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Millennials and Boomers

How Utah's Generations Compare to Each Other and the Nation
Part IV: Politics and Society



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The mission of Utah Foundation is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change.

Millennials and Boomers

How Utah's Generations Compare to Each Other and the Nation

Part IV: Politics and Society

Increased voter turnout in the 2008 presidential election helped create movement around understanding younger voters, who in previous election cycles had been thought of as an inactive group. National research has painted Millennials as a socially-conscious generation who do not identify with the two major parties. These attributes are influenced by their goals and values in areas outside of the political realm.

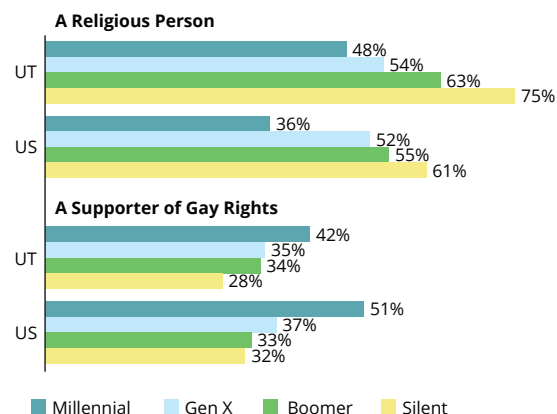
For Part IV of this report, Utah Foundation set out to explore how Utah's Millennials and other generations compared to their national peers regarding social values and political sentiment. In general, Utahns tended to follow national intergenerational trends, although levels of support or importance varied by topic. Conversely, Utah's conservative political climate created some differences with national data.

FINDINGS

- Utahns across all generations identified more strongly with being religious and patriotic than their national peers, while still following national trends of younger generations identifying less strongly than older generations with both characteristics (see pages 3 and 6).
- Although the percentage of Millennial and Gen X Utahns who described themselves as supporters of gay rights was higher than older generations, Latter-Day Saints across all generations had a very similar proportion of supporters (15-20%) (see page 4).
- Utahns put far more importance on being leaders in their communities than their national peers, with similar importance seen across all generations (see page 6).
- While Utahns were far more likely than their national peers to identify as Republicans, the national trend of younger generations being less likely than older generations to identify as Republicans held true in Utah (see page 7).
- Political party affiliation of Utah women across all generations was correlated with their marital status. Over half of married Utah Millennial women were Republicans compared to one-third of unmarried Millennial women (see page 7).
- Although survey respondents overestimated their levels of voter registration and participation, national trends were reflected in Utah's younger generations which were less likely than older generations to be registered to vote and to have voted in the 2012 and 2014 elections (see pages 8 and 9).

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How Generations Describe Themselves, Utah and U.S.



Source: Utah Foundation Survey.

In 2008, the United States saw the largest turnout for a presidential election the country had witnessed in 40 years.⁵⁹ This surge in participation featured a large proportion of young voters, which in turn sparked a wave of research and interest regarding how Millennials were politically different than previous generations. Nationally, Millennials have been pegged as being independents that align more with Democrats than Republicans. They have also been deemed more socially conscious than other generations, embracing volunteering and other arenas where they feel they can make an impact.⁶⁰

In order to gain an understanding of how Utah Millennials might reflect these national trends as well as how they compare to other generations, Utah Foundation included questions regarding social and political preferences in its survey. To compare Utah's generations to the nation (as well as each other), Utah Foundation used national survey questions from the Pew Research Center and from Net Impact.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

Personal Description through Social Issues

In an attempt to get a brief glimpse into what was important to Utahns, the Utah Foundation survey used a series of questions written by Pew for its recent research into generational differences. Respondents were asked to rank how well these descriptions fit them on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most like them and one being the least like them. Generally this section will discuss those who identified the most strongly with the description (8-10 on the 1-10 scale).

For analysis of Utah Foundation survey findings, each part of this report utilizes the Pew Research Center's definitions of generations.

Figure 34: Definition of Generations

	Born Between	Age in 2015
Millennial	1981 – early 2000s	18 to 34*
Gen X	1965 – 1980	35 to 50
Boomer	1946 – 1964	51 to 69
Silent	1928 – 1945	70 to 87
Greatest	Before 1928	88 and up

*No chronological end point has been set for this group; this report uses a cut point of age 18 in 2015.
Source: Pew Research Center.

