

MILLENNIALS: REDEFINING ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Millennials are characterized as a generation disengaged and unconcerned with the political process. Reports from small news agencies, researchers focused on the Millennial Generation, and political analysts have contributed to telling a narrative of Millennial disengagement from the political process. Analyzing their news consumption through traditional media platforms, and their participation in conventional political activities is used to support the disengagement of Millennials.

This thesis indicates the reason for a gap between Millennials and the traditional measurements of engagement and redefines how Millennials are still highly engaged in the political process through volunteerism, consumer activism, and social media. Presenting a more accurate narrative about Millennial engagement in the political process can hopefully garner their support from the public and government to give them reassurance in their power of the vote.

## Chapter 1: Who are Millennials?

“Millennials” is a buzzing topic of discussion arising primarily during the United States presidential election. Political analysts, researchers, politicians, and the media have either analyzed the affect of the Millennial vote or their low turnout at thUnlike the Baby Boomer Generation, infamously known for their peak in the U.S. fertility rate post World War II, Millennials, individuals born between 1981 and 2000, hold their claim to fame from a combination of factors. Millennials are well-known known for their innovation and adaption of digital technology, and online connectivity, but their primary renown comes from their persistent low voter turnout at the election polls. <sup>1</sup>

As Millennials out number the Boomer generation as of 2015 their actions specifically in the political process has drawn close review and criticism. Attention is focused on the persistent trend of low voter turnout. Experts have tracked these findings to produce articles, books, and insight on the Millennial Generation concluding Millennials can be a problem of the future state of the country. Mark Bauerlein, author of *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30)* is one individual criticizing the Millennial generation for their low participation in what he considers activities to help promote a more knowledgeable generation.

Like Bauerlein, critiques of Millennials have focused more on their disengagement from traditional participation rather than providing solutions to addressing

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<sup>1</sup> “Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse, Census Bureau Reports”. United States Census Bureau. 25 June 2015.

their low voter turnout. The stories accompanied with these statistics have helped to shape a negative stereotype about Millennials and distance them further from the political process. However, Millennials are generating a new narrative about their engagement lacking in recognition.

### **Millennial values**

In order to understand how the traditional narrative of Millennials is able to exist there is a need to understand the generation's values. Millennials were raised in a country propagating the idea of equality and freedom for all from their childhood until the time they turned 18 and exited high school. In Neil Howe and William Strauss's study *Millennials Go To College* they have identified seven characteristics of the Millennial Generation. Millennials are characterized as a special generation due to their development through childhood where they have received praise with every piece of work they performed. Millennials are also characterized as a sheltered generation compared to their parents and grandparents. They have experienced the height of safety measures while always under the care of their parents or another trusted adult. Millennials are a confident generation "motivated, goal-oriented, and confident in themselves and the future".<sup>2</sup> The individuality of American culture has evolved into a team-oriented mindset among Millennials as they seek conformity, and equal praise for their efforts as a group. The generation is achieving as they aim to succeed through college in order to reap the ultimate benefits of their future. They are also characterized as pressured as they assume multiple roles while experiencing pressure to succeed since their childhood years. Lastly, Howe and Strauss have identified Millennials as

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<sup>2</sup> Howe, Neil, and William Strauss. "Millennials go to College: Characteristics of the Millennial Generation." *Life Course Associates* (2013): n. pag. Web.

conventional in their interactions with society, and their respect for authority and opinions of their parents.

The seven characteristics of the Millennial Generation assist in understanding what their primary social and economic interests are and why. Millennials social interests are shaped around their positive team-oriented attitude, their characteristics of being special, achieving, confident and conventional. Equality and responsibility are two central themes of social, environmental, and political issues currently contested on Capitol Hill. The issues involving the two central themes are the ongoing fight for civil rights for women, the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex (LGBTQI) community, and immigrants, along with environment protection, and comprehensive regulation on money and politics. The central issues have garnered a large support from young Americans over the past decade.

The focus on the rights of the LGBTQI community has found overwhelming bi-partisan support among the Millennial Generation. The forerunning issue to draw attention to their civil rights movement was the right for same-sex couples to marry. The Supreme Court granted the right for same-sex couples to marry nationwide in a 5 to 4 vote on June 26, 2015.<sup>3</sup> When polled by Pew Research Center in 2014, 68% of Millennial respondents supported the right for same-sex couples to marry compared to 44% in 2004. This was one step in progressing the movement of LGBTQI rights with continual support among Millennials. From a survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute 47% of Millennials said transgender people, the top victim of violent

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<sup>3</sup> Liptak, Adam. "Supreme Court Ruling Makes Same-Sex Marriage a Right Nationwide". 2015 June 26. The New York Times. Web.



crimes in the United States<sup>4</sup> faces the greatest social stigma in the country. Millennials continue to recognize the need for advancing the rights of LGBTQI in the United States. Their participation in the community as we will see further in this thesis, seeks to address matters where the government is slow at making progress.

Reformation of immigration policy in the United States is another hotly debated issue in Congress with no resolution. However, Millennials are finding continuity on their stance of immigration policy as compared to their representatives on Capitol Hill. Millennials have a more positive outlook on the inclusion of immigrants into American society. 55% of Millennials believe immigrants residing in the United States should be allowed to stay and apply for citizenship, with 25% stating they should be allowed to stay and apply for permanent residency only, and a smaller percentage of 16% with the belief they should not be allowed to stay legally in the United States. The message of equal treatment in a land of immigrants has resonated with Millennials as they seek to change policy themselves.

