for significant changes in their country, though not all youth agree on what that change should look like. Almost three quarters of young Trump voters came out to choose a President that could bring ‘needed change’” (“Young Voters,” 2016).

Similarly, a high distrust of Clinton in the 2016 election could have been her downfall. A large majority of young voters already distrust the media, and thirty-six percent of her own voters viewed her as dishonest. Former President Obama had a larger support system of young voters in both of his elections; he even uncharacteristically gained the majority of young, white voters in the 2008 election (“Young Voters,” 2016). Clinton failed to gain the young support necessary to win the election perhaps because of the untrustworthy nature she portrayed concerning private email servers and foreign affairs. She was still not as

favorable as Obama to this generation, and even though she won the majority of young voters, her lack of transparency could have been her downfall.

Generation Z is following suit. Dominic Scavuzzo, a 17-year-old candidate in the 2018 Kansas governor election, said that transparency was one of his top platforms. He stated, “this goes into the idea of transparency that I would like to spread — I saw a bill offered by a representative from a city in Kansas which stated that we put a bill up 24 hours before we vote on it (48 hours if it’s a budget bill) to let the people know what’s going on, so they can have their say and contact their representatives” (Camp, 2017). Young voters want to trust their representatives, and the absence of this could be detrimental to a campaign.

College Tuition

On the topic of education and college tuition, liberal candidates are often favored for their support of free or low cost secondary education. Bernie Sanders, who received more primary votes among 18-29 year olds than Clinton and Trump combined (“Donald Trump,” 2016), advocated for free tuition at public colleges and universities and a substantial decrease of student loan interest rates (“On the Issues”). His plan differed from other candidates’ by avoiding limitations on out-of-state students while also appealing to diverse or low income students. He referenced Germany, Sweden, and Finland as examples of countries who had also made this decision. Conversely, Trump, who won only twenty-three electoral college votes among 18-29 year olds (Castillo, 2016), holds a more conservative view on college tuition. Instead

of free college, Trump said that colleges should focus their endowment spending on lowering tuition and bettering student life instead of increasing private-equity funds and mutual plans (Jaschik, 2016). He also advocated for a massive cut on loan interest which would help students pay off their federal loans much faster (“Trump student,” 2018). Clinton had a similar plan to that of Sanders. 18-29 year olds voted for Clinton over Trump by an overwhelming margin, suggesting that they are much more likely to support politicians that back free or low-cost secondary education.

Health Care

Young voters are generally in support of less expensive government involvement, and this is especially true for entry-job health care. While fifty-four percent of young voters opposed the Affordable Care Act, they agree that universal health care is the responsibility of the federal government (“Generations and Issues,” 2014). In 2015, only forty-four percent of young people who qualified for employer-subsidized health care took advantage of it, perhaps because premiums are on the rise and young workers cannot afford it. Since 2011, premiums have risen over nine percent, making the monthly cost \$552 in 2015 (“Despite Affordable Care,” 2015). The average weekly income for 20-24

year olds is \$528 or \$2,112 per month (Josephson, 2018). Based on this data, twenty-five percent of monthly income is spent on premiums for those who choose entry-job health care. Regardless of expenses, fifty-one percent of young people strongly support or somewhat support universal health care which perhaps leads to the large portion, sixty-five

percent, that support allowing people under twenty-six to be covered on their parents’ health care plan (“Health Care,” 2017). See figure 3.

Based on this data, it is assumed that a majority of college-aged voters would support a health care plan that enabled them to be covered under their parents’ insurance well into their adulthood. These trends suggest that this age group would also support lower premiums and cheaper, more accessible insurance.

Do you favor or oppose allowing young adults to stay on their parents’ insurance plans until age 26?

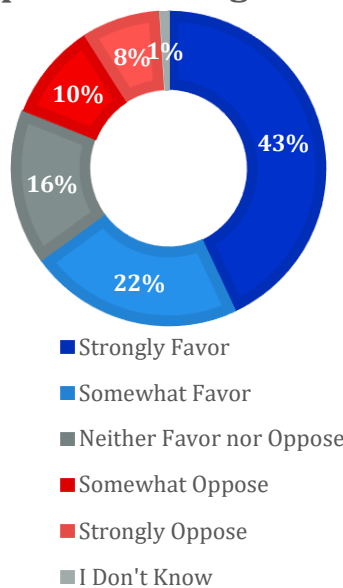


Figure 3

Job Availability

Over two million individuals aged 16-24 are not in school and not working but are eligible for a job. This same age group experiences a nine percent unemployment rate, more than double the national average (“Employment and Unemployment,” 2017). By 2020, it is predicted that two-thirds of American jobs will require an Associate’s degree, and young voters are concerned that they will not be prepared for the job market. In addition, only twenty-six percent of people aged 18-29 feel