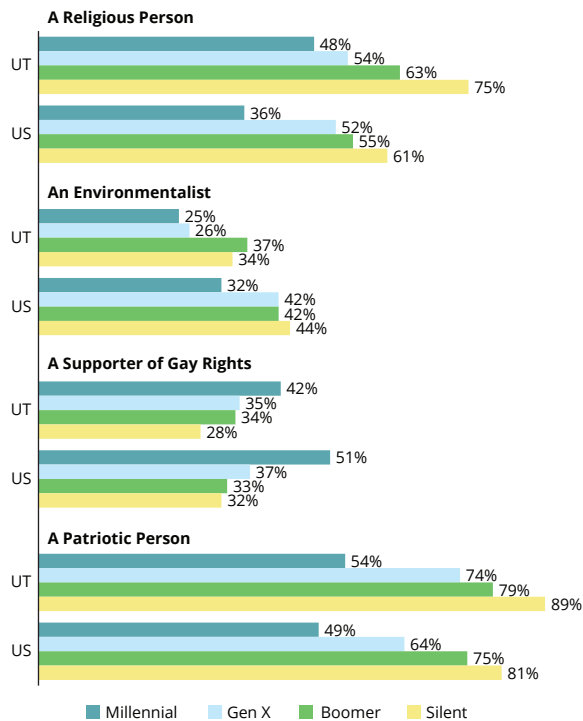
Overall, Utahns of all generations followed the trends seen on a national level. Members of younger generations identify more strongly as supporters of gay rights, but identify less strongly as environmentalists, patriotic, or as religious people. Differences from their national peers were seen in the extent to which Utahns felt that these attributes were good descriptors of themselves. Utahns identified more strongly as religious and patriotic than their national counterparts. Figure 35 illustrates both Utahns and Americans who felt that these descriptions fit them very well.

A Religious Person

Utahns across all generations are more likely than their national peers to indicate that being a religious person describes them very well. However, Utahns follow the national trend of younger generations being less likely than older generations to describe themselves as religious people, with each older generation in Utah being 4% more likely to indicate that being a religious person describes them very well. Within Utah's generations, correlations appeared with religious identification, political leaning, community involvement, and race and ethnicity.

Survey respondents who identified as Latter-day Saints were almost 39% more likely than respondents of other religions to describe themselves as a religious person (8-10 on the 1-10 scale). This likelihood increased for Millennials, with LDS Millennials being 48% more likely than respondents of other religions to identify with the description. This is due to Millennials who identify with other religions or no religion being far less likely than LDS respondents to say the description of being a religious person fit them very well.

Figure 35: How Generations Describe Themselves, Utah and U.S.



Note: Responses for those who indicated that the question described them "very well" (8-10 on 1-10 scale).
Sources: Pew Research Center and Utah Foundation.

Political leanings also correlated with people identifying themselves as religious. When comparing responses to this question to whether people identified themselves as conservative, moderate, or liberal, trends indicated that liberals were 11% less likely than their moderate peers and 17% less likely than their conservative peers to feel that the description of being a religious person fit them well. These differences were most pronounced within the Millennial and Silent generations.

Those who indicated that being a religious person described them very well were 14% more likely to indicate that being a leader in their community was important to them. People who described themselves as religious were almost 13% more likely than those who did not to say that having jobs that impacted issues that were important to them was a priority.

Overall, Hispanic respondents were 12% more likely than white, non-Hispanic respondents to indicate that being a religious person described them very well. This likelihood increased to 20% for Gen X Hispanic respondents. Within the Silent Generation, non-white, non-Hispanic respondents were 22% more likely than white respondents to indicate that being a religious person described them well.

An Environmentalist

Millennial and Silent Generation Utahns follow national trends most closely in regards to identifying as an environmentalist, with Millennials having the lowest percentage and the Silent Generation having the highest percentage. Fewer Utahns identify as environmentalists than their national peers. Within Utah, differences were seen when comparing by gender, political leanings, and what respondents valued in their communities.

Across the board, Utah women were 8% more likely than men to say that being an environmentalist described them very well. This percentage jumped to 21% for Boomer women. This tendency to identify more strongly as environmentalists than men was true even after accounting for the likelihood of women to be more liberal in general. Overall, respondents who identified themselves as liberal were more likely than their conservative peers (by almost 28%) or moderate peers (by 15%) to indicate that being an environmentalist described them very well. These differences were most pronounced for Boomers and the Silent Generation.

