

The Millennials—

America's First Post-Ideological, Post-Partisan, and Post-Political Generation

By Eric Greenberg with Karl Weber

A new generation is poised to seize the reins of history. It's a generation unique in history—the Millennial generation. Born between 1978 and 2000, the Millennials currently include 95 million young people up to 30 years of age—the biggest age cohort in U.S. history.

The Millennial generation has already begun to emerge as a powerful political and social force. They are smart, well-educated, open-minded, and independent—politically, socially, and philosophically. They are also a caring generation, one that is ready to put the greater good ahead of individual rewards. (Hence our preferred name for them—“Generation We.”) And they are already spearheading a period of sweeping change.

For our new book *Generation We*, I sponsored a major research study into the characteristics of the Millennial generation. It was conducted by Gerstein | Agne Strategic Communications, one of the most respected research organizations in the U.S., and included both extensive oral and written surveys and a series of in-depth focus groups. The Greenberg Millennials Study (GMS) offers the most detailed portrait available of the attitudes and values of today's youth, and we've supplemented it with extensive research into other indicators of the behaviors and beliefs of the Millennials. Here's some of what we found.

First, by comparison with past generations, Generation We is highly politically engaged. Voting turnout is one marker of this trend. In the 2004 election, the 18-24 year-old age group, completely composed of Millennials, increased their turnout 11 points to 47 percent of citizens in that age group, while 18-29 year-olds—dominated for the first time by Millennials—increased their turnout nine points, to 49 percent. These increases were far higher than among any other age group. Further increases occurred in the 2006 elections.

As a result, Generation We is already beginning to make its influence felt—and that influence is heavily leftward-leaning. If young people ruled America, Kerry would have won by a landslide in 2004, claiming 372 electoral votes to 166 for Bush. And in 2006, Millennial voters (then 18-29 years old) favored Democrats for Congress by a margin of 60 to 38 percent. They (not anti-Iraq-war-voters) were the swing voters who delivered Congress to the Democrats.

Yet though the Millennials lean Democratic, our research demonstrates that they're far more wedded to progressive political and social views than to any party. More Millennials in our study described themselves as independents (39 percent) than either Democrats (34 percent) or Republicans (24 percent). And on issue after issue, from the economy to global warming to the war in Iraq, the young people we surveyed favored progressive solutions even as they rejected both “conservative” and “liberal” labels.

Generation We is also eager for political, social, and economic change. Our GMS asked Millennials whether their generation was more likely or less likely than earlier generations to be characterized by various attitudes and behaviors. Over three quarters

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(78 percent) said that Millennials were more likely than earlier generations to “embrace innovation and new ideas”—by far the strongest result for any of the 14 characteristics we tested.

They're also highly entrepreneurial in their thinking. Another question in the GMS found 87 percent of Generation We agreeing with the statement, “Throughout our history, America's success has been built on innovation and entrepreneurship. As we confront the many challenges facing us today, it is that same spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that is needed to maintain America's strength in the 21st century.”

But Generation We doesn't equate entrepreneurial problem-solving with cowboy-style “lone wolf” individualism. Today's youth are sold on the value of political engagement, civic responsibility, and cooperative activism. For example, when they were asked about the best way to address the challenges facing the country, the leading choice by far was “through a collective social movement,” with 60 percent making that option their first or second choice.

What does it all add up to? A political profile unlike that of any previous generation. Determined to find their own solutions to the major problems we face, and convinced that their unprecedented levels of education and technological know-how will enable them to do so, Generation We shares a social orientation that might best be described in terms of what they have left behind. Speaking broadly, Generation We is *post-ideological, post-partisan, and post-political*.

They're post-ideological because they're uninterested in defending specifically “conservative” or “liberal” approaches to national problems. Instead, they're pragmatic, open-minded, and innovation-oriented, eager to experiment with new solutions no matter where they may come from.

They're post-partisan because they're disgusted with what they perceive as the narrowness, pettiness, and stagnation that characterize both major parties. Though they are open to the possibility of a third party, the Millennials are far more interested in getting beyond party identification altogether and in focusing on cooperative efforts to make America and the world a better place.

And they're post-political because they are fed up with the interest-group conflicts, identity-based appeals, and power-seeking maneuvers they see as dominating the public arena. More tolerant and accepting than any previous generation, Generation We is ready to call a halt to “culture wars” that pit people of different religions, races, ethnicities, regions, cultures, values, and sexual orientations against one another for political gain.

The Millennials believe that all of us—not only all Americans, but all humans across the planet—will ultimately share the same destiny, and therefore must find ways to work together for the common good. And they stand ready to lead the effort. Keep an eye on the Millennials: They're about to change our world forever—and, we believe, for the better.