

Do younger generations care more about global warming?

climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/do-younger-generations-care-more-about-global-warming



Younger Americans have grown up with more exposure to the effects of global warming than their parents and grandparents. Perhaps it isn't surprising then that polls find young adults are particularly concerned about global warming. A 2018 Gallup analysis found a "[global warming age gap](#)" in some beliefs, attitudes, and risk perceptions. For example, 70% of adults aged 18 to 34 say they worry about global warming compared to 56% of those aged 55 or older.

Although young adults in the U.S. may be more concerned about the climate than older adults, it is unclear to what degree they are engaged with the issue. In fact, [one study](#) found that younger generations exhibit less civic engagement on many issues, including the environment. In this report, we examine age differences in global warming beliefs and engagement across four generations of adults in the U.S.

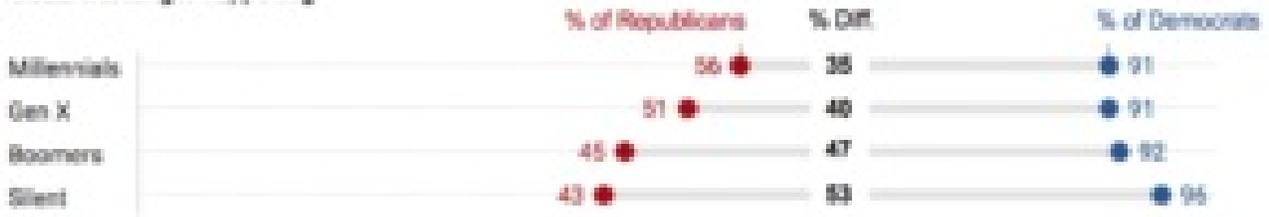
Are younger generations narrowing the political divide in climate change opinions?

Using data from several waves of our *Climate Change in the American Mind* surveys (June 2017 to April 2019), we find important evidence of generational differences among Republicans. Millennial Republicans are more likely to say global warming is happening, is human-caused, and that most scientists agree it is happening, and they are more likely to worry about global warming than older Republicans. Further, the gap between Republican and Democratic views on global warming is smaller for Millennials than for older generations, indicating that there is less political polarization over this issue among younger Americans.

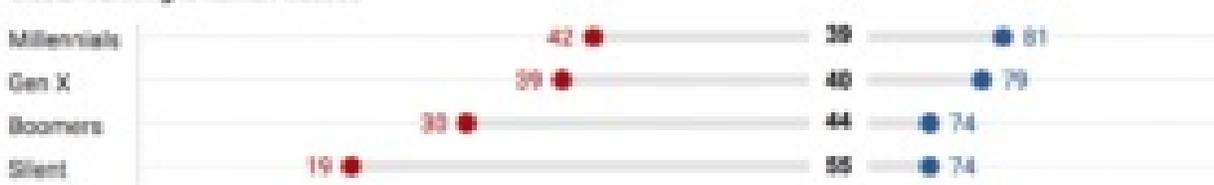
There are not, however, clear generational differences among Democrats. For example, Millennial Democrats are less convinced global warming is happening than are Silent Generation Democrats. Conversely, Millennial Democrats are more convinced that global warming is human-caused than are older generations of Democrats.