Those who felt that being an environmentalist described them very well seemed to be looking for similar community attributes and job values. Environmentalists in this survey were almost 16% more likely than other respondents to indicate that public transit was an important attribute in their community. Additionally, environmentalists were almost 11% more likely than other survey respondents to indicate that having a job that impacted causes that were important to them was a priority.

A Supporter of Gay Rights

Perhaps surprisingly, Utah followed national trends in regards to those who would describe themselves as supporters of gay rights. Utah Gen Xers and Boomers nearly match their national counterparts. The largest difference between Utah and the nation was among Millennials, with 42% of Utah Millennials compared to 51% of Millennials nationwide identifying as supporters of gay rights. The largest proportion of both Utah Gen Xers and Boomers in Utah fell into a middle category (4-7 on the 1-10 scale). Significant differences in support of gay rights between and within generations were seen relating to religion, political leaning, and party identification.

Those who described themselves as religious were not more or less likely to describe themselves as a supporter of gay rights than those who did not use this description. However, those who did not identify as a religious person (1-3 on the 1-10 scale) were more likely to identify as a supporter of gay rights, especially among younger generations; 76% among Millennials and Gen Xers, 67% among Boomers, and 35% among the Silent Generation.

Additionally, respondents who identified with different religions displayed varying trends across generations. LDS respondents had very similar results across all generations for those who felt being a supporter of gay rights described them well – ranging from 15% among Boomers to 20% among Gen Xers. In contrast, younger generations among non-LDS Christians and individuals who did not identify with a religion were more likely to identify as a supporter of gay rights than older generations. The majority of respondents across all generations who did not identify with the LDS faith responded that being a supporter of gay rights was a description that fit them very well.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, liberals were almost 21% more likely than moderates and 30% more likely than conservatives to indicate that the description of being a supporter of gay rights fit them very well. This difference between liberals and other political leanings was most visible among Millennials (31% more likely than moderates and almost 38% more likely than conservatives) and Gen Xers (22% more likely than moderates and 30% more likely than conservatives). Along party lines, Republicans were 22% less likely than Democrats and 8% less likely than Independents to say this description fit them very well. These differences between Republicans and other parties were most pronounced among Boomers (almost 28%), with Millennials (23%) and Gen Xers (22%) being close behind. Utah women were 7% more likely than men to identify themselves as supporters of gay rights.

A Patriotic Person

The majority of Utahns strongly identify as patriotic. More Utahns of all generations than their national peers indicated that they would describe themselves as a patriotic person. Once again, political affiliation and other social attributes have an effect on individual feelings regarding patriotism.

Although Utahns identify themselves as patriotic more frequently than their national peers, this does not correlate with their level of engagement at the voting booth. Those who indicated being a patriotic person was a good description for them were no more likely have indicated they were registered to vote, nor were they more likely than those who identified as less patriotic to have reported voting in the elections of 2012 or 2014.

Conservatives were 11% more likely than moderates and 22% more likely than liberals to identify strongly with being patriotic. Perhaps speaking to the gap between Utah Millennials and their national peers, those who identified themselves as conservatives were 30% more likely than liberals to say being a patriotic person fit them very well. Similarly, conservative Gen Xers were 29% more likely than liberals to identify as patriotic.

When comparing this description to other survey responses, connections to religion and jobs appeared. Respondents who identified strongly as religious were 23% more likely to also describe themselves as patriotic. Those who would describe themselves as patriotic were 8% more likely to indicate that achieving success in a high paying career was a priority.

Values and Long-Term Goals

Personal values and goals are undoubtedly contributing factors for determining political preferences. In the following set of questions, Utah Foundation survey respondents were asked to rank each goal on a scale of one to four, with one being completely unimportant and four being extremely important. Although the national datasets were not directly comparable to the Utah Foundation survey responses, the structure of responses for all three surveys provide a similar framework for general comparisons. Overall, Utahns mirror national trends, seeing similar shifts in values between generations. However, differences were seen between members of the Silent Generation in Utah compared to their national peers.

Figures 36 and 37 highlight those who responded with 2, 3, or 4. Most analysis in this section compares responses of those who gave higher importance (3 and 4) to those who gave little or no importance (2 and 1).