Despite the fight for women's rights in the 1960s this topic remains of relative importance to today's young Americans. Millennials are joining alongside politicians and activists in retaining the right for women to keep control over their reproduction system. According to the Public Religion Research Institute, a greater percentage of Millennials are supportive of relaxing access to birth control and improving the sexual health of women. 58% of Millennials believe privately owned corporations should be required to provide employees with health care plans that cover contraception with 73% of respondents identifying as Democrats, 57% as Independents, and 38% as Republicans.

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<sup>4</sup> "Responding to Transgender Victims of Sexual Assault". June 2014. *Office for Victims of Crime*. Office of Justice Programs. Web.

When it comes to the debated topic of legality of abortion 33% believe an abortion should be legal in most cases, and 22% in all cases.<sup>5</sup>

Self-identifying titles appear to be less favorable among Millennials, but this does not mean they do not support the initiatives of certain labels. One of those labels are environmentalists, while only 32% identify as such, protection of the environment and recognition of climate change is an increasing issue they support. Young conservatives, and liberals are agreeing across the board the government needs to develop alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, and hydrogen technology. The environment is a long running issue young Millennials know they will have to face the consequences of in the future, and is in favor of policy reformations to induce this change.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jones, Robert P., and Daniel Cox. "How Race and Religion Shape Millennial Attitudes on Sexuality and Reproductive Health." *Public Religion Research Institute*. 27 March 2015. Web.

<sup>6</sup> "Beyond Red vs. Blue: The Political Typology, Fragmented Center Poses Election Challenges for Both Parties". 26 June 2014. P. 62-73. Web.

## **Chapter 2: The Traditional Narrative**

The views of a disengaged generation has derived from studies assessing Millennials rate of news consumption, and their participation in political activities. In order to determine the patterns in both categories experts have looked at their consumption of news from traditional media platforms, and their involvement in political activities not generally associated with this generation. However, statistics are manipulated to present a one-dimensional picture telling the disconnection of the young population, and the detrimental future of the United States.

### **News Consumption**

News has served as the primary source for decades for any individual to stay up-to-date with current events. Even at a point in time reporters served to keep track of the government's actions and present their finding to the general public. In former studies news consumption among Millennials was assessed through traditional media platforms such as newspaper and television.

The newspaper agency has experienced great setbacks as they face competition with alternatives platforms for news. The daily newspaper consumption patterns associated with 52% of the Silent generation and their cup of coffee is not finding the same habitual patterns with today's young generation.<sup>7</sup> In 2008 31% of 18-24 years old and 32% of 25-24 years olds reported reading a daily newspaper yesterday. These numbers have declined to 17% among 18-24 years old and 20% among 25-34 years old

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<sup>7</sup> "Trends in News Consumption 1991-2012: In Changing News Landscape, Even Televisions is Vulnerable". 27 September 2012. Pew Research Center. Web.

in 2014.<sup>8</sup> While the numbers decline among all age cohorts the most drastic decrease is among Millennials who are turning to alternative platforms.

Television has also served as a primary source for news consumption mainly by Gen Xers and Boomers. Indeed the innovation of television has served as a large competitor for the newspaper as individuals apt for a visually stimulating intake of their news. Among Millennials only 34% of 18-29 year olds reported watching televised news yesterday in 2012 compared to a significant number of Silents at 73% and the Boomers at 65% in the same year. Pew Research Center has compared their 2012 statistics to their 2006 studies to show the change in consumption patterns of televised news. There was a 2% increase among 50-64 year olds, and a 4% increase among 65+, but as for the 18-29 year old cohort there was a 15% decline in their consumption of television news. For the portion of Millennials watching television to obtain their news they have opted for popular shows such as the Colbert Report, and the Daily Show introducing an entertaining spin to informing their audience on today's political events.<sup>9</sup> As with the newspaper, television is attracting a smaller percentage of the Millennial population.

Presenting these statistics to generations frequently consuming their news through traditional platforms can appear startling, and raise questions of how Millennials are staying informed. However, the insight on news consumption through these mediums is bias in recognizing the evolvement of news into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Shifting from this reiterated narrative used by writers such as Mark Baurerlin, news agencies, and other experts and taking into consideration news consumption today can allow us to understand a new narrative of the Millennial.

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<sup>9</sup> Pew Research: Trends In News Consumption.

The Digital Era has expanded the medium for news consumption while also introducing different perspectives on current events. The mediums have expanded from newspaper and television to an online news media platform. Here the decline of Millennial consumption of traditional media platforms is translated to an incline in news consumption via online.

The online news media platform includes online news sites, social media, blogs, and digital applications on mobile devices, tablets, and computers. Millennials are discovering and enjoying other mediums for news consumption. The most current research conducted in 2012 by Pew Research Center found 33% of 18-29 year olds used tablets to access their news, and 37% utilized their smartphones. Multiple devices to access news information devices allows for ease of access of news at any time of the day.

The combination for news is interwoven into Millennials weekly, and even daily digital activities much like the Silents with their cup-of-joe and printed news. “Millennials are more likely to report following politics, crime, technology, their local community, and social issues than report following popular culture and celebrities, or style and fashion”.<sup>10</sup> Aside from their online social networks they are also receiving news through private networks, such as group texts and instant messaging.<sup>11</sup>

The American Press Institute, and the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research have collaborated on a study called the *Media Insight Project*. Through this study they have assisted in re-telling the narrative of Millennial news consumption in the digital age. Social media is a major contributor for news with young adults. The

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<sup>10</sup> "How Millennials Get News." *American Press Institute RSS*. N.p., 16 Mar. 2015. Web.