Global Warming Beliefs and Attitudes by Political Party and Generation

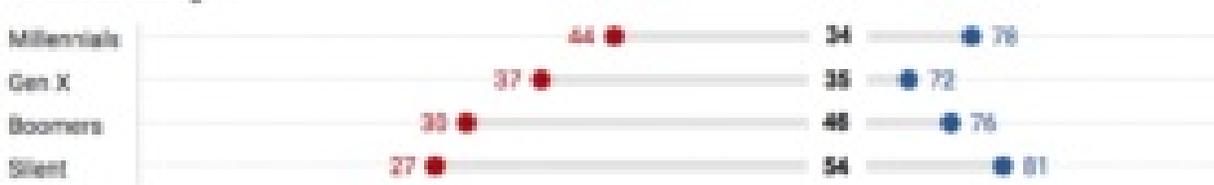
Global warming is happening



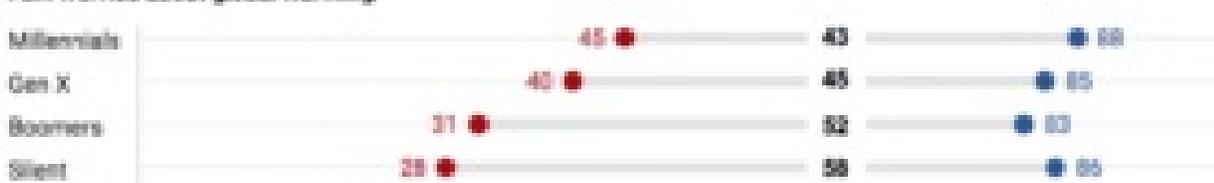
Global warming is human-caused



Most scientists agree



I am worried about global warming

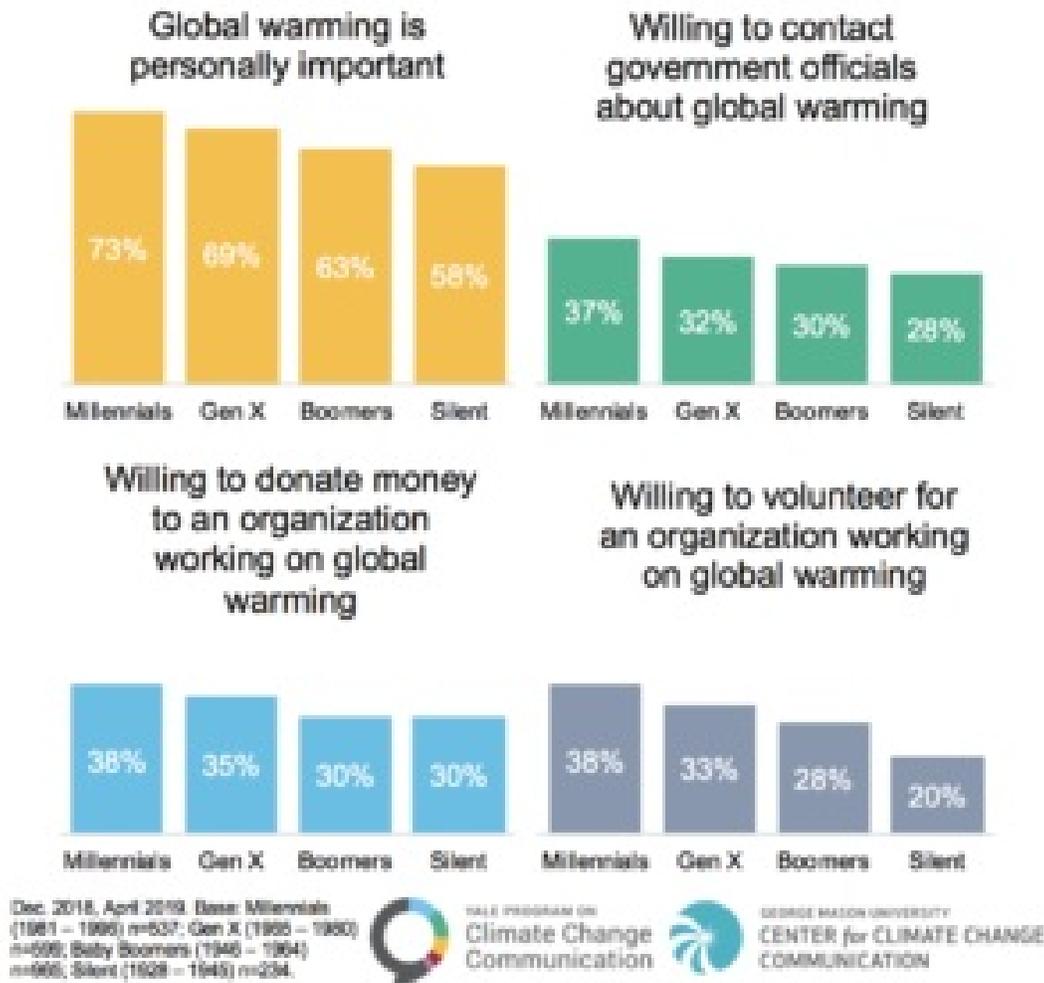


Five national surveys (June 2017 – April 2019).
 Base: Registered U.S. voters – Millennials (1981 – 1996) n=755; Gen X (1965 – 1980) n=1,016; Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964) n=2,352; Silent (1928 – 1945) n=587.



Are younger generations more engaged with global warming than older generations?

Nearly a decade ago, our research on the [perceptions and beliefs of young Americans](#) found that younger adults appeared to be slightly *less* engaged than older adults. In our December 2018 and April 2019 surveys, however, younger generations are more engaged than older adults on several measures. For instance, younger generations are more likely than older generations to view global warming as personally important and/or to express a willingness to engage in climate activism (e.g., contacting government officials about global warming). When it comes to actually contacting government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming, however, Millennials are no more likely than Baby Boomers or members of the Silent Generation to report having done so (respectively, 13%, 12%, and 10%); they are, however, more likely than members of Generation X (8%) to have contacted government officials.