Employment Values

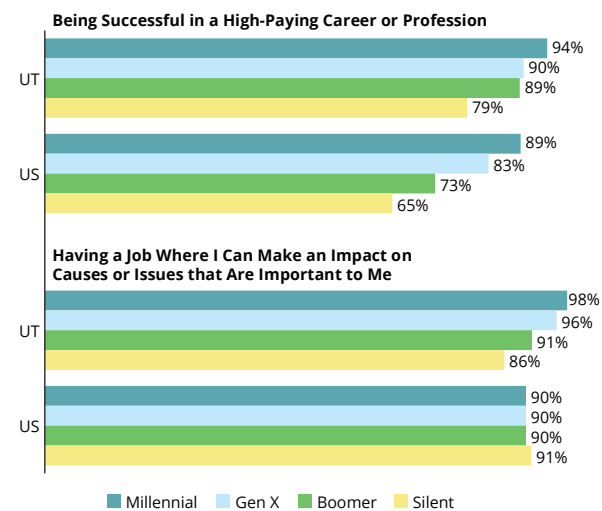
Responses of Utahns regarding the importance of success in high paying jobs reflected national trends, with older respondents placing less importance on being successful in high-paying careers. However, responses regarding the importance of jobs that impact causes important to respondents deviated slightly from the national trend (see Figure 36).

Married Utahns were 14% less likely than their single peers to rate being successful in a high-paying career as important, and women were almost 15% less likely than men. Full-time employees were 13% more likely than other workers to rate success in a high-paying career as important. Compared to previous questions regarding workplace preferences, those who valued good compensation as well as those who valued rapid advancement gave this more importance than those who responded differently.

Nationally, the proportion of those who valued having a job that would impact issues that were important to them was fairly level across all generations. In Utah, younger generations gave this value more importance than their older peers. Utah Millennials gave this goal the most value of any generational group, whether in Utah or the nation. This coincides with nationwide studies showing that Millennials typically are more motivated by personal values than career advancement when seeking higher-level work.⁶¹

Utahns who have lived in the state longer were more likely than newer Utahns to rank a job that impacts issues they care about with importance. Overall, women were almost 7% more likely than men to feel that this job attribute was important.

Figure 36: Importance of Employment-related Values by Generation, Utah and U.S.



Sources: Pew Research Center, Net Impact, and Utah Foundation survey.

Marriage, Religion, and Community Leadership Values

Utah was almost exactly the same as the nation with regards to importance given to having a successful marriage, with very small segments of respondents indicating it was not important to them (see Figure 37). Within Utah, married individuals across all generations were more likely than their single counterparts to rate a having successful marriage as important. For those who were not married, Utah Millennials gave having a successful marriage the most importance – perhaps reflecting their life stage and anticipation of forming their own families in the future. Individuals who responded that maintaining a good balance between work and other parts of life was important were almost 9% more likely than other respondents to give having a successful marriage a high level of importance.

Utahns were more likely than their national peers to place importance on living a very religious life and being a leader in the community. However, Utah’s unique religious composition had an influence on responses regarding the importance of living a very religious life. While national responses were more likely to be important or somewhat important – responses from Utahns were much more likely to be either completely unimportant or extremely important.

Those who identified with the LDS faith were 60% more likely than other respondents to indicate that living a very religious life was important. While Utah’s Boomers and members of the Silent Generation deemed that living a very religious life was more important than their national peers, Gen Xers and Millennials in Utah gave it less importance than their national peers. For Millennials, those who identified as LDS were 71% more likely than other respondents to identify this as important. Gen X LDS respondents were 56% more likely to rate this as important.

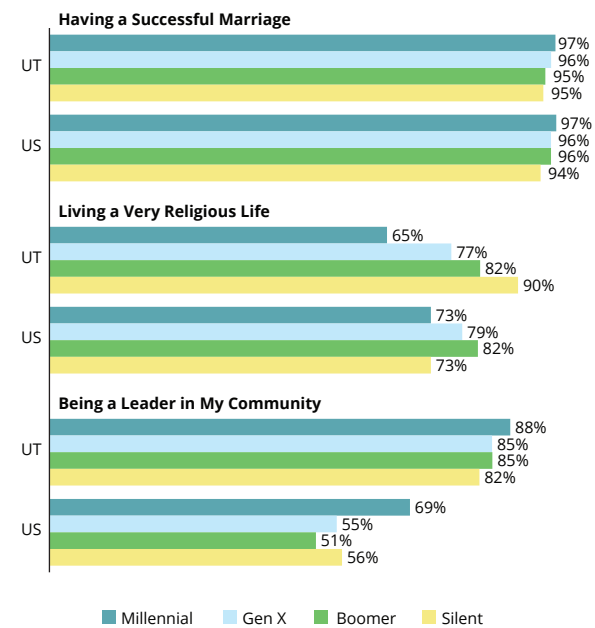
Answers from previous questions in the Utah Foundation survey seem to indicate some connections between workplace and neighborhood preferences and the desire to pursue community leadership. Utahns who indicated that living in a neighborhood with a mix of incomes was important were 14% more likely to express interest in being a leader in their community. Additionally, those who placed importance on good compensation and opportunities for rapid advancement were more likely than their counterparts to indicate that they considered being a community leader as important.

POLITICAL PREFERENCES

Party Affiliation

While Boomers and members of the Silent Generation have significant identification with political parties, younger generations are less likely to align with the two major parties; a shift toward party independence

Figure 37: Importance of Marriage, Religion, and Community Leadership Values by Generation, Utah and U.S.



Sources: Pew Research Center and Utah Foundation.

has been occurring since the late 2000s.⁶² The proportion of Utahns who identify as independent is fairly reflective of their national peers, regardless of generation (see Figure 38). Of those who do identify with a party, Utah has a higher proportion of Republicans in all generations than comparable groups at a national level.

Utah's large Republican population could be related to the large LDS population. In a nationwide Pew study, LDS respondents had the highest proportion of Republicans of any religion at 49%.⁶³ Within the Utah Foundation study, LDS respondents were 32% more likely to be Republicans than Utahns of other or no religious affiliation. Outside of connections with religious affiliations, interesting findings were seen regarding gender and ethnicity.

For the past 20 years, around 50% of women in the U.S. have identified or leaned Democrat compared to around 35% Republican.⁶⁴ On average, a majority of women in Utah do not identify as Republicans. The one outlier to this trend, interestingly, was among Millennial women. They were 11% more likely than their male peers to be Republicans, whereas Boomer and Silent women were 10% more likely than men to be Democrats.

When marital status was considered, non-married women across all generations were far more likely than their married peers to identify as Independents or Democrats. The largest gap was seen with Boomer women, with only 22% of unmarried women identifying as Republican compared to 52% of those who were married. Millennial women followed the most closely, with 33% of unmarried women being Republican compared to 52% of married women. These data all follow national trends that shows that both men and women who are married are more likely than their unmarried peers to identify as Republican.⁶⁵

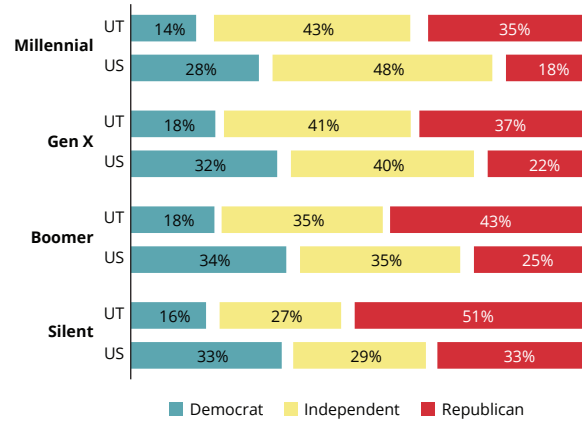
In Utah, Hispanic or Latinos are 28% more likely than white, non-Hispanic or Latinos to be Democrats. This was particularly the case for Hispanic or Latino Gen Xers in Utah, which were 34% less likely to identify as Republican than their white, non-Hispanic or Latino peers. In addition, non-white, non-Hispanic or Latino members of the Silent Generation were 27% less likely than white, non-Hispanic or Latino peers to be Republicans.

Political Leanings

Similar to party affiliation, Utah tends to be more conservative than the nation across all generations (see Figure 39). These differences are once again most notable for Millennials who did not identify with either party – 36% of independent Utah Millennials indicated they were conservative compared to 29% of Millennials nationwide. Significant differences within generations in Utah were seen regarding gender, ethnicity, employment, income, education, and tenure.

Women and Hispanics or Latinos were more likely than men and white, non-Hispanic or Latinos to identify as liberals. Women were more liberal among Millennials, Boomers, and the Silent Generation. Gen X and Silent Generation Hispanic or Latinos and individuals of other races that do not identify as white were more liberal than white respondents.

Figure 38: Party Identification across Generations, Utah and U.S.



Note: Entries may not sum to 100% due to non-response.
Sources: Pew Research Center and Utah Foundation.

As mentioned in Part II of this report, employment, education, and income are all closely related. These factors produced significant differences regarding how each generation leaned politically. For all Utahns, full-time employees were more likely than part-time workers and non-workers to identify as liberal. For Gen Xers and Boomers, those with higher levels of education were more likely than their peers with less education to be liberal. For the Silent generation, individuals with higher levels of income were more likely to be liberal.

Impacts of Utah residency and type of home varied between generations. For Millennials and members of the Silent Generation, those who had lived in Utah longer were more likely to be liberal. Among Boomers and members of the Silent Generation, renters were more likely to be liberal.

Voter Registration and Activity

Registration

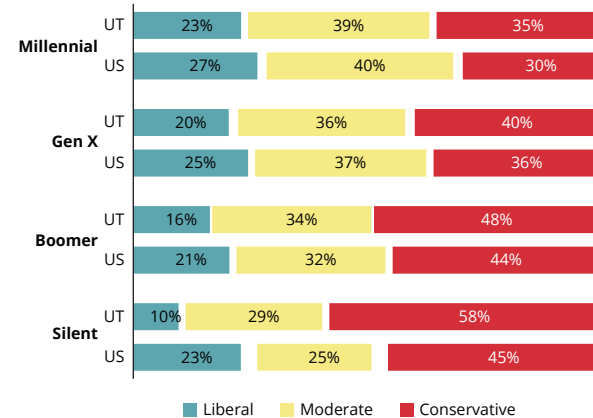
If Utah Foundation survey respondents all answered truthfully, recent statewide voter registration efforts worked exceptionally well. Over 90% of respondents indicated they were registered to vote. However, data shows that in 2012 only 63% of Utahns who were registered to vote. This increased slightly in 2014 to 66%.⁶⁶ This contradiction between datasets reflects trends found in recent research, which show that survey respondents tend to over-report their voting behavior on a consistent basis.⁶⁷

Utah follows national trends with fewer younger respondents being registered to vote than older respondents (see Figure 40).⁶⁸ Other factors which show significant differences regarding voter registration were age, education and tenure – both in relation to Utah residency and type of housing.

Each subsequent level of education increased the likelihood by almost 5% that survey respondents would indicate they were registered to vote. This was most significant among Millennials (7% per level of education) and Gen Xers (almost 6%).

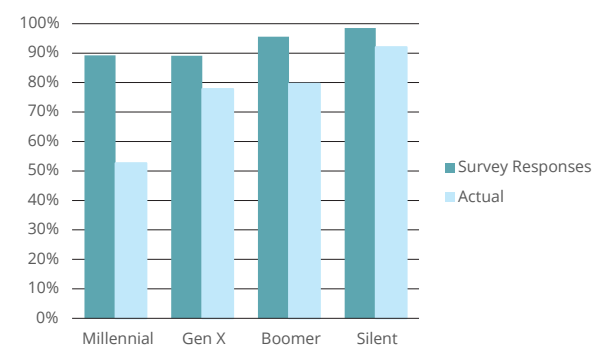
Overall, renters were 7% less likely than homeowners to indicate they were registered to vote. This was especially significant within the Millennial generation (12%). For Gen Xers, the longer people had lived in Utah, the more likely they were to be registered to vote. Those who had lived here for 20 years or more were 9% more likely than those who had lived here for shorter amounts of time to indicate they were registered to vote.

Figure 39: Political Leanings by Generation, Utah and U.S.



Sources: Pew Research Center and Utah Foundation.

Figure 40: Voter Registration by Generation, 2014



Source: Utah Foundation.

2012 Election

In Utah, older residents were more likely to report they were registered and demonstrated this via higher levels of voter turnout than their younger peers (see Figure 41). While 83% of survey respondents reported voting in 2012, Utah's voter database reports that only 46% of Utahns actually voted in 2012. Younger generations were both much less likely to vote when compared to older generations and much more likely to over report their voting behavior. Each older generation was 4% more likely than the previous generation to have reported voting in the 2012 election.

Nationally, the election in 2012 saw a reduction in participation from 2008 by many different segments of the population. Fewer Hispanic or Latino individuals between 18 and 64 years of age turned out in 2012 than in 2008.⁶⁹ In Utah, the non-white population as a whole was 18% less likely than their white-only peers to have reported voting in 2012. While 2008 saw a high point in turnout of female voters nationally, the proportion reduced in 2012 (63.7%).⁷⁰ However, the proportion of women who have voted in presidential elections has consistently been larger than the proportion of men nationally since 1980.⁷¹ In 2012, women in Utah were 6% more likely than men to have indicated they voted. This bump in female voters was particularly prevalent among Millennial women, who were almost 15% more likely than men to indicate they had voted in 2012.

2014 Election

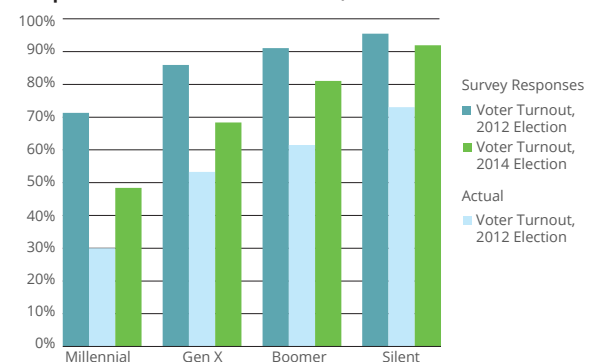
Presidential election years always see higher turnout than midterm or other years with only smaller elections.⁷² Nationally, 2014 saw the worst voter turnout in 72 years (36%).⁷³ Although Utahns were voting for the Utah Attorney General and all four congressional seats, Utah's turnout was below the national average at approximately 30%.⁷⁴ Overall, 67% of Utah Foundation survey respondents indicated that they voted in 2014. The likelihood of reported voting increased by almost 10% in each older generation. Those who identified themselves as Democrats were almost 17% more likely to have indicated they voted than their Republican counterparts. Research shows that the perception that an individual's vote will make a difference is an important factor in voter turnout.⁷⁵ This might speak to the larger number of local elections being more appealing to voters outside the majority party than larger, less competitive political races.

Each level of education showed an increase in the likelihood of indicating voting by 6% for all Utahns. This was even more significant for Millennials, with each subsequent level of education showing an increase in the likelihood of reported voting by almost 10%. Within Gen X, those who had student debt were 18% more likely than those without to have responded that they voted.

Approval of Current Political Officials

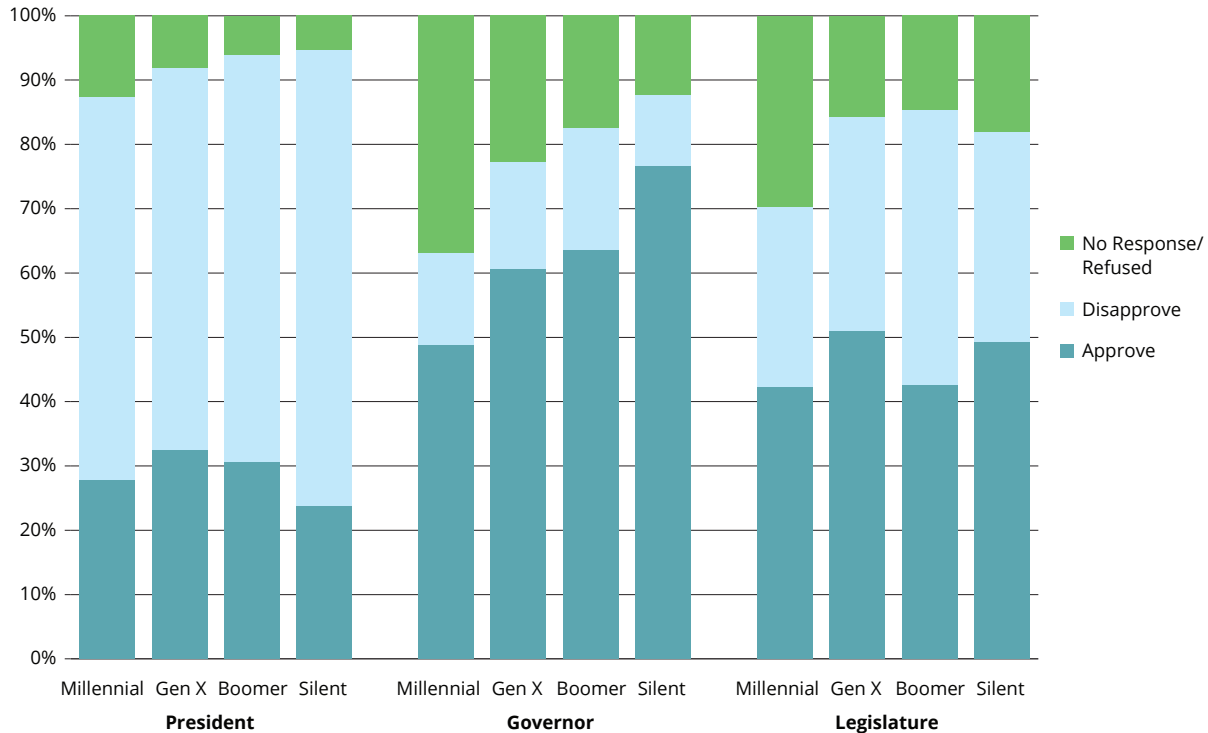
Although approval ratings are variable over time, they can provide a snapshot of the political preferences of the public. While President Obama's approval ratings have fluctuated significantly over time, Utahns traditionally have given him lower ratings. Locally elected officials at the state level, including the Governor and the Utah State Legislature, have fared better (see Figure 42). There are differences in ratings for all three between generations.

Figure 41: Voter Participation by Generation, Survey Responses and Actual Counts, 2012 and 2014



Note: Data was unavailable for 2014 Actual Voter Turnout at time of publication.
Source: Utah Foundation.

Figure 42: Approval of the President, Governor Herbert, and Utah Legislature, by Generation



Source: Utah Foundation Survey.

President Obama

According to recent Gallup polls, President Obama's approval rating was 45% in June 2015.⁷⁶ By contrast, only 29% of Utahns approve of the president, with little variation among generations. Utah Foundation survey respondents across all generations who identified as Democrats were 51% more likely than Republicans to approve of the President. Additionally, those who did not affiliate with any party were 12% more likely than Republicans to approve of the President. Utah's Gen Xers gave him the highest approval rating at 33% and Boomers followed closely behind at 31%. Millennials give him an approval rating of 28% and the Silent Generation gave him the lowest approval rating at 24%.

Governor Herbert

In 2014, Governor Herbert was dubbed the most popular governor in the nation.⁷⁷ Utah Foundation survey respondents reflected this by giving Governor Herbert a high approval rating of about 60%, with a quarter of respondents choosing not to answer the question. Support was highest among the Silent Generation (77%) and lowest among Millennials (49%) although Millennials also had the highest rate of non-response on this question (37%).

Party affiliation had more influence on approval ratings than political leanings. Republican respondents across all generations were 16% more likely than Democrats to support Governor Herbert; however, among Millennials and Gen Xers, approval seemed to be independent of party affiliation or political leaning. Conservative respondents gave the Governor the highest approval rating (68%) of any political leaning, with moderates following about 7% behind.

Utah State Legislature

Fewer people approve of the Legislature than of the Governor. Overall, 45% of Utahns approve of how the Legislature is handling its job. Gen Xers gave the Legislature the highest level of support (51%) and once again, Millennials gave the lowest approval rating (42%). This lower approval rating could be due to younger generations being more likely than older generations to lean liberal.

Liberals were 14% more likely than moderates and 28% more likely than conservatives to disapprove of how the Legislature is handling their job. Party affiliation also plays a role, with Republicans being 24% more likely than Democrats to approve of the Legislature. Differences in party affiliation were particularly strong in Millennials and members of the Silent Generation, with Republicans being 50% more likely to approve of the Legislature than Democrats for both groups. The large political leaning and party affiliation differences could be in large part due to the Legislature being predominantly Republican (24 out of 29 Senators and 63 of 75 Representatives).⁷⁸

CONCLUSION

While Utahns reflect national trends on some values, goals, and social issues, the unique culture of the state creates a very different political picture than the nation. Nationally, Millennials seem to be more liberal and independent from the current political structure than older generations. Utah's Millennials are more conservative than their national peers, although they tend to follow national trends regarding their values and the causes they support.

The differences between Utah generations show the impacts that marital status, gender, education, and goals and values can have on political views. Although Utah is much more conservative than the nation as a whole, the variations seen within each generation show that Utah has a more diverse electorate than might meet the eye. This diversity could create a basis for further outreach and study on how to improve voter registration and participation in the state.

ENDNOTES

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