

UMass Lowell
Survey of American Adults
(includes oversample of respondents age 18-39)

October 5-12, 2020

N=1503 American Adults; 864 American Adults 18-39

The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-3.2% for American Adults; +/-3.4% for 18-39 year-olds

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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Do you have a question about this poll? If so, tweet @UML_CPO and we'll get back to you.

HIGHLIGHTS

A Focus on the Political Attitudes of Gen Z and Millennials

In a new poll from the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion, we explore three sets of issues facing Americans today – views about how and when the American political system is in need of reform, attitudes about environmentalism, climate change and sustainability, and views about race, policing and systemic racism. The project places a particular focus on the attitudes of young Americans – those from Generation Z (ages 18-23) and Millennials (ages 24 to 39).¹ We accomplish this by taking a nationally representative sample of 1000 American adults and then surveying an additional 503 Americans under the age of 40. The result is that our sample includes 222 Gen Z respondents (MOE +/-6.7%) and 642 Millennials (MOE +/-3.9%).

Majority of Americans in Favor of Systemic Reforms including Expansion of Supreme Court and Ending the Electoral College; Reforms Especially Popular with Gen Z and Millennials

The American public appears to have an appetite for reform in the current moment and on most of the reforms that we asked about, this is being driven by younger Americans. A key question of the political campaign and one that former Vice President Biden continues to evade is whether the Supreme Court should be expanded. Our survey finds that a majority of Americans (52%) are in favor of a proposal to expand the Supreme Court from 9 to 13 justices. Support for this is

¹ Here we are using the generations definitions as laid out by the Pew Research Center.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>



strongest among Millennials, 66% of whom favor Supreme Court expansion. A sizeable majority of those from Gen Z also favor court expansion at 62%.

In addition to the controversial issue of court expansion, our survey also asked about potential term limits for Supreme Court Justices; 72% of Americans were in favor limiting the terms to Justices placed on the nation's highest court, who currently serve lifetime appointments once confirmed. Here, we see a split, with Millennials most likely to favor court term limits at 79% but those in Gen-Z least likely to favor court term limits at 62%.

On a variety of other reforms, we see an appetite for reform among the general public where Millennials are the most enthusiastic, but where Gen Z appear considerably less enthusiastic. On whether or not the Electoral College should be replaced with a national popular vote, a majority of Americans, 58%, agree. The policy is especially popular among Millennials (64% support the national popular vote), but less popular among Gen-Z (54% support). Asked if the United States would be better off if it had more than two competitive political parties or with the current two-party system, 61% of American adults said more than two competitive parties, including 59% from Gen Z and 71% of Millennials. On whether Americans favor the use of ranked-choice voting, 47% are in favor, including 54% from Gen-Z and 64% of Millennials.

On reforms surrounding making it easier to vote, we also see the public broadly supportive of these reforms, and young voters, especially those under 40 years of age, especially enthusiastic. Asked whether so-called "no-excuse" absentee balloting should be available to all voters in future elections, 69% say yes and 31% say no. Those from Gen Z are supportive of no-fault absentee voting at 75% and Millennials support this reform at 77%. Similarly, 64% of Americans believe that Americans should be able to register to vote at the polls on election day, with no closing date – 70% from Gen-Z support this reform and 76% of Millennials also support this reform.

The one reform where older voters are more supportive than younger voters is on the question of legislative term limits for members of the US Congress. Overall, 84% of Americans are supportive of implementing some form of term limits. Support is weakest among Gen-Z at 65%, followed by Millennials at 80%, Gen-X (40-55) at 83%, Baby Boomers (56-74) at 94% and those from the Silent generation (75 and up) at 92%.

One thing that is interesting to note is that while Millennials appear to have more reform-oriented and ideologically liberal attitudes on many of these proposals than members of Gen Z, the distribution of party identification by generation is not ostensibly different. Just over half from Gen Z (53%) identify as Democrats or Independent-leaning Democrats, whereas 54% of Millennials identify as Democrats or Independent-leaning Democrats. Millennials are actually slightly more likely to identify as Republican/Republican-leaning (27%) than Gen-Z (22%), but this may be accounted for by the fact that a higher proportion of Gen-Z (14%) respondents answer the party ID question "not sure" than Millennials (6%).



Attitudes about Climate Change and Sustainability

On electoral reform, an interesting pattern emerges, Millennials have consistently more reform-oriented and liberal attitudes than their Gen Z counterparts. However, what happens when it comes to future of the planet?

On the question of whether human activity contributed to climate change, 74% of Americans say that it does (44% “a great deal,” and 30% “some”). Notably, Gen Z and Millennial respondents are the most likely to say human activity contributes to climate change – 84% for Gen Z and 85% for Millennials. A majority of Americans (54%) also believe the US Government has done too little to combat the effects of climate change, with Gen-Z leading the way at 65% and Millennials at 60%. Millennials and Gen-Z respondents are again also the most likely to agree that laws should be implemented to prohibit new fossil fuel plants and pipelines; All Adults 59%, Gen-Z 72%, Millennials, 70%. Finally, turning to the wildfires that have ravaged across California and other western states, respondents were asked if this was mostly the results of climate change, mostly the result of poor forest management, or a mix of both. Among all adults, 35% said climate change, 31% said poor forest management, and 34% said they are about equal factors. Once again, those from Gen-Z (40%) and Millennials (41%) were most likely to attribute the wildfires exclusively to climate change.

Race and Policing

Another very salient issue in the country right now is race, policing, police budgets, and the Black Lives Matter movement. We asked respondents in the survey if Blacks are treated less fairly than whites, if whites are treated less fairly than Blacks, or if they are treated about the same. Overall, 43% of Americans say that Blacks are treated less fairly than whites, [down 8 points from August](#). Asked if the Black Lives Matter Protests are generally peaceful or violent, a majority (51%) say that they are mostly or somewhat peaceful. And, on the question of whether respondents support efforts to decreased funds allocated to police departments and reallocate them to community programs like mental health, social work, and education, only 29% of American adults are in favor.

On each of these issues, members of Generation Z give the most consistently ideologically liberal responses, followed by Millennials. On the question of fairness and policing, 54% of Gen-Z respondents and 53% of Millennials say Blacks are treated less fairly than whites. Furthermore, 70% of Gen-Z respondents and 63% of Millennials agree that the Black Lives Matter Protests have been mostly or somewhat peaceful. Finally, while falling short of a majority, a larger proportion of Gen-Z respondents (47%) and Millennials (42%) support so-called “defund the police” reform efforts.



Other Findings from the poll

- Trust in government in the overall population is quite low – only 24% of respondents trust the government (“almost always” – 5%, “most of the time” – 19%). However, the most trusting age cohorts are the youngest and oldest respondents: among Gen Z respondents, trust is at 31%, Millennials 27%, Gen X 22%, Boomers 19%, and Silent Generation 30%.
- A majority of Americans are in favoring of canceling all student loan debt: 52% in favor to 48% opposed. Support is strongest amongst Gen Z respondents (66% favor) and Millennials (66% favor), while Gen X respondents are split (51% favor) and Baby Boomers (38% favor) and members of the Silent Generation (31% favor) both oppose canceling student loan debt.
- On the question of whether it is safe to open schools, a majority say that is it probably or definitely not safe to either open local public schools (58% no, not safe; 41% yes, safe) or colleges and universities (61% no, not safe; 39% yes, safe). Members of Gen Z, who contain traditional college-aged undergraduate students, were more likely to say its safe (39%) than Millennials (30%) to open colleges and Universities.