<sup>11</sup> American Press Institute.

project's smaller pool size found, 83% of individuals interviewed reported obtaining news from YouTube, while 50% percent cited Instagram. However, Facebook remains a prominent source of daily news consumption for Millennial adults.

The Pew Research Center narrowed their study of news consumption through Facebook among Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers. Their study found 61% of Millennials interviewed received political news in the previous week from their Facebook newsfeed. 32% of Millennials followed or 'liked' a news organization, reporter or commentator's page, 23% followed political parties, candidates, or elected officials, and 35% followed issue-based groups on Facebook. Both, Pew Research and the Media Insight Project have both found Millennials are less likely to experience partisan polarization through their social media platforms, and more likely to see diverse views in their news feed in comparison to Gen Xers and Boomers. 18% of Millennials reported, "only seeing news in line with their own views on their Facebook news feed" in contrast to the 31% among Boomers and 21% of Gen Xers.

Social media as a source of news consumption has surpassed what traditional media platforms failed to present. This emerging platform has introduced diversity into their news, and has allowed them to critically analyze the information they receive. Millennials are coming to age in the boom of technology, and information. Having this access allows them to research the validity of certain news. Further, social media has acted as a platform to cross-examine reporters and news agencies manipulating information.

The mobility of news information and the progressive rise of technology has provided an outlet for the introduction of digital news applications (apps). Digital news

apps have enhanced the mobility of political news consumption, and other topics for young Americans. Older news agencies have evolved with the Digital Age creating news applications for their audience with a click of the download button. Original contenders of traditional news platforms such as NPR, BBC, CNN, Associated Press, New York Times, and the Washington Post have transitioned into utilizing the benefits of media in the Digital Age. These news agencies provide their readers free access to an extensive range of timely news by pushing the costs onto their advertisers. This has removed barriers of access for Millennials and the general public to stay up-to-date on current events.

Aside from original news agencies a recent trend has taken way in the App Store and Google Play for iPhone, Android, and Windows phone users. Similar to the applications of news agencies, new digital news applications such as Flipboard, Circa, Digg and now Apple's "News" combines news tailored to their user's interests. These applications generate news from notable and "underground" sources tailored to the user's interests. Users also have the option of enabling push notifications where they can receive breaking news at any moment to keep them connected.

The creation of websites such as Project Vote Smart, Open Secrets, and Open Congress have provided resources for their users to keep track of politicians, elections, voting, funding, speeches and the influence of lobbying by individuals, organizations, and corporations. In combination to the expanded mediums for news information has allowed Millennials to assess and cross check their news sources while exposing their selves to a diversity of views to enhance their civic and political knowledge.

## **Political Activities**

Criticism is drawn to Millennials when reviewing the extent of their involvement in conventional forms of political participation. Volunteering for political parties or a candidate's campaign, donating to certain political parties or candidates, signing petitions, attending speeches, contacting a government official about a specific issue, and actively participating in a non-partisan group trying to influence public policy or government are all forms of political activities used to account for Millennials disengagement in the political process. Failing to review the reasons for Millennials low participation rates in these activities hinder the validity of stating this generation is not engaged with the political process. Instead let us assess the reasons for their low participation, and then discover their shift to unconventional forms of participation.

An increasing percentage of Millennials unlike the generation of their parents, and grand parents do not feel an inclination to align their selves with a political party. Their views of the government has also waned and influenced their low participation in party-based political activities, or activities directly aligned with the government itself. Despite, the overwhelming favor of a larger government the current actions of Congress and the on going game of 'party politics' has disheartened Millennials from aligning them selves with the bi-partisan government.<sup>12</sup>

The growing distrust of the game of politics with Millennials does not favor one party over the other. In 2014 the percentage of the population identifying as an Independent was highest among Millennials at 50% leaving 27% identifying as Democrat

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<sup>12</sup> "Millennials in Adulthood." *Social Demographic Trends Project RSS*. Pew Research Center, 06 Mar. 2014. Web.



and 17% as Republican.<sup>13</sup> Millennials are still overwhelmingly identifying with liberal over conservative views, but the idea of identifying with a party is not an important factor to them. The young American population looks to the official with solutions to addressing issues in line with their values.

As Millennials gradually align with Independents it is inevitable the number of volunteers for a political party or campaign will experience a decline. Instead there is a growing trend for Millennials to participate in unconventional political activities such as volunteering, consumer activism, and use of social media. The unconventional forms of participation are viewed as an effective method to make a direct impact where the gridlock in Congress fails to address their concerns.

### **Volunteerism**

Volunteering is a civic duty instilled in American children through their education with results of an increase participation in volunteering. The several social issues Millennials witness Washington failing to address has brought them to volunteer at the grass roots level. As a generation characterized as special they believe a primary purpose to their existence is to solve the world's problems that older generations have failed to solve.<sup>14</sup>

The Millennial Impact Report is dedicated to researching Millennial volunteering habits, and serves as a primary source for businesses and organizations seeking to incorporate and promote effective volunteering methods in their environments. The 2015 Millennial Impact Report found 70% of Millennials interviewed spent at least an hour volunteering their time to a cause they cared about in 2014.

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<sup>13</sup> Millennials in Adulthood.

<sup>14</sup> Howe and Strauss.

America has drawn strong criticism for its overall ranking in education, and the quality of education differing between socio-economic backgrounds. Millennials see a country promoting the idea of education equality, but in turn does not see the implementation of such at the individual level. This is an opportunity for Millennials to make a direct connection with American students in developing a confident and educated generation by addressing factors playing a role in educational success.

The United Way has experienced an influx of young Millennials looking to assist in the development of children and the community. The organization first started their “Alternative Spring Break” with 4000 student volunteers in 2006, and has seen their number rise to over 700 million as of 2014. Millennials have swapped beer bongs on the coast of South Padre Island for tools of change in communities of the United States and Jamaica. They have facilitated change through this program by building houses, tutoring children, and helping with disaster recovery contributing a total of 130,000 hours in 2014.

United Way has also organized other opportunities for Millennials to make an immediate impact in their nation through their “Intern Day of Action”. The program completed over 30 volunteer projects in 4 county regions here 27 companies and 750 local interns worked together to induce change in their nation. The United Way serves as only one example of the hundreds of non-profit organizations involving growing numbers of Millennials seeking to bridge the gap between policy and direct impact into the nation.

The increased participation in the volunteer sector from Millennials has initiated businesses to incorporate this civic duty into their framework. As Millennials now constitute the largest generation in the U.S. workforce at 53.5 million businesses are

increasingly aligning with Millennials.<sup>15</sup> U.S. businesses are actively seeking to understand how Millennials function in order to produce greater productivity in the workplace. While free lunches and happy hours are one method, opportunities to volunteer are the primary method for many businesses. The Millennial Impact Report found 50% of Millennials have volunteered their time to a company-sponsored initiative at some time in their careers with 79% stating, “they felt they made a difference through their involvement”. Volunteering through their company has allowed Millennials to continue to their love for giving back and making a difference in their community. The initiative for more businesses to adopt volunteering into their business model has helped reshape corporate culture, and practice.

The rise of issue-based non-profit organizations have also allowed for the young American population to organize, and make an immediate change in social issues primarily important to Millennials. A large support for LGBTQI rights, and immigration reform has sent Millennials to seek out organizations assisting in finding solutions in these social issues. Organizations are excited at the enthusiasm and support Millennials are bringing to their initiatives. One such organization is Immigration Equality.

Immigration Equality (IE) is an organization providing free legal services to their LGBT and HIV-positive immigrants, which include asylum seekers, separated bi-national couples and families, detainees in immigration jail facilities, and undocumented LGBT individuals living in the United States. Millennials have advocated through IE on several policy issues detrimental to the LGBT immigrant community. IE has focused on policy reformations such as ending deportation of LGBT immigrants, repealing filing deadline

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<sup>15</sup> Fry, Richard. “Millennials surpass Gen Xers as the largest generation in U.S. labor force”. 11 May 2015. *Fact Tank News In Numbers*. Pew Research Center. Web.

for asylum, including their community into the administrative relief and immigration reform, improving conditions in immigration detention, increase the use of alternative detentions, decrease asylum backlogs by hiring the appropriate number of officials recognize their families to include those without access to marriage equality, and utilizing group-based protection mechanisms for LGBT individuals trapped abroad.

Their attorneys include Millennials who have received awards and recognition for the initiatives from the *Immigration Lawyers Association*, *Arthur Helton Memorial Human Rights Award*, the *CLASSY Human Rights and Social Justice Award*, and more than one of their lawyers are featured on best lawyers under 40 by the *LGBT Bar Association*. While the organizations initiatives and success have also involved members across generations the enthusiasm and drive has played a role in demanding change of issues important to Millennials. The organization recognizes the broken immigration system, and through IE Millennials can help bring equality, justice, and freedom for a marginalized community.<sup>16</sup>

The civic duty of volunteering was ingrained into Millennials since their childhood, and as they grew up even post-college they continue to see the power volunteering can have on their communities domestically and abroad. They are shaping the culture around them through their positive efforts with the ability to make changes where policies have failed to address.

### **Consumer Activism**

Corporate America running the country may have held ground in the past, but Millennials are making the initiative to end the overbearing influence Wall Street has in

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<sup>16</sup> Immigration Equality. 2012. Web.

politics. Millennials came to age during a time when financial institutions, little regulation, and greed has led the downturn in the American economy with the 2007 recession. This left millions of Americans and Millennials in debt and with nor working struggling to survive. Consumer activism is one form of participation Millennials have found their power to invoke change. Former generations may have engaged in this unconventional form of political participation, but Millennials have sought to maximize its influence in order to address key concerns of corporate social responsibility.

Consumer activism entails consumers utilizing their leveraging power of money to disturb undesirable practices or values of corporations and pressure them to adopt practices in line with their values and interests. Consumer activism includes boycotting and buycotting. Boycotting is the action of choosing not to buy certain products or services, because the consumer disagrees with social or political values of the providing company. Buycotting is consumers choosing to buy products of a company, because they like their social or political values.<sup>17</sup>

Millennials, as the largest consumer group, have utilized the acts of boycotting and buycotting to decide which businesses and industries will survive in the long run. Corporations have held a tangent history of corruption bypassing full responsibility of social and environmental hazards. Corporations in the past and into the present day have utilized their monetary influence to lobby Congress to progress their initiatives. However, recent trends over the past decade have shown businesses reforming their culture and practices as Millennials assume their workforce and consumer population.

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<sup>17</sup> “Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next. Confident, Connected, Open to Change.” Pew Research Center. February 2010. Web.

Consumer activism is conceptualized as an activity appealing to people who feel alienated or marginalized from traditional political settings.<sup>18</sup> 83.1 million Americans constitute the Millennial population now rising in the buy power of consumption.<sup>19</sup> In a research study conducted by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) found in 2006 found the percentage of Millennials engaging in boycotting in the past 12 months was 35%, and those engaged in buycotting was 34%. The numbers of consumer activists has increased over the decades from 15% in 1975 to 53% in 2006 of individuals engaged in boycotts in 2006.

Millennials consumers are spending 600 billion USD annually, and these expenditures are projected to grow to 1.4 trillion USD in the next six years.<sup>20</sup> This projected growth is one of the primary reasons consultants, experts, and other professionals are urging corporations to adapt to the values of Millennials. “Now much of the corporate world...is realizing Corporate Social Responsibility is not [a] fad relegated to a small group of “do-gooders,” but a trend that is maturing and moving from the realm of the regulatory into the domain of consumer-driven market behavior...the Millennials, who are doing the hard work of pulling that corporate chain.”<sup>21</sup> The primary decision-making behind Millennial consumption is the corporation’s value and image. Are these companies aligned with Millennials values or not?

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<sup>18</sup> Copeland, Lauren. “Political Consumerism: Boycotting, Buycotting, and the Expansion of Political Participation in the United States”. 2013 April 23. University of California at Santa Barbara.

<sup>19</sup> "Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse." *United States Census Bureau*. N.p., 25 June 2015. Web.

<sup>20</sup> Donnelly, Christopher, and Renato Scaff. "Who Are the Millennial Shoppers? And What Do They Really Want? | Accenture Outlook." *Outlook: The Journal of High Performance Business*. Accenture, 2013. Web.

<sup>21</sup> Stoddard, Russ. “Millennials Pull Corporate Social Responsibility into the Marketplace.” 2014 July 23. Web.

Millennials are joining the ranks of consumer activists to boycott the companies not aligned with their values. These companies are traditionally known for their poor practices with the environment, human rights, and their ideals contradicting Millennial progressive attitudes. A 3-year study conducted by Scratch Viacom Media Networks surveyed over 10,000 Millennials from 73 companies in 15 different agencies. The purpose of this study was to learn which industry was the least favorable amongst Millennials. The Banking and Financing industry ranked at the top of Millennials least desirable industries. The Banking industry linked to the cause of the Great Recession left thousands of Millennials at this time to balance the stress of unemployment accompanied with their student debt. The four leading American banks are among Millennials ten least loved brands. The views of the banks are unfavorable, with 53% stating they don't think their bank offers anything different than other banks, and 1 in 3 stating they are open to switching banks in the next 90 days. Millennials are also supporting alternative solutions to the banking industry with companies they align with such as Amazon, Apple, PayPal, Square, and possibly Google providing a financial service in the near future.<sup>22</sup> As they voice their discontent with the financial sector their consumer activities are also hindering the future of these industries. Millennials are more reluctant to purchasing homes, automobiles, and other high-ticket items essential to the revenue of this industry. As they opt for access over ownership the financial sector are forced to look to other ways to appeal to the largest consumer generation.<sup>23</sup>

Millennials may not be the sole components, but they make a larger portion of the population of individuals pushing forth these movements. Corporations are recognizing

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<sup>22</sup> "The Millennial Disruption Index." Scratch Viacom Media Networks.

<sup>23</sup> "Millennials Coming to Age." *Goldman Sachs*. N.p., 2013..

the power and ideology behind the Millennial Generation. Guides, research studies, and seminars are growing in numbers to learn more about the Millennial consumer and their purchasing ideology.

In 2011 a study conducted by an advertisement agency, TBWA/Worldwide, found 4 in 5 young adults surveyed said they were more likely to purchase from a company supporting a cause they care about, and 3 in 4 would think more highly of a company supportive of a social cause. Further, 3 in 4 said they believe corporations should create economic value for society by addressing its needs.<sup>24</sup> Millennials are reshaping the role of corporations in modern day America. As their attitudes wane at the effectiveness of their politicians to effectively address the issues concerning corporations i.e. the environment, corruption, and human welfare the statistics along with comparative studies are indicating Millennials are taking the lead in addressing their greatest social and political concerns.

Studies dedicated to Millennials are advising corporations on how to capture the largest generation in their market. The underlying message is corporations will have to adapt or die to the generation wielding the greatest demand, and assuming the roles within their companies.<sup>25</sup> We are beginning to see the shift in corporations with a negative track record in environmental, social, and human rights issues begin to reform the company to meet with ideals of the Millennial generation, because they can no longer deny the fact Millennials are the steer leaders of this economy.

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<sup>24</sup> Swinand, Andrew. "Corporate social responsibility is Millennial's religion". 2014 March 25. Crain's Chicago Business.

<sup>25</sup> Hais, Michael and Winograd Morley. "How Millennials Could Upend Wall Street and Corporate America." 2014 May. Brooking Institution.



Wal-Mart is one example of a corporation traditionally unaligned with Millennial values. Wal-Mart has held a negative track record in their human welfare with their employees, and their contribution to environmental hazards through ill practices in their company. However, Wal-Mart has recently made a larger effort in taking on the role of making a positive contribution to the environment. The company has set a new initiative to be 100% renewable energy by 2020.<sup>26</sup> They have already taken the step in setting up a 10-year contract with Pattern Energy's Logan's Wind Gap Farm in Texas.

The role of corporations in the political process has remained a main subject spoken out by the public, but Congress continues to fail in addressing these concerns of Corporate Social Responsibility. However, through the use of controlling the circular flow of revenue to these companies Millennials have commanded the attention of corporations to reform its practices and values. The rise of consultations about Millennial consumer shows the consumer activism is an effective mechanism. A lost voice on Capitol Hill does not mean silence the will to stand forever.

Even with these positive efforts there is still a larger resistance to reform from certain industries. The oil industry remains one of the greatest industries Millennials are slowly combatting to reform its ideals through consumer activism. The oil companies and local utilities are at risk of revenue of erosion as Millennials are adopting energy efficient, digital technologies and sustainable practices, but the effects are slow.<sup>27</sup> Shell,

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<sup>26</sup> Vanderhelm, Mark VP of Energy for Wal-Mart. "Walmart Leaps Toward 100% Renewables With Wind Deal." *Triple Pundit People Planet Profit*. N.p., 01 Oct. 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Roth, Bill. "Millennial Activists Driving America's Revenue Growth." *Triple Pundit People Planet Profit*. N.p., 14 Sept. 2014. Web.

BP, Exxon-Mobil, and Chevron have all shared the limelight of environmental disasters and major contributors to climate change.<sup>28</sup>

The financial and oil industries are the main entities resisting adaptation of Millennial values. Consumer activism, as effective as it is with current businesses and industries is not a lone powerful enough tool to combat the industries resisting reformation. These industries have the capital and power to lobby towards their political officials placing Millennials at an unfair advantage. The power of consumer activism coupled with the power of the vote can help reform the private sector to align with their values.

### **Social Media**

Millennials are connecting with individuals from diverse backgrounds and interests via online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Reddit to share information, and their personal opinions instantaneously. Government officials, organizations, and corporations have also adopted various social media platforms in effort to outreach their message to a larger audience.

Social media has served as a platform to open communication between Millennials and the government as officials also adopt various platforms to outreach to young Americans. Millennials are able to connect with their representatives and bring to their attention issues of relevance. Further, the use of social media has also helped in cross checking political officials in their statements and actions, which would otherwise be dismissed without the pressure and power of social media.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

While social media has allowed Millennials to share their stances on an array of policy issues it has also allowed them to draw to light what politics overshadows, the faces behind the population. Tony Pham, Vice President of Marketing at Life 360 said, “instead of just posting a story about President Obama’s statement on same-sex marriage, I’m able to add a comment on what this means to me personally.” Social media has allowed for the young generation to communicate with their peers, and officials how the existence or non-existence of certain policies directly affects them.

Their efforts have not gone unnoticed as they develop a large following in support of their opinions while also sparking discussion about issues and its meaning to Americans. Social media has played a significant role in garnering support for LGBT movement, and the ruling of the Supreme Court in favor of granting same-sex couples the right to marry. The power for videos to go viral has allowed for the decision makers in the Supreme Court to see the overwhelming support for the LGBT community making it difficult to deny public opinion.<sup>29</sup>

#ProudToLove, YouTube’s own video supporting the Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage went viral on June 26, 2015. As well on June 26 Facebook allowed their users to apply a rainbow filter on their picture to show their initial support for the Supreme Court Decision. Social media has expedited the progress of certain movements on social issues, and continues to find support from the platform creators.

Facebook has tracked the LGBT movement among their users since 2012 discovering the influence its social media platform has on garnering support and spreading the word of LGBTQ rights. After the Supreme Court ruling on marriage

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<sup>29</sup> Pew Research Millennials in Adulthood.

equality the top 300 LGBT rights groups, including Human Rights Campaign, and GLAAD spiked with over 150,000 new fans spiked. On this same day they noted a 250% increase in the number of users “coming out”. Facebook identifies coming out as updating their sex interests to same-sex or custom gender.<sup>30</sup>

Social media exercised by Millennials has played a significant role in Millennials efforts to address the rights concerning the LGBTQ community. Facebook has played one part in allowing supporters of the LGBT community to communicate, and organize offline to push forth initiatives in finally obtaining the right for same-sex couples to marry.

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<sup>30</sup>State, Bogdan, and Nils Wernerfelt. "America's Coming Out on Facebook." *Research at Facebook*. Facebook, Oct. 2015. Web.

### **Chapter 3: The Power of the Vote**

The power behind the vote is not a universal concept accepted by Millennials. This has caused Millennials to pursue other methods to address policy, social, and economic issues. However, even through this new narrative voting remains the most important component of a democracy driving the interests and directions of the state. In which instance, we cannot disregard voting as an effective tool of political participation.

The 2008 presidential campaign received great hype about the positive outlook of Millennial participation and voter turnout. In 2008, Senator Barack Obama's election into the White House received substantial support from young Americans across the board. This prompted the media to print striking headlines about the return of young voters, and even compelled some political analysts to reevaluate the direction of young voters in America. Statistics indicating the youth share of the vote was over hyped by the media as the actual numbers only showed a 1% increase from the 2004 to 2008 elections, and an additional 1% increase in the 2012 elections.<sup>31</sup>

While the media draws attention to highlighting youth engagement during the presidential elections the mid-term elections often go unnoticed. In the 2010-midterms youth turnout was 24%, but declined in 2014 to 19%.<sup>32</sup> The 2014-midterm elections

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<sup>31</sup> "Early Exit Polls: Youth Represent 19% of Voters, Up 1 Point from 2008." *CIRCLE RSS*. N.p., 6 Nov. 2012. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.

<sup>32</sup> "Official Youth Turnout Rate in 2010 was 24%" The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. 2011 April 15. Web.

experienced the lowest turnout among young voters in the past forty years.<sup>33</sup> The consequence of Millennials low voter turnout during the midterms served as one of their reasons for distrust with the government. Millennials are now witnessing the gridlock of Congress, and their increased marginalization due to their low voter turnout at the polls. The trend has assisted in reinforcing the stereotype about Millennials and overshadowing their current engagement trends.

Are Millennials causing their own discontent about the government by not exercising their right to vote? Political analysts have focused on the causes of low voter turnout due to redistricting, declined outreach efforts from politicians, and new laws making voting a greater challenge. What they have indicated has played a role in low voter turnout, but reviewing the persistent decline of youth voter turnout prior to new restrictions indicates there is something further. The neglect to address other indicators may stem from the media and other experts using small statistics to show Millennials supporting different initiatives of the Obama Administration, but are not connecting it to their stagnant turnout rate.

A survey conducted by the Harvard Institute of Politics found 43% of non-voting Millennials surveyed did not care who was elected, because “Washington is broken”, 31% said it didn’t matter, because “none of the candidates represented their views”, and 25% said, “the parties were more or less the same”.<sup>34</sup> Of course one set of statistics despite its source would not seem evident enough to tell the story of Millennials.

However, several other polls have shown a common response from Millennials in

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<sup>33</sup> "2014 Youth Turnout and Youth Registration Rates Lowest Ever Recorded; Changes Essential in 2016." *CIRCLE RSS*. N.p., 22 June 2015. Web.

<sup>34</sup> Gilman, Hollie Russon and Elizabeth Stokes. “The Civic and Political Participation of Millennials”. New America. 2014. Web.

assessing their attitudes about politics and voting. On a smaller scale Fusion Poll surveyed a thousand Millennials to assess their views about Washington. The question asked during this poll was, “why do you think you are likely not to vote?” The largest response of 16% stated, “I don’t care about voting”, 12% “I’m too busy”, 9% “Nothing ever changes” and another 9% said, “My vote doesn’t count”, leaving 8% stating, “I don’t trust the system.”

Changing Millennials attitudes towards the government to increase turnout at the polls begins with the government itself. Underrepresented by their officials they witness the extent to which money has influenced the interests of a few over their own interests through poor lobbying regulations. Millennials have viewed the financial sector as one of the few influencing government actions.<sup>35</sup> This notion is stemmed from the financial sectors involvement in the 2007 recession, and the small response to hold them responsible for their actions. The individuals, organizations, and corporations with money are viewed as the ones with the power of persuasion in the government. The power of lobbying is beneficial for several reasons, but with a stronger lobbying influence not in the hands of the general population this remains a great concern for young voters. Yet, the marginalized youth population in the government is continuously sought after during times of elections, and not in between.

A door partway closed, and articles slandering the Millennial name does not help spawn a sense of patriotism in voting. As a result they move from the closed door on Capitol Hill to unconventional forms of participation where they witness a direct impact

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<sup>35</sup> “The Millennial Disruption Index”. 2013. *Scratch*. Viacom Media Networks.

through volunteering, utilizing their economic power of consumption, and finding their voice online where it was silenced on the office steps of their representatives.

The waning trust between Millennials and the government remains the greatest barrier to increasing their turnout at the polls. On behalf of the government political officials need to reestablish trust with young voters by showing their genuine empathy and concern for their interests and ideas. If political strategists fail to incorporate the fundamental principles we are taught as children of “treating others like you want to be treated”, “play fair”, and “share” political outreach programs will continue to make little progress in obtaining the vote. These principles help in building trust between individuals, and can recreate a gratified attitude about the United States from its young citizens.

There is a need to stress the genuine human concern for wanting to rebuild this trust between young voters and the government. Millennials have come to age in the Digital Era with an influx of information fighting for their attention. They have learned to sift through and analyze the vast amounts of information weighing what is genuine and what is false. Professors drill into their minds from high school to college to double and triple check their resources, and also Wikipedia is not a genuine source. It is inherent in the framework of Millennials minds to assess what is fighting to obtain their attention, thus officials showing their empathy only for the camera is not a difficult challenge for Millennials to analyze.

The setback for political officials effectively outreaching and obtaining the youth vote is their timing. As the 2016 presidential election approaches attention will shift again to Millennials and the emerging 18 year olds voting for the first time. The young vote is



the golden key to shift the direction of a party's chance at the presidential seat. Parties will once more invest numerous resources into outreaching to Millennials with some of the same strategies, but with a "hip" spin to it. Young voters nearly expect the same tactics of campaigns to appeal to hotly debated issues by slandering their opponents stances, changing their views to cater to their audience, and trying to register them to vote with very few actually turning out to do so. Political campaigns are buying right into the game of "party politics" disfavored among young voters. Millennials are tired of the game of politics to obtain their votes, and wish officials would clearly and honestly present their stance on certain issues.<sup>36</sup> Continuing down this familiar campaign route will only result in them rejecting the idea of the vote.

In order to obtain the non-voting Millennials share of the vote the government must repair their relationship with young voters during non-campaign seasons. Re-establishing this trust takes the government reforming unpopular practices, which have placed Millennial interests on the margins. The government will need to rebalance the power of influence any individual or entity may have in the government. The ability for the U.S. government to look within itself and make necessary changes to show the young population it wants to include their voice can change Millennial attitudes.

Reformation of poor practices is only one step. There are officials currently within office benefiting from the influence of disproportionate power in the population. This delays the process of reforming ill practices on behalf of the government. However, for the officials genuinely wanting to reconnect and reestablish trust with young voters they must actively involve Millennials in policy creation and reformation.

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<sup>36</sup>"Political Advertisers Take Notice: Millennials Are Not Impressed." *PBS*. PBS, Nov. 2014. Web.



## **Chapter 4: Solution**

The U.S. Congress should create a non-partisan effort to compose a representative committee of the youth population reflecting the diversity of Millennials. Participation in a representative committee can enhance Millennial's civic duty skills and allow them to translate their passion for civic involvement to the macro level of government. They will have opportunities to address key issues of a collective importance from the generation by incorporating their positive attitudes about civic duty from volunteering.

The role of this Committee as a representation of young voters is to advise Congressional members during their active sessions in order to provide insight on policies from the standpoint of Millennial values. At the same time this also allows Millennials to reciprocate the important role government plays in addressing several issues. Without the presence of a representative population during policy debates, congressmen can choose to overlook how their policies will affect Millennials and the greater population. The decline in outreach to Millennials from their representatives was reflected in the 2014 mid term elections.<sup>37</sup> Portions of congressmen have already shown the ease in neglecting a portion of the population in favor of another. As both outreach and voter turnout continues to decline it is an inevitable fate for the future of politics in the United States.

The Manor Labs Project, an initiative of Stanford University's Peace Dot Project and Assistant City Manager of Manor, Texas Dustin Haisler, took a similar approach in

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<sup>37</sup> "Youth Turnout and Youth Registration Rates Lowest Ever Recorded; Changes Essential In 2016".

2010, but through a virtual perspective on a smaller scale. The project outreached to 5,800 citizens in Manor, Texas to remove the barrier between the community and the government in order to enhance their town. Through the Project's on line site citizens were able to register and submit their ideas for improving their community. The pool of ideas entered into three different stages: the incubation stage, the validation stage, and if determined a good idea it would enter into the pilot project stage. During the length of this research project from October 2009 until 2010 over 500 people registered, with a collection of a hundred ideas, and the execution of five. The representatives of the community reciprocated the proposed ideas. Any rejected idea was provided with a full detailed brief on the reason behind the decision. Harvard University's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation recognized the Manor Project's initiative as a recipient in its 2010 Bright Ideas Program.<sup>38</sup>

The federal government functions on a larger and more complex scale, but the idea of incorporating the community and the government has helped close a gap of distrust, and create a more positive perspective about the role of the government. A similar initiative is something worthy of pursuing as a collaboration project between universities directly working with young people and their city governments.

A physical versus a virtual committee can be a more effective solution of involving Millennials, because they are a generation, which likes to see the results of their direct impact. First initiating the project on a smaller state level provides time for contributors to analyze the committee, and make adjustments and improvements to how

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<sup>38</sup> "New Bright Ideas Recognizes Innovative Government Programs." *Harvard Kennedy School: Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation*. N.p., 29 Sept. 2010. Web.

this committee functions. The members selected should be placed in a revolving leadership role so they know their presence is recognized and they are an active part of the community. As well the committee like their representatives should hold their positions for an allotted time in order to bring forth new perspectives and idea. This incorporates the Millennial characteristics of feeling special, team oriented, and achieving, while also recognizing their values of equal representation. Acknowledging these characteristics can assist in forming a stronger sense of trust between the government and young voters.

The Committee should be tasked with an agenda, which allows them to discuss and formulate policies and reciprocate it back to their representatives. In line with having a physical committee Millennials can use their familiarity with social media to connect with a greater portion of their generation online in order to receive feedback, and allow Millennials to track their progress through the use of pictures, videos, and text. The Committee should also have an opportunity to rate the performance of their representatives with feedback for them to review. In turn their representatives should also provide feedback about the committee, and contribute to the idea of an open and welcoming community.

The Manor Labs Project was only one initiative of many, which presented its success on a smaller level. As more cities begin to adopt a similar model behavior can they attract the attention of the media, which will help in redefining Millennial engagement while at the same time rebuilding the relationship between this generation and the government.

The presence of a committee of young people supported by their officials will show D.C.'s initiative to involve young voters, and deter from practices, which have alienated the population. Once the government begins to show their diligence in involving Millennials will we begin to witness an increase turnout at both the presidential and midterm elections. Young people will see the influence their power in the vote can have can help promote the changes they were addressing through their unconventional methods of participation.

## **Conclusion**

For nearly a decade Millennials were characterized as a generation disconnected and unconcerned with the political process. Their disengagement was critiqued from their low consumption rates of news information through traditional media platforms, their low participation rates in traditional political activities, and a persistent decline of voting among the young population. This narrative has not only shaped the stereotype of Millennials, but has also failed to recognize their engagement in the Digital Age.

Millennials have reversed the old narrative about their generation as developing research has revealed they are more engaged than prior narratives have indicated. Millennials remain connected with political news and current events via online through a variety of social media platforms, online news sites, news applications, and group messaging. As Millennials are marginalized in the government they have sought different methods to addressing policy, social, and economic issues through their increased participation in volunteering, consumer activism, and social media usage. Their increased involvement in these efforts has made a profound difference.

However, voting is still the key to democracy, and is not a political tool to be disregarded. Millennials low voter turnout has allowed for their stereotype to develop, but through understanding their personal attitudes towards voting we have learned the government and society have played a role in their discouraging views about this civic engagement. The government and the community must both re-mend the disdained relationship with young voters in order to reverse their voting patterns.

One step to closing the gap between the government and Millennials is through allowing them to hold representation in the U.S. House. The presence of a physical committee of young voters in the House can begin the initiative in rekindling this relationship. Millennials will witness their government taking their values and interests into account as they are allowed to work with congressionals formulating policies that will impact their future. Collaborative projects between communities and governments have already taken initiative with successful results. Promoting this trend of connecting citizens and the government can help redevelop old practices that once distanced the two.

Without reaffirming this relationship between young voters, the government, and society there is no hip political strategy, which will mobilize the youth to see the power in their vote. The fundamental principle of trust and sincerity is the key to moving forward in initiating a positive outlook on Millennials voter turnout.



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