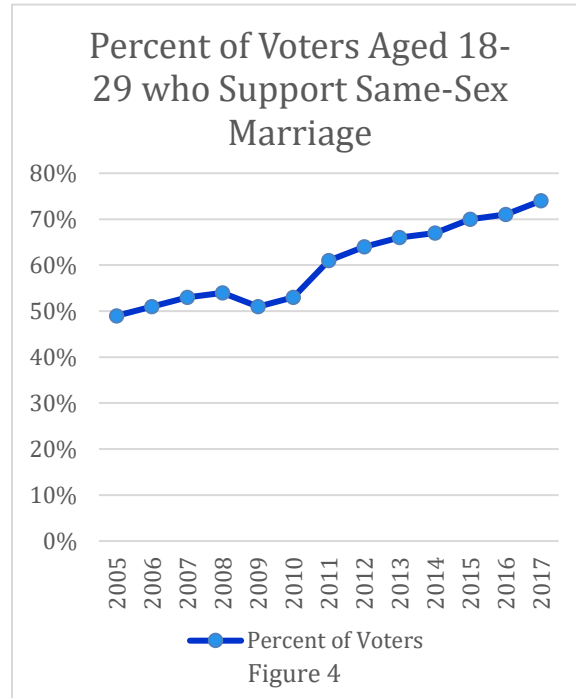
their current job is a career (“How Americans,” 2016). This leads young voters to look for politicians who aid in the advancement of affordable secondary education and a foundation in career employment.

Social Inequality

Social inequality is arguably the most discussed issue among young voters and is at the mental forefront of 18-29 year olds. Seventy-nine percent of voters in this category are concerned about the state of inequality in the United States (“Two-thirds,” 2017). The number of young people who consider their race under attack “a lot” has risen four percent since Fall 2016, and, as a result, forty-six percent support affirmative action on college campuses in an attempt to balance the social playing field. This, however, is a much debated issue with eighty percent of self-identified Democrats supporting it and only eighteen percent of self-identified Republicans (“Two-thirds,” 2017). Despite this, a majority of young voters (fifty-nine percent) do not believe movements like Black Lives Matter will be successful in changing the United States justice system (“No Front-Runner,” 2015).

A recent support of same-sex marriage has also sprouted among young voters with seventy-four percent supporting it in 2017.

See figure 4. This is congruent with all political affiliations; eighty-five percent of liberals and forty-one percent of conservatives are in favor of same-sex marriage (“Changing Attitudes,” 2017). On the topic of gender inequality, forty-nine percent of young voters aged 18-29 support women’s rights, but only



twenty-seven percent identify as feminist (Panetta, 2016). A majority, fifty percent of men and sixty-eight percent of women, believe in a glass ceiling that prohibits women to get ahead in the workplace; however, young voters are less likely to be attached to the women’s rights movement. They are in agreement that gender inequality takes place but are not as motivated to vote based solely on this issue (Panetta, 2016).

Discussion

Young voters seem to be particularly interested in identity politics. Based on the largest majority opinions, the top political concerns seem to be social inequalities and college tuition. A distrust of the government and major news media also binds young voters together, regardless of their political ideology. As the youth tend to favor liberal or moderate candidates, those attempting to appeal to this group should consider social politics as a primary platform. Young voters desire a candidate who brings change, honesty, and equality for all peoples.

References

- Camp, F. (2017, October). The daily wire interviews all four teenage candidates for Kansas governor. Retrieved from <https://www.dailywire.com/>.
- Castillo, W. (2016, November). How we voted — by age, education, race and sexual orientation. *USAToday College*. Retrieved from <http://college.usatoday.com/>.
- Changing attitudes on gay marriage. (2017, June). *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/>.
- Despite affordable care act compliance challenges large employers finding ways to manage healthcare costs. (2015, April). *Media Center*. Retrieved from <http://mediacenter.adp.com/>.
- Donald Trump and young voters. (2016, June). *The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://civicyouth.org>.
- Employment and unemployment among youth summary. (August, 2017). *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov>.
- Geiger, A. (2018, January). About six-in-ten Americans support marijuana legalization. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org>.
- Generations and issues: Millennials in adulthood. (2014, March). *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/>.
- Health care reform. (2017, July). *Polling the nations*. Retrieved from <http://0-poll.orpub.com.library.acaweb.org/>.
- How Americans view the jobs. (2016, October). *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/>.
- Jaschik, S. (2016, September). What's Trump's plan on college affordability. *Inside Higher Ed*. Retrieved from <http://www.slate.com>.
- Josephson, A. (2018, March). The average salary by age. *Smart Asset*. Retrieved from <https://smartasset.com>.
- Millennials' diverse political views. (2018, March). *The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://civicyouth.org/>.
- No front-runner among prospective republican candidates, Hillary Clinton in control of democratic primary. (2015, April). *Harvard Kennedy School Fall 2017 Youth Poll Results*. Retrieved from <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/>.
- On the issues: it's time to make college tuition free and debt free. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://berniesanders.com/>.
- Panetta, M. (2016, April). Millennials and feminism. *Harvard Political Review*. Retrieved from <http://harvardpolitics.com/>.
- Rall, T. (2018, February). Never mind millennial apathy, here's generation Z. *Rasmussen Reports*. Retrieved from <http://www.rasmussenreports.com/>.
- Trump student loan forgiveness. (March, 2018). *Student Debt Relief*. Retrieved from <https://www.studentdebtrelief.us>.

Two-thirds of youth fearful about America's future, prefer democratic control of congress, Harvard youth poll finds. (2017, December). *Harvard Kennedy School Fall 2017 Youth Poll Results*. Retrieved from <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/>.

Young voters in the 2016 general election. (2016, November). *The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://civicyouth.org/>.

Youth electoral significance index. (2018, March). *The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*. Retrieved from <https://civicyouth.org/>.