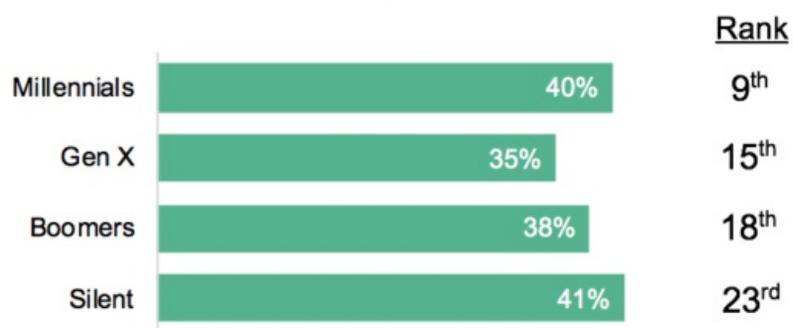


Will global warming be a voting issue priority for younger Americans in the 2020 Presidential election?

In 2020, for the first time, the youngest generations (both Millennial and iGen – born in or after 1997) are projected to make up the largest proportion of registered voters. Whether they will actually vote and whether concern about the climate will be a priority for them remains unclear.

In our April 2019 survey, we asked respondents how important 29 issues (including global warming) will be to their voting decisions in the 2020 Presidential election. We find that relatively similar proportions of registered voters across generations say global warming is “very important” to their voting decisions, but younger generations rank global warming higher in voting issue priority than do older generations.

Global warming will be very important to voting decisions in the 2020 presidential election



For 29 issues, respondents were asked "As of today, how important will the following issues be to you when you decide who you will vote for in the 2020 Presidential election?"

April 2019. Base: Registered U.S. voters - Millennials (1981 – 1996) n=214; Gen X (1965 – 1980) n=269; Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964) n=471; Silent (1928 – 1945) n=111.



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It appears that young Americans may be particularly likely to make climate change a voting issue and thereby help advance mitigation policy. Young Republicans in particular may be critical to bridging the political divide on climate change and building bipartisan support for reducing carbon emissions.

As organizations, institutions, and policymakers aim to motivate younger generations to act on climate change, questions remain about how to best engage them. The Green New Deal, promoted by young politicians who care about youth engagement (e.g., Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez), and youth-led initiatives such as [Our Children's Trust](#) and [Zero Hour](#) are examples of initiatives that have emphasized the importance of young voices in policy debates and have successfully engaged many young adults to take action. As more youth see others in their age group getting involved, more may be inspired to get involved too. And as more youth raise their voices and vote, they may realize just how much power they have to shape the future.

Methods

The data included in this report are based on five waves ($n=6,253$) of the [Climate Change in the American Mind](#) survey—a nationally-representative analysis of public opinion on climate change in the United States conducted by the [Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#) and the [George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication](#). Using the Ipsos (formerly GfK) KnowledgePanel®, a representative online panel of U.S. adults (18+), surveys were conducted May 18 to June 6, 2017 ($n=1,266$); October 20 to November 1, 2017 ($n=1,304$); March 7 to 27, 2018 ($n=1,278$); November 28 to December 11, 2018 ($n=1,114$); and March 29 to April 8, 2019 ($n=1,291$). Generational cohort and year of birth were computed based on respondents' age at the time of data collection (Millennials: 1981 – 1996; Generation X: 1965 – 1980; Baby Boomers: 1946 – 1964; Silent Generation: 1928 – 1945). Given that generation is estimated, some respondents may be miscategorized. References to Republicans and Democrats throughout include respondents who initially identify as either a Republican or Democrat, as well as those who do not initially identify as Republicans or Democrats but who say they "are closer to" one party or the other (i.e., "leaners") in a follow-up question.

All questionnaires were self-administered by respondents in a web-based environment. Data are weighted to align with U.S. Census parameters and adjusted by sample size to account for the different number of respondents from year to year. For tabulation purposes, percentage points are rounded to the nearest whole number. The following

average margin of errors are calculated at the 95% confidence interval. Millennials: from +/- 8 percentage points (smallest sub-sample) to +/- 4 percentage points (largest sub-sample); Generation X: from +/- 7 percentage points (smallest sub-sample) to +/- 4 percentage points (largest sub-sample); Baby Boomers: from +/- 5 percentage points (smallest sub-sample) to +/- 3 percentage points (largest sub-sample); and Silent Generation: from +/- 10 percentage points (smallest sub-sample) to +/- 6 percentage points (largest sub-sample). For more information on survey methods, please review the [2018 Climate Change in the American Mind report](#) and the [2019 Politics & Global Warming report